

LEGALISM, LIBERALISM AND CONSERVATISM # 1

Int.

1. Aim: To show what these terms mean and the truth between the extremes.

2. Deut. 4:2 - **"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish [ought] from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you."**

Rev. 22:18-19 **"For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: 19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and [from] the things which are written in this book."**

- a. Extremes - adding unto the word - diminish = scrape off, lesson, make small
- b. The word of God is the message of God - men have always wanted to change it
- c. Either by adding to the message or taking away from the message of God

3. In other verses the terms that are used are turning to the right or the left

a. Deut. 5:32 **"Ye shall observe to do therefore as the LORD your God hath commanded you: ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left."**

- (1) Do as the Lord hath commanded - Moses speaking to people of Israel
- (2) Do not turn to the right or the left

b. Josh. 1:7 **"Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it [to] the right hand or [to] the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."**

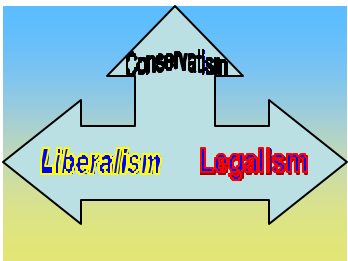
- (1) Joshua receiving message from God
- (2) Observe to do all according to the law / no turning to right or left

c. Josh. 23:6 **"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom [to] the right hand or [to] the left:"**

- (1) Joshua speaking to the people near end of his life
- (2) Do all written in the book of the Law of Moses
- (3) Turn not aside to the right or the left

d. II Kings 22:2 **"And he did [that which was] right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."**

- (1) Josiah - began to reign when he was only 8 years old - 31 years
- (2) He walked in the way of David his father
- (3) Did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left



4. The terms Legalism, liberalism and conservatism are not found in the

Bible. Definitions:

- a. Legalist. Those that bind, or fall short of, the standard of the absolute.
- b. Liberal. Those that loosen, or go beyond, the standard of the absolute.
- c. Conservative. Those that hold to the standard of the absolute.
- d. Conservatism is following the will of God, legalism is go to the right, liberalism is going to the left.

5. In this lesson we will explain what it means to go to the right or be a Legalist

Discussion**I. WHAT ISN'T LEGALISM ?**

- A. Some people put labels and tags on people that are not correct !
- B. Legalism is not:
1. Fidelity and loyalty to the word of God:
 - a. Jesus stressed and taught the importance of absolute trust in what God has said
 - b. Matthew 4:4 "But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. "
 2. Stressing the need to obey the Scriptures:
 - a. Jesus also stressed this point - John 14:15
 - b. Matthew 7:13-14; 24-27 - obedience to the word of God is not legalism
 3. Linking our salvation with obeying the word of God:
 - a. Jesus knew all about grace and mercy, and yet He deliberately linked our salvation with whether or not we follow His teachings
 - b. John 8:31-32 **"Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, [then] are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."**
 - c. Jn. 12:48 **"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."**
- C. Many times we hear people called legalists when in fact they are just obedient to the word of God.

II. LEGALISM DEFINED AND DEMONSTRATED

- A. Legalism is best understood and defined as adding to what God has said.
1. This can be done either in matters of detail or in the attitude of a thing's importance.
 2. It can mean that additional activities or practices are used to supplement God's design (i.e., the oral Torah, prescribed fasting, etc.) - traditions
 3. It can also mean having an overly zealous attitude toward only a portion of God's law
 - a. Matt. 23:23 **"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier [matters] of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.**
 - b. Luke 11:42 **"But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone."**
 - c. These people get so detailed in the law that they split hairs so to speak trying to make sure they keep the law. One group of the Pharisees was so extreme they carried the commandment not to work on the Sabbath day to the point that they ordered their followers not even to turn over in bed on the Sabbath, lest their turning over would be a form of work.¹
 - d. Ultimately, legalism becomes so heavy a burden that it leaves one in a state of frustration and even despair.
 4. Legalism is the blind adherence to law, emphasizing the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

- B. Dealing with legalism was a large concern of Jesus' work, as well as the Apostles'.
1. The sermon on the mount (Matt. 5--7).
 - a. Holding to legalistic interpretations of aspects of the Law caused the Jews to miss the point of the Law (Matt. 5:21-48).
 - b. Being motivated only by pride, their desire to be seen of men caused them to fail to see God as their master (Matt. 6).
 2. Legalism is what Christ was dealing with when speaking to the Pharisees
 - a. Matt. 15:3 - tradition - **"But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?"**
 - b. Mark 7:13 **"Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye."**
 - c. The Pharisees placed a tremendous amount of importance upon prior interpretations made by famous rabbis - Matt. 15:2 **"Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread."**
 - d. For them, the words or interpretation of some famous teacher became divine law.
 3. What happens is that legalists go beyond what God requires and bind upon men their own extensions of the commandments of scripture.

III. LEGALISM IS CREED-MAKING

- A. The church has always been plagued with two extremes - liberalism & legalism²
1. Liberals - uphold and practice things the scriptures do not authorize
 2. Legalists - condemn things the scriptures authorize.
- B. The major differences
1. Liberals ignore the law of Christ in some matters, legalists seek to make law in some matters.
 2. Liberals treat matters of faith as if they were matters of opinion, while legalists treat matters of opinion as if they were matters of faith
- C. Some examples of legalism - condemning certain things which the Bible authorizes
1. **Simultaneous Bible classes**
 - a. Some make a law that the Bible can be scripturally taught in only one class at a time
 - b. They treat their opinion as if it were a matter of faith.
 - c. They formulate a human creed and seek to bind it on others as if it were the law of Christ
 2. **Women teachers**
 - a. Some make a law that a woman cannot teach a class of women and/or children - if the church makes arrangements for the class.
 - b. In doing this they formulate a human creed and seek to bind their creed on others. I Tim. 2:12 Tit. 2:3-4

c. They leave their rightful realm of law-obeyers and become law-makers!

3. **Located preachers**

- a. Some make a law that a church cannot have a located preacher, receiving a regular, stipulated salary while preaching the gospel regularly to the saved and the lost.
- b. In doing so, they condemn what the Scriptures uphold; they formulate a human creed and seek to bind it on others as if their opinion were the law of Christ

4. **Individual communion cups**

- a. Some make a law that only one cup [container] can be scripturally used in the Lord's Supper.
- b. They condemn what the Bible upholds.
- c. In doing so, they formulate a human creed and seek to bind their opinion on others as if it were the law of Christ.

5. **Church cooperation**

- a. Some make laws on church cooperation.
- b. Some say that one church can render assistance to another church only in physical matters.
- c. In doing so, they condemn what the scriptures uphold (assistance in spiritual matters),
- d. Consequences of the idea that the church cannot render assistance to another church in spiritual matters:
 - (1) One church cannot send a Bible to another church
 - (2) One church cannot lend chairs, song books etc. to another church in connection with a gospel meeting

- (3) One church cannot allow its preacher to assist another church in a VBS
- (4) One church could never help another church to build a church building

6. **Care of the needy**

- a. Some make a law that a church cannot send to an orphan home if the home, in compliance with legal matters, is under the direction of a board of trustees.
- b. In doing so, they condemn what the Scriptures uphold Jas.1:27
- c. Some condemn a church rendering assistance to anyone who is not a member of the church.
- d. This, too, is a condemnation of what the scriptures uphold. Gal.6:10
- e. They treat their own opinion as if it were the law of Christ.
- f. These last two have been called "Anti-ism" That is people who are opposed to church co-operation and care of orphans.

D. **Traditions can become legalism for example**

1. **Order of worship**

- a. Some people think that the order of worship cannot be changed.
- b. They condemn any order other than what they think is correct
- c. In doing so, they formulate a human creed and seek to bind their opinions on others as if those opinions were the law of Christ

2. **One Hour Service**

- a. This is a tradition - Time to meet is tradition
- b. Paul preached past midnight. I don't think that they met at 11 PM
- c. In other countries they meet for several hours studying and worshipping

3. **Closing Prayer**

- a. There is very little in the Bible about how the assemblies are to be organized
- b. We do have one scripture [Mark 26:30] where we are told that after Jesus and his disciples had taken the Lord's supper, they sang a hymn and went out.
- c. Prayer is a good way to conclude a service, but not the only way !

4. **Contribution collection**

- a. "How to" collect the offering is not specified in the Scriptures.
- b. You could have everyone come forward and place it on a table or in a basket.
- c. Envelopes with the contribution is another method
- d. There is no scriptural method and we must not bind one on others.

Conclusion

1. We have been discussing one of the extremes that men take in religion. It is called legalism.
 - a. Going to the right
 - b. Making laws where God has not made a law - saying here is the one and only way you can do this or that, and the Bible does not bind this.³
 - c. It is just as wrong to make a law as it is to break a law which God has given
2. We are not in the law making business, but in the obedience business
3. Whatever is done in religion must be done according to that which is authorized by the Word of God.
4. Josh. 23:6 **"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom [to] the right hand or [to] the left:"**

1. FREED HARDEMAN UNIV. Lect. "Legalism or Liberalism." Batsell Barrett Baxter p. 281
2. The Spiritual Sword - March 1958 p. 4 - Thomas B. Warren Editor.
3. Lectures on Church Cooperation and Orphan Homes by Thomas B. Warren p. 18-19

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