

5.27.19 - Legalism

Legalism: *Theology .the doctrine that salvation is gained through good works. the judging of conduct in terms of adherence to precise laws.*

We have a strong natural tendency toward legalism. We all believe that we are good people so God should be pleased with us as we are. We all want to be better than those around us. This tendency seems to be very useful to Satan. The first example in the Bible was: **Gen 2:17 - But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Gen 3:3 - But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.**

Notice the difference between God's command and Eve quote of God's command. She added "neither shall ye touch it" and softened the death part. Adam's instruction may have included both the addition and the change. He may have meant well, but he should have taken credit for the addition and given the full impact of breaking the commandment.

The second example is closer to the definition: Adam and Eve's fig leaf aprons as their attempt to make up for their disobedience. In other words, to get saved.

The Pharisees were legalist. **Mat 15:2 - Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.** "Traditions of the elders" are legalistic rules not found in the Bible. **Mat 12:2 - But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day.** Here they added to the commandment to make it more burdensome. **Mat 12:10 - And, behold, there was a man which had his hand withered. And they asked him, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath days? that they might accuse him.** Notice on this verse they were not seeking knowledge. The Pharisees were the "best educated" of their day in the scriptures, so they "knew" the

answer and they could not tolerate being wrong. They wanted to look smarter than this average guy who claimed to be the Son of God. They were dealing with an all-knowing God. They were outsmarted. **Mat 12:13-14 - Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. 14 - Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.** Sounds like the same spirit Cain had towards his brother. As with most errors, those who support them do not want any opposing opinions expressed. Truth can tolerate error, but error can not tolerate the truth. They were not seeking for truth. They were looking for a way to eliminate the competition.

Legalism is still alive in our churches today. We will give some extreme cases to illustrate the point, but you can find many more with a little searching. I live in an Amish and Mennonite area. Some of them will not use anything with rubber tires, some of them will not use farm machinery that is powered by a gas engine, but they have machinery that has a gas engine that is pulled by horses. Some will drive cars, but it has to be black including the chrome. Many of them use a horse and carriage on roads with cars and trucks going much faster than the horse. I would not have the faith to try traveling that way. They have very strict clothing standards-looks like a school uniform.

There are believers in more main line churches that cannot believe you could be right with God and watch TV, or have wire rimmed glasses, or hair that is long on men, or hair that is short on women, or women wearing pants, or

Before we label all rules as legalism, there are rules that you need to follow to be right with God. **John 14:15 - If ye love me, keep my commandments.** We should not need to point out that there are a lot of commands from God in the Bible, but we need to be certain that it is a command from God and not man. Man's rules and wisdom can be foolishness in God's realm. **Rom 1:22 - Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, Rom 10:3**

- For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. This last verse could mean they missed heaven by depending on their own righteousness.

Legalism is progressive. Since we do not know what God made for Adam and Eve to wear, we are going to assume that they continued to make their own clothing. The loin cloths would have soon seemed too average. To really have an edge with God you need a skirt or a kilt. When that becomes average something else replaces it in the ever-improving way to be better than your neighbor. Before the flood the tropical weather would limit how much of the body could be covered. Even the most addicted legalist has a limit of how uncomfortable he wants to be for a long term. It seems that if the followers are too few then the person with the extra clothing just looks odd or crazy.

After the flood the cost of clothing was so high that many people did not have any clothing at all. Those who did have clothing, had only one garment which they made last as long as possible by limiting the time and environment where it was worn. Advancing the legalism of clothing had to wait till clothing became cheaper so enough people could go to the “higher/more spiritual” level without looking just strange or crazy. As clothing became cheaper the amount of the body covered increased till the Victorian age when everything except the face and sometimes the hands were covered. Now society is moving in the direction of more skin exposed.

Suppose God created us with fur like the animals, would that end legalism rules about clothing? NO! Notice all the ways to deal with facial hair on men. Imagine all the ways to deal with a body covered with hair. Do you keep the hair on the parts that “cause lust” or shave it off? Do you add cloth to make a better cover for those parts? There would be rules about how long the body hair may get before it is cut, rules about what may be shaved, rules

about covering parts or the whole body with clothing, rules about designs shaved onto the body, and etc.

Does clothing make us more acceptable with God? We are created naked and in His image by a God who could have put fur on us if it fit his plans. God declared his creation good, while Adam and Eve were naked, which does not leave much room for human improvement on His creation. Any attempt, like clothing, is implying that God did not do such a good job so we need to hide the flaw. Covering God's image or implying He is not perfect does not seem to be a good way to win His favor.

As suggested above, legalists will resort to violence if they can not defend their position with logic. A closed-minded textile person acts like you chased him out on a limb with your logic on the Bible view of clothing. They have nowhere to go so they are ready for anything that might help them with the exception of admitting that they might be wrong. Pride rules this choice out. This suggests that their rules are not in the scripture or it is obvious that they added to the rule since error is very intolerant.

Legalism is a tool of Satan. Legalist are very intolerant of opposing views. They judge others by how close they come to complying with their beliefs instead of how much they love God and man. The Bible and history are full of stories of righteous people suffering even to death because they opposed a legalist view. Jesus and the Pharisees would be the ultimate example. Jesus was without sin, but the Pharisees and their allies had Him murdered.

Legalism is a conflict between two masters. God asked who told you that you were naked of Adam and Eve. He created them to serve Him. He gave no rules about clothing. Someone else is giving commands. Time to find out who, but first, did they keep My commands. It is a little like a wife ignoring what her husband wants and instead doing what her pastor suggests when they are opposing ideals. If we follow man's rules instead of God's rules,

we are serving man and not God. If we are doing God's commands to get approval of man, we are serving man and not God. This is what the Pharisees were doing. They made a show of following the commands that could be seen by men and left the ones that only God would see undone.

A sin that goes with legalism is judging motives or heart condition from outward appearances. If you are naked in a public setting you must be demon possessed. If you do not have your hair cut by our standards you can not be right with God. Only God knows the condition of the heart. The judgment is made in ignorance. This is an area where you are instructed not to judge because you are not qualified.

A lost person could change his outward appearance and still be lost giving him a false salvation. It would be better if lost people look like lost people, so that we know that they are lost. Judging by appearance also allows the wolf in sheep's clothing to go undetected. We are looking at what he wears and not the fruit he produces.

Legalism may be a hindrance to reaching the lost. Sinners came to Jesus, but the Pharisees had to go to great lengths to make converts to their beliefs. I do not know many lost sinners who looked to a church to help them with their problem. Could it be that the legalists keep them away?

Legalistic churches can be very heartless about Bible beliefs that do not agree with their traditions. All textile rules are legalistic rules. A standard for staff members is necessary to indicate they view their position as representing God, but the rule should not be called a Bible rule. It should not be used to judge regular members and certainly not visitors. If you are a member of a legalistic church, do not expect to have a naturist's view of the body accepted.

The test for a legalistic church is not a question about Isaiah's three years without clothing. I would try something unrelated to clothing, but not usually accepted, like evolution, or wine, or Bible versions. Remember that if the position agrees with the Bible, it is not legalism. You are looking more for an intolerant attitude than the right answer. I know a fellow who seems to enjoy finding a new church. One standard he requires is a KJV only church, but he asks if he can use his NIV when calling a new church. Remember there is no perfect church. If you found one, they would not let you join because you can not meet their standard.

The concern about a legalistic church is their textile position. There are no commands about clothing in the Bible except for priests in the Old Testament. If they discover that you accept the Bible position on nakedness, you could be asked to worship somewhere else and the members will be instructed to not talk or deal with you in any way. It would be better to find a tolerant church and use some excuse to leave before your views are discovered. That way your friends in that church will still associate with you and you made the choice instead of being forced to leave. Don't try to correct their false belief on clothing. Jesus was not able to convert the legalistic Pharisees and I'd bet that you cannot match His skill with people.

Basically, it comes down to the heart condition that the action springs from. **I Cor 13** says that you can do a lot of great things in the wrong spirit and do no good (not please God). If you follow tradition instead of God, you are serving the wrong master.

In conclusion, legalism is wrong there can be no doubt about it as it adds to scripture and there is direct command in both the old and new testaments regarding that. But pride is also wrong...if you have discovered the truth about naturism and it's God ordained roots then praise the Lord, but do not get the idea that you are now somehow superior to those who have not yet discovered the joy and freedom that comes from living as God

intended from the beginning. We need to be loving and patient with those who have not yet learned to trust the Bible over their own preconceived ideals. Just as the Bible method of winning the lost is to love them to a relationship with Jesus, the best method of winning the textile world is to love them into a life as God intended as well.