

GOD'S COMMANDS ARE NOT BURDENSOME

-Paul Earnhart

"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."
(1 John 5:3, KJV).

Teenage children, in their immaturity, frequently see their parents as unfeelingly harsh and restrictive with a special delight in the word, "no."

Unfortunately, many people have about the same attitude toward God. They view Him as one young English lad who when asked what he thought God was like said that as nearly as he could tell He was someone sitting up in heaven trying to find someone having a good time and then putting a stop to it! And if some are willing to shield God from such a charge they are not so generous toward gospel preachers whom they view as grim purveyors of heavy burdens and endless restrictions which drain every bit of the joy out of life.

The truth is that God has left us remarkably free. Out of all the possibilities for a human life, there are really very few divine restrictions. The only way that freedom could be enlarged would be to make it absolute. "Oppression" is in the eye of the beholder. Adam and Eve were placed in Eden to enjoy every wonder in it, but that was all forgotten about in their fascination with the one exception (Genesis 2:9,16: 3:5). And that obsession arose not from the realities of God's treatment of them but the deceptions of the serpent: "Pay no attention to all these distracting little baubles God has given you, because," he insinuated, "He has in His contempt for you withheld the only thing worth having." This was a preposterous lie, but Eve believed it. And some of us may be giving it thought. When it is pointed out what following the Lord will cost us, what we must leave behind to be His disciples, our first reaction can be, "That's just asking too much."

At times we are like the mad bombers of Oklahoma City who saw themselves at war with oppression and from their relatively privileged status didn't have a clue as to what a truly repressive regime might be.

If we could only realize how kind, gracious and good God is in all His

requirements of us we would quit our pathetic grumbling and begin to serve Him with Joy. How truly John writes: "For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

How good God was to Israel, and yet while He was acting to bless them their reaction was a litany of constant complaint: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness?" (Exodus 14:11). As Moses reminded his people in his farewell admonitions: "What great nation has God so near to it, as the Lord God is to us . . . and what great nation . . . has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law . . .? (Deuteronomy 4:7-8). Those who find themselves in fellowship with such a God are truly fortunate and His demands are never grievous. "And now Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes . . .?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). We need to ask ourselves what God is asking that is so burdensome. To reverence Him? To love Him? To serve and obey Him with all the heart? After all, He is the great God who created us and gives us our very breath (Acts 17:24-25). We have done as much for our earthly fathers and thought nothing of it (Hebrews 12:9-10).

God is not a tyrant and there are three characteristics of His commands which make that evident.

First, they are always possible. "God has never asked the unreachable. "As a father pities his children, our frame; He remembers that we are dust" (Psalm 103:13-14). Moreover, He is with us in all that He asks of us (Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:20-21). When we do His will, God provides the way.

Secondly, they are always understandable. Adam and Eve did not obey the command of God but they fully understood it (Genesis 3:1-3). Moses had many excuses for not doing what God requested but he understood completely what God wanted him to do (Exodus 3,4). Abraham understood perfectly even the incredible command, and obeyed (Genesis 22). Human speech in human hands is thought to be sufficiently understandable to make children, students, workers and citizens responsible. What would it be from the mouth of God? "The entrance of your words gives light. It gives understanding to the simple" (Psalm 119: 130).

Finally, the commands of God are gracious. God has never given a single command for His own advantage (Acts 17:24-25). All is for our sake and for our good (Deuteronomy 6:23; 10:13). "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a

future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

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