

Liberty vs. Legalism

How to avoid the traps of religion and enjoy a real relationship with God



As a teacher of God's Word, I have a great responsibility to equip people with the knowledge of how to live a holy life and not be legalistic. It's part of addressing the age-old issue in the church of liberty versus legalism—by helping believers understand how to be free in Christ instead of “holier than thou.” But in our quest for freedom, we can't forget that God is a holy God, and He does want us to live holy lives.

A good place to start is by simply understanding the difference between what real holiness actually means and what legalism looks like.

“Holy” means being separate and set apart for God's use. It's about belonging to God, not the world, and pleasing God, not man. The focus is on God's love and grace—God's power, given to us free of charge, to enable us to do with ease what we could never do with any amount of struggle or effort. It's having a heart that desires to do what's right because you love God, not because you want to try to earn something from God or impress anybody.

Legalism, on the other hand, is about works of the flesh, which are the exact opposite of God's grace. “Works” are accomplished through my own energy and are about me trying to do God's job. I'm doing works of the flesh when *I'm* deciding what I need or want and when it should happen. This always results in struggle and frustration, which causes discouragement and disappointment.

Legalism steals the joy out of everything—prayer, Bible study, doing good deeds to help others, going to church, even our daily routine of life. It makes us feel like we have to do

certain things to earn God's love or favor and leads to guilt and condemnation when we don't do everything we feel like we're supposed to do. It also makes us judgmental and critical of others because we aren't just trying to "keep the rules;" we're comparing how we measure up with the way other people do.

God gave Moses 10 commandments, and I think it's interesting (and sad) that by the time Jesus came the people had developed 2,000 additional laws or rules they were supposed to live by that God didn't give! These were rules that were *supposed* to "help" people keep the original Ten Commandments God *actually* gave.

The Bible teaches us that living like this just leads to disappointment and destruction. Galatians 3:10 (AMP) says: "All who depend on the Law [who are seeking to be justified by obedience to the Law of rituals] are ... doomed to disappointment and destruction."

Why are we doomed? Because none are capable of living a sinless life in their own strength and by their own ability. We all need Jesus—desperately.

I understand what it's like to be legalistic and feel like my worth and value are based on what I do, not on who I am in Christ. I also know the amazing love, joy and peace Jesus can give when we stop trying to make ourselves worthy of His love and just accept what He did for us when He took our sin on Himself and died on the cross. Jesus made a way for you and me to know our Father in heaven through a real relationship—not a religion.

It's because of my relationship with God that my heart has been changed and I want to live in a way that pleases Him. And instead of teaching people all the dos and don'ts of religion, I want to help them learn how much God loves them. I want them to know how to fall in love with Jesus so they will want to do

what's right because they love God. That's when we can really experience the abundant life Jesus died to give us.

Let's be real Christians. Every single one of us needs to pray: "God, examine my life. If I'm phony and legalistic—judging people, being critical—and have wrong motives in my heart, then change me. Let change begin with me, and show me how to love others like You love them."

We don't have to live a legalistic, "doomed to disappointment and destruction" existence. God loves you, and His plan is for you to have life and liberty through your relationship with Him!

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