

HOW TO BE HOLY

“For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.” —ROMANS 6:14

If there is one thing we all share in common, regardless of how long we have been Christians, it is our struggle with sin. Sin is a problem; temptation is a problem, and so one of the big questions we are faced with is: “What are we supposed to do about sin?”

There are two extreme attitudes Christians take in dealing with sin. One is ‘legalism’, and the other is ‘license’. Legalism is basically reducing Christian living to a set of rules, which make us feel secure, because we are living within those rules. It says things like, “You shall only listen to approved music. You shall not drink alcohol at any time. You shall not wash your car on Sundays,” etc., etc. When many people first come to Christ, they experience a new liberty and freshness, but little by little, become strangled by legalism, which unfortunately is often induced by other Christians. The telltale symptom of legalism is that we begin to insist everyone keep the rules, and judge them according to how well they keep them.

The other extreme is license, which says because God is so kind, so merciful and gracious, and because we have been justified before Him, it does not really matter how we live. We can sin, come back to God, and He will cleanse and forgive us. In any case, we are going to heaven, so we begin to live more and more as we please.

This is what Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor who was put to death near the end of World War II, called “cheap grace.” It is tempting, but reveals little, if any, change in us.

Paul adamantly rejects both legalism and license as the means to holy living. So what is his answer to sin? Is it a compromise where we allow a bit more liberty with the law, or is it exercising a little more restraint in license to stop us from going too far? Paul’s answer is not in taking a middle ground, but he says that we are to, “offer every part of ourselves to God as an instrument of righteousness” (Romans 6:13).

The all important thing about an instrument is whose hands it is in. Who is operating it? When we allow Christ the freedom to work in us, we become His instruments in which He plays His tune of righteousness in us. Dealing with sin does not come by trying, but by trusting in the sufficiency of Christ. We are not made holy by legalism or license, but by life – the life of Christ dwelling in the heart and soul of every believer.

PRAYER: Dear God, I submit myself wholly to You, so that You can produce in me your character and righteousness. Thank You, God.

TO REFLECT UPON: How can I combat veering off into legalistic or license-like attitudes?