

Little things in the Law

By Peter Salemi

Many of the “no law” people ask the question “if you keep the law of God then you must keep all of the little commandments as well”? What are these small commandments? Must we keep them? And even though they are lesser commandments is their meaning insignificant?

Time and time again critics of God’s church come up with more and more excuses of why we should not keep the law of God. Recently one person wrote on our YouTube channel that if you keep the law, then do you not wear clothes with “mixed” fabrics as the law requires? What about fruit? Do you make sure your fruit is 5 years old before you can eat it? What of these laws in the Old Testament? Should they be kept? Or, do these people *miss the whole point* of what God is telling us about the laws? Is there an underlying principle involved?

What does Jesus say?

Are small things in the law less important than the bigger issues? Jesus spoke of the “weightier matters of the law” (Matthew 23:23). He told the Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, [lesser things in the law] and have omitted the weightier *matters* of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and *not to leave the other undone.*” (Matthew 23:23). Did Jesus say forget the lesser things in the law? No! He said “*not to leave the other undone*”

Jesus told his disciples, “Think *not* that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, *one jot or one tittle* shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.

“Whosoever therefore shall break one of these *least commandments*, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but *whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*” (Matthew 5:17-19). Jesus said he came not to destroy the law but to fulfill or do it.

Notice what the New Bible Commentary says, “To fulfill is to *bring about* that to which scripture pointed, and that is what Jesus has now done. But the fulfillment of the *law does not mean its abolition; it remains wholly authoritative and demands the fullest respect of the disciple*” (p.912, emphasis added).

A “jot” or a “tittle” means “Jot means the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, while tittle refers to a simple turn by which one letter is distinguished from another. The expression, ‘jot or tittle,’ was proverbial for the smallest [part of the law].” (Peoples New Testament).

The JFB Commentary, says, “The meaning is that *‘not so much as the smallest loss of authority or vitality shall ever come over the law.’*” (emphasis added).

The smallest part “shall in no wise pass from the law” Jesus says, “till heaven and earth pass” the smallest portions of the law are still intact.

“till all be fulfilled” “The expression, ‘till all be fulfilled,’ is much the same in meaning as ‘it shall be had in *undiminished and enduring honor*, from its greatest to its least requirements.’” (ibid, emphasis added).

F.F Bruce writes, “The Law was a revelation of God’s will and would therefore **stand until heaven and earth disappear (= until everything is accomplished)**” (The International Bible Commentary, p.1124, emphasis theirs).

This source continues, “Revised Version, *be accomplished* (γένηται). The clause is probably *epexegetical* of ‘till heaven and earth pass away.’ Nothing in the Law shall pass away till heaven and earth pass away, when, with a new heaven and earth, *all the contents of the Law will be completely realized* (cf. *Nosgen*) so that even then *nothing in the Law shall pass away* (*vide infra*). On the *contrary*, *every part of it*, moral or ceremonial (Weiss), shall then, by being fully **understood** and obeyed in its true meaning, *enter on its full and complete existence* (γένηται).” (Pulpit Commentary, emphasis added). Clearly the law of God is here forever as other scriptures say (Psalm 119:160; 1 Peter 1:25). When the heaven and the earth pass away everything in the law will be understood and obeyed, the law will rule the entire universe, as Jesus said, “Thy will be done [God’s law] in earth, as *it is* in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus also said, “whosoever shall *do* and *teach* them, the same shall be called *great* in the kingdom of heaven.” And that, “Whosoever therefore shall **break** one of these **least commandments**, and shall *teach men so*, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.” This is what these “no law” preachers and teacher are doing; they are setting themselves up as being the “least” in the kingdom of heaven, meaning they will lose salvation by breaking and teaching others to break the law of God-by not teaching the little things in the law of God.

The “least” in this sense means, “meaning either the church of God, *where he shall have neither a name, nor place; he shall not be in the least esteemed, but shall be cast out as a worthless man*; or the ultimate state of happiness and glory, in the other world, *where he shall not enter*, as is said in the next verse [v.20];” (Gill’s Commentary).

Verse 20 Jesus said, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, *ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven*” The righteousness of God which is his law (Psalm 119:172), was to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees which was the commandments of men (see Matthew 15:3) which they, “transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” They broke the law of God and taught others to do so, and Jesus said if the disciples did the same they would not *enter* the kingdom of God, so being “least” in the kingdom meant they would lose salvation.

Clarke’s Commentary concludes, “Whosoever shall break. What an awful consideration is this! He who, by his mode of acting, speaking, or explaining the words of God, sets the holy precept aside, or explains away its force and meaning, shall be called least - *shall have no place in the*

kingdom of Christ here, nor in the kingdom of glory above. That this is the meaning of these words is evident enough from the following verse.[v.20]” (emphasis added).

So what of these little things that the law requires? Should they be obeyed?

Leviticus chapter 19

In Leviticus the 19th chapter, there are laws that seem insignificant, and most people don't bother to keep them, and of course the “no law” preachers use these commandments to try and disprove the whole notion of keeping the law in the first place.

God commands, “Ye shall keep my statutes. Thou shalt not let thy cattle gender with a diverse kind: thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee.” (v.19). Are we to keep this law? What is the point God is trying to make here? Are we not to wear clothes that are mixed with wool and linen? Is that what God wants us to do? Or is there an underlying principle?

First off, this command from God in Leviticus 19:19 was given for our good, and for the good of our livestock, so that we might learn from God those principles that we might not be able to discover for ourselves.

The effects of doing these practices are, “This prohibition was probably intended to discourage a practice which seemed to *infringe upon the economy* which God has established in the animal kingdom.

“ ‘If the various genera of the natural order Gramineae, which includes the grains and the grasses, should be sown in the same field, and flower at the same time, so that the pollen of the two flowers mix, a spurious seed will be the consequence, called by the farmers *chess*. It is always *inferior* and unlike either of the two grains that produced it, in size, flavor, and nutritious principles. *Independently of contributing to disease the soil, they never fail to produce the same in animals and men that feed on them*’

“The law, it is to be observed, *did not prohibit the Israelites wearing many different kinds of cloths together, but only the two specified*; and the observations and researches of modern science have proved that ‘wool, when combined with linen, increases its power of passing off the electricity from the body. *In hot climates, it brings on malignant fevers and exhausts the strength; and when passing off from the body, it meets with the heated air, inflames and excoriates like a blister*” (JFB Commentary, emphasis added). So these laws were given for the health of the lives stock, the agriculture, and our own bodies. But there is more!

Second, it should also be noted that such combinations of fibers in garments, produce a cheaper garment quality-wise than one made with the best grade of pure fabric. On the other hand, a garment made from low-grade natural fibers is usually improved by the addition of compatible man-made fibers. Such mixtures enable the manufacturer to use a cheap grade of wool or cotton by fortifying it with a cheap man-made fiber. Far too often, the motivation for such combinations stems from the greed for profit. Any good tailor knows that the best quality clothing is made

from 100 percent wool, cotton, etc. Nevertheless, one need not throw away or destroy clothing which may be of a poor quality or wrong mixture. Such materials are NOT sin in themselves. Rather, *God does not want a manufacturer to produce shoddy materials and take advantage of his customers.* A wise principle to follow in purchasing either a pure or mixed garment is to purchase the best quality you can afford for yourself and your family. We honor God in what we wear. Cheap imitations (both in character and wearing apparel) that appear to be genuine do not honor God! So remember, be a quality Christian and buy the best quality clothing you can afford! But don't go deeply into debt buying better quality than you can afford. That's not being genuine either!

Third, and the most important point, is the true reason why these things were prohibited. All these methods were the ways of the pagans in the land of Palestine, the land the Israelites were to possess. God said not to take up their ways and apply it to him (Deut 12:29-32).

The JFB Commentary explains, "This also was directed against an idolatrous practice, namely, that of the ancient Zebians, or fire-worshippers, who sowed different seeds, accompanying the *act with magical rites and invocations*; and commentators have generally thought the design of this and the preceding law was to put an end to the unnatural lusts and foolish superstitions which were prevalent among the heathen. But the reason of the prohibition was probably deeper:

“neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woollen come upon thee — Although this precept, like the other two with which it is associated, *was in all probability designed to root out some superstition*” (emphasis theirs and mine). This is why God says, “Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, *as of woollen and linen together.*” (Deut 22:11). The pagans did this in honor to their gods, and God did not want them to do the same thing to him. This was the main reason, which of course leads to the other reasons of health, prosperity and healthy livestock. Most superstitions cause terrible effects in societies due to ignorance, India is a prime example. So mixing fabrics is not a sin. But practicing what the pagans did, and doing it to God is, *this is the underlying principle, you shall not commit Idolatry!* Do you see why the little commandments are just as important as the greatest ones as Jesus said! As small as they are, the effects are huge!

What of this commandment, “And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of.

“But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD *withal.*

“And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: *I am the LORD your God.*” (Lev 19:23-25)? Should we be careful about the produce that we buy?

First, this law pertains only to *trees that bear fruit*, and does not pertain to small shrubs, bushes, brambles, and grape vines or olives. These latter types of fruit, having a different length of life span and production cycle, are classified with field crops, as is shown in the laws of gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10) and of the sabbatical-year rest for the land (Lev. 25:3-5), God makes a clear distinction between these small fruits and the trees bearing fruit, which are dealt with in this law of Leviticus 19:23-25.

If you are one who plants trees and want good crops to eat and sell, if we are diligent in obeying God in this matter, and also take proper care in the management of our fruit trees, God will cause them to provide us with fruit for many years can anyone object to that?

“Every gardener will teach us not to let fruit trees bear in their earliest years, but to pluck off the blossoms; and for this reason, that they will thus thrive the better, and bear more abundantly afterward.” (JFB Commentary).

Second, one verse says, “But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD *withal*.” unfit for presentation to Yahweh. In regard to its spiritual lesson, this law may be compared with the dedication of the first-born of beasts to Yahweh, see Exodus 13:12; Exodus 34:19. It was not to be eaten, not because the fruit was bad, but because it was being prepared to be offered to God as all the first-fruits were in the land. Then afterwards the owner of the tree can eat from it. This has nothing to do with where or how we buy our produce, but the preparation for the first fruits of the produce to be given to God. Today it is done by our tithes.

“Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.” (Lev 19:27). Is this to be obeyed? Are we to wear our hair and cut our beards in this way?

Again, many are missing the point. “This kind of coiffure had a *highly idolatrous meaning*; and it was adopted, with some slight variations, by the Arabs and other idolaters in ancient times (Jer 9:25-26; Jer 25:23, where ‘in the utmost corners’ means having the extremity of their hair along the forehead, temples, or behind the ears, cut in a circular form: see Robinson’s ‘Biblical Researches.’ vol 1;; ‘Egypt’s Testimony,’ p. 123: cf. ‘Herodotus,’ b. 3:, ch. 8:).” Here again is the underlying *principle*. God is saying do not use pagan rituals, to worship him. It has nothing to do with how we should cut our beards, or style our hair today. But it has everything to do with Idol worship, this is the main point!

Tattoos—“Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I *am* the LORD.” (Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1). Are tattoos prohibited?

Some think that the *context* in this passage is printing tattoos “for the dead.” However looking into history, one sees that, “This is not to give the impression that tattooing never appears in ancient Near Eastern texts; it does—*just not as a mourning practice*” (Article: What Does the Bible Say About Tattoos? Megan Sauter Biblical Archaeology Review 04/07/2018). The *historical context* must be sought after in this scripture.

What did God mean when he said not to printing marks on people *that the Israelites understood what he meant*? This source states, “In the ancient Near East, tattoos were *used to mark slaves*. Often the name of a slave’s owner would be tattooed or branded on his hand or forehead. If then the slave were to run away, he could be easily returned to his master. Thus, tattooing was seen as *a sign of ownership*...*Tattooing, an insignia of ownership*, was perhaps condemned in Leviticus because it reminded them [the Israelites] of their past. After all, they had just spent the last four centuries as slaves in Egypt, where tattooing was also used as a sign of slavery” (ibid, emphasis added). This is what is meant. Tattoos were used claim ownership over people and mark them as slaves. God just released Israel from slavery, and God was not going to institute slavery in Israel.

This will make God look like a hypocrite! This is the reason why God in the end of the sentence says “I am the Lord.” God is saying “you belong to me; no man owns you anymore like the Egyptians. You are a free people under the government of God.” So the practice of tattoos in and of itself is *not* condemned in the Bible, *it was what the tattoo was used for*. People get tattoos today for a variety of different reasons. But the practice of tattooing to claim ownership over people as slaves was the sin, not the tattoo itself.

There is actually a positive reference to tattoos in the Bible. Isaiah 44:5 states:

“This one will say, “I am the LORD’s,”
another will be called by the name of Jacob,
yet another *will write on the hand*, “The LORD’s,”
and adopt the name of Israel.”

“By writing God’s name on his hand, the Israelite in Isaiah 44:5 ‘was willingly proposing to become a servant of God.’ At least in this case, it seems that tattooing was acceptable because the person was ***marking himself as belonging to the God of Israel***.” (ibid, emphasis added). People do this all the time when it comes to tattoos; they *willingly* mark themselves, not forced against their will like the slaves. People in this case are willing to tattoo their hand saying they “belong to God.” So the tattoo in and of itself is NOT condemned in the Bible.

Other laws

What about, “Thou shalt make thee fringes upon the four quarters of thy vesture, wherewith thou coverest *thyself*.” (Deut 22:12; Num 15:38)? What is the purpose of this? Are we to wear fringes or tassels on our clothing?

In Numbers the 15th chapter, God tells us what is the purpose of the fringes, “And it shall be unto you for a fringe, *that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them*; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring:

“That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God.

“I *am* the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I *am* the LORD your God.” (vv.39-41). People today wear elastic bands around their wrist to remind them that they have to do something or pick something up. The same concept is applied with the tassels worn by the Israelites. It’s a reminder that they must walk in the Law of God always and seek his will. That’s the point! Today one can use elastic bands or just carry the Bible to remind them that God’s will be done in your life, tassels like the Israelites do not have to be worn. Or if you feel that you want to wear the tassels, of course that is one’s own decision, but the main point is that one is reminded to do the law of God in their lives, “Thy will be done.”

What of this law, “Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk.” (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Deut 14:21)? What does this mean? Are we not to eat dairy and meat at the same time like the Jews do today?

Two meanings of this scripture are given by the commentaries looking into the moral and historical meaning of this passage.

First, it is “ ‘a protest against cruelty, and outraging the order of nature,’ more especially that peculiarly sacred portion of nature’s order, the tender relation between parent and child, mother and suckling. No doubt the practice existed. Kids were thought to be most palatable when boiled in milk; and the mother’s milk was frequently the readiest to obtain. But in this way the mother was made a sort of accomplice in the death of her child, which men were induced to kill on account of the flavor that her milk gave it.” (Pulpit Commentary). One, it was a protest by God against animal cruelty, like that law of not taking the dam with the young, on finding a bird’s nest, Deut 22:6, and a contempt of the relation which God has established and sanctified between parent and young, and thus subverting the divine ordinances.

Second, “...there is reason to believe that it was designed to prevent an imitation of the superstitious rites of idolaters, who at the end of the harvest seethed a kid in its mother’s milk, and sprinkled the broth as a magical charm on their gardens and fields, to render them more productive the following season” (JFB Commentary). Here is the most important point, Idolatry! Not to use pagan superstitions to worship God Almighty! It does not mean that we are *not* to eat dairy and milk at the same time, this is not the point God is making giving this Law.

What of this law, “When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.” (Deut 22:8)? One person said to me, “Pete, if I have to keep the Law of God, does this mean I have to put a battlement (parapet) on my roof?” I Answered, “No!” The point is entirely missed. Public safety is the point God is making here, “that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence.” Today builders already follow certain building codes and standards, but if there is anything in your house that is dangerous or loose, fix it so there is no potential for an accident to happen, this is underlying principle of this law, public safety!

So the lesser things in the Law of God are actually very important things, that deal with Idolatry, cruelty, greed and public safety, is it any wonder why Jesus told us to preach even the least of these commandments and to do them? If we do we shall be called “great” in the Kingdom.