

MARK 2:18

LEGALISM and FREEDOM - RELATIONSHIP and PERFORMANCE

1. REVIEW:

A. WHEN JESUS SHIFTED HIS MINISTRY OF HOPE TO THE POINT OF NEED (FORGIVENESS OF SIN)... THE PHARISEES WERE ANGRY BECAUSE THAT CHALLENGED THEIR AUTHORITY WHICH THREATENED THEIR POWER OVER THE JEWISH PEOPLE!

2. Mark 2:18 (NASB) John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, "Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

3. INTRODUCTION TO LEGALISM: "YOU MAY NOT REALIZE THAT WE HAVE PHARISEES AMONG US TODAY, BUT THEY ARE VERY MUCH ALIVE AND WELL."
– CHARLES SWINDOLL

A. LEGALISM: IS A THEOLOGICAL TERM USED TO DESCRIBE THE ERROR OF TRYING TO EARN SALVATION OR SPIRITUAL MATURITY THROUGH HUMAN RULES RATHER THAN THROUGH GOD'S GRACE AND FAITH.

B. LEGALISM: IT IS AN ATTITUDE OF AUTHORITARIANISM... A DESIRE TO CONTROL OTHER PEOPLE BY ENFORCING AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF DO'S AND DON'TS THAT ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE WHICH EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE BY THE GROUP OF LEGALISTS.

C. PROBLEM: LEGALISM LEADS TO A SELF-RIGHTEOUS ATTITUDE, WHERE PEOPLE BELIEVE THEY CAN EARN GOD'S FAVOR THROUGH THEIR OWN ACTIONS BY FOLLOWING A SET OF RULES.

1. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NASB) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

2. Galatians 2:16-17 (NIV) know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

D. NOTE: THE PHARISEES WERE LEGALISTS.

1. THEY WERE BOTH RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL LEADERS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE, AND THEY ATTEMPTED TO CONTROL THEM BY "ENFORCING AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF DO'S AND DON'TS".

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a. 365 DO'S AND 248 DON'TS!

1) THAT IS HOW RIDICULOUS LEGALISM CAN BECOME!

b. THE PHARISEES WERE BOTH JUDGMENTAL AND CRITICAL OF JEWS WHO DID NOT SUBMIT TO THEIR AUTHORITY.

1) Matthew 7:1-5 (NLT) “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

2) Romans 2:1-3 (NASB) Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things. And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same *yourself*, that you will escape the judgment of God?

E. LEGALISTS: LEGALISTS ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO EXAMINE THE EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR OF OTHERS AS A MEANS OF GAUGING THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL HEALTH... WHEN THEY SHOULD BE GIVING MORE ATTENTION TO THEIR OWN INTERNAL THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES IN THE INTEREST OF THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL MATURITY.

1. CONSEQUENTLY, LEGALISTS APPEAR SPIRITUALLY STRONGER THAN OTHERS... BUT ARE, IN FACT, SPIRITUALLY ANEMIC.

2. RATHER THAN FINDING JOY IN A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD... THEY BECOME GRACE KILLERS, JOY STEALERS, AND FREEDOM DESTROYERS.

3. LEGALISTS THINK THEY UNDERSTAND GRACE, BUT THE DEMANDS THEY PLACE ON OTHERS PROVE THAT THEY HAVEN'T THE SLIGHTEST IDEA OF GRACE AS TAUGHT BY JESUS.

F. LEGALISM:

1. IS AN ENEMY OF CHRISTIANITY!

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2. IS NOT A WELL-MEANING BUT MISGUIDED FRIEND... BUT RATHER AN

AGGRESSIVE OPPONENT:

- a. TO A LIFE OF JOY,
- b. TO A WALK OF FAITH,
- c. AND TO LIBERTY IN CHRIST.

3. IS A THIEF... STEALING OUR FREEDOM AND ROBBING US OF SPONTANEOUS JOY.

4. IS A BULLY... INTIMIDATING ALL THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW HOW TO DEFEND THEMSELVES.

5. IS A GRIM-FACED, GUILT-GIVING, SELF-APPOINTED JUDGE WHO INDICTS AND PRONOUNCES SHAME AND CONDEMNATION ON ALL THOSE WHO REFUSE TO OBEY ITS RIDICULOUS LISTS OF NONBIBLICAL RULES AND MAN-MADE REGULATIONS.

6. IS AN ATTITUDE OF AUTHORITARIANISM.

7. IS A DESIRE TO CONTROL OTHER PEOPLE BY ENFORCING AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST OF DOS AND DON'TS THAT ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE WHICH EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR SHOULD BE CONSIDERED ACCEPTABLE.

G. LEGALISTS USE CONFORMITY TO AN EXTERNAL SET OF RULES AS A LITMUS TEST TO DETERMINE ONE'S ACCEPTABILITY... WHICH IS THE EXACT OPPOSITE OF GRACE.

H. LEGALISM EMPHASIZES THE LETTER OF THE LAW TO THE EXCLUSION OF THE SPIRIT OR INTENT OF THE LAW.

I. LEGALISM MAKES SECONDARY ISSUES PRIMARY WHILE MAKING PRIMARY MATTERS SECONDARY.

J. LEGALISM USES MANIPULATION TO CREATE BLIND OBEDIENCE.

K. LEGALISM PROMOTES EXTERNAL APPEARANCES THAT SEEM TO BE SPIRITUAL IN NATURE... BUT THAT, AT THEIR CORE, REPRESENT PRIDE AND SELF-SERVICE.

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4. QUESTION: HOW DOES LEGALISM GAIN A FOOTHOLD IN SO MANY CHRISTIAN'S LIVES?

A. FIRST: BY FEAR AND INTIMIDATION FROM THOSE WHO ARE IN POSITIONS OF

AUTHORITY... BECAUSE LEGALISTS WILL AMPUTATE THOSE WHO DO NOT ACCEPT THEIR AUTHORITY!

1. PEOPLE FALL IN LINE BECAUSE THEY FEAR THE BULLIES WHO DETERMINE THE RULES AND REGULATIONS REGARDING:

a. HOW TO LIVE.

b. WHAT TO DO, AND WHAT NOT TO DO.

c. WHAT TO WEAR, AND WHAT NOT TO WEAR.

d. WHAT TO DRINK, AND WHAT NOT TO DRINK.

e. WHAT TO EAT, AND WHAT NOT TO EAT.

f. WHERE TO GO FOR AN EVENING IN A RESTAURANT, AND WHICH ESTABLISHMENTS TO AVOID.

g. HOW TO RESPOND IN CERTAIN SITUATIONS, AND HOW TO BEHAVE BEFORE THE EYES OF THE EVER-WATCHING PUBLIC.

h. FACT: FEAR OF THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE THE RULES GIVES LEGALISM UNQUESTIONABLE POWER!!!

B. SECOND: THE DESIRE TO BE ACCEPTED BY ONE'S PEERS.

1. SOMETIMES THIS DESIRE IS GREATER THAN THE DETERMINATION TO HONOR CHRIST... AND IT STEMS FROM INSECURITY.

a. LEGALISTS FEED ON INSECURE AND UNTAUGHT BELIEVERS.

C. THIRD: IGNORANCE OF THE SCRIPTURES.

1. FACT: THE MORE A PERSON UNDERSTANDS THE WORD OF GOD (NOT JUST THE WORD ITSELF, BUT THE SPIRIT OF THE WORD) THE LESS THAT PERSON IS INCLINED TO BOW TO LEGALISTS.

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2. WITH IGNORANCE OF THE PRINCIPLES OF SCRIPTURE COMES A DEEPER DEPENDENCE ON LEGALISTS TO DIRECT ONE'S SPIRITUAL LIFE.

D. FOURTH: HESITATION TO CONFRONT MANIPULATORS AND FIGHT FOR ONE'S FREEDOM.

5. LEGALISM IN SOME CHURCHES TODAY:

A. "YOU MIGHT FIND THIS HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT I MEET PEOPLE IN THE CITY OF DALLAS WHO SAY, "PASTOR, WE COULD NEVER BE PART OF YOUR CHURCH BECAUSE WE DANCE, AND WE KNOW BAPTISTS DON'T DANCE." I SAY TO THEM, "YES, BAPTISTS DO DANCE... NOT VERY WELL, BUT WE DO DANCE!" - DR. ROBERT JEFFRESS (PASTOR OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DALLAS)

B. DANCING IS ONE EXAMPLE OF LEGALISM IN SOME CHURCHES TODAY.

1. THERE'S NOTHING IN THE BIBLE THAT SAYS BELIEVERS SHOULDN'T DANCE, HOWEVER SOME LEGALISTS HAVE MADE THAT A STANDARD... NOT JUST FOR THEMSELVES BUT FOR EVERYONE ELSE.

C. DISCUSS: OTHER LEGALISTIC PROHIBITIONS IN SOME CHURCHES TODAY:

1. ALCOHOL,
2. TOBACCO,
3. ENTERTAINMENT,
4. CLOTHING,
5. TATOOS, BODY PIERCINGS, HAIRSTYLES AND COLOR,
6. CHURCH ATTENDANCE,
7. WORSHIP MUSIC,
8. PROHIBITIONS AGAINST MANY SUNDAY ACTIVITIES,
9. FINANCIAL TITHING AMOUNTS,
10. SEPARATION, DIVORCE, AND REMARRIAGE.

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11. OTHERS?

D. **TRUTH:** THERE ARE SOME **GOOD REASONS WHY YOU MAY CHOOSE TO DO, OR NOT DO, SOME OF THOSE THINGS... HOWEVER THAT IS A PERSONAL CONVICTION, NOT A BIBLICAL STANDARD.**

1. **NOTE:** IT IS **LEGALISTIC TO EXPECT OTHER CHRISTIANS TO FOLLOW YOUR PERSONAL CONVICTIONS.**

2. **AND... IT IS DANGEROUS TO JUDGE OTHERS AND CRITICIZE THEM.**

a. **Matthew 7:1-5 (NLT)** “Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging is the standard by which you will be judged. “And why worry about a speck in your friend’s eye when you have a log in your own? How can you think of saying to your friend, ‘Let me help you get rid of that speck in your eye,’ when you can’t see past the log in your own eye? **Hypocrite!** First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

b. **Romans 2:1-3 (NASB)** Therefore you have no excuse, everyone of you who passes judgment, **for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself;** for you who judge practice the same things. **And we know that the judgment of God rightly falls upon those who practice such things. But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God?**

E. **TRUTH:** **LEGALISM IN CHURCHES OFTEN KEEPS THE VERY PEOPLE GOD CHARGES US TO REACH... AWAY FROM COMING!**

1. **MANY NON-CHRISTIANS ARE TURNED OFF BY THE CHURCH BECAUSE OF JUDGEMENTAL MAN-MADE REGULATIONS.**

a. THEY **THINK**, “I COULD NEVER LIVE UP TO THAT STANDARD”, AND THAT **THINKING OFTEN KEEPS** THEM FROM **COMING TO A CHURCH** WHERE THEY **COULD HEAR THE “GOOD NEWS”** AND **THEREFORE AN ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST.**

b. **THAT IS ONE OF THE MANY DANGERS OF LEGALISM.**

6. **SCRIPTURE:** REGARDING **LEGALISTS AND LEGALISM:**

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A. IT'S INTERESTING THAT JESUS' HARSHTEST WORDS WERE NOT AGAINST ADULTERERS, MURDERERS, THIEVES, OR DRUNKARDS... HIS MOST SCATHING CRITICISM WAS AGAINST THE LEGALISTS IN HIS DAY, WHO WERE CALLED THE PHARISEES.

1. Matthew 23:13 (NASB) "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

a. NOTE: WHEN JESUS SPOKE "WOE" TOWARD THE PHARISEES OR UNREPENTANT PEOPLE, IT INCLUDED CONDEMNATION AS WELL AS PROFOUND PERSONAL GRIEF AND SORROW OVER THE MISERY THEY WERE BRINGING UPON THEMSELVES.

1) AN ETERNITY IN HELL!

2. Matthew 23:23-24 (NASB) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. "You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!"

3. Matthew 23:27-28 (NASB) "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. "So you, too, outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."

4. Mark 7:5-8 (NASB) The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with impure hands?" And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'" Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

7. SUGGESTIONS: FOR DEALING WITH LEGALISTS:

A. ONE: LEARN HOW TO IDENTIFY A LEGALIST.

B. TWO: IGNORE THE COUNSEL OF LEGALISTS.

C. THREE: DELIBERATELY STAND AGAINST LEGALISM.

D. FOUR: ENJOY YOUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST IN SPITE OF LEGALISTS.

8. CONTRAST: BETWEEN LEGALISM (RELIGION) AND A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD THROUGH HIS SON, JESUS CHRIST.

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A. IN **CONTRAST TO LEGALISM**, THE **BIBLE EMPHASIZES A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD**, CHARACTERIZED BY **FAITH, LOVE, AND OBEDIENCE** THAT FLOWS FROM A **TRANSFORMED HEART**.

1. THAT **RELATIONSHIP** IS MADE **POSSIBLE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST**, WHO **RECONCILES HUMANITY TO GOD**.
2. THE **NEW TESTAMENT FREQUENTLY HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATIONAL ASPECT OF FAITH**.

B. **NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURE:**

1. **John 15:4-5 (NASB)**

"**Abide** in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it **abides** in the vine, so neither *can* you unless you **abide** in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who **abides** in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

2. **DISCUSS: WHAT THE WORD "ABIDE" MEANS.**

9. NEXT WEEK: **GOD WANTS A RELATIONSHIP... NOT A PERFORMANCE!**