

## *Ruling without Rules*

### **Exodus 19:16-19**

“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.” (New International Version)

Why do we have rules? I often think of the relationship between a father and a child, in which rules become the fundamental means of relating to one another. “Don’t cross the street” or “Don’t hit your sister” says that dad with authoritative force. But what if rules merely stood for the absence of true intimacy and relationship? In the story of the Israelites before Mt. Sinai there is an interesting interaction between God and his covenant people. In chapter 19, God tells the Israelites that when the trumpet sounds the people are to come up the mountain and talk to God. It was at this time God intended to make them a nation of priests commissioning them to be his “go between” with the other nations. But then the story takes a wrong turn. When the promise came to its fulfillment and they were to climb up to meet with God, fear fell upon them. They never climbed the mountain. They never met with God.

As a result, God spoke to Moses, their advocate and gave the people the 10 Commandments. Rules to follow. I often wonder if these rules are merely the byproduct of the Israelites fearful neglect of a relationship with God. The rules were necessary when God could not deal with the people directly. This seems strikingly true in our daily experiences when we prefer clean-cut rules over a messy relationship, legalism over grace, judgment over forgiveness, and personal justice over mercy. What would have happened had the Israelites been so courageous to climb up Mt. Sinai and enter into a relationship with God? Would rules have been needed?

SWB

### **Point of Prayer:**

What rules are you placing on the relationships around you? Are they protecting or hindering intimacy?