

## **Legalism & The Lord of The Sabbath**

(appropriate for Mid Schoolers and older)

Michael R. Daily, November 2015

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

(Portions taken from material by the Rev. John S. Mahon)

What is legalism? Some say it is being too rigid or extreme in adhering to God's commands. So, in other words there is something wrong with following God's commands as completely as possible? No. This is not legalism, it is obedience.

Some say it is following the letter of God's commands instead of the spirit of His commands. In other words there is some weakness in the commands of God that we must protect ourselves from. Is that true? No.

God wants us to obey His commands zealously.

**Zealous:** *showing strong interest and energetic enthusiasm such that someone becomes very eager or determined to do something.*

### **Titus 2:11-14**

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,<sup>12</sup> instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,<sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,<sup>14</sup> who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, **zealous for good deeds.**

### **I Peter 3:13-15**

Who is there to harm you **if you prove zealous for what is good?** <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

### **Revelation 3:19**

Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore **be zealous** and repent.

**Legalism:** *replacing the commandments of God with the traditions or rules of men*

From a Biblical perspective legalism occurs when the moral code of God is set aside and replaced with the rules or traditions of men. It is characterized by rules or traditions that do not help people obey God but instead get in the way of helping people obey Him.

### **Matthew 15:1-9**

Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said,<sup>2</sup> **“Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”** <sup>3</sup> And He answered and said to them, **“Why do you yourselves transgress the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘He who speaks evil of father or mother is to be put to death.’ 5 But you say, ‘Whoever says to his father or mother, “Whatever I have that would help you has been given to God,” 6 he is not to honor his father or his mother.’ And by this you invalidated the word of God for the sake of your tradition. 7 You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 8 ‘This people honors Me with their lips, But their heart is far away from Me. 9 ‘But in vain do they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’”**

### **Mark 7:8-9**

Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” <sup>9</sup> He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

When someone accuses you of being legalistic they are saying that you are setting yourself up over God and your motivation is to impose your rules on other people as a replacement for God's commands.

### **(Colossians 2:20-23)**

**If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as,<sup>21</sup> "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"<sup>22</sup> (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?<sup>23</sup> These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.***

Legalism has no value. It also is not concerned about what is best for other people.

This is a statement a woman made to our church one day. Determine if this statement is true or not:

*"After becoming a Christian I got involved in a group that told me that to grow as a Christian I should read the Bible on a regular basis regardless of how I felt about it at any given time. But now I realize that was just legalism. God loves me just as much whether I read the Bible or not. Now I'm free from that legalism and I feel closer to God."*

Is this really legalism? Were God's commands replaced with men's traditions? No. Was the motivation something other than the person's spiritual benefit? No. So, this is actually not legalism, it is discipline.

There are numerous verses where God tells us the regular reading and studying of His Word is expected. Here is just one:

### **Joshua 1:8**

**This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.**

How can you meditate on God's Word day and night without reading it regularly? Its not possible.

What about this statement? *"As Christians we must celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25<sup>th</sup>".*

Does this replace a command of God with a tradition of men? Yes it does. December 25<sup>th</sup> is a tradition of men and the Bible does not tell us the date Jesus was born. In addition, Romans 14 gives a command on this topic.

### **Romans 14:5-7**

**One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.**<sup>6</sup> **He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God.**<sup>7</sup> **For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;**

So, the statement, *"As Christians we must celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25<sup>th</sup>"* is one of legalism. We can celebrate the birth of Christ on any day or we can choose not to celebrate it and still be in God's will.

### **Luke 6:1-5**

**Now it happened that He was passing through some grain fields on a Sabbath; and His disciples were picking the heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands, and eating *the grain.***<sup>2</sup> **But some of the Pharisees said, "Why do you do what is not lawful on the Sabbath?"**<sup>3</sup> **And Jesus answering them said, "Have you not even read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him,<sup>4</sup> how he entered the house of God, and took and ate the consecrated bread which is not lawful for any to eat except the priests alone, and gave it to his companions?"**<sup>5</sup> **And He was saying to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."**

Were these things really unlawful? No. The Pharisees had gone beyond the command of God and added rules of men. Also, Jesus is pointing out that He is Lord of the Sabbath. As a result He understands God's rules better than anyone and is unique in that He is the only one who has the authority to modify them.

In fact, Jesus, brought us the New Covenant. In so doing what happened to the commands of the Old Covenant?

### **Galatians 3:23-25**

**But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.**

The Old Covenant was meant to be a tutor for us. The analogy is of tutoring a small child into maturity. As the child grows into a teenager and then into a young adult some of the rules of childhood continue on, some are elevated to a higher standard, and some rules are no longer in force.

### **Commands of the Old Covenant**

1) Some passed into the New Covenant unchanged.

#### **Joshua 1:8**

**This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.**

2) Some were modified by Jesus to a higher standard.

#### **Matthew 5:21-22**

**“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ <sup>22</sup> But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty *enough to go into the fiery hell.*”**

3) Some were stopped by Jesus because their purpose as tutor had ended.

#### **Matthew 15:1-2, 10**

**Then some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup> “Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”**

**<sup>10</sup> After Jesus called the crowd to Him, He said to them, “Hear and understand. <sup>11</sup> *It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man.*”**

When Jesus spoke the words of verse 11 he turned off all of the Old Covenant commands related to types of food that can be eaten. This is why Christians no longer have to abide by Jewish dietary restrictions.

### **Conclusion**

We learned two things in our study tonight.

- 1) God's rules are to be zealously obeyed but legalism (replacing God's rules with man's rules or traditions) is to be avoided. Be careful that you don't confuse the two.
- 2) Because Jesus is our Lord and God He alone has the authority to modify the rules between the two covenants (Old and New). As a result Jesus elevated some of the Old Covenant rules to a higher standard in the New Covenant, He “turned off” some of the Old Covenant rules so they are no longer in effect, and He allowed some to continue into the New Covenant unchanged.

**QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD**

***JEREMIAH 15:16***

**THEME: *Legalism & The Lord of The Sabbath***

**PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Titus 2:11-14***

**How does this passage relate to the theme?**

**When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:**

**How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?**

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