

4D LEGALISM

Theology

Throughout the New Testament we find two deadly paths that will miss God and lead to death:

1. Sin, and
2. Legalism

Legalism refers to

- An emphasis on the Law rather than on God's grace.
- A faulty belief that trying to keep the Law can lead to salvation.
- Adding laws to God's Law to attempt to achieve righteousness.

The New Testament understanding is that the Law can't save us but is valuable as our tutor, guardian, or "schoolmaster," showing us our need of Christ because we continually fall short. (Gal.3:24, Rom. 3:23)

Chip Ingram points out that three things people typically do will not bring us closer to God: [1]

- Rules (Pharisees loved rules, probably more than most people)
- Rituals ("You make the word of God of no avail by your traditions." -Mk. 7:13)
- Religion (Pharisees appeared to be very religious but "Inside were full of dead men's bones." Mt. 23:27)

Christ's emphasis was on trust, forgiveness, and a relationship with the King.

The ultimate legalists in Scripture were the Pharisees of Jesus' day who added hundreds of Laws to God's revealed Law in order to insure righteousness. The most complete collection of the rabbis' oral tradition would be the Mishnah, a detailed collection of exegetical material, the oral tradition of Hebrew Law.

Expanded Sabbath

One of the largest sections of the man-made laws concerns the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Israel was told to "remember the Sabbath to keep it holy," to avoid labor on the Sabbath. The extra rabbinical laws, however, essentially made it impossible to save a life on the Sabbath.

According to the Mishnah, Sabbath observance included these details: [2]

- If a fire breaks out on the Sabbath day, a family may save food enough for three meals.

- If a stone lays on the mouth of a jar the jar may be turned on its side so that the stone falls off.
- If a man went beyond the Sabbath limit he may not enter again.
- Pickling brine may not be prepared on the Sabbath, but a man may prepare salt water to dip his bowl in.

Pharisees

(By Bill)

In Jesus' day, there were three parties among the Jews, somewhat like denominations today- the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. The Herodians seem to have been a sort of a political party; the Pharisees believed that there would be a resurrection of dead people, and life after death, and that there were such things as angels- in other words, they believed that there is a supernatural realm. The Sadducees didn't. The Pharisees had also decided that the way to get to heaven was by keeping the law, so they added a bunch of extra laws to the law that God gave to Moses (adding to the law, as well as subtracting from it, by the way, was forbidden by God). In adding extra laws, the Pharisees had to contradict some of the laws already given; and whenever a conflict came up, they kept their own law rather than God's. This is where the expression "Keeping the letter of the law, but not the spirit" came from. They would, for instance, pay a tenth of all their income to God, even to the extent of giving a tenth of the spices they grew in the garden, but would foreclose the mortgage on a widow. They would dedicate a certain amount of money to God or to the temple, and then neglect taking care of their own aged parents. To put it in a few words, they were so eager to show how good they were that they forgot the goodness and wisdom of God, which He showed when He set down His laws. They thought that by adding to His laws they could somehow make them better, but any addition by man to what God has done only makes it less complete. God's works are optimum.

Jesus had little patience with the Torah-oriented religious leaders of His day, the Pharisees. They were the ultimate legalists. They taught that people could be righteous by scrupulously trying to follow the Law, and they added to God's law. In order for people to respond to Jesus' salvation, the teachings of the Pharisees had to be undone. (In Matthew 5, "You've heard it said...but I say unto you..") In that sense, Jesus was also a "back-to-the-Bible" preacher.

In essence, the Law is a yardstick to show us how *short* we are.

References

1. Ingram, C., "Pathways to Intimacy with God", Living on the Edge radio broadcast, 2017.
2. The Mishnah, Hebrew Oral Tradition, available online:
<http://huc.edu/research/libraries/guides/rabbinic-literature/mishnah>