

Discovering the True Meaning of Legalism

Level 6 Lesson 6 Disciple

Invariably when you teach on holiness, the cry legalist is heard against the teacher, Let's look first and understand what legalism is according to the Bible.

Jesus opposed the Jewish legalism of His day, particularly that of the Pharisees. These Jewish legalists believed that salvation rested in strict conformity to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions they had built around it.

Jesus rebuked this self-righteous attitude, the hypocrisy that accompanied it, and the man-made traditions that actually subverted the Word of God.

Jesus rebuked them in Matt 23:23-28 and look closely at what he said:

23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, 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. 24 Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel. 25 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. 26 Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. 28 Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Matt 23:23-28 KJV

Look at the areas highlighted in yellow

QUESTION vs 23: What should they have done ___TITHED___

QUESTION vs 25: Where should we start on our holiness journey ___ON THE INSIDE___

QUESTION v2 28 What was Jesus condemning ___PUTTING ON A FACADE___

The Pharisees were tithing to the minutest detail, an Jesus said your should have!

What 3 weightier matter of the law were spoke about

- ___Judgment___
- ___MERCY___
- ___FAITH___

The 28th verse says you outwardly appeared righteous to men, and Jesus didnt condemn that, but none of it involved faith.

Paul later pointed out that conformity to external law never meant anything unless the heart was right (Romans 2:17-29).

The Law of Moses could not and was never intended to impart salvation based on works (Romans 3:19-20; 8:3; Galatians 3:21-22).

But the law of Moses served to teach man several important truths:

- [The definition of sin](#)
- [The sinfulness of sin](#)
- [Our own sinfulness](#)
- [Our lack of power to overcome sin on our own](#)
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(Romans 3:20; 5:20; 7:7-14).

The law was referred to as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ so that we would have faith in Him (Galatians 3:21-25).

Throughout history, salvation has always been by faith, not by works. Abraham (who was before the law) and David (under the law) were saved by faith in God, not by good works or conformity to law (Read Romans 4).

The New Testament church contended for this doctrine of justification by faith against some Jewish Christians who still maintained legalistic concepts.

These Judaizers taught that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and had to obey the Jewish law.

The church convened its first general council to discuss this issue (Acts 15). At the conference, Peter said that Gentile Christians should not have to obey the law, for God had already given them the Holy Ghost based on their faith alone.

James pronounced the decision agreed upon by the church: Gentiles did not have to obey the Law of Moses, except to abstain from food offered to idols, blood, things strangled, and fornication.

Later Paul wrote in Col 2:11-14

1 In him you also were circumcised - not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. 12 Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. 13 And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions.

Col 2:11-14 NET

What did Paul show us Old Testament Circumcision was? **__WATER BAPTISM__**

Paul strongly opposed legalism in general and the Judaizers, in particular. The legalism they were trying to impose was not holy living, but rather a return to the Jewish ceremonial law with its unclean foods and drinks, special festival days, and sabbaths

He taught that we are justified by faith, not by observance of the Law of Moses (Romans 3:20-28).

We are saved by grace through faith, not by good works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The gospel of Christ has liberated us from the need to observe the ordinances of the Jewish law (Romans 7:6; Galatians 2:16-21).

Yet the scripture plainly teaches is faith without works is **__DEAD__**

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

James 2:26 KJV

Good works are inspired by the spirit working in us and out love for God.

However, if we persist in seeking righteousness by works of the law (ie outside of faith), we frustrate the grace of God and make Christ's death vain (Galatians 2:21).

Christ's death abolished the Jewish ceremonial law with its unclean foods and drinks, special festival days, and sabbaths.

We do not have to follow ritualistic rules that forbid us even to touch certain unclean foods or other items.

This true legalism may superficially seem to be wise and holy, but it has no power to restrain the lusts of the sinful nature.

“Therefore let no one judge you in food, or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. . . . Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations ‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh”

Colossians 2:16-17, 20-23, NKJV

However, the grace we have according to Titus 2:12-13 does this:

11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Titus 2:12 KJV

This is not legalism, but the call of the spirit.

To see how people twist scripture lets use the phrase let no man judge you in drink.

He is speaking of the drink offerings of the law, not the choice usage of alcohol.

Paul showed us the New Testament application of the drink offering He twice used the image of a drink offering to describe his own service to the Lord.

17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice together with all of you.

Phil 2:17 NET

Here Paul acknowledged his life was like and drink offering and later challenged the church in Philippi to live a life worthy of his dedication to them.

For I am already being poured out as an offering, and the time for me to depart is at hand.

2 Timothy 4:6 NET

Here Paul sensed the end of his ministry, again comparing his efforts to drink offering poured out of a vessel onto an altar.

Legalism not a motivation to live for God. It will not bring salvation, nor will it produce true holiness.

True holiness is produced we live after the spirit and not after the flesh

5 For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit. 6 For the outlook of the flesh is death, but the outlook of the Spirit is life and peace, 7 because the outlook of the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to the law of God, nor is it able to do so. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, this person does not belong to him. 10 But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is your life because of righteousness. 11 Moreover if the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will also make your mortal bodies alive through his Spirit who lives in you. 12 So then, brothers and sisters, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh 13 (for if you live according to the flesh, you will die), but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father."

Rom 8:5-16 NET

QUESTION: What is your outlook? _____

The prophecy of Scripture in Jeremiah 31:31-33 tells us:

31 Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, 32 Not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was their Husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel: After those days, says the Lord, I will put My law within them, and on their hearts will I write it; and I will be their God, and they will be My people.

Jeremiah 31:31-33 AMP

When a person receives the Holy Ghost, the spirit brings the holiness and righteousness of God with it.

As Roman 8 said: *if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live*

The spirit will not lead us into sin, but as Psalms 23:3 says:

He leads me in the paths of righteousness [uprightness and right standing with Him — not for my earning it, but] for His name's sake.

Psalms 23:3 AMP

By this study we should see legalism rejecting faith and trying to be right with God through the Jewish ceremonial law with its unclean foods and drinks, special festival days, and sabbaths.

It has nothing to do with a child of God responding to the spirit of God in them and putting to death the deeds of the body as Romans 8:14 said.

When the Holy Ghost in us leads us into paths of righteousness, it is not legalism

ANSWER KEY

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