

Bite Size Bible Study

God's Instructions #165

By Pastor Lee

I have been making an in-depth study of the 613 Mitzvot aka Laws, Commandments, Instructions, Teachings. The study keeps growing and has probably gotten too large for even the Saturday Bible Study group. However, there are a few comments I would like to make.

We in the Western cultures seem to see all of these as Laws with penalties for not following them, but most Jewish people do not see them in that light. To them these are God's instructions for living a full and fruitful life. And even more than that they tell them of the character of God.

God would not tell us to do something that was not in His character. He tells us that we are made in His image and therefore should act as He does. Looking at this teaching from this point of view not only gives us a glimpse into His character. It also gives us reason to follow His teaching in order to better display His image to others.

Just so you don't think I am saying that we are required to keep this "Law", as some have taught, I AM NOT.

While I believe that there is wisdom to be gained from these teachings, we are under the covenant made and given by Jesus, not the one made with the Jews through Moses.

But to ignore these, because we are under a New Covenant, is to "through out the baby with the bathwater".

When we see and understand these commandments, or teachings, in this way, we greet them with less of a negative attitude and more as loving guidance.

The word Mitzvah (Mitzvot plural) refers to the teaching in the Torah (Pentateuch). When one does a Mitzvah, one is supposed to perform it happily, not grudgingly, with true feeling and as beautifully as possible. There are 248 positive mitzvot, which explain what one should do, and 365 negative mitzvot, which explain what should not be done.

Some of the mitzvot are considered no longer relevant now because they relate to practices that could be observed only in the Temple in Jerusalem, which has been destroyed. However, I contend that even though they cannot be practiced they still contain wisdom.

Ten of the mitzvot are the Ten Commandments, which most Christians believe are relevant. These contain much of the wisdom of the 613 but are worded

somewhat differently and not in the order we have grown to expect.

When Jesus was asked about the commandments He summarized all of them by saying: ...*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."* This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Mat 22:37-40 NIV

The question is – do we want to live by the "Cliff Notes" version or be well versed in the whole of God's instructions?

If your answer is "no" to the "Cliff Notes" version then these 613, which are often ignored, are important. But this is only one portion of what has been given to us.

There are many other bits of instruction to be had in the New Testament. They all go together to provide a complete course in living God's way, as well as the understanding His character.

Jesus amplifies some of the mitzvot in Mat 5 and 6 but there are many other references as well. Paul has much to say regarding the mitzvot but rarely calls them that. James and Peter also have comments that relate. *{If you are interested in them I recommend an unabridged version of Nave's Topical Bible. There are over 15 pages of references to Commandments.}*

Admittedly this is a huge project. It cannot be studied in one sitting. But we are given a lifetime to learn, study and put into practice God's character in our lives. It is worth spending some of our time attempting to know and follow what He is teaching us. Not doing so may show that we don't know and love God as much as we think.

When we choose a vocation we spend a lot of time in schooling to be well versed in that vocation, we are willing to make sacrifices to become the best we can. That vocation is only for a short portion of our lives.

If we really want to know God we will need to invest time in understanding His character and learning what He has given us for our education in being like Him. Becoming an image of the one True God is for eternity.

Becoming that image should make us happy and be done with intense desire and feeling. But most of all it should be done beautifully, so that it will glorify His character for others to see.

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