

Uncomplicated

My particular edition of the Bible has 1614 pages. It is full of commandments and examples that tell me in detail how God expects me to live my life. Not a single page lacks significance.

Though the Bible is not as long as the US tax code (the 2011 version of which is 72,536 pages; that's four times longer than the complete works of Shakespeare) and is a great deal more interesting, it can be a bit daunting to think of all the numerous precepts and regulations against which my life will be judged.

But on second thought, it might not be all that complicated. Moses says,

Now Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deuteronomy 10:12–13).

Moses said this not long after delivering God's Old Testament law in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, a law that includes some 613 particular rules (according to the rabbis' count).

But Moses realized that the whole law of God boils down to a few basic principles treasured in the human heart. Everything else is an outworking of these basics. What more does God require than these?

Fear Him

To fear God is to respect Him as one would a father—He created you and cares for you. And yet He threatens to punish bad behavior. A God-fearing person believes in Him, worships Him regularly, and strives to please Him. A God-fearing person does not speak flippantly of Him or use His name in vain. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10).

Walk in His Ways

When we discover through God's revealed word His nature and His character, we imitate Him. We avoid sin because God is pure. We treat others with kindness and forgive our enemies because God is kind and forgiving. We love all mankind because Christ first loved us. We tell the truth because God is truth. As 1 Peter 1:16 says, "you shall be holy, for I am holy."

The Bible is not a random collection of rules, nor a series of hoops to jump through for God's entertainment—it is a direct reflection of God's own character, and our relationship to Him as His children. "The one who says he abides in Him, ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Love Him

How do a man and woman fall in love? They are initially attracted by something hard to explain, they begin to enjoy one another's company, they are intrigued to find out more about one another's attributes and aspirations, they delight in what they find, and finally decide to walk hand-in-hand forever.

Is falling in love with God that much different? We discover God, we learn more about Him, we see the things He has done on our behalf, and we confess our loyalty to Him forever. If you love someone, you will do what you can to please him. That's why Jesus said that loving God is the foremost commandment (Mark 12:28ff).

In fact, that's why God created mankind with free will. He could have created a bunch of robots that automatically obey His programming and never sin. But instead He wanted creatures that could choose whether to love Him or to reject Him.

God wants to be loved. Not that He is dependent upon us. Nevertheless, He longs for that relationship. When is the last time you prayed to Him, "I love You?"

Serve Him with All Your Heart and with All Your Soul

God requires us to serve Him. To speak more plainly, we are His slaves. We live to serve Him, not to serve ourselves, not to serve money, not to serve

our spouses or our bosses or any other human being. Often we serve these others as a subset of our service to God. But ultimately, we *belong* to God.

The most prominent man in the kingdom is no more than God's slave. There is perhaps no one more praiseworthy than the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:11), and yet he calls himself a slave of Christ (Rom. 1:1).

But this service is given freely, gladly, and whole-heartedly. We do not begrudge Him our service, because, after all, He purchased us from slavery to Satan with His own blood, and we do owe Him our lives. So, it's only fitting that we serve Him willingly and openly.

We also serve Him with "all" our heart and soul. There is no area of our lives which we hold back in reserve. Nothing of which we say, "God, you can have this, and this, and this, and everything else, *except* you cannot have this one thing right here." No activity, object, relationship, or pursuit is exempted from God's claim.

Keep His Commandments, Which Are for Your Own Good

Finally, God asks us to treasure His will by obeying His commandments. Whether or not the Lord is pleased with His people always comes down to this in the end. With regard to the Old Testament nation of Israel, He ultimately destroyed them because they broke His Sabbath law and the other laws of observance and worship, because they behaved wickedly and did not keep his moral precepts, and because they disobeyed the commandment against idols.

The New Testament says, "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). The gospel has plenty of rules to obey, too. But, the genuine Christian has a pure and uncomplicated attitude in the heart that says, "God's will be done." If you set your mind to obey God's word, then you don't need to keep a checklist. When you encounter temptation, you *want* to obey God. What does God require of you, except to do what He says? That's not hard to remember at all! "By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3). Jesus says, "if you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

We are also convinced that God isn't making rules to spoil our fun. Rather, His commandments are "for our good." God is the Creator of man. He knows better than anyone else what will give a person a fulfilling life while on this earth, and eternal life when this earth is gone. God's commandments are not to restrict us, but to liberate us from the pain and heartache and suffering of sin, and to bring us into fellowship with Almighty God. "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3). We must learn to appreciate the limits God has set for us, rather than rebel against them.

—*John Guzzetta*