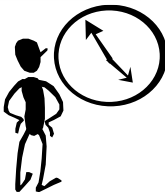


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Obeying God in Everything

By Hugh DeLong

“Legalist?” “Legalism?” Is it **wrong** and **sinful** to attempt to obey God in **everything**? Is it wrong to attempt to keep all the teachings and doctrines of Jesus? Is it sinful to strive to never sin?

Can one strive for such things and yet not **rely** on them as the basis of their relationship with God?

I would first of all read:

*"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you;** and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age'" (Matthew 28:18-20).*

*"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, **do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,** giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Colossians 3:16-17).*

*"My little children, I am writing these things to you **so that you may not sin.** And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2).*

Then, consider Jesus' attitude toward such questions:

*"For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. **Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.** For I say to you that unless your righteousness*

surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:18-20).

Or we might read again exactly what he condemned the Pharisees for:

*"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but **these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others**"* (Matthew 23:23).

Or James 4:17: *"Therefore, to one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin."*

Or I John 3:10: *"By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."*

The hard part seems to be that as we strive to obey 'everything,' we can easily become arrogant, proud, and puffed up and begin thinking of ourselves as right with God **because** of such obedience. Thus the condemnation in Luke 18:9-14: *"And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt:..."*

Yet, one is right with God on the basis of forgiveness which comes because of the graciousness and mercy of God.

The call of the gospel is to repent and receive forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus (Acts 17:30). The call of holiness is to become 'dead to sin' (Romans 6:11), to put away **all** unrighteousness (Colossians 3:8; Hebrews 12:1; James 1:21; I Peter 2:1), and yes, to obey in all things. Yet in our striving to be holy, we are to recognize our failings and our need for forgiveness and mercy.

Study the word 'righteous.' Make sure you recognize the subtle distinctions in its use. It does **not** mean the same thing in every instance. As a short and simple demonstration notice:

- God is righteous (Romans 3:25-26).
- Some of God's people were said to be righteous: Simeon was righteous (Luke 2:25), Joseph was righteous (Luke 23:50), etc.
- Yet *"there is none righteous, no, not one"* (Romans 3:10).

Obedience is never wrong, but our attitude concerning such obedience may be. Take a quick look at obedience in the book of Romans (a book that is often said to teach salvation by **faith** only and is said to **contrast** as opposing concepts the ideas of obedience and faith)

"Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Romans 1:5).

"But to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation" (Romans 2:8).

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts" (Romans 6:12).

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed" (Romans 6:16-17).

"For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed" (Romans 15:18).

"But now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith" (Romans 16:26).

Faith is **never** contrasted against **obedience**, rather they are coupled together! The obedience of faith: at the beginning (Romans 1:5) and the end (Romans 16:26).

Thus, we are brought back to our opening questions. Can one attempt with all of his might to obey in all things and at the same time recognize his failing and rely upon forgiveness to be his only hope of being right with God in the end? Yes. It may be fraught with difficulties and dangers, but it is what we are called to do.

This always leads me back to the distinction between commands and teachings that are connected to forgiveness and things that are necessary for holiness. **Most** commands and instructions pertain to our being holy unto God, paying taxes, not lying, loving our spouse and children, sharing our worldly possessions with those in need, etc., etc. **Yet**, some things **are** said to be 'for forgiveness,' which are conditions to be 'saved.'

- Of course, our belief and trust (actually from the same word in the New Testament) (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16; etc.).
- Confession of such faith before men: *"That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation"* (Romans 10:9-10).
- Repentance of sin (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 17:30; II Peter 3:9; Acts 2:38).
- Baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Colossians 2:12-13; etc.).

Then, as we live out our lives as disciples, we recognize when we sin and make a confession of such (I John 1:7-9; Acts 8:28), **and** we are merciful to others, forgiving them as we want to be forgiven by God (Matthew 6:14-15; 18:35 (read Matthew 18:18-35); Mark 11:25-26; Ephesians 4:32; James 2:13).

Are you forgiven? Are you forgiving?

*"Jesus is the author of salvation unto **all who obey Him**"* (Hebrews 5:9); and wrath and condemnation await all who *"obey not the gospel"* (II Thessalonians 1:8).

Legalism ... Again ... and Again ... and Again ...

By Jonathan Perz

Ugh. (Yes, I just started a post off with the word "ugh.")

I realize that many of my brethren have grave concerns about the idea of "legalism." It has become quite paramount in the thinking of some. The way some speak, there is nothing worse in Scripture than being a "legalist" and there exists no greater threat to Christianity today than "legalism." You would think that this is the worst "sin" a Christian can commit and is at the root of nearly every single problem in the church these days. You would think the "love of keeping God's law" is the root of all kinds of evil.

Now, I realize that I might have been a bit hyperbolic in the last paragraph. However, I could make a pretty good argument to support the case with the writings of some.

Frankly, I see no good fruit coming from the term "legalist" and its use, as it is a term laden with all kinds of baggage. Not to mention that it is a relatively modern term or label (Merriam-Webster suggests the word was first used in 1928. I am not sure on that date, but I can tell you one thing without a doubt, the term is not used in Scripture). This pejorative term seems to be and bring nothing but trouble. The next new division on the horizon (and some have already divided over this) is between the "legalist" Christians and "anti-legalist" Christians. Am I the only one who is simply dumbfounded by this? Are we really this desperate for more division?

I have brethren who I see eye-to-eye on so many issues who would argue that "legalism" is a sin in and of itself (or at least what in their minds "legalism" refers to). I have concerns about this approach to condemning sin. However, instead of striving about this word to no profit (cf. II Timothy 2:14), I have a suggestion. Since the word is so problematic, why not choose a few Bible words and phrases to identify the problems behind the "legalism" so many believe is killing Christians en masse? Was the Lord's description of the Pharisees (the original "legalists" - according to some) and their problems inadequate, insufficient, or not thorough enough for us today? Why not use our Lord and Savior's terminology to describe sin, instead of a manufactured word that simply causes more trouble than it is worth?

I see the term "legalist" as a catch-all type of phrase that is abused more than it is properly used (if you accept the definitions its user is supplying). Much like the wrath of man, I have rarely seen the use of this term produce the righteousness of God. More often than not, in fear of being thought of as a "legalist," many swing the pendulum and end up advocating doctrines that cannot be advocated, or making statements as truth that cannot be supported or that would fly in the face of simple truths revealed.

To illustrate, I asked the question some time ago, "Can you say: 'I am justified by works?'" No caveats. No conditions. Just as a simple declaration. Some might have been willing to say, "I am justified by works, and not by faith only." Yet, far too many are not comfortable with this expression at all, because they are afraid it would make them sound like a "legalist?" This, my friends, would make James a "legalist" (cf. James 2:24). Are we really willing to go there?

Yet, let's get back to Jesus' various condemnations of the Pharisees.

- Some clearly trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. This didn't

make them "legalists" ... it made them arrogant and self-righteous. Was Jesus' condemnation insufficient for us today?

- Some were clearly hypocrites. This did not make them "legalists," it made them ... well... hypocritical. Again, maybe Jesus didn't have the full scope of their problem (and many of our problems today).
- Some were teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, honoring God with their lips only, and not their hearts. Yet, even this, according to Jesus did not make them "legalists." It made them insincere and guilty of binding what God has not bound. Again, Jesus' condemning quote from Isaiah must be lacking in some way.

I can go on and on.

Brethren, for the past 75 years (and perhaps much longer), we have been called "legalists" by those who follow and adhere to the doctrines of Calvin and the Baptist church. Why was this? Because we believe and teach that baptism is necessary **for salvation** (not because it is necessary **for obedience** because we have already been saved as some of us argue today, but for actual **salvation**). Now, everywhere I turn, I see brethren calling their brethren "legalists" because they believe this same thing. We are even tagging on all kinds of other beliefs. Motives have been questioned and characters impugned as "legalistic" regarding issues such as the instrumental music in worship, the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, the actual observance of the Lord's Supper itself, the work of the church, the belief that we should be silent where the Bible is silent, whether or not they are truly seeing to the needs of the widows and orphans and loving the poor, whether they use a "Command, Example, and Necessary Inference" hermeneutic, etc. etc. On and on it goes.

All I have to say is "Ugh." This madness has to stop. I have been called a "legalist" by more brethren than I care to count over the past three years. I am sure others have been labeled as such more than I have. Yet, not once have I been charged with a sin as it relates to being a "legalist." Every time I am labeled a "legalist," I wonder, what sin have I committed? What law from God's word have I broken? Is that not what a sin is? Am I the only one who sees this as utterly ironic (a "legalistic" lawbreaker?) I have been told I am a "legalist" who has "fallen from grace" (both indirectly and directly) because I believe we do indeed have to do some things to be saved and stay saved. Yet, I have not found one single person who will show me how to be saved by doing **nothing**, how to stay saved by doing **nothing**, and give me one example of someone who has done **nothing** to be saved. There are more examples I can cite, but I have written enough.

Dear brethren, we will never resolve the real issues dividing us today until we lay aside these pejorative labels never once employed by an inspired writer and start humbly, lovingly, and respectfully discussing the actual doctrines that are indeed dividing us. I am afraid the only one gaining from the problems caused by the use of the term "legalism" is Satan. Maybe we should put that in perspective for a bit and ask ourselves how labeling our brethren as "legalists" really advances the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you who judge your neighbor?" (James 4:11-12).