

ACCIDENTAL
PHARISEES

Week 5 – Legalism

Larry Osborne's Outline

- *Legalism and litmus test Christianity:*
 - *A litmus test is something (such as an opinion about a political or moral issue) that is used to make a judgment about whether someone or something is acceptable*
- *Extra rules and extra fences*
- *The death of mercy*

Legalism

- How would you define a “**legalist**” or “**legalism**”?
 - From Logos: having a strict **outward conformity** to moral and religious practices and an **expectation** that others have the same.
 - Practical definition: What used to be **evidence** of a person’s salvation now becomes the **means** to a person’s salvation.
- Was Jesus a legalist? Or was Jesus a lawbreaker?

Legalism

- **Is all legalism bad? Why or why not?**
 - **Rigid rules** and **extrabiblical standards** give Pharisees (old or new) a quick and easy way to distinguish between the godly and ungodly, the committed and the uncommitted.

“Legalism puts man-made rules above people’s needs, and blinds us to our neighbor.”

– Mike Livingstone

Legalism

- **What book addresses legalism for a Christian?**

“⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are **turning to a different gospel – ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” – Galatians 1:6-7**

“²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, **for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” – Galatians 2:21**

Legalism

- *What book addresses legalism for a Christian?*

“¹O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ²Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ... ¹⁰for all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written ... ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather ... ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” – Galatians 3:1-14

What is Bad about Legalism?

- *Legalism steals **joy** – becomes about rules.*
- *Legalism breeds **conflict** through **divisiveness** and **jealousy**:*

*“¹³For you were **called to freedom**, brothers. **Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh**, but through love serve one another. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, **watch out that you are not consumed by one another.**” – Galatians 5:13-15*

Danger of Litmus Test Christianity

- Legalism is alive and well - it has just changed.
- **Old school** legalism:
 - Concerned with external factors: what to eat or drink, dancing, playing cards, dress code, hair length, beards.
- **New school** legalism:
 - Concerned with what you drive, your life style, being missional, being gospel-centered, or being revolutionary.
 - Really spiritual Christians attend a house church.

Litmus Test Christianity

- *Something that is used to make a judgment about whether someone is acceptable.*
 - *Today's church uses different buzzwords as a litmus test*
- *Pharisee is out of favor so we've come up with new phrases to describe ourselves as more committed than the rest: **radical**, **crazy**, **missional**, **gospel-centered**, **revolutionary**, **organic**.*
 - *Which word would you use to describe FCOV?*

From the Book

“These buzzwords let everyone know that our tribe is far more biblical, committed, and pleasing to the Lord than the deluded masses who fail to match up.”

– Larry Osborne

Litmus Test Christianity

- *Litmus test Christianity is never a good thing. It pits one part of the body of Christ against another.*

“¹Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ²they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed ... ⁵And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, ‘Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?’ ⁶And he said to them, “Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

*‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁷in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’*

⁸You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.” – Mark 7:1-8

Litmus Test

*In what areas do we “teach as doctrines the **commandments of men**” today?*

Great Quotes

*“The gospel unites believers; **legalism divides**.
Legalism breeds a self-righteousness that
promotes prideful comparison and smug
judgmentalism.”*

*– Mike Livingstone, Lifeway Christian
Resources*

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- Gold-package fences are designed to keep sin out but are not found in the Bible:
 - God says “Don’t get drunk”, so we add “don’t drink”.
 - God says “Don’t fornicate”, so we add “don’t dance”.
 - God says “Don’t love money”, so we add:
 - “Don’t have any debt” or
 - “Don’t have a large house” or
 - “Don’t have a nice car”.
- Gold-package rules create **pride**.



Great Quotes

“The legalist isolates the law from the God who gave the law.” – R. C. Sproul

“What make legalism so dangerous is that it always flows out of the best of intentions. Legalist do not see themselves as a legalist – they seem themselves as obedient. They never think of their extrabiblical rules as extrabiblical.” – Larry Osborne

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- **Paul address extra rules in Colossians:**



“²⁰If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, **why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations – ²¹Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’ ²²(referring to things that all perish as they are used) – according to human precepts and teachings? ²³**These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, **but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.**”** – Colossians 2:20-23**

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- **How can 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 be mis-used?**

*“¹⁹Or do you not know that **your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit** within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”*

- **Used *out of context* as a mandate for:**

Looking our best

Prohibition against body piercings

Dressing for success

Prohibition against body art

Physical fitness

Prohibition against plastic surgery

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- **What is 1 Corinthians 6:19 really about?**

***“¹⁵Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ ¹⁷But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. ¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, ²⁰for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*”**

- **The context of this verse is to *flee from sexual immorality.***

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- **What about tattoos?**

*“You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead, **nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the Lord.**” – Leviticus 19:28*



“You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard.” – Leviticus 19:27



**SHOULD CHRISTIANS
GET TATTOOS?**

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- **What about tattoos?**

“¹¹And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. ¹²His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many crowns; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.

¹³He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. ¹⁵From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. ¹⁶And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written: “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.” – Revelation 19:11-16



Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- ***Verses often quoted as “against” Tattoos and Body piercings:***

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” – 1 Cor 6:19-20

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” – 1 Cor 10:31

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image.” – Gen 9:6

“Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.” – 1 Tim 2:9

“‘Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food’—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” – 1 Cor 6:13

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.’” – 1 Sam 16:7

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- ***Verses often quoted as “against” Tattoos and Body piercings:***

“For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” – Rom 10:4

“Then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.” – Ex 21:6

“But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” – Rom 14:23

“Whoever blesses his neighbor with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, will be counted as cursing.” – Pr 27:14

“You are the sons of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.” – Deut 14:1

“Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” – Gal 3:23-25

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

“If you haven't noticed, extra-biblical and legalistic rules are always based on the Bible. They're just not found in the Bible.”

– Larry Osborne (Thriving in Babylon)

Extra Rules and Extra Fences

- ***An early sign of legalism is a heightened emphasis on the **implications of Scripture** rather than the **explicit commands** of scripture:***
 - ***It is hard to argue with a legalist***
- ***Legalism destroys our freedom in Christ:***

“¹³For you were **called to freedom**, brothers. **Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh**, but through love **serve one another**. ¹⁴For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ¹⁵But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.” – Galatians 5:13-15

The Death of Mercy

- *The absolute worst thing about legalism is what it does to **mercy**. It casts it aside, then walks away:*
 - *It leaves people who need mercy most to fend for themselves*
 - *It castigates those who offer mercy as spiritual compromisers who water down the gospel.*

“Legalist have always viewed the application of mercy as selling out.” – Larry Osborne

The Death of Mercy

- *Sabbath healings by Jesus highlighted this issue:*



*“¹Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a **withered hand**. ²And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. ³And he said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Come here.’ ⁴And he said to them, ‘**Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?**’ But they were silent. ⁵And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. ⁶The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.” – Mark 3:1-6*

The Death of Mercy

- *Work on the Sabbath is a **nebulous** term:*
 - *The Pharisees took it upon themselves to help God out and define it precisely.*
 - *They decreed what was work and what wasn't.*
 - *How far you could walk.*
 - *What you could carry.*
 - *Whom you could help.*
 - *What had to wait until the next day.*
 - *Helping an animal that fell into a pit was not work.*
Practicing medicine was work.

The Sabbath was never meant to be a test to see how much people were willing to give up for God.

It was designed to make our lives better.

“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” – Hoshea 6:6

The Death of Mercy

“Jesus is by no means a legalist, and therefore sees no problem with breaking particular commands so long as people's needs and love are being promoted. Doing this is how Jesus understood the fulfillment of Torah.”

– Derek Flood

¹ <https://www.therebelgod.com/2017/01/did-jesus-break-old-testament-law.html/>

The Death of Mercy

- *Legalist offer mercy – but with limits:*
 - *They have plenty of mercy for those **overseas**, mercy for those who **face tough odds**, mercy for those **who don't yet know Jesus**.*
 - *But there's little mercy for **struggling** brothers and sisters in Christ.*
 - *There's not much sympathy for people who are weak and faltering. For those folks, there's nothing but a harsh rebuke and stinging exhortations to catch up with the rest of us – **often with a disclaimer that they're probably not even real Christians anyway**.*

The Death of Mercy

- *Legalist offer mercy – but with limits:*
 - *Unfortunately, the **more zealous** and **passionate** we become, the easier it is to fall into the trap of harsh legalism. We can become so focused on the so-called hard sayings of Jesus that we miss the incredible compassion and mercy he showed to the weakest and most vulnerable of his flock.*

From the Book

“To both ancient and accidental Pharisees, mercy is a scary thing to offer other disciples. We fear that they might take advantage of it or see it as permission to live in halfhearted obedience.”

– Larry Osborne

Application Questions

- 1. Are you more tempted to fall into “**old-school legalism**” or “**new-school legalism**”?*
- 2. What lessons can we take away from the “**diet wars**” and “**Sabbath wars**” between Jesus and the Pharisees? What are some present-day equivalents?*

Application Questions

- 3. Accidental Pharisee often are driven by the fear that showing **too much mercy** will lead to compromise and half-hearted obedience. What group of people (or sins) do you have the hardest time offering mercy to?*
- 4. Can you be a Christian and not go to church for **your entire life**?*

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Next Week – Idolizing the Past