

Avoid the Pendulum Swinging in Either Direction of These Traps

The pendulum often swings when following truth (biblical principles).

At one extreme is legalism. Legalists have self-righteous attitudes that rate spirituality by how well a person follows rules. This we want to avoid at all costs, lest we become modern-day Pharisees.

A legalist often has a sliding-scale mentality—the more rules and regulations a person follows, the more spiritual they become. The legalist often forgets that we are saved because of what Christ did, not by what we do. Legalists may have the tendency to view struggling Christians as counterfeits because they don't measure up to their exacting standards.

Most Christians will struggle with legalism from time to time. That's why it's important to check motives, remove the plank from our eye and respond in love.

The compromiser, sometimes referred to as a “Las Vegas Christian,” is at the other extreme, and compromises God's word by their lifestyle. They forget that God's absolutes are guardrails through the canyons of life. They don't prevent us from enjoying life; they protect us from falling. First Peter 2:16 warns us “not [to use] your liberty as a covering for evil.” In other words, we can artfully use liberty (such as the freedom to consume alcohol) to hide addictions, sins and destructive lifestyles.

Liberty has limits—the key is to ask, “Will it build me up spiritually, or pull me down?” And, does your liberty build others up, or pull them down? “But take heed, lest by any

means this liberty of yours becomes a stumbling block to those who are weak" (1 Cor. 8:9).

As I have said before, there is a troubling trend toward moral compromise in the evangelical church. I've witnessed alcohol abuse, soft porn images on Christian websites, questionable movie clips during sermons and youth pastors talking about their favorite sexually charged TV show or movie with the youth—all under the guise of relating to the culture.

As W. Graham Scroggie once said, "Light and darkness, right and wrong, good and evil, truth and error are incompatibles ... when they compromise it is the light, the right, the good and the truth that are damaged." The church should not reflect or imitate the world but lovingly confront it.

Legalism and compromise both drain spiritual life from our lives and from the church. Consider the following:

Legalism can quench the Spirit of God as much as compromise. In their effort to highlight obedience to Scripture, legalists often lose balance. They contend that they are passionate and have strong convictions, but that statement is often an excuse. It's good to be passionate, but motives shouldn't stem from self-glorification or self-righteousness. Difficult as it may seem, it can be done if we examine ourselves, and our spiritual state. In short, "... First take the plank out of your own eye" (Matt. 7:5a).

Jesus has scathing words for both the legalist and the compromiser. In Revelation 2:4, He appears to address dead formalism. After commending followers for their patience, good works, endurance and ability to spot evil, He shifts gears, "But I have something against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." No doubt their rigid, dead orthodoxy was shaping them into Pharisees.

Matthew Henry's commentary is spot-on, "The sin that Christ charged this church with was their decay and declension in

holy love and zeal: 'Thou hast left thy first love'; not left and forsaken the object of it, but lost the fervent degree of it that at first appeared."

These followers had two choices: repent and return to genuine love for Christ, or remain indifferent and quench the power of the Holy Spirit. Later in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus turns his focus toward compromise in the other churches. He sees their love, service and faith, yet responds, "But I have a few things against you: You permit that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality ..." (Rev. 2:20a).

The church was compromising doctrine, holiness and purity. Today, it's true as well. In an attempt to relate to the world, the church has so popularized the ministry that it's hard to distinguish the church from the world. (Refer to 2 Thess. 2:10-12.) We have become a church that frowns on holiness and finds immorality and sexual perversion entertaining. Or we don't want to confront because of cowardliness and self-preservation (trying to build a church rather than honor God). We spend very little time with God in prayer and reflection, and there's very little humility and brokenness—the cure for both legalism and compromise.

Pride is at the root of both. The legalist takes pride in being "right;" the compromiser in their "liberty." And both lack true humility. As a result, the legalist thinks more highly of himself than he should, and the compromiser lacks genuine awe and respect for the things of God.

Avoid the pendulum swinging in either direction. {eoa}

Shane Idleman is the founder and lead pastor of Westside Christian Fellowship in Lancaster, California, just North of Los Angeles. Shane's sermons, articles, books, and radio program can all be found at [www.shaneidleman.com](#). Follow him on Facebook at: [www.facebook.com/shaneidleman](#)

For the original article, visit [www.shaneidleman.com](#).