

Should Christians Wear Tassels?

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

Some believe that faithful Christians should wear tassels like the ones described in the fifteenth chapter of Numbers. When considering this practice, it is important to recognize the context of God's instructions. Notice that tassels were not a part of the Ten Commandments. Nor were they included in any of God's statutes and laws. The instructions to wear tassels were given after an individual was disobeyed the fourth commandment:

Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him. Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died. Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a blue thread in the tassels of the corners. **And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them,** and that you *may* not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God" (Numbers 15:32-40).

These verses indicate that the purpose for wearing tassels was to remind the Israelites to obey God's Commandments. It should also be understood that God instituted the wearing of tassels after Israel was in bondage for hundreds of years. Over several centuries they had forgotten God's laws and turned to idolatry (Jos. 24:14; Eze. 20:7-13).

Generations had come and gone in which the Ten Commandments, circumcision, God's statutes, and annual holy days were widely not taught nor observed. The fact that this man violated the Sabbath soon after God declared that the seventh day must be kept holy makes the problem understandable. The people needed a regular reminder of the necessity to live each day while observing God's laws. Tassels were designed to bring to remembrance the terms of Israel's covenant with God (Exo. 24:7).

It is also worth noting that numerous printed copies of the law found in the Bible were widely not available. People did not have copy machines or books as we do today. Therefore, God deemed it appropriate for Israel to have a physical aid to help them remember the commandments (Num. 15:39). Understanding that tassels were given as a reminder to keep the Commandments, we should also recognize that they are not required in order for a person to be able to keep the Commandments. Whether or not a person wears tassels, their ability to keep God's law remains the same. The Apostle Paul wrote something that relates this same principle, stating:

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God (Galatians 6:15-16).

Perhaps an important reason for the creation of tassels comes from the fact that many were not sensitive to the Holy Spirit upon them, or they did not have it. In contrast to what most have thought, God did give His Spirit to many people other than Moses (Exo. 28:3; 31:4; Num. 11:16-17). Even some of the Judges such as Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson are noted as having God's Spirit. The Prophet Elijah thought that He was alone in revering God, and the LORD told him there were 7,000 others. We cannot know the number of people who had the Holy Spirit, but it is certain that not everyone had it just as not everyone in the Church of God has God's Spirit today. A person's desire to obey God is crucial in receiving the Holy Spirit. In addition, continual obedience to God is critical to maintaining and increasing in God's Spirit (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30).

Understanding how the Holy Spirit functions can help us to recognize its importance. Receiving it is a form of begetting (Gal. 3:29). It is the first step toward the individual's conversion and is the means by which Christians are able to grow in grace and knowledge (2Pet. 3:18). Grace is not simply unmerited pardon or a free gift. Grace is defined primarily as, "the divine influence upon the heart, and its reflection in the life" (*Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, G5485).

The Holy Spirit is God's influence upon those who are called. It facilitates spiritual growth and maturity also referred to as perfection (Mat. 5:48; 1Pet. 1:3; Jam. 1:4). True Christians become a part of the body of Christ in this way, and they are placed within His Church to develop spiritually much like a child within the womb of its mother (Col. 1:24). Those who are faithful will eventually be born again as spirit beings when Christ returns. This process is only possible as a result of spiritual begetting (John 3:5-8; Eph. 4:30). The Holy Spirit was given to an unknown number of individuals during the time of the exodus, but it is clear that most did not continue to be led by it.

Therefore, tassels were a reminder to ancient Israel at that time that they were called to be a nation under God's laws and as such all were required to keep His Commandments. For this reason, God also told the people to write His law on the doorposts of their homes and on their gates because printed copies of the law were not readily available or easily accessible (Deu. 6:9).

In like manner, Christian's have printed Bibles. There is no need to wear tassels as a reminder of what the commandments are. In addition, those who are given the Holy Spirit have as a way to help us understand the spirit of the law. Notice who Christ said that keeping His word is directly related to the Commandments.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me. "These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, that the Father will send in My name, it will teach you all things, and **bring to your remembrance** all things that I said to you" (John 14:21-26).

We recognize that these verses do not specifically say that having the Holy Spirit does away with the wearing of tassels. However, what Christ said about the Holy Spirit fulfills the purpose

tassels and much more. It is also interesting to consider that, like circumcision, tassels were a part of the Old Covenant. And the Apostle Paul wrote the following the Old Covenant:

But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not *in* the oldness of the letter (Roman 7:6).

The majority of Israel eventually misapplied God's purpose for tassels. They became an appearance of righteousness among many of the Jews during Christ's time. As Jesus stated:

But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and **enlarge the borders of their garments**. They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi' (Matthew 23:5-7).

Tassels were used by many as a show of piety. Nonetheless, not everyone who might choose to wear tassels is motivated by the same self righteous pride of the Pharisees. And yet, to a large degree, not much has changed. Many Jews today grow long beards or unique sideburns. Others who desire to identify with the Jews might wear a prayer shawl, a kippah, yarmulke, or tassels. Much of this adorning is not done in an effort to better obey God. More often than not it is an effort to stand out as pious.

With a humble attempt to obey God, we should be reminded of the following truth. Christ condemned doing anything solely for the sake of simply appearing to be righteous. In His words:

Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly (Matthew 6:1-4).

We should not purposefully draw attention to our personal religious observance. While there is no Scripture that prevents people from wearing tassels, in light of their purpose and the New Testament, we find that they are unnecessary. Today we have printed bibles that spell out every commandment, statute, and law. In addition, the Holy Spirit is an intimate reminder.

The Scriptures also reveal that wearing tassels can become a spiritual distraction. Worn as an appearance of piety, they can ultimately do us more harm than good. Religious garments such as tassels, rosary beads, yarmulkes, and prayer shawls cause many to focus on what is unnecessary while disregarding what God truly requires. While wearing tassels is not a sin, if we wear them to draw attention to ourselves and to appear religious it is vanity.

Therefore, as Christ indicated to the Pharisees, wearing tassels is of no real spiritual value. A true believer is to avoid public displays of devotion to God. We are to humbly seek God in spirit and in truth through prayer, meditation, reading the Bible and applying God's moral laws. In these ways our behavior becomes that which reflects our faith through good works. As Christ stated:

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and

glorify your Father in heaven. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).