

Learning To Know God Through His Commandments

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Many Christians are trapped in a sad inconsistency! They are being asked to treat others in a different manner than they are being taught God treats them!

It is as though God, as their heavenly Father, is saying "Do what I say, not what I do!" Unfortunately, that view of God undermines His method of teaching His children. With this picture of God asking us to do for others that which He is not first doing for us, rebellion builds in the child of God.

However, as we look at Scripture, we see something totally different and refreshing! In verse after verse, we find God calling us to be like Himself (Romans 8:29; I Peter 1:16).

The result of this very basic truth is that every commandment given in God's Word contains a wealth of information about God and His characteristics.

This is the concept we want to work with in this paper:

WHATEVER GOD COMMANDS ME TO BE -- HE ALREADY IS!

Let's work together through some of His commandments and discover what we can about this God we desire to know. Later there will be some commandments for you to discover on your own.

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers -- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock." (I Peter 5:2,3)

These two verses from I Peter were spoken to church Elders in a desire to show them God's method for leading His church. Although that is not the emphasis of this study, if we apply the above principle (i.e. Whatever God commands me to be -- he already is!), we find a world of information about the method God uses in leading us.

What are the attitudes as He leads and works with us? Out of this section of Scripture, one of the most exciting truths to me is that God is EAGER to shepherd me! Taking care of me is not a responsibility that God reluctantly accepts (i.e. just because He's God). Rather He shepherds me with a spirit of eagerness! Many times this has not been my picture of God's attitudes. Sometimes I see Him getting tired of taking care of me. How refreshing it is to see Him clearly!

See how easy it is to use a commandment to give us a clearer view of God? Let's try another!

"This is what the Lord says, 'Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength . . .'" (Jeremiah 17:5)

One of the greatest areas of inconsistency is brought to the forefront by carefully thinking through this commandment.

God says in this verse that we are not to trust nor ultimately depend upon another human being. The reason for this command is shared just four verses later when He says: "The heart (of man) is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

In the previous concept, we apply the fact that God models for us what He wants us to do. Therefore, **GOD DOESN'T TRUST IN MANKIND!** He doesn't lean in a dependent manner on humans to accomplish His tasks!

At first reading, the above statement might seem so elementary that it isn't important. We need only think back to emphases in our past to hear in our minds some sermon that portrayed God as counting on us to get His task accomplished. How inaccurate those presentations become as we see that God **NEVER** trust in us!

Although it is true that He works through people to accomplish His work here in earth, His ultimate trust to get the job done resides in Himself! This truth removes an otherwise unreasonable burden from the Christian. Once again a commandment has been used to clarify a proper view of the Person of God. The commandment becomes a check on whether or not we are seeing God correctly.

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." (Philippians 2:3)

Can it be? Does this verse really say that God might view me as more important than Himself? The Creator of the Universe, the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings, views me as more important than Himself?

If God asks me to have that attitude towards another, then He does indeed first have that attitude toward me! In fact the rest of the passage surrounding Philippians 2:3 shows that Christ was willing to leave heaven in order to come to earth and die for me. His actions speak even louder than His words in showing that indeed He did view us as more important than Himself! The concept is totally staggering but nevertheless totally true. "So in everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

Here we find capsulized in one verse the entire concept under consideration. Whatever God wishes us to do for Him, He will first do for us! What a beautiful picture this gives us as to the way He leads us.

All too often we picture Him leading us from a position high in the heavens shouting down to us in a booming voice through a megaphone. He barks the orders and we try to respond.

However, in contrast to that picture, John 13 gives us a very clear picture of how He really operates in His leadership in our lives. In that chapter Jesus is sitting with His followers at the final meal together before His death. In His conversation with them, He will eventually present them with the following commandment:

". . . you also should wash one another's feet." (John 13:14)

Contrary to some of our first thoughts, he did NOT begin by telling them what to do. Peter probably would have found that easier. If Christ would have said, "Peter, this is what I want you to do. Go around and wash the other disciples' feet!", Peter would have done it! In fact, Peter would have felt good about himself after having done it!

However, Christ had a better way. Christ wanted to lead Peter by serving him. He wanted to first do for Peter that which He would later ask Peter to do for others. Peter's reaction was predictable. He resisted as Jesus stooped to wash his feet. Who wouldn't? As the account progresses, Christ persists and states that it is absolutely essential that Peter allow himself to be served before attempting to be a servant.

Whenever we resist God serving us, we short-circuit the infinitely wise method of God in teaching us. To the extent that I have not allowed Him to serve me in the area of forgiveness, I will not overflow with forgiveness towards others. To the extent that I have not experienced His viewing of me as more important than Himself, I will have difficulty viewing others more important than myself. Any area in which I am not overflowing in obedience can be traced back in part to the fact that I have not allowed Christ to fully teach me that area by His example to me.

What a God! What a marvelously wise Teacher He is! May each commandment in the Bible fill you with an increased awe of who He is! As a result, may your life be characterized not by overwork, but rather by overflow!

Discussion Questions

1. Put yourself in Peter's place in John 13. If Peter had washed the disciples' feet prior to having his own washed, what in all probability would have been his attitude during and following his washing of their feet?
2. In contrast, how would you characterize his probable attitude AFTER Christ had washed his feet?
3. In what ways is Christ's true method of leading by serving much wiser than the way we tend to typically view His leadership?

Personal Bible Study

Do you remember when you first learned how to subtract one number from another? You placed one number under the other and then entered your answer below the line.

725
-52

Do you remember how you'd then in an effort to check your answer add the second number in the column with the answer and you should arrive at the top answer.

God's commandments can now serve as a check on our view of God. After reading the commandment, we need to be able to see God doing it first for us.

If we cannot picture Him doing the commandment first for us, one of two possible problems may exist:

- 1) You may have an improper view of God; or
- 2) You may have an improper understanding of the commandment.

In either regard, the check will have been profitable. You will either need to realign your view of God or change your understanding of what the commandment actually means.

Let's try it!

Below are some commandments taken from the Bible. After reading each passage apply the following principle:

WHATEVER GOD COMMANDS ME TO BE -- HE ALREADY IS!

Then answer the question "What does this commandment teach me about who God really is?"

1. Matthew 20:25-28 _____

2. II Timothy 2:24-26 _____

3. Titus 1:5-9 _____

4. I Timothy 3:1-7 _____

5. I Corinthians 13:4-8 _____

6. I Thessalonians 5:14 _____

7. I Thessalonians 5:16 _____

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