

## New Wine & Old Wineskins

Mark 2:18-22

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, April 7, 2024

Good morning, everyone. Would you join with me in a word of prayer before we open up the Word of God together? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we come to You this morning. And we are diving into probably Lord, one of the thorniest issues in the Christian life, and that is the topic of legalism. It's something that we sometimes have a hard time putting our finger on, and yet, it's in all of our hearts. It's the human nature to try to climb our way up into Your presence. We do it in so many ways. And this morning, Father, I just pray for Your grace, to explain this problem to our congregation. I pray for our people, for grace for them to hear it, that this would sink into their hearts, and they would not look at others, but they would look at their own lives, that we would all do that. To see areas where we need to repent, as we have tried to enforce laws on people that are not found in Your Word. This is an ancient problem. It's nothing new. It happened long ago. And so God please open our eyes to see it in this modern age, and we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

Well, if you would, please take your Bibles with you and open to the Gospel of Mark. That's the book we're in today. We are looking at the gospel of Mark, continuing our studies there. And as you're doing that, I just want to ask you a question to get started, as we often do. And that is the question, what is legalism? Have you ever wondered that before? What is the term legalism? It's a term you hear in Christian circles a lot today. What does it mean? Well, it's a funny term, because if you hear that term, you automatically think, well, I know someone else who's a legalist. And you might say, "Well, I know certain churches that are legalistic." But I don't think anybody in this room would say, "I'm a legalist," right? Because that's a dirty word for most of us; we understand it's bad. But as you're going to find out in a minute, I think this is something that we all do struggle with.

As the name suggests, let me say a little bit about it, so we can sort of understand what we're talking about here, legalism, refers to the act of being preoccupied with the legal side of Christianity, and putting people under a law that they don't have to follow. It comes in two forms; you need to understand this this morning. There's two forms of legalism.

If you're taking notes, you might want to write this down. One deals with salvation. That version of legalism says, You must keep the law to be saved. It teaches in order to go to heaven, you need Jesus and something; and the key word is "and." Jesus and baptism, Jesus and joining a church, Jesus and being a good person, living a holy life, keeping the commandments and, and, and, and it just never ends. It views conversion as a synthesis between faith and works as one form of legalism.

Having said that, there's another form you need to be aware of as well, because that's what we're going to talk about today. And that's legalism as it relates to sanctification. And this one says you're saved by faith in Christ alone. But once you are, you have to keep a bunch of rules. Not God made rules, but man-made rules. And that's the key. Where someone tells you do this, don't do this, do this. don't do this. Don't wear makeup. Don't wear jewelry, don't get an earring, don't get a tattoo, make sure you put on a head covering whenever you come to church, and on and on and on and on and on. Because that's how you know you're growing in Christ: you keep extra biblical commandments. Not biblical commandments, we all need to keep those. I'm talking about extra ones.

And I mentioned that because that's what we're dealing with in our text for today. If you look in your Bibles, in Mark 2:18, it's kind of subtle. It's sort of hard to understand what's going on here. But I gave you that background because it sheds light on what's being said, when it tells us that the Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Why do John's disciples fast and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" And we might add, "as a rule that we just made up" because the Bible never commanded you to fast. That's the issue here. The Pharisees want to know why Jesus disciples don't fast to keep their list of extra biblical commandments. You see the problem? Jesus' answer is veiled, so I'm going to unpack all the mysterious stuff He's saying here. But it's found down in verse 22. This is one answer, when it says, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins." In other words, just like no one at this time, would put fresh liquid into a crusty old container because it's too hard and rigid, and it doesn't fit. So Jesus says, "No one can put the gospel I preach into the things you just made up." Doesn't fit there either.

The reason He says this is because earlier in Mark 2, Jesus saved a man named Matthew, you remember that who was as lost as he could be because he didn't fast. He didn't do any works. He didn't keep any traditions of the Pharisees. He couldn't. They kicked tax collectors like Matthew out of the synagogue. So Jesus came to Matthew, and He said, "Follow Me." Which means follow Me and be saved. Matthew, follow Me and be My disciple, follow Me and leave your way of life behind so you can have your sins forgiven, which rocked these men to the core because they didn't have a category for that because Jesus didn't give him any extra laws to follow. To show that He wants to save us apart from that, did you know that? I don't know where everyone comes from this morning, but some of you may. Did you know Jesus wants to save you apart from any extra laws? He didn't want you to feel like you have to keep man's list to be sanctified; the only thing He wants you to do is follow the teachings that are found in this book. That's all. That's good news. And then, because now instead of saying you have to do what so and so says, as it relates to makeup, jewelry, earrings, head coverings, I'll give you a long list later on. You just have to do what God says. That's the only thing that matters in the Christian life. That's the only thing that matters now. It's the only thing that mattered in the first century too because in this passage Jesus is going to talk to some of the most legalistic people of his day, the Pharisees, in order to correct them over this issue. And what He will say to them is going to be so helpful for us today. So let's just jump on into this.

We're going to look at several ways Jesus responds to this question about fasting. So if you're taking notes, this is our outline in Mark 2:18-22, we're going to look at several ways that Jesus responds to this question. And I'll try my best to apply it to our world today. He's gonna give you several pictures. The first one is the picture of a bridegroom. So the first way He responds to this question about fasting and the law and extra stuff, is with the picture of a bridegroom where He compares Himself to a groom at a wedding.

And in order to understand what He's saying here, it's good to stop for a moment and say a few things about the circumstances behind this altercation because if you look in verse 18, it says, These are the circumstances, it says all this began when John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, see that word there? That's the issue that led to the confrontation. It revolved around the issue of fasting, which refers to the act of giving up food for a period of time to focus your attention on God.

I don't know a whole lot of Christian groups that do this today. The Catholics do it during Lent, but they kind of just fast from certain things, like meat on Fridays. Most Christian groups don't do this, but in the ancient times, there were a lot of reasons why someone would practice the ceremony. They would do it to focus attention on God, they would fast to cry out for help, and they would do it as an act of repentance, which was always a voluntary thing because it was not commanded in Scripture. Some have said it might have been commanded in the Book of Leviticus on the Day of Atonement, but that's a little bit ambiguous. I don't know that it was.

The first time you ever if you search the word fasting in your in your Bible, the first time you ever see it's in the book of Judges after the Levite cut his concubine up and sent parts of her body to the 12 tribes that it says the Israelites fasted. That's the first time it occurs, but from that point on, it becomes a regular part in the life of the Jews. It's mentioned in 1 and 2 Samuel. It's mentioned in 1 and 2 Kings. You see it in places like Ezra and Nehemiah, Esther, the prophets. And so by the time you come to the destruction of Jerusalem in the sixth century BCE, it's so common that the Jews added four fast days to their calendar. And you won't read that in the Bible; that just happens in history, they created a fast to commemorate the siege of Jerusalem, they created a national fast to commemorate the breaching of the walls, they created a fast to commemorate the burning of the temple, and another one for the assassination of their leaders. And in each of those, they were told to avoid eating anything from nightfall to nightfall the next day, a 24-hour period of time fasting, unless you had health complications, then you didn't have to fast or unless you were sick, or old, or pregnant, had a child. Those were the exceptions. Which is interesting because it shows you how zealous they had become over this issue. One minute, they're not fasting, the next minute, the whole country is supposed to do it.

And over time, some went even further. That's the Pharisees. If you look in your in the verse here, this is this first group, because they said not only do you need to fast four times a year, but when they were created as an entity, they said, you have to do it twice a week, every Monday and Thursday. Those were the days. And not only do you have to do it twice a week, you have to do it with a gloomy expression,

you have to be sad about it. And not only do you have to do the gloomy expression, you need to do it in public so people can see you and say, "What's wrong?" And you say, "because I'm fasting." "Oh, you're so holy." That was their whole modus operandi. There's only 6,000 Pharisees in the time of the first century, but they had so much influence on the people, because they were considered to be so high up in the things of God, because they were zealous about stuff like this.

Until the disciples of John the Baptist came along, that's the other group in the passage here. And they took it further because they said, "No, if you really want to honour God, you need to fast twice, so we can do it in the desert." See where this is going. They told them, "If you if you really want to please Him, you keep this ceremony in the wilderness next to the Dead Sea where it's hot and dry and dusty. That's where we live. And he two of them did this. It became a competition in an attempt to prove which one was better than the other. And the thing they're asking in verse 18, the reason I'm giving you this background, the thing they want to know is why doesn't Jesus get caught up in that? When they say in verse 18, "Why do John's disciples fast and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't?" What they're asking is, "What's your problem, Jesus? Why don't you keep this ceremony? Why aren't you part of the rivalry? Why aren't you doing the one upmanship?" You guys know any denominations that try to one up each other?

And the answer is found in verse 19 when He says, "because while the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom cannot fast. And to be honest, that phrase is a little hard to understand when you read it, it sounds a little bit ambiguous. If you've studied this before, many of you have read through your Bibles and you've come to that. And wondered what was He talking about? What's that mean? He's painting you a picture here. That means Jesus is the bridegroom. The attendants are the disciples. Remember, they're asking, "Why aren't the disciples fasting?" And the bride is presumably the sinners that He's come to save. And Matthew's house, the tax collectors, the lost people. And his point is that while I'm saving them, My disciples don't have to keep this ceremony because it's a joyful thing. It's a wonderful thing to see sinners saved. So there's no point in them fasting right now.

The reason He says this is because the Jewish wedding in the first century began when the bridegroom would pick up his bride, bring her back to his house, at which point a wedding party would begin in the home that would have food and music and wine for everybody, just like you see happening in verse 15 in Matthew's house. It's just like a wedding going on there. And to help the groom put this together, he would have a group of men called the attendants, they would set the food out, serve the guests, make sure everyone had all they need to do enjoy it. And what He's saying to the Pharisees, is that you can't expect My followers to avoid eating at a time like that, it doesn't even make sense. Instead, they need to celebrate with everyone else.

Now to balance this out, He'll say in verse 19, that so long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast, but the days will come when He's taken away, and then they'll fast. Because there will come a time when the disciples will keep this ceremony when Jesus has left the earth. You look in your New

Testament, you'll see Paul fasting, you'll see Peter fasting, you see all the apostles doing that. But it hasn't happened yet. So now is the time for other things.

His response to the Pharisees starts off when He tells them they had their priorities all backwards. Sinners are being saved. A revival is happening in this man's house, and they can't get excited about it. rejoice and celebrate, because they're too caught up in their man-made traditions that say, "Do this, don't do this, do this, don't do this. Be sure you keep our list of rules." In fact, the Pharisees even had a book that told them how they were supposed to keep these rules of fasting, it was called the Talmud. And I've told you about that before, but it was the rabbi's commentary on the Old Testament. It was 3,000 pages long contained in six volumes, one of which talked about how to keep this ceremony. And some of the pages said, you couldn't drink water and fast. Other ones said you could not work and fast or give a sacrifice at the temple and fast. The one section talked about what to do at your wedding. And it said you couldn't stop fasting if you were getting married. If your wedding fell on a Monday or Thursday, one of those special days, and you were a Pharisee you couldn't break this ritual, even though it was the most important event in your life. And Jesus says here with that picture in mind, that's ridiculous. It shows a total lack of perspective. What's more important? Your wedding day or that?

And the Pharisees aren't alone in this. I mean, how many of you know of a church that has lost its sense of priorities over this. We all have. I think we all know of a Christian leader or a pastor who would rather confront someone over their movie preferences than preach the gospel to them. They say if you want to follow Christ, I'm just using this as an example, we could use lots of examples, but you can go to the movies, that's fine. But if you really want to honour Him, you have to watch the ones on our list. Only once a week, only if they come from a Christian Film Company and on and on and on and on and ever ends. It becomes like a competition with churches. Who can one up the other one? They preach sermons about this. They do blogs about it. And as you read this story about Jesus, it makes you wonder what would He say about that? Would He say it's that important?

It's not the mission of the Church. The Church exists to tell people about Christ and the gospel and rejoice over their salvation. Fasting, movies, all that's a secondary thing. You need to show discernment when you handle movies all that type of stuff. But don't make such a big deal of it. That's not what Christ did here. I mean, what are the Pharisees do here? They want to make a big deal out of fasting, they want to fight. They're coming to Jesus trying to spark a debate. What does Jesus do? He doesn't fight with them. He just corrects them and moves on. Because He's got bigger fish to fry. And it's a good reminder that we have bigger fish as well as the church as Christians.

And brings it to another way He responds to these people and that is the picture of the new patch and the old garment. The first gives you the picture of the bridegroom at a wedding. And now He's gonna give you another picture and His response to the Pharisees and the issue of fasting. And that's with the picture of the new patch and the old garment.

As you look in your Bibles here, this is a continuation of the wedding metaphor because if you look in verse 21, it says no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth onto an old garment. And then refers to the fact that whenever someone went to a wedding in the first century, they were supposed to put their best garment on or their best older garment that had probably been passed down through several generations in the family because those things were so expensive. The clothing was handmade. And they would have worn robes that were long and went down almost to the floor and were colourful and made out of wool. You guys go to the closet, you've got like 100 different things to wear. They didn't have that back then. And since it was made of wool, it had to be preshrunk by the manufacturer or the hand maker to keep it from shriveling up once it got wet. And with that in mind, Jesus says no one would put a piece of new cloth onto that, if it hadn't already been prepared that way, preshrunk. Because if they did, the rest of the verse says, The patch will pull away from it, the new from the old and a worse tear results because as the new fabric gets wet, it shrivels up breaking off from the garment.

And what the Lord is saying here, this is the image is that this is what the Pharisees are trying to do to Me. They're the older garment, I'm the new. And they want to come into Matthew's house, in their robes and try to put Me on them like a patch. They want to throw Me on top of their legalistic system of rules. They don't want to change the system. They don't want to repent of the system, they just want to drop me on it. And it won't work because I'm just gonna.

it's not a minor issue in the eyes of Christ. What's at stake here is who has the authority to speak for heaven, God or man? Are the Pharisees going to tell you what God says? Or is Christ gonna tell you what He says? And Jesus says, "I will. I'm not going to be manipulated by these guys."

In fact, this is not the only time when the Lord will say this to these men. If you want to follow along in your Bibles, He's going to confront the Pharisees a lot over this issue. And so this is just a just a taste of the beginning of the battle. But if you follow along in Mark 2, later on, the Pharisees will approach Him down in verse 23 over the issue of His disciples picking grain on the Sabbath. And they'll say to Him, "The disciples can't do that because it's unlawful," even the Bible didn't say that. Can't find one verse where it says you can't pick grain on the Sabbath. So what does Jesus say in response in verse 28 of chapter two? He says, "I am the Lord of the Sabbath." In other words, it's my Sabbath. I'm God, I'm King, and I'll make the rules for it, not you. It's pretty blunt. Do You think He made friends on that day.

Then in Mark 3, they'll do the same thing again over the issue of the Sabbath because they'll tell Him He cannot heal a man with a withered hand on that day because that's unlawful, too. So He'll say to them in verse four of Mark 3, "Is it lawful to do good or harm on the Sabbath?" In other words, who has the right to determine that, you or me? Who's calling the shots here? The Bible or your preferences? He says, the Bible does. God does. And He goes on and heals the man right in front of their eyes.

Then if you look down in Mark 7, they're going to do the same thing over the issue of washing hands. Because they'll say to Him, Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but

eat their bread with unwashed hands? And the answer to the question is because it's the tradition of the elders, not gods. And My disciples don't have to submit to the tradition of your elders. It's pretty abrasive, isn't it? You think He might be a little more politically correct in His discussion with these guys and friendly? There's no friendly here. He's drawing a line in the sand and saying, "I'm not going to do that, and neither are My people."

Let me just stop for a moment and point out if He said that to them, how much more would He say to the church today? There are Christian groups who talk like this right now. They tell you, you have to keep the tradition of their elders, not the Bible, the elders. They say to please God, you have to stick Jesus onto their robe like a patch. You don't have to change the robe. You don't have to change the garment, keep it like it is and just throw Him on top.

For example, give you some examples of this. The Roman Catholic Church says if you want to be a Christian, you need to believe in Jesus that's important, but that's not enough, you also have to keep the seven sacraments and they are the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament of the Mass, the Sacrament of Confirmation, the Sacrament of Confession, Anointing the Sick, Marriage, and the Priesthood. And when you ask them why, if you've ever met a Roman Catholic, ask them why do you say that? Because I don't see that in my Bible, they say, "Because our elders told us to. You have to keep that because it's our tradition. We do it because of the Pope."

You want a more Protestant version of this another example, you can take the Tennessee Baptists where I grew up, they say that if you want to be a Christian, you need to believe in Jesus. That's important. But that's not enough. You have to do more and stop drinking alcohol. You can be a bigot, a racist, godless person who curses every Saturday night and comes to church on Sunday, but you can't drink alcohol. When you ask them why they will tell you because my father didn't drink alcohol and my grandfather didn't drink it, and neither did my great grandfather. Well, that's fine. But here's the thing, your grandfather is not God. And I don't submit to your grandfather's rules, I submit to Christ. You can't take whatever your relatives did, and just call it Christian and expect everybody to follow it. That's the battleground here. That's the issue. If you want to put in the modern world. When it comes to the law, there's only one standard to follow. And it's found in the Word of God.

By the way, this is why some of those groups like the Catholic Church and some of the Tennessee Baptists, where I'm from, are drying up and losing members. Because as people get saved, and they read their Bible, they find all that stuff is not in here. And so as they grow in Christ, their lives begin to go this way away from that, and they tear off, just like that new patch off the garment. Jesus says, anytime someone takes My name, and sticks it onto someone's manmade traditions, there will always be trouble.

It brings you to another way Jesus response to their question here and we're having to take some time to make application of this because some of these pictures are a little bit veiled when you first read them; but another one is the picture of the new wine and old wineskins. You see that one there? A third way

He responds to this legalistic question of the Pharisees is with the picture of the new wine and old wineskins, which is just saying the same thing from another angle. It's another continuation of the wedding picture in the next verse when it says, "No one puts new wine into old wineskins. "

And what that's referring to is the fact that when someone went to a wedding, they wouldn't just drink water or coffee like we do today, they would drink wine, but it wouldn't just be any wine. You could call it rugged wine, the kind that they make in a wine press, which was nothing more than two big holes in the ground several feet deep, one slightly elevated above the other and a channel running between them. So, you could crush the grapes in one place, the juices would flow into the other. And that's where the wine would come from, which sounds simple enough, but the issue was the process often left certain things in it like dirt and grass. I don't know if you'd want to go to a first century wedding and drink that, and it didn't stop the juice from fermenting. So to store it properly, the ancient people came up with the idea of placing that wine into an animal skin, that's what this passage is talking about, designed for the purpose, the skin would swell as the wine fermented. As the gases would come off and the whole process would make it expand, the skin would expand because they would take a goat or sheep and skin it and cut the head off and put a hole to pour the alcohol in. And at first the animal's skin was soft and moldable as the wine grew. But over time, it became hard and brittle, so you couldn't pour any more wine into that because if you did, verse 22 says, the wine will burst the skins and the wine would be lost and the skin as well. Causing the whole thing to just explode. You can imagine just doing your work in your house. You hear an explosion in the barn, you go out to the barn and there's hair and skin and grape juice all over the floor. That's the picture.

And Jesus says that's what happens when you try to mix the Pharisees' doctrine with mine. It's just explodes because the Pharisees or legalists are like an old wineskin that's hard and brittle, while My kingdom is like new wine that's expanding and growing and showing you new things every day. And that's why they can't handle it because they have the wrong container for it.

It's interesting because it's not what you'd expect to read here. You would think of all the people in Israel who would get along with Jesus, the Pharisees would be at the top of the list because they're serious about God, and Jesus is serious. And they're holy, I'm using my quotation marks here. And He's holy. They love the law. He loves the law. But every time you see them, they're butting heads. And this is why, because the Pharisees were all wrong on the inside. They thought they knew it all already. They had no container for new information. Jesus says that's what needs to change. The end of the verse says, new wine has to go into fresh wineskins that are able to do this and listen to the Word of God and obey it.

This is where legalism fails you. It just doesn't have the ability to do that. Legalism sets up a system that just doesn't listen. To show you what I mean, has anyone tried to correct someone about their movie preferences and tell them it's not a big deal? There's more important fish to fry in the church. And what happens? And listen? Oftentimes, they argue and fight for hours. Some of them do it for days, I can



show you long emails I've gotten over stuff like this. What about doing the same thing with someone's alcohol choices? Sometimes they explode and get angry at you, skin, hair, juice flying everywhere. What about talking to them about fasting or talking to them about makeup or talking to them about jewelry, or head coverings? Or earrings or tattoos? Or just fill in the blank? Oftentimes, the reaction over that is war. And so the question is, how do you fix it? And the answer looking at this text is that God has to do a work inside someone's soul. I'm not saying all those people are lost, I'm just saying He has to soften them up a bit to help them. It's gonna take more than just debating for hours. The Lord has to reach inside your spirit.

Listen to what one author writes about this when He says that "At its heart, legalism is a desire to appear holy. It tries to be justified before men and not God and as such, its core essence is pride. It exists to make me look good instead of Christ looking good, which explains why people have such a hard time letting go of it; so the only one who can give them victory is the Lord." And that's the lesson behind this final picture.

If you remember, when Jesus talked to Nicodemus, the Pharisee, the man from the legalistic background, He says, "Unless one is born again, you cannot see the kingdom of God." He didn't tell Nicodemus, "you need more education." He didn't tell Him, "you need more religion." He didn't tell Him "you need to look at more blogs or books or sermons or so forth and so on. Your heart needs to change Nicodemus."

And if you look back in your Bibles, you'll see that that's it. That's where this particular story in the life of Christ comes to a close. It's really a continuation of what happened at Matthew's house when He saved the tax collector. I've told you before Mark is a very quick gospel. He writes in a very frantic kind of pace. And sometimes it's almost like Mark just says, "Okay, I'm done now."

But in order to answer the question I asked earlier, what's wrong with legalism? In summary, what Jesus is saying is that it's wrong because it's not joyful like a wedding. And legalism is gloomy and sad. And it's wrong because it tries to add Jesus on top of its traditions and rules and things like this, instead of letting Jesus call the shots. And it's wrong because it's not soft like a new wineskin and teachable and moldable; it thinks it knows everything already so hard. And that's how He closes this out.

Next time the Lord will talk to the Pharisees again over the issue of the Sabbath because they're not going to let Him alone over this. I mean, make no mistake, you're going through the Gospel of Mark with us, the fight has just begun. After this, it's going to be one thing after another with these guys, they're going to wrestle with Him from Mark 2 all the way through Mark 3 without a break. I'll show you that next time.

But for now, I don't want to leave you without a few more thoughts on this text because I don't think Jesus said this, just for the Pharisees; I think He's saying this for all of us today. So let me give you a few closing applications for this.

The first one is this, there will always be war between legalism and true Christianity, always. It's been that way from day one. You can look through church history, from the first century to the church fathers to the Middle Ages, to the Protestant Reformation to the Great Awakenings, always been a battle. Whether it's the legalism of the Pharisees or the legalism of the Catholic Church, or the legalism of the Baptists in Tennessee, the two always clash, because legalism makes its own rules. And Christianity doesn't do that. And legalism adds man's word to God's word, and Christianity doesn't do that. And legalism tries to imply Jesus is not enough. And Christianity doesn't do that. Which is why it always has to be confronted. There's only one way to respond to something like this in the life of the church. And that is that you drive it out. Because it says you can't be a Christian, unless you do what we do. And we can't go along with that. In fact, the Bible actually tells you to drive this sort of thing out of the church. If you want to write this verse down in Titus 3:9, Paul says, avoid disputes about the law, does that sound legalistic? Of course, it does. Avoid arguing about the law. And He says, "reject the factious man." And in the context, that means a factious man is being factious about the law. "After a first and second warning, knowing such a man is perverted, and self-condemned." And that means that if a man comes into this congregation or a woman or whoever, and causes trouble over stuff like this, they get one warning, they get another warning, and that's it, they're out of here. You treat them that way if they're making trouble over fasting. You treat them that way if they're making trouble over the Sabbath. You treat them that way if they're making trouble over whatever. Every time legalism raises its ugly head, you have to strike it down. It creates a have and have nots mentality, where some of you have Jesus and some of you don't. And you can't allow that to happen.

It brings you to another application you can take away from this story and that is that there will always be war between Christianity and legalism because true religion is a religion of the heart. That's why the system's fight so much. That's why there's this conflict because Christianity, biblical Christianity is not concerned with what a person looks like on the outside. You want a case in point for that, read the story of John the Baptist. Nobody looked worse on the outside and nobody was used more for God. Christianity is concerned with the internal things. That's why Jesus in this encounter in Mark 2, He just brushes the Pharisees off. You see that? When they bring up fasting, He doesn't spend much time on it. He just points out their mistake and just presses on. The way some people act I've seen in churches, they would do the opposite. They would spend hours on a conversation like this. If the Pharisees approached them on fasting, they would have gone home and read 100 books, and then go online and write about it for hours. They would have gotten on the phone and called their pastor or another pastor, and they would have sent out a bunch of emails. He didn't do any of that. You never find Jesus doing that in the Bible. Which means if He lived in the modern world, Jesus would never have spent much time talking about movies, or alcohol, or makeup, clothing choices, or food choices, music choices, parenting choices, He gives you principles biblically. But He wouldn't spend a lot of time talking about Christian

holidays. He wouldn't have taught a million Bible studies on the issue of whether to celebrate Easter or put up a Christmas tree. He would have been far too busy preaching the gospel. Which means if we want to be with Him in ministry, we want to do the same thing. Don't spend all your time getting wrapped up in every little argument about extra biblical things. That never ends.

Let me give you another application for this passage, I think that balances that one out, and that is that while true religion involves the heart, it also involves the law, but only as properly understood. And that's the key. You don't want to ever walk away from what the Lord is saying here with the impression that Jesus told you to ignore the law. He did not. What He's telling you here is to ignore the law of the Pharisees. You don't have to keep that. You have to keep the law of God, you have to keep Christ's law, the Bible's law. But not the law of some man. Once you become a Christian, what you're saying is you acknowledge Jesus is Lord, and there's no part of my life over which He does not control and say "Mine. Your marriage is Mine. Your job Mine, kids Mine, clothing choices Mine, movie preferences Mine." Which is why you change in those areas is not because you're being legalistic, it's because you're acknowledging it belongs to Him, and you want to give it back to the Master. When you fast, you fast because of Christ. And when you drink alcohol, or do not drink alcohol, you do that because of Christ. Keeping the Sabbath, wearing head coverings, all those things are done out of a desire to bring Him glory. But they're not done out of a desire to make the guy over there happy. In fact, it's my prayer after going through this, if you find yourself caught up in these things, you'd go home and ask the question, "Why am I so passionate about extra biblical things? Is it because of Jesus? Or is it because of some other reason?"

And that brings you to one final application for this. And that is that if you come to the end of this, and you do find yourself struggling with legalism, as we talked about, the answer is very simple. You need to learn how to fear God and not man. That's the greatest problem of legalism if you could put it in a nutshell. Legalism puts man up here and God down there, and it should be the other way around. At the end of the day, it just doesn't matter what people think about you. It matters what God thinks. He's the one you follow before anything else. The reason that's important is because listen, there will always be someone coming out with more rules. If you've been a Christian for any period of time, you know that every other day, it seems like, there's somebody coming up with a new book, telling you how to be a better parent. Or how to be a better husband, wife, boss at work, guy out on the street, whatever, man of God; and it's so easy to get distracted by that. But the truth is, you don't have to do that. God's already told you everything you need to know in the pages of the Bible. That's what you need to focus on now.

Ecclesiastes 12 says, "The conclusion then when all has been heard, is this: fear God and keep His commandments." And that means whatever you do, God is the one you answer to, and no one else and He just wants you to keep His word. That's all.

Let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to give us grace to do that.

Heavenly Father, we do pray for Your grace to remember what we've learned this morning and to learn how to balance these things, Father. The Christian life, it's like there's two sides of a ditch. And on the one side, there's those who say, "I can do whatever I want," and that's wrong. We're not allowed to do that. But on the other hand, it's like there's this ditch which says that we have to do everything that's said about us, from anybody anywhere all the time, and that's wrong too. So Lord, I pray for grace for our church to hear what we've talked about this morning and strike the biblical balance down the middle, where we are saved by Faith in Christ alone, through works, but they are biblical works.

Lord, we need Your help in this. We all come from different backgrounds, but I know many of us come from backgrounds where we have just been saturated with manmade rules. And we need to break away from that. Lord, there needs to be freedom in our lives as Christians. There needs to be joy as was talked about here. And we need to have a church where people like Matthew can come in and grow and be fed and be encouraged and be told just to keep Your word and nothing else. We pray for help in this Lord. This is a supernatural thing that we cannot accomplish on our own. So we pray for grace in that.

Thank You for the Lord Jesus here in this passage, that He came to save sinners. But not only did He come to save sinners, He came to confront men who would stand in the way of the gospel. These Pharisees were blocking the men in Matthew's house from coming to Christ, and Jesus said, "I'm not going to allow it." May we always remember that in our hearts this morning?

Would You go with us now and Father as we take the Lord's Supper, we remember what Christ has done. May He be glorified as we remember His body that was broken for us, and His blood that was poured out. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.