

"Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"-1King 22:16

Legalism: The Un-Sin



Since the church began, the devil has concocted any number of diabolical schemes to ensnare God's people. One of his most successful gambits has been the invention of the pseudo-sin commonly called legalism. More people consider legalism to be a sin than consider 7-UP to be a cola, but they are all mistaken. Legalism is the UN-SIN.

Legalism is defined as "strict, literal or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code" (Webster's Dictionary). Simply put, a legalist follows the rules.

I was not there when the devil and his angels dreamed up this strategy for getting Christians to commit more sin by convincing them that legalism is a sin. But I must say that it was a stroke of genius. Just think of it -- being able to actually convince people that not committing sin is a sin!

Satan must have noticed that early disciples "continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine" (**Acts 2:42**), and that they were expected to be "obedient in all things" (**2 Corinthians 2:9**). At some point however, Satan also became aware that the apostles and prophets of Christ were teaching Jewish Christians that they could not rely on their obedience to the Law of Moses for their salvation; it would do them no good to strictly follow the Law of Moses. And that's when Satan hatched his scheme. He knew that if he could convince Christians that the apostolic warnings against becoming "entangled

again with a yoke of bondage" (**Galatians 5:1**) were talking about strictly keeping the commands of Jesus, then he could get them to stop being concerned with commandment keeping.

This is what has happened. Millions of people today who call themselves Christians believe that strict obedience to God is a sin called legalism. They believe that to be a faithful Christian one must not be too concerned with actually doing exactly what Jesus said to do. Their leaders write things like the following:

"Stringently striving to obey Christian rules and regulations doesn't enable the Spirit-filled walk; it often kills it" (**2 Corinthians 3:6**). [Neil Anderson Freed From Legalism].

Please note that in the verse cited by this anti-legalist, the apostle Paul states that God "made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." What is "the letter" in this passage? Is it "Christian rules and regulations" as Mr. Anderson states? We don't have to guess, for Paul tells us in the next verse. The letter that kills is called "the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones" (**2 Corinthians 2:7**). "The letter" is plainly the Law of Moses! It was written on tablets of stone.

Over and over again the apostles of Christ warn that striving to strictly follow the Law of Moses will lead to death, not life! But NOWHERE do they state that strictly following the commands of Christ will do the same.

The New Testament never condemns the strict keeping of the commandments of God. It always commends it. Even the hair-splitting, herb-tithing, commandment-keeping Pharisees were not condemned for keeping God's commandments too well. They were condemned for keeping the small requirements while leaving off the big ones. Jesus told them that they should have kept BOTH! "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (**Matthew 23:23**).

My friends, those who love God will keep His commandments. "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (**1 John 5:3**). Those who don't keep God's commandments, don't really know Him. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (**1 John 2:3-4**). - Steve Klein

HAVE YOU STUDIED YOUR BIBLE TODAY?

Grace and Righteousness

It seems to me that so many members of Christ's body have a grave misconception of the role of grace in our right-standing with God. Because of this many feel insecure in their relationship with God. They tend to rely on their own righteousness, and, realizing their frailties, imperfections, and short-comings, lose heart or become fearful that they might miss Heaven. The fact of our imperfection is precisely why God's grace is provided and why it is so valuable in our lives.

Why Law Cannot Produce Righteousness

In a law system such as we see in the Mosaical age, absolute obedience is required in order to produce righteousness. "For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.' Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them'" (Gal. 3:10-12). Those who feel that right-standing comes only by law-keeping (any law) must face up to the consequences of their choice. That choice demands total and perfect law-keeping. "So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, but which a man may live if he does them" (Lev. 18:8). If you miss one little point, you are a law-breaker (See James 2:10). Now, if you are a law-breaker, you are a sinner and are not "righteous" and cannot stand before God, but are under a curse (v. 10 above). "Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them" (Deut. 27:26).

What Can Forgive Sin?

Law cannot forgive sin. You will have to rely on something other than law to have right-standing. The fact is that no one perfectly keeps the law (except Jesus). For that reason, "no one is justified by the law before God." It is this realization of our falling short that often makes us miserable in our religion because we feel that we must render perfect obedience to be right, but we don't!

If we cannot obtain right-standing by law-keeping, then by what means does it come? Enter the grace of God. You see, God loved us even when we were sinners (Rom. 5:6-9). That love provided a way through Jesus Christ who came and who died in our place and for our sins. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law,

having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). But how do we gain access into this grace and thus obtain righteousness? The answer is plain. It is by faith. Our text above says, "The righteous will live by faith." Or to put it another way, "The man who is right with God by faith will live." Paul stated it this way, "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand" (Rom. 5:1-2). The way of faith takes God at His word. It trusts Jesus and His sacrifice to take away our sins. When my faith leads me to genuine repentance and to a burial with Him in baptism, it is His blood that forgives and gives me a right-standing that I have not earned and do not deserve. Actually, what I have is an imputed righteousness (Rom. 4:5-8). It is not of debt but of grace that I am declared righteous. And, I might add, it is this grace which continually provides the blood of Christ by which I can daily stand in righteousness before God and have fellowship with Him (1 Jn. 1:7).

Paul speaks of the "righteousness of the law" (Rom. 8:4). That is, the righteousness which was demanded by the law and could only come by perfect law-keeping. Paul says that this right-standing that perfect law-keeping could have produced can be fulfilled in us. How? Remember, it doesn't come by perfect obedience. Then how? By grace on God's part and by our faith accessing that grace. When my faith leads me to repent and be baptized and to "walk according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4), then I have full faith that God's grace accepts "such a worm as I" (Ps. 22:6). Truly, I can praise Him for imputing to me a righteousness which I have not earned and be as Abraham of old, who "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom. 4:3).

One other thought: God's grace is not a license to sin. I cannot reason that since I am saved by grace that it doesn't matter whether I try to follow His will or not. His will was given for the purpose of our striving to follow it in our lives. Our faith takes Him at His word and seeks to walk in His way so long as we live. Understanding His grace helps to have full assurance as we walk humbly with our God. - Forrest D. Moyer

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

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