

LEGALISM - LAW - GRACE - OBEDIENCE

The legalism of the Church System says:

- ~ We *have to* attend church every Sunday morning (or whatever the rule may be).
- ~ You *have to* tithe 10% of our income (or maybe of everything we own).

But what about those who go to church and tithe, not because they are afraid God will be angry with them if they don't; and not because they are trying to earn points with God, but because they genuinely love Him, and they want to please Him?

What if a person *loves* to go to church because he feels he gets spiritual life there, or he feels the presence of God there? What if it's not a "duty" for him to go to church all the time, but rather, a pleasure? Is he still walking in legalism when he goes?

What if a person really *desires* to give 10% of his money to the Lord? What if tithing is not a duty he begrudges; but rather, a pleasure he loves because he genuinely loves the Lord, and he believes tithing is pleasing to the Lord? Is he still walking in legalism? I believe the answer is, No.

The reason it's not legalism is because the issue of legalism *doesn't* revolve around what we do. Legalism has to do with *the motives* and *the reasons* we are doing whatever it is we are doing. When we are doing something because we love God and we want to please Him, and we believe the thing we are doing *is* pleasing to Him, this is not legalism.

If we really love God—if we aren't just trying to *use God* to get what we want in life—then we will have a strong desire to please Him. This desire to please Him is spiritually healthy and Scriptural.

*For this reason also, since the day we heard {of it} we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, **to please {Him} in all respects**, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

Colossians 1:9-10 (NAS)

*And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and **do those things that are pleasing** in his sight.*

1 John. 3:22

A lot of people talk about how “love” is the fulfillment of the Law of Moses; and that as long as we walk in this love, we are no longer under that Law—and this is absolutely true. The problem is, most of the people say this have no idea what this “love” is. They talk about it, but they do not keep it in it’s proper Scriptural framework. They ignore the Scriptural definition of this love.

In the end, it becomes some kind of *nebulas concept*, which works out like this: We should accept every one, regardless of their spiritual condition; we must never judge, expose or condemn any one; and we must always forgive them. Also, because this love has set us free from the Law of Moses, we are no longer required to obey anything: no laws; no ordinances; no statutes; no commandment found in the Scripture; nothing. We have been freed from the necessity of obedience to anything.

First of all, the “love” that sets us free from the Law of Moses *does not* set us free form the commandments of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus said:

*Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, **he will keep my words** [ie: teachings; commandments] and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.*

John 14:23-24

John reiterates this truth again and again in his epistles:

*If ye love me, **keep my commandments**...He that hath my commandments, **and keepeth them**, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him...**If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love**; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love..*

John 14:15 & 21; 15:10

loving God and keeping His commandment is a *cycle*. The love we have for God makes us want to please Him. The way to please him is to obey His commandments. When we obey them out of love, this creates in us an ever deepening love for the Lore, and an ever deepening desire to please Him by obeying His commandments.

Yes we should “love” others. We should love our neighbor as ourselves. But we can’t really love our neighbors the way God wants us to unless we are loving God first, the way he wants us to—and the way he wants us to love Him is by keeping His commandments! So we see that the love being referred by John

(who is called the apostle of love) is not an Adamic love. John's not talking about soulish love or sentimental love. He's talking about spiritual love, which is God's love, and this is how John, *defines* that love:

***By this** we know that we love **the children of God**, when we love God, **and** keep his commandments. For **this is the love of God**, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments **are not grievous**.*

I John 5:2-3

*And **this is love**, that we **walk after his commandments**. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.*

II John 1:6

*Blessed are they that **do his commandments**, that they may **have right** to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*

Revelation 22:14

Again, love sets us free from the Law of Moses, but not from the commandments of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus warned us what would happen to those who teach or believe such folly:

*Therefore whosoever **heareth these sayings** [teachings; instructions; commandments] of mine, and **doeth them**, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that **heareth these sayings** of mine, and **doeth them not**, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: **and great** was the fall of it.*

Matthew 7:24-28

If we “walk in the Spirit”, we *will be doing the things* Jesus commanded and we will be fulling the righteousness that is in the Law of Moses. When we are not walking in the Spirit—and there are many times that we do not walk in the Spirit—the commandments of Jesus are there to remind us that we are not walking the way we should, and to show us what we should be doing.

The relationship between the Law and Grace has always been a confusing issue, even from the very beginning. The early Church was plagued by *antinomianism*. Much of the book of Romans, indeed much of Paul's writings in general, were devoted to this issue. Paul spent most of his ministry fighting the *duel deceptions* of Jewish legalism and Gentile antinomianism—both of which flourish when we are ignorant of the purposes of, and proper relationship between, the Old and New Covenants.

Jewish believers were caught up in legalism. So Paul had to keep reminding them that they were not justified "by works" (i.e.; obeying the Law), but through faith in the atonement of Israel's Messiah (Rom. 3:20,24). However, Gentile believers were never under the Law, and they did not understand the arguments Paul used when talking to his fellow Jews. As a result, they began to draw erroneous conclusions from his statements about how wrong it is to try and be justified by works. So Paul had to remind these Gentiles that genuine faith is more than mere mental assent to truth. Faith produces a change in behavior (Gal. 5:16-26), it produces "works". He warned them not to assume works are no longer necessary, now that they have been brought into the covenant of Grace.

Men have been fighting for centuries over the definition of the term "works." Since the Law of Moses was still a predominate force in the Early Church, "works" was defined within the framework of the Law. The Jewish legalists whom Paul fought continually, believed that *obedience to the Torah* was the *evidence* of true faith. So the big question facing *Jewish believers* at that time was: Which portion of the Law had to be obeyed in order to remain a Christian? The Jewish legalists said all of it had to be obeyed. The Gentile antinomians said none of it had to be obeyed.

Today the issue is no longer obedience to the Law but the necessity of obedience period. Is obedience to *anything* (including Jesus Himself) *mandatory* in order to remain a Christian? The belief that a person must obey something—anything—in order to remain in Christ is a concept that modern antinomians not only reject but militantly oppose.

Why? Because they deduce that if a person can do something to ruin his salvation after coming to Christ, then his salvation was not truly based on grace. It was based on the works or effort of the individual. If sinful behavior can annul our redemption, if disobedience can get us cut out of the Vine, then salvation is not an "unmerited" gift but a reward for our performance.

Can a person accept Jesus as his personal Savior but *refuse* Him as his personal Lord and still be saved? Can we believe in Jesus and accept His atonement, yet refuse to obey Him faithfully and remain eternally secure? Can an individual say he is a believer, yet continue in sin the rest of his life still inherit the Kingdom of God? Can a Christian sow sin and reap eternal life? The number of popular Christian leaders who would answer yes to these questions is staggering!

Here's the reason so many of us stay confused. Obedience can be legalism, though it is not necessarily legalism. Obedience can just as easily be the *fruit* of true faith. The thing that determines whether a person's obedience is fruit or legalism is

- ~ The condition of their heart.
- ~ What it is they are obeying.

Obedience to rituals and traditions of the organized churches, or any religious system for that matter, does not equal obedience to God. But obedience which comes as a response to the moving and working of God's Spirit in our lives is fruit. It is the "work" that proves our faith is genuine. Moreover, obedience perfects faith!

The issue is not what *should* we do but what *must* we do once we have come to Christ. Everyone agrees that Christians should live like Christians—but what if we don't? No one suggests that we should continue to practice sin once we are saved—but what if we do? If our profession of faith has produced no change of behavior (no works), will it still keep us in Christ? Those who answer yes have been deceived by antinomianism.

Let's look at a very subtle example of antinomianism at work. In a summary of the book of Galatians, Dr. Scofield, in his study Bible, writes that those who teach works (obedience to the Law of Moses) are necessary to salvation are guilty of teaching legalistic error.

"At the time Paul was writing, the Galatian churches were facing a double threat, involving purity of doctrine and purity of conduct. Certain individuals had come into the area who would pervert the gospel of Christ (1:7, 5:10). They insisted that, while salvation was of Christ, **works were also necessary for salvation.** To this Judaizing, ie., legalistic error, the Galatians were already beginning to yield (1:6, 3:1), thus **returning to the bondage of observing days, months, years, times,** etc, (4:10)."

Page 1264 (Emphasis mine)

Does any one in the room perceive any evidence of antinomianism in this explanation of the message of Galatians? The problem that faced the Galatian believers was not that Judaizers were saying that works were necessary for salvation. The problem was that they were *defining* works as obedience to the Torah. They were trying to lead the people back into the *observance* of "days, months, years times."

This was certainly wrong. However, it does not change the fact that obedience is necessary for salvation. The real question is, what kind of works are necessary? Must we obey the regulation found in the Law of Moses, or the external rituals and regulations of the Religious System? Not at all. Must we obey the letter of the Word? Absolutely not. Must we obey God? You bet!

If you don't obey God, you'll find that in the coming days, when the storm is fully unleashed, your spiritual house is going to fall....and *great* will be the fall of it!