***Beware the Legalists - PH66-01

Advanced Bible Doctrine - Philippians 3:1-2***

Please turn with me to Philippians 3, as we continue studying the warning that the apostle Paul has given in the first verses against the legalists. He begins this whole chapter with a warning against the practice of legalism in the Christian life. The formula of the Judaizers was this: faith in Jesus Christ, plus practicing the rituals and the ceremonies of the Mosaic Law will provide you with salvation and sanctification, or spiritual maturity. People were following the apostle Paul, and they were teaching the converts: "You have made the first step toward salvation. You have placed faith in Christ. Now you must follow through with the Mosaic Law. You must obey the details of the Mosaic Law for salvation, and to have God's blessing upon you."

So we had these Jewish Christians who, in New Testament times, were teaching believers that in the church age you must observe the law of Moses just as you had to observe it in the Old Testament era under Judaism: this to be saved; and this to develop a spiritual maturity. But even in the dispensation of the law, the Jews were shown that the law was not the means for salvation or sanctification.

For example, in Galatians 2:16, we read, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ. Even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." You couldn't say it any more clearly. He said it in the book of Galatians, because this was the group of churches who were playing by this formula: believe in Christ, and do all the details of the Mosaic Law, so you will be saved. Paul says, "Never." You can do all the law works that you wish, but it will never lead you to salvation. You may also read that further in Galatians 3:2-3 and in Galatians 3:11-12.

**The Mosaic Law**

The Law of Moses, however, was indeed a way of life for the Jews of the Old Testament era, but it was never applied to Christians in the New Testament, not even any single part of the law. Remember that the law was a structure of three areas. It was made up of ordinances, judgments, and commandments. The ordinances had to do with guidance for the religious life of the Jewish people; the judgments had to do with guidance for the social life of the people; and, the commandments were moral guidance to the people. This whole thing is one unit. You can't pick any part of this structure of the law and say, "I'm going to keep," for example, "the commandments, but I am going to discontinue the social and religious practices of the law." It was a unit, and you could not split it.

So no part of the law was ever carried over into the New Testament. None of the three parts was applied to Christians. It was all done away with. Whenever the New Testament refers to the law, it is referring to all three segments. It never refers to one segment as the law apart from the others. That is a deliberate human division, usually of covenant theology, in order to be able to peel off the commandment part so they can hold on to some legalistic elements, as the moral code is expressed in legalistic terms rather than in grace terms as we have in our New Testament. This was for them to be able to disband all these judgments; ordinances; sacrifices; and, all the other things that were required.

So the law in no part was carried over into the New Testament era. Observing rituals, ceremonies, holy days and good works to gain merit with God is legalism. That is self-exaltation. Yet, Christians today are indeed given many many codes of conduct (systems of rituals that they should keep) in order to gain God's favor. Many Christians believe this because the pulpits of our land are full of legalistic preachers who themselves sincerely believe this, and who themselves have never learned what the apostle Paul tried to teach the churches at Galatia–the complete divine abandonment of the Law of Moses in the age of grace.

So legalism violates the principle of grace, which is complete freedom from any human works in order to gain God's blessing. Legalism is a system of bondage. Galatians 5:1 describes it in just those terms when the apostle Paul says, "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free. And be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage;" that is, that bondage of the Old Testament law.

The freedom under grace does not mean that there are no divine rules for Christianity to obey. Legalism is a bondage. So God says, "This is not for you, for I have come to make you free in Christ Jesus." But as Christians, we have many positive and negative rules to obey–literally, hundreds of them. But these rules are not to be kept in order to gain favor with God. They are to be kept because we already have complete favor with God. All spiritual blessings, the Bible says, are already yours. There is nothing that God has more to give you than what is already yours. All you have to do is, through the learning of doctrine and the guidance of the Spirit, enter into your spiritual possessions.

So the commandments of grace bring happiness because they enable us to live in tune with the divine viewpoint of God. We bring glory to Him as we enter into the possession of what is already ours. Our heritage as Christians, however, is something else: grace.

The Jews in the Old Testament, actually, we're keeping the Mosaic Law like some magical formula in order to secure their favor with God. That's why we say they were legalists. They obeyed the letter of the law, but not the spirit. The legalists today, as then, are always offensive, self-righteous people. Legalists exalt themselves through their old sin nature rather than exalting Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Legalism does not please God. As a matter of fact, it hinders His blessing upon the legalists. The marvelous heritage of grace is a totally different way of life, and that's the one that applies to us.

So let me just run through a few points on this in order to maybe contrast what we mean by legalism–doing something to gain divine favor, and to gain points with God over against living as those who already have all of God's favor.

**Grace**

1. Under grace today, God bestows the right mental and overt conduct, which under the law He merely demanded (John 1:17, Romans 3:21, Romans 10:4-5). Under the Old Testament, the Jews were told to live a certain way. But they couldn't do it. They just could not obey the fine standard that those 613 commandments represented. There was no way that they were able to live under it–no matter what attitudes of thinking they wanted, and no matter what context they wanted to perform. In all sincerity, they were not able to cut it. So they were a failure. But today, God doesn't ask us to do that. Instead, He gives us the capacity to have the right thinking and the right conduct, and He gives us all the elements (from the Bible and the local church on down) to be able to perform this. It all begins with taking in doctrine into our own souls.
2. So every believer in the church age is permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit.
3. Every believer has the privilege of being filled with the Spirit today, or controlled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). As we confess known sins, God the Holy Spirit, who already indwells us, is now free to give us the right thoughts and to give us the right conduct. In the Old Testament, people were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit, so there was no way they could have the right thoughts and the right conduct. All they had was the old sin nature, so the best they could come up with was human good.
4. Every believer has a living human spirit in which to store Bible doctrine. You have the capacity to store it, but to learn it is something else. Every Christian has the capacity to develop a spiritual IQ, but not all Christians do it.
5. The indwelling Holy Spirit leads the believer today through doctrine stored in his human spirit so that the Christian is able to please the Father and to bring honor to the Son (Romans 8:2-4, Galatians 5:16-18). It is God the Holy Spirit, taking doctrine which we have stored within our spirit, who touches our knowledge and enables us to please God; to honor the Son; and, to do all the things that the poor Jew of the Old Testament wanted so desperately to do, but had no ability to perform. Grace is not lawlessness or anarchy, but rather the ability to do right through the enablement of the Holy Spirit. In other words, we are able to obey Bible doctrine (1 Corinthians 9:21).

This is the first thing that uninformed people will come up with when you say such a thing as, "The law was an entity of three parts, and all three parts are gone." That just makes them itchy and nervous as all get out. The first thing they say is "Well, then you can just go and live like the devil, and do whatever you want." That is automatic. The two are tied together, because they don't understand that what God has said is, "I once used this system under the law and I said, 'Here's what you do. Now go ahead and do it.' And I proved to mankind in that dispensation his total inability to think right and to do right." Now God says, I'm going to do it for you, and I will give you the capacity, through the indwelling Spirit and the knowledge of doctrine, to think right and to act right. And you'll be a victor in the Christian life every time."

**Victory in the Christian Life**

Now, what does it mean to be victorious in the Christian life? It means that you will please God as a Christian, as the Jew never could please God. It doesn't mean that you're going to be an evil person. It means that you will be everything the Jew hoped to be, but never was. So it is pure ignorance to suggest that because we accept Paul's principle, that we are not under the law, but under grace, that that means that we are going to be evil people.

1. The Christian is not under the Law of Moses with its system of required rituals (Romans 6:14, Romans 7:4).

**The Nature of Legalism**

Let's tie this up by looking at the nature of legalism. The reason that you and I obey a commandment or a code of conduct determines whether you are a legalist or not. I think we've established that. The principle is why you obey something. The reason one obeys any commandment or code of conduct determines whether he is being a legalist. Just because you obey certain divine rules does not make you a legalist. Just because God gives us rules to obey does not mean that He is a legalist. Just because within the context of life we have rules given to us that are necessary to obey (whether at school; at work; or, in church) does not mean that we are being legalistic. But anytime we begin obeying rules because we think we're going to gain God's favor, then we are a legalist, even if the rule is a good and right rule to obey.

**Drunkenness**

For example, the Bible very clearly forbids drunkenness. The Bible says you must not use alcoholic beverages and get drunk. The reason for this is that the mentality of your soul loses control over the body. It is God's ordained order of human relationships within your soul that the mind should always be dominantly in control. Anytime the mind is not in control, there is the threat of the emotions being permitted to lead the person anywhere at all. This is the thing that makes fools of people, especially in religious things, more than anything else–when the emotions can go rampant.

So God says one of the great threats to controls within your soul, which is your mind controlling your life, is alcohol. When you become drunk, alcohol controls your life. For this reason, the Bible forbids drunkenness. As a matter of fact, that is such a great hazard that if you happen to be president of the United States; if you happen to be the prime minister of England; if you happen to be the ruler even of Russia; or, if you happen to be the chairman of the central committee in Russia, the Bible says once you are the head of a nation, you are forbidden to use alcoholic beverages at any time under any condition. Proverbs 31:4-5 say, "For it is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes strong drink, lest they drink and forget the law and pervert the justice of any of the afflicted."

So one of the principles of wisdom in the book of Proverbs is that if you're the head of a nation, you must not drink. You can carry that down and say, "Well, the principle here is no alcohol, because so many people could be hurt by the fact that the head of a nation has been drinking." How many times have rulers, because of their drinking in their conferences with one another, been thrown off base in their judgments so that they made that euphoric decisions and concessions at the moment? Only eternity will reveal to us what has been done to mankind because somebody exchanged a cocktail when heads of state met together. The Bible is smart. The Bible knows what it's talking about. It says that drunkenness is forbidden. And for a head of state, you're not even to hazard this.

**Drinking**

I think we can carry this down and say, "Well, how many other areas of life are there where people are in a position where many would be injured if their thinking was not clear?" Therefore, I think the same principle can be applied to many others who are in places of authority, including the local pastor-teacher, and on up the line from him. People in places of authority, where they are making decisions that affect the lives of many other people, are not to do anything that would cloud their thinking.

So the Bible calls for voluntary abstinence from the use of anything which would hinder the development of spiritual maturity in another person. This includes the use of alcoholic beverages. For some Christians (for some weaker Christians), to use any kind of drink at all would be a disaster to them spiritually. The Bible says you must voluntarily abstain under those conditions. But my point is that the use of alcoholic beverages in any form is dangerous for the believer because we are in the angelic conflict. Because we are surrounded by the angelic demonic host who is waiting to pounce upon us, anytime our thinking is brought under something less than full capacity, we are in danger.

Don't forget that you and I live in the intensified stage of the angelic conflict. When it is winding up, the use of alcoholic beverages is hazardous. As a matter of fact, I noticed yesterday on TV a very amazing little analysis. People often say, "Well, beer is not so bad. The Germans drink beer, and the Germans aren't bad–they're not too much alcoholic." Also, I've been told how many good vitamins are in beer, and a lot of folks say, "Well, let's knock off the vitamin tablets and go for the beer, and we'll enjoy our vitamins all the more." Well, on TV yesterday, you may have seen it: beer, in its alcoholic content and influence is as bad as a glass of wine or a mixed drink. There is no difference.

This goes along with a lot of other misconceptions. For example, some people say that what you do with a drunk to sober him up is to give him coffee. The program said all you do is have a wide awake drunk. Or some people say that you put him under a cold shower because he's a drunk. The program pointed out that all you have is a clean drunk. Or they say that you should take him and walk him around because he's drunk–to sober him up. The program pointed out that you don't sober him up. All you have is a well-exercised drunk. The point being that once you put alcohol in the bloodstream, which immediately begins changing the control of your mentality of your soul (and I mean, immediately–with the first drink), there is no way for you to reverse that except to wait it out until, by natural processes, the body disposes of the alcohol. There is no way. You cannot sober up. You cannot do anything to remove it. You just have to sit there and ride it out.

Therefore, the Bible says, "Do not be drunk." While it doesn't say "Don't drink," it says, "Do not be drunk." So your pastor-teacher comes along, perhaps in your local church, and says, "Under the fact that we are in the intensified stage of the angelic conflict, for us as Christians, the hazard is infinitely greater in the use of alcohol than for the unbeliever. For the influence that we bear, and the destruction we can affect, it's infinitely greater." I've already noticed I've had occasions where younger people have been ready to defend drinking to me because they had somebody who was older that they esteemed who did it. So don't kid yourself that your influence does not cause a younger person to try to defend it, partly because you've esteem that person. You love him, and you hate to say, "Well, this person is doing a bad thing." For that reason, your pastor-teacher may say, "Lay off the booze altogether." Is he a legalist when he tells you that?

I've had Christians rise up with foam in their lips, in their rage and in their indignation, over the fact that I have suggested that, as Christians, it's better to lay off in our age; at our stage of history; and, at our stage of the angelic conflict, we should have no participation in alcoholic drinks at all. Well, he's not a legalist unless your pastor-teacher says, "If you don't drink, God will really bless you." That's wrong. At that point, he has become a legalist. But for all these other reasons, very legitimate and proper reasons, you may say, "Yes, I will do this for the Lord's exaltation." That's what he's telling you. This is for the Lord's glory, for the Lord's exaltation, and for His honor. For that reason, though I can drink, scripturally speaking, I won't drink, speaking from the frame of reference of good Christian judgment. Grace does it because it's good Christian judgment, and it avoids injuring others spiritually, let alone the unknown quantity, which is in every human being, of who is destined to become the alcoholic.

Some people never seem to understand that no alcoholic ever started off intending to be an alcoholic. He just suddenly discovered that that's where he was. The program on television yesterday pointed out another interesting fact–that most people think that the alcoholics are down on skid row. The program said, "That's wrong. 5% percent are on skid row. The other 95% are in the circles that you move in." Isn't that interesting? We have cultured drunks.

That may be a practical illustration of legalism and non-legalism in action. You can be legalistic about telling people not to drink, but you can also be very non-legalistic about it–the reason being why you are advising them not to drink. Are you saying that it's to gain favor with God? That's legalism. The real reason is because it is an honor to the Lord, and it fulfills His call to you as a believer. That is not legalism. That is right.

**The Characteristics of Legalism**

If you open your Bible to Matthew 23, we have here some splendid examples in this chapter of characteristics of legalism to help us to tie down some of the qualities (the expressions) of legalism, which will help us to spot them in ourselves. These are the characteristics of legalism:

1. In Matthew 23:1-3, Jesus is teaching the Jewish people the proper attitude toward the Law of Moses and toward their teachers. He says, "Then spoke Jesus to the multitude and to His disciples, saying, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses's seat (the place of teaching authority). All, therefore, whatever they bid you, observe; that observe and do, but do not after their works, for they say and do not.'" The scribes and the Pharisees were the legitimate teachers of the law. That's what Jesus points out. But the Jews were to obey, on the one hand, the 613 rules of the Mosaic Law, which the scribes and the Pharisees taught them, but they were not to follow the pattern of their teachers in the way their teachers were fulfilling those commandments, because their teachers, the scribes and the Pharisees, proved themselves to be legalists. They were violating the very principle of the law which was given such that it had a spiritual impact and a spiritual significance. To them, it was a point-making system with God.
2. So in verse 4, Jesus points out that legalism, is burdensome: "For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers." There is a monotony to the rituals that are imposed by legalists in order to appease God. These are all old sin nature productions, and they get old. They are imposed by religious leaders who themselves are out of touch with divine viewpoint. Living a legalistic life is a very tiresome and burdensome thing.
3. Legalism is showing off. In verse 5, Jesus says, "But all their works they do to be seen of men. They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments." The phylacteries were those little boxes that they wore on their forehead and on their arms with Scripture verses in it, and the trim on their garments indicated their official standing and their various honors and status that they had. So in other words, it was wearing a religious garb to impress people that they had some special intimacy with God.

You may do this by wearing a religious habit of some kind. Nuns wear a certain kind of habit. When you see a nun, you say, "Oh, there's a person who knows God." Some preachers wear their collars around backwards. It makes it terrible to button up the shirt, but it impresses a lot of dummies with the fact that you know something very much about God, and you have a close touch with God. So this is what the legalist does. He goes through making an impression. He shows off. He does things in public view deliberately to gain the esteem of people. He walks up to the offering box with his check and he holds it out full-blast. He has an enlarged copy that he waves around trying to find the hole in the offering box. Everybody sees it, and he drops it in. That's what the scribes and the Pharisees were doing. Legalism is showing off.

Why they do that? Well, they want to gain esteem, and show that they love the Lord. They're trying to gain points. They're trying to exalt themselves.

Legalism has a lust for prominence. Jesus says, "And they love the uppermost places at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue." They seek the places of honor at public functions. They desire the place of importance in prestigious organizations. They play ball with those in power in order to get ahead. The legalist is a joiner of organizations that he thinks will gain him some prominence.

1. Legalism desires recognition. Verses 7-12: "And greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men 'Rabbi. Rabbi.'" They love to be recognized as very important people (VIPs), and they seek this false respect. They love the titles of dignity and of prestige. "But be not called 'Rabbi,' for One is your master, even Christ, and all you are brethren. And call no man your 'father' upon the earth, for One is your Father who is in heaven. Neither be called 'masters,' for One is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant, and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." So legalism desires self-exaltation. Jesus Christ says that the legalist is always doomed to disappointment, because the exaltation he seeks, he will not receive.
2. Legalism hinders personal spiritual growth. Verse 13: "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for you neither go in yourselves, neither permit them that are entering to go in." Legalism is guilty of false doctrine which leads people away from God's thinking. Legalists are, in effect, blind leaders of spiritually blind people, so they both go astray from the truth–truth which is necessary for them to move forward in their spiritual lives. Legalism always hinders spiritual growth. That's what's so terrible about it, because usually the legalist is championing his cause under the excuse that it will help people to advance spiritually.
3. Legalism is hypocritical. "Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore, you shall receive the greater condemnation." These people were putting on airs while being filled with mental attitude sins. Here were the mental attitude sins of greed for money. Here's this Pharisee, this scribe, this legalist, who goes up and he forecloses on some poor widow's house. Then he goes to the temple and he prays, "Oh, God, you know that this poor widow has no husband. She's all alone in the world. She has no place to live. I pray that you would give her shelter and care for her. We beseech you, God, to be merciful to this wonderful, wonderful woman of God who needs you now." This is when he just foreclosed on her house. That's the legalist. He is hypocritical. He is basically motivated to put on an impressive public image.

So the legalist likes to parade himself as a great prayer warrior. It is the legalist who always comes through as the sweet and the loving person, where underneath he is shot through with sins, and is hypocritical. He's putting on a front. That is a threat to all of us. Every time we come to church, we are threatened by the temptation of putting on some kind of front, and that is legalism. Legalism is sin.

1. Legalism is zealous for its cause. Verse 15 says, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, you make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves." No effort is too great for the legalist to entrap converts. The result of this missionary zeal is to enslave a convert to his old sin nature twice as much as the missionary is enslaved to his. In other words, the missionary makes converts who are twice as bad as himself. That is the result of legalism.
2. In verses 16-20, the Lord indicates that legalism is stupid: "Woe unto you, you blind guides who say, 'Whosoever shall swear by the temple,' it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor.' You fools and blind, for which is greater: the gold or the temple that sanctifies the gold? And whosoever shall swear by the altar is nothing. But whosoever swears by the gift that is upon it, he is bound. You fools and blind, for which is greater: the gift; or, the altar that sanctifies the gift. Whosoever therefore shall swear by the altar, swear by it, and by all things on it; and, whosoever shall swear by the temple, swear by it, and by all that dwells in it. He that shall swear by heaven swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it."

They impose the arbitrary religious distinctions on people. That's what legalism does–arbitrary religious distinctions. They make the burden of observing ritual even greater than it originally was under the law. These distinctions are often drawn to justify one's personal evil. These scribes and Pharisees were doing something wrong, and they were saying, "Well, if you do it this way, it's not wrong; but if you do it this way, then it is wrong. These are arbitrary religious distinctions to cover their own sin.

1. Legalism, Jesus indicates, is superficial. It observes the letter of the law, but it ignores the spirit of the rule. Verse 23: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have admitted the weightier matters of the law, justice, mercy, and faith. These you should have done, and not to leave the other undone. You blind guides which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel." These people are strong against trivial matters, while they'll tolerate really vital errors and sins of the mind. But they'll get all up in arms over whether a lady is wearing slacks to prayer meeting or not. I can always tell a legalist. Many times I've had visitors say, "I observe that your ladies wear pantsuits to prayer meeting. They wear pantsuits here to church." It depends what my mood is. I'll say something sweet like, "Yeah, and it would be a lot worse if they didn't." They never thought of that. But right away, I know that this character is saying, "Oh oh. The ladies are coming to church in pants. God's not going to bless that."

That's a superficial, smug attitude of having been taught by the best preachers. The really spiritual morons, I discovered, are those who've been taught by the best preachers, because the morons don't know a good preacher when they see one.

1. Legalism ignores mental attitude sins. Verses 25-26: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. You blind Pharisee, clean first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also."

Put yourself into the place of this illustration here. You've been invited to dinner. You sit down at the table and your hostess has beautiful china, and the crystal is all there. And, on the outside it's glistening. You sit down and you look inside your coffee cup, and there are the grounds left from the last person that used it, as the hostess comes with her coffee and pours you a nice cup over old grounds. The Lord says, "That is what you people are. You have ignored the corruption on the inside (your mental attitude sins) while you specialize in showing people how correct you are on the outside according to rules you've made for yourself." These external practices are pursued for righteousness while ignoring internal attitudes.

How many times since the days of my childhood (maybe I ought to stop and read it to you) have I heard Deuteronomy 22:5 quoted to me? "The woman shall not wear that which pertains unto a man. Neither shall a man put on a woman's garment, for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord your God." The very people who are shocked by women who wear pantsuits to prayer meetings are quoting Deuteronomy 22:5 to show you how that is a violation: "God will not be pleased if you do that." Well, that is a legalism. As a matter of fact, what Deuteronomy 22:5 happened to say is that a woman should not wear clothing which has been designed for a man. It does not mean that she should not wear clothing which looks like a man's clothing–like trousers with two legs. But she should not wear clothing that has been manufactured and made for a man. The language does not mean in the shape of a man, and so on. It totally misses the point. Yet there are Christians all over this country who are serious, zealous, dedicated Christians who are tied up legalists, who will quote Deuteronomy 22:5 to you with all sincerity, not realizing the ridiculousness of what they're saying.

If you want to know what godliness and beauty and good taste is in a woman, then read 1 Timothy 2:9-10. But the point is that moral purity begins in the mind, and then it finds its outward expression. The legalists appear very godly to undeserving observers. But you just stand up to a legalist, and you'll see how quickly his smile disappears.

1. Legalism is self-propagating. Verses 29-33: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchres of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' Wherefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of them who killed the prophets. Fill up then the measure of your father, you serpents, you generation of vipers. How can you escape the condemnation of Gehenna?"

The point here again is that the descendants of legalists often will view themselves as superior to their ancestors. Legalistic parents, however, make legalistic children. So if you grew up under the influence of legalism, and if you grew up under legalistic parents, you're going to find it hard to undo that distortion in your thinking. You're going to find it a little strained for you to be able to sluff off the misconceptions that your parents have passed on to you. Jesus here says, "In the case of these who view themselves as superior, that all you're admitting is that you are the descendants of those who murdered My spokesman." So that gives you a clue as to what kind of influence was around you when you were growing up. So the Word of God points out that legalistic parents contaminate their children.

1. Legalism is antagonistic toward sound Bible teachers. Verses 34-36: "Wherefore behold, I send unto you the prophets and wise men and scribes, and some of them you shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall you scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous bloodshed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, son of Barachias, whom you slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation."

Legalists very naturally are negative to sound Bible teachers–teachers who are oriented to grace in which God has given to them, because they are offended when they are taught grace. Legalists are not adverse to murdering their teachers. Legalists today are not adverse to murder a grace-oriented pastor-teacher. Usually they don't do it overtly. They do it mentally. They do it with personal hatred, and they do it with their words. Remember that the legalist is the person that you least often expect to be the legalist. It is the legalist, who is reflecting these qualities that we have seen in this chapter, that is often the esteemed church member who is the one who is out to murder the pastor-teacher. Why? Because he is a legalist. Divine judgment, we are told here, is inevitable upon such negative volition.

1. Let's add two more here from the book of Galatians. In Galatians 2:4, we find that legalism is sneaky: "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in secretly to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage." This is the mouth-full-of-teeth smile Christian who comes in, who just compliments you and flatters you and praises you, which should be a signal to you. Anytime anybody starts complimenting you and praising you, you really know what you are. Therefore, you should know better than to believe it. A legalist is prone to forget this. So when you say nice things about the sermon, and I look at you a little slyly. I'm calculating, because I don't want to believe the press notices, because I know that legalism is sneaky.

Legalists in the New Testament church came in and you thought they were the sweetest, nicest people. You were so glad that they came in to have fellowship with your group. And the crumbs were standing there watching what you were doing, analyzing what the believers we're doing in the New Testament church, and then finding the right people to zero in on. The Judaizers, the legalists, can always spot the weak link in the local church.

There are certain people that a legalist would never dare open his mouth to, because he would find that he had lost some of his teeth, verbally speaking. He just would not speak to certain people. But other people can just smell them out. A legalist walks in, and he smells out the malcontents. I've seen it for a quarter of a century in this place. They can smell out a malcontent, and the legalists moves in with this cause. That's what they were doing here. They are sneaky. If you don't understand that, you who are a grace-oriented Christian, who are enjoying your liberty in Christ, will find yourself involved in some bondage. Usually the bondage that you will get involved in is that creep's personal problem–that his own negative volition has brought upon him, and you become part of his negative difficulties that he's going through.

1. So to put a top caution to all of this, we end up with one which is almost hard to believe, and that is that legalism is able to intimidate sound mature Christians. In Galatians 2:7, we have, of all things, the scriptural record how the apostle Peter, who is viewed as the chief of the apostolic band, fell into a horrible practice of legalism on one occasion, such that it was necessary for the apostle Paul to stand up in church, and, of all things, rebuke the "Pope" himself (not really) for this act of legalism:

"But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me (that is, to Paul) as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter, for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the gentiles. When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the gentiles, and they unto the circumcision."

It was understood that Paul would be the great apostle to the gentile world, and Peter and the apostolic band, the great testimony to the Jewish world. "Only they would that we should remember the poor, the same which I also was diligent to do. But when Peter was come to Antioch (a gentile center, strongly infiltrated by the Judaizers), I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he did eat with the gentiles, but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them who were of the circumcision." This was because, as you know, the gentiles were viewed as dogs–contemptible.

The Judaizers (believing Judaizers–Christians) came along and said, "Brother Peter, this is a terrible thing that you do–sitting here eating with gentiles." "And the other Jews dissembled in like manner with him insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their false pretense. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly, according to the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, being a Jew, live after the matter of the gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why do you compel the gentiles to live as do the Jews?'"

So the unbelievable point we make is that legalism is able to intimidate sound, mature Christians such as yourself. When it happens, even in the terms of a spiritual leader, there is no choice, and there is no direction which can be followed except to rebuke it, and to rebuke it publicly.

We have been trying for the past couple of sessions to rebuke legalism publicly, and to define it exactly so that you will not be scared off by rules and regulations that are proper and right for Christians to keep, and which we are obliged to keep. But you will understand that the reason that you keep it makes the difference as to whether you are legalists or not.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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