

Commands Are Insufficient Motivators

If we can just get people to study the Bible more to learn right from wrong, they will make the right choices in their spiritual lives. Right? It is not that simple.

Eve knew what God had said about eating of the tree. She had knowledge about the tree of knowledge. She was so impressed with the warning against eating that she added her own safeguard, or fence around the law, in saying that she should neither eat *nor touch*. She was a very scrupulous lady!

Noah probably could not comprehend a flood, but he did understand God's will for him. So he obeyed in preparing the ark.

Surely, Abraham could not envision the fulfilled purpose of God in calling him, but he knew the instruction to leave his homeland. Likewise, he could not be expected to understand the command to offer Isaac, but he did know what he was told to do. So he obeyed.

Were the commands of God sufficient motivation to guide the lives of these three persons? If so, how can we explain that the law was ineffective in restraining Eve? Eve relented to temptation. God does not permit us to be tempted beyond our capacity but he provides a way of escape. Didn't that include Eve? And our sins are not incurred because of lack of knowledge of commands from God. Nor were Eve's. I question the idea that a person can sin ignorantly. We do not sin without evil intent or purpose. Because of ignorance, a person may fail to accept the blessings provided, however. Here is a good place to ponder again the struggle with commands depicted by Paul in Romans 7.

The tempter convinced Eve that God was capricious in telling her she would die. God would deceive her! Her God was depicted as a jealous Deity who wanted His creatures to remain in ignorance lest they become like Him. She had undeniable knowledge of God and His command, but evidently she did not understand that His restrictions were expressions of His love and concern for her. She should have realized that God is not a maker and enforcer of arbitrary law in order to demonstrate His almighty power or to protect His status.

No mention is made in the Scriptures of Eve having faith though it is evident that she realized divine presence. Living in His presence, she knew God by association, but evidently she did not understand His nature enough to really love Him.

The *faith* of Noah and Abraham motivated their obedience (Heb. 11). It was not the commands, however, which moved them to action. *It was their belief in the trustworthy and benevolent character of Him whom they served.* And that is a necessary ingredient that turns acknowledgement of God and His will into life-ruling faith.

While fear brought by commands has some motivating power, it is ineffective. Countless disobedient people have faced their dying moments in agonizing fear, yet without repentance.

Yes, we must have some knowledge of the Scriptures in order to learn the will of God. Even memorization of texts, however, might not produce active faith. Jesus chided some in his day who were “book” people: “You search the Scriptures for in them you think you have life.” They were missing the loving provision that God was making for them which they should have detected in their Scriptures. Their concern for knowledge of law was leaving them without a caring savior.

Law given by Moses was an ineffective motivator, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Grace is the motivator. “We love because he first loved us.” The love of Christ constrains us.” Learning the facts alone or being familiar with all his commands does not produce our motivation. That motivation comes from understanding his character. Then it becomes “faith working through love.”

The person who is truly convinced of the benevolent and trustworthy nature of his/her Maker is undaunted by temptation. This world can offer nothing to allure such a believer from the provisions and promises of his Creator. []