

“The Rituals Point to a Way of Life”

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BIG SANDY, Texas—In my 2:00 Bible study last Saturday and in my March 21 article in “Among Friends,” I covered a topic with the title “A Season of Exciting Rituals.”

In my Wednesday-night Bible study, I gave a presentation titled “The Rituals Point to a Way of Life.”

‘Rituals’ are different from the law

In the Wednesday Bible study, I mentioned that the word *ritual* is not mentioned in the King James translation. So I read two verses that have words that express the concept.

- Leviticus 26:46—“These are the statutes and judgments and laws which the Lord made between Himself and the children of Israel on Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses.”
- Numbers 9:3—Concerning the Passover, the Lord spoke: “According to all its rites and ceremonies, you shall keep it.”
- The root words for “statutes” (Leviticus 26:46) and “rites” (Numbers 9:3) are related Hebrew words.
- The root word for “judgments” (Leviticus 26:46) and “ceremonies” (Numbers 9:3) is the same Hebrew word.
- The statutes/judgments and rites/ceremonies are important, but they are different from the law (“Torah”).

613 commandments

Some people could ask me: “Do you keep the 613 commandments?”

My answer: “No, I do not.”

Some people could ask me: “Do you teach about the 613 commandments?”

My answer: “No. Since I view the Talmud and the 613 commandments differently from how I view the Bible and the Ten Commandments, I do not spend time teaching about the 613 commandments.”

Since I do not teach about the 613 commandments, I will share an excerpt from someone who has written about them.

Following is an excerpt from an article by Mendy Hecht titled "The 613 Commandments (Mitzvot)" that is posted at chabad.org.

"The Talmud tells us (Tractate Makkot 23b) that there are 613 commandments (*mitzvot*) in the Torah; 248 Positive Commandments (do's) and 365 Negative Commandments (do not's). However, the Talmud does not provide us with a list of these commandments. Several great Jewish scholars have compiled a complete listing of these *mitzvahs*. Although they all agree on the vast majority of the commandments, they do disagree concerning a number of them . . . It must be noted that many of these commandments (such as all the commandments associated with sacrifices) are not practicable as long as there is no Temple in Jerusalem."

Important comments about rituals

At this time, I want to mention three specific sections of Scripture that are amazing in the discussion about rituals.

Consider Acts 10:44-48.

- Although God established the wonderful ritual of water baptism, He is not bound by any ritual that He gives.
- Earlier (in Acts 2:38), Peter taught that disciples should be baptized in water to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Later, while Peter was giving a wonderful sermon, God gave the Holy Spirit to some gentiles before they participated in water baptism.
- Peter commanded these gentiles to be baptized in water.

Consider Matthew 12:1-5.

- When the Pharisees were criticizing the disciples of Christ for plucking grain on the Sabbath to eat (which was in violation of their rituals), Christ defended the actions of the disciples.
- And how did Christ defend their actions? He used the Old Testament example of David, violating the ritual of partaking of the showbread (which was unlawful for David to do).
- David violated the ritual, but Christ used David's behavior to defend His disciples (and to correct the Pharisees).

Consider Mark 7:1-13.

- Some Pharisees and scribes saw Christ's disciples violating their traditions (their rituals) and complained to Christ about their behavior.

- Christ paraphrased Isaiah 29:13 to tell them that their traditions (rituals) were worshiping in vain and were teaching doctrines (rituals) that were commandments of men.
- Mark 7:8—"For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the traditions [rituals] of men."
- Mark 7:9—"You reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition [rituals]."
- Mark 7:10-13—Christ specifically mentioned how people violated the Fifth Commandment by giving financial gifts to God instead of providing for their parents.

And now our congregation is entering the spring season where many of us will be following a few rituals that are bunched together. Let's notice them.

Rituals at the commemoration

Notice three rituals at the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Savior.

- Foot-washing—John 13:1-17
- Broken bread—1 Corinthians 11:24
- Small amount of wine—1 Corinthians 11:25

Ritual after the commemoration

After the commemoration of the suffering and death of our Savior, there are some rituals dealing with food.

- Exodus 12:15—Eat unleavened bread and remove leaven [leavened food].
- Exodus 12:18-19—Eat unleavened bread and remove leaven [leavened food].

And there are two valuable lessons with the food ritual.

First lesson

Here is the first lesson. Disciples should be prepared to leave a situation in haste.

- Exodus 12:11—You shall eat it with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. You shall eat it in haste.
- Exodus 12:33-39
- Matthew 24:16-18
- Luke 17:31-33

Second lesson

Here is the second lesson. Since disciples are saved by grace, they should stop sinning.

(For your information, many Bible students are aware that scriptures like Matthew 13:31-33 and Luke 13:20-21 also use leaven as a description of an expanding Kingdom of God. Please recognize the context.)

Here are a few scriptures that picture leaven as sin.

- Mark 8:15
- 1 Corinthians 5:6-8
- Galatians 5:9

Here are a few scriptures that show how Paul taught that people who realize they are saved by grace seek to stop sinning.

- Romans 6:1-2
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Titus 3:4-8.