

Shepherds & Servants 10

Don't Fall Victim To Legalism

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Memory Verses: 1 Timothy 4:4

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Throughout the course of this study we have been looking at what God desires for the leaders of the local church. There are to be Elders who lead in spiritual matters and Deacons who lead in practical matters. And both of them are to be qualified to protect the gospel, hold to the faith, pray for the people, know God's calling, partner with women and most importantly shepherd and serve the people of God.

Over the last three weeks in particular we have looked at the responsibilities and qualifications of these roles. This past Wednesday at our Quarterly Conference we voted to amend our by-laws to recognize these two roles as our biblically prescribed governance. We even voted for our first Elder Board and new Deacon Team. These men will be ordained into this ministry in the coming weeks.

And while we still have much more to look at in this book, I want to assure you, that these men are listening and aware of the importance of what we are going over. First and foremost these sermons are to them. But, not just to them. They are also for all of us here today. And so, we want to pick up where we left off in **1 Timothy 4:1-5**. Today we will be seeing the Elders and Deacons responsibility to lead us away from legalism and for us as a congregation to not fall victim to legalism.

But what is legalism? Let's play a game. Shevi says. Shevi says pat your head. Shevi says put both hands in the air. Your out because you didn't do it good enough. You see, legalism is when we change the rules that God has given us to make it harder for some to win.

There is a terrible danger in the church today of falling out of alignment with scripture by adopting legalism. Over the past three months we've seen how we can fall out of alignment by giving into liberalism and licentious sinful living, but there is an extreme in the other direction. Where as many fall away into selfishness, others fall away into man made rules or religion. Both are extremes and both are just as dangerous as the other. Today it is our hope that you will see the danger of falling into the trap of living according to a works based religion. **We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing we need to see here is that **Legalism Is Demonic.**

Let's first focus on **verse 1**. In these last days some will depart from the faith. They were departing the faith in Paul and Timothy's day and they are still departing the faith in our day. Throughout this series we've discussed this many times. One of the reason you need faithful leaders in the church is to maintain unity among the body both physically and spiritually. The better the leaders, the better the health of the church, the less people will depart from the faith.

Often when you think of people departing the faith you think they are doing so because they have been lured by a false doctrine, or cult of that they have simply fallen back into sin. Here it is neither. Yes, they are falling into a false gospel but this false gospel is much harder to recognize. Where most false gospels take away from scripture, legalism adds to it. What does it add? It adds rules and regulations that stem from past experience, traditions, and man's feelings on certain things.

Now of course it would be easy to think that this is just another way we are fallen as people. We are prone to wander. But the Bible also tells us in many places that we wander from the path because we are lured from the path by spiritual forces. We must remember, we do not fight against flesh and blood but against demonic forces in this present darkness. Yes Satan can lure you with sin. But what about those who have overcome the normal sins. What about those who are no longer effected by the lure of lust, greed, or general wickedness. What about good church people? Does Satan have a better way to lure those people away? Could it be a more simple and elusive way called legalism? Absolutely. **Legalism is the devil's way of luring "good" church people away from the true gospel.**

The way it works is simple. Good church people want to look the part and play the part. They are very concerned with being considered good. Where as sharing the gospel, discipling young believers, being faithful to fellowship with the body, scripture memorization, and intercessory prayer may be hard and time consuming. Simply following a few shallow rules that don't have much consequence is easy. In fact, when you follow the rules you have deemed necessary to look good in the church, you not only feel good, but you also feel you have a place to now call others out for not looking the part as well as you do. Legalism certainly has its perks.

Satan knows this and he uses it to trap church going people into caring about things that don't matter so that they cause division in the church and lead others to focus on things that distract from the real mission of reaching people with the gospel. So we must adhere to **1 John 4:1** and test the spirits against the truth of God's word. God will never tell you to do anything against his word. If you hear a voice leading you in that direction, its most definitely Satan. Ignore it and rebuke it! Simply put, we run the risk of listening to demons when we entertain legalism. **We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**

The second thing we need to see here is that... **Legalism Is Deceitful**. Look again at **verse 2**. Satan is a liar and legalism is one of his lies. But often his words come from people who claim to speak the truth. There are many people who claim to be preachers and teachers of God, but there are many who no doubt have left orthodox teaching from the Bible a long time ago. **Just recently Andy Stanley, a man I've admired for many years, has left orthodox teaching to embrace homosexuality. We must never think that a preacher or pastor is beyond apostasy.** How can a man like Andy Stanley who was as conservative evangelical christian as one could be ever become an apostate false teacher? Simple. Over time he has leaned more into culture and less into the word of God and eventually given enough time his conscience was seared. Meaning, with every step away from God's word it became easier to step further away until eventually he had no qualms about leaving his faith behind. It starts with one lie, one falsehood, one deceit, one compromise, and eventually you aren't who you once were.

How might legalism deceive us? Simple. Legalism looks good. It looks right. It looks proper. Just like the fruit in the garden, it is pleasing. In the context of religion it looks very religious. **Let me tell you a story. I had been at Third Avenue for about two months. I had told the pastor selection team and the deacons that I would not be wearing a suit every week when I first came and they agreed. So I was in a rotation where one week I'd wear the suit, the next just the tie, the next week just the coat. Well one day I was just wearing the tie and not the suit coat and after the service a member who had probably been a part of the church since he was a baby came up to me and told me that I was in sin and was going to take the whole church down with me. I was shocked, what in the world had I done now. He told me that my cardinal sin was that I was not wearing a suit and by extension I was desecrating the holy sanctuary. Now, you can do your own research, but I still haven't found in the Bible where I am told that in order to follow Christ and be a faithful Christian, I must wear a suit. You won't find it. In fact, in order to even get a whiff of it you have to take a lot of passages out of context and make up a whole lot of other things too. But somehow, throughout all of his years in church, he had gotten the impression that a suit was vital to being a follower of Christ. It was especially vital if you were the preacher. It didn't matter to him what I had preached. He would not be convicted of his sin of not sharing the Gospel or racism. All he was concerned about was whether I was in a suit. He had been deceived. He had been deceived by years of tradition, false teaching perhaps, or some misguided understanding of scripture.** Regardless, by being deceived he was focusing on the wrong things rather than what God was really trying to show him.

In **verse 3** we see what the deception of legalism was for the

church at Ephesus. Forbidding marriage. The Bible doesn't forbid marriage for believers. It encourages it. You know, the whole be fruitful and multiply thing? Or what about Ephesians 6. The whole chapter is on marriage and love. And abstaining from certain foods. The Bible doesn't forbid believers from eating certain foods. And I know this is a harder one to understand because the Jews were told to not eat certain things. But that changed with the New Testament. Look at **Mark 7:18-20**. Look at **1 Cor. 10:25-27** and **Acts 10:9-15**. The point is simple. If God has said it's good and okay, then it's good and okay. If God has said it's not good and not okay, then it's sin. If God seems to not have a for sure white and black answer, then it is up for Christian liberty and you can make a wise decision. But **don't ever be deceived into adding rules that God doesn't give! It will get you off track. We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**

Thirdly, we must see that... **Legalism Disregards God's Plan**. Continue looking at **verses 3-4**. Satan's goal with legalism is to get you on the wrong path and to deviate from God's plan. If we are thinking about suits and food and accusing others of these trivial things then we are off task and out of God's will. In a sense we are walking slightly away from the faith. Faith in God says, thank you for your word, thank you for your commands, we believe it is the truth and we will live accordingly. Right? Isn't that faith? You may say, but God that person isn't looking the part. We must have faith that regardless of what we may think, we don't judge outside of God's commands. When we start judging based on legalistic things we have basically said, God, I can't trust you with this so I'll take it in to my own hands. If you aren't going to tell them they are doing it wrong then I will. That's not faith is it? That's not God's plan is it? Don't you think there are enough rules and commands in the bible. I mean it's hard enough just for me to do the 10 commandments. Much less all the other stuff. And you want to add more to it? Come on. That's not the plan! **We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**

And lastly, we must see that ... **Legalism Denies God's Grace**. Lastly let's look at **verse 5**. Of course in God's grace we have salvation. That is first and foremost. But once we are saved we still partake of that grace everyday. Everyday I sin and everyday God says, you are covered and I love you. Just try not to sin anymore. And everyday I do things that don't look too Christian. I heard Jim say the other day that true Baptist don't go to movies, don't gamble, and don't dance. By golly I do all of those and more. I know that at times I don't look like a good cookie cutter christian! But in God's grace he doesn't care about things that aren't sin. I have a freedom in Christ that says, it may not look the part but that's not your problem, it's theirs. If God has said food is good and he has made it holy

and his word says so... then I'm not going to fret about what people think of what I eat. Some people say Christians shouldn't eat pork. I'm going to tell you right now. I'm going to go home and eat a pile of pulled pork bbq wrapped in bacon, with a side of pork chops, and ham for desert. And if I live through that, I'm not going to lose sleep thinking about what those people might think of me.

Why are we so concerned about what other people are doing with their life when it doesn't relate to their walk with Christ? If im not praying, in the word, or growing in my faith, you better come and tell me we got a problem. If I'm preaching false doctrines or watering down the truth of the word then you better come tell me we got a problem. If im living in sin, sleeping around, getting wasted, popping pills, cursing out the deacons, then you better come and tell me we got a problem. If I'm watching Braveheart or Gladiator at home and you have a problem with that... keep it to yourself. I'm under grace and not your rules!

The point is simple. We are under the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. It doesn't give us a license to sin, but it does give us the freedom to live apart from the burden of legalistic rules. **Living in the freedom of Christ's grace is more important than living according to legalist rules. We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**

Application

The application for our leadership is this. We will never put more on you as way of rules and commands than what is clear in scripture. It is our job to allow you to live in the freedom of God's grace while we walk in obedience to follow his commands. If we ever start preaching commands that the Bible is not clear on, then we are out of place and walking away from the scripture.

Conclusion

And the application for you is to be wary of falling trap to legalistic teachings. Whether it involves what you wear, what you eat, your hobbies, etc... Keep Christ first, obey him when the scripture is clear, and make wise decisions. But don't ever add to the scripture. The very last passage of the Bible gives us this warning. **Revelation 22:18. We run the risk of losing our faith when we devote ourselves to unnecessary rules.**