

6-06-21 You Can Put Lipstick on a Pig, but it is Still a Pig.

Acts 15:1-5.

A church/body of believers living after God's heart will come under attack from Satan and his minions. The church in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas home/sending church had a bull's eye on it and tribulation/troubles were coming. These attacks weren't coming from the outside, these ones were coming from the inside.

The attack that came at the church in Antioch was nuclear, a spiritual bomb was set off. It had rippling effects that gained traction not only in the church of Antioch but many churches. In fact, this one attack would keep Paul on his toes the rest of his earthly ministry and continues to create havoc today.

We read it in **verse 1 of Acts 15**. **"Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."** BOOM!

Literally saying, to be saved, to be born again, restored to God, to gain access to heaven, you must become a Jew, become circumcised, put yourself under the law (all 613), plus the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. This all must be done to get to heaven.

Their stance was Jesus + circumcision/law = salvation.

God's stance was and is Jesus + nothing = salvation.

We too must be careful that we are not adding something to Jesus for salvation.

In Christianity, legalism is the excessive and improper use of the law (10 commandments, holiness laws, etc). This legalism can take different forms.

*The **first** is where a person attempts to keep the Law in order to attain salvation.*

*The **second** is where a person keeps the law in order to maintain his salvation.*

*The **third** is when Christians judge other Christians for not keeping certain codes of conduct that they think is needed to obey, but in reality, is not.*

I. **Legalism turns a relationship of love into a religion of laws.**

- Convictions, personal preferences, and standards are great for each believer to have and for God to reveal them in an individual's heart in His timing. They can be what God uses to guide His people. But they **CANNOT** be used to judge the legitimacy of someone else salvation.
- Legalism can be a stain on any church and its individuals.
- This is what began in Antioch. **Read verses 2.**
- Paul and Barnabas weren't having it. **Verse 2 says, "had no small dissension and dispute with them,"**
- Dissension literally means a standing up. Paul saw this as an insurrection, high treason against God.
- Dispute meaning, an argument, debated discussed heatedly, with such passion it polarized the church. Paul didn't view these "certain men" as "brethren" that were misinformed. Paul saw them as instruments of Satan.

- I picture Paul standing up and shouting, you can put makeup on a pig, but it is still a pig, referring to these men and their thesis.
- **Read Galatians 2:1-5.**
- Legalism turns a relationship of love into a religion of laws. A believer/follower's relationship with God is supposed to be a relationship of love, rather than adherence to a list of laws.
- I want to be careful here, in our culture, we have emphasized grace to the point where many people seem to feel that obedience to a moral code is not necessary.
- Our culture does not have a problem with legalism as much as it does legalism's opposite, something I will call "Gracism" — that is, an overemphasis on grace to the point that we believe it is not important whether we obey God or not. We **carelessly** live any way we please, believing that we live by grace and that God automatically forgives us for anything and everything. We almost rejoice in our brokenness and use it as an excuse. We have talked so much about the love of God that we cannot imagine him be so mean as to judge our sin.
- So let me say in the beginning that rules are necessary, and the laws of God are good. In fact, the purpose of the laws of God are not to hinder us and make our lives difficult; they are the guidelines which show us how to get the most out of life and fully enjoy it. If you want to be an unhappy person break any or all the laws of God. It is a formula for certain disaster. God's laws are the result of **His love**.
- But we cannot mistake God's laws as being at the heart of our relationship with him. Neither can we make the mistake of thinking that we are made right with God by obeying his laws or the rules we have added to them.
- We are not saved by never sinning, rather we are made right with God by admitting our sin and receiving **His forgiveness** as a free gift, which was made possible by the atoning death of our Savior Jesus Christ.
- When we receive this free gift, we find a new love for God growing in our hearts. The whole reason for the creation of the world, and the reason for Jesus Christ coming to earth to die for us, was that we might have a relationship with God, and he with us.

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

II. **Legalism left unchecked can paralyze evangelism.**

- Satan's answer to Paul's evangelism was to cause inward strife; direct all energy against other believers; put the church on the defensive, keep it squabbling.

John Phillips in his commentary says, *"It is significant that we have no record at this time of further plans for missionary activity and no record of souls being saved at Antioch. Evangelism had come to a halt. Controversy is the enemy's favorite tactics against the church."*

- James states that the believe of adding something to the gospel was causing trouble to those turning to God. **(Verse. 19)**

III. Legalism turns people from encouragers into faultfinders.

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- **Read verses 3-4.**
 - Paul didn't allow this false belief to keep him bringing joy to others. As Paul traveled, he pointed out all the Gentiles that God saved along the way. (In the face of the false brethren)
 - We cannot be the type of Christians who would never consider going to a movie, dancing, playing cards, or listening to certain music, but think nothing of being mean, critical, slandering and gossiping about others that do those things.
 - God may convict you of something but that doesn't mean it is too used to measure others.
 - This type of behavior comes across as proud, arrogant and can cause conflict.
 - Bean counting rule keepers do not attract people to Jesus.
 - We should be people who are interested in helping others become **transformed** into the people God wants them to be, but sometimes we are guilty of merely shaming them.
 - The world paints us as rigid and joyless. They think we don't know how to have a good time. Unfortunately, we all must wear the shirt, many if not all of us have been guilty of it.
 - Too often I have been pointing my finger at the people of the world instead of putting my arms around them to lead them to Christ.
 - Legalism can turn us into uptight people who turn others off to Christ rather than turning them onto him. Our task is to be encouragers.

Philippians 4:4-5, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand." (are you known for your gentleness?)

- It is the joy of God that should be our badge of distinction, not our anger and self-righteous spirit.
- Don't miss the obvious reality that someone is turning to God because you are so anxious to get them to observe laws or merely Christian tradition.
- Moral law is important, and they will get there soon enough, but we don't have to try and be the Holy Spirit for people. The Holy Spirit can change people quite well without our help.

IV. Legalism emphasizes outward conformity rather than inner transformation.

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- **Read verse 5.**
 - Christianity is a relationship with God to be enjoyed, not a set of rules to keep. At the heart of the Christian faith is a loving God who wants a relationship with us — a relationship not based solely on fear, but on love and trust.

- God loves us even when we fail. But **His purpose is not** to get us to conform to a moral code written on tablets of stone. Rather, **His purpose is to change us inwardly** so that our obedience comes from our heart.
- In the scripture today, the legalists who arrived in Antioch telling everyone to conform to the law of Moses somehow missed the fact that God had changed the heart of these people. They were demanding outward conformity and didn't see that there had already been an inner change and transformation.
- God's **purpose had always been to create a heart within us that was in love with him and eager to do his will.** God shared His heart desires through the prophet Jeremiah:

 **Jeremiah 31:33, But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**

- It's hard for us to get it into our heads that we are not made right with God by being "good people." If we could do that, we would not need a savior, we could save ourselves. We are made right with God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross and nothing else. Nothing you could do would be good enough to earn your forgiveness and entrance into heaven.

The Bible puts it like this:

 **Ephesians 2:8-10, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast. 10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."**

 **Titus 3:5-7, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."**

- Jesus Christ is not interested in our outward conformity to a moral code, He is interested in transforming your heart. It is an inside job. And when our heart is transformed, we will fall in love with God and want to do his will.
- It will not be a **burden, but a delight.** Demanding that people obey rules can't begin to touch what God is really wanting to do for them. Just keeping the law misses the point completely.
- I have known a lot of people who were extremely good at following all the rules — dotting all the "i's" and crossing all the "T's," but who missed the bigger picture of kindness, love, and decency.
- You can be exactly right when it comes to following the rules, and all wrong when it comes to following the heart of God.
- Jesus warned us not to be like the Pharisees whom he described in this way: **"Do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:3-4).**

Conclusion

Trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. There is nothing you can do to earn, gain, deserve eternal life in heaven. We are all born in this world with a one-way ticket to hell. But God intervened and send His one and only Son to pay the price for our sin to give us a new ticket. A ticket to heaven.

Our obedience should reflect our heart/love towards Him. It will not be a burden, but a delight.

We should tell others about God/Jesus because we love Him and understand that is at His heart. God's heart is toward man, His love for man, His desire is that everyone spend eternity with Him.

2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

1 Timothy 2:3-4, "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Romans 10:13, "For "whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Before I trusted in Jesus I used to think, I need to clean my life up, I'm not ready yet. The bible says Jesus did all the work, I just need to come, call out, believe, place my trust, love Him back.

Christian Brethren,

Legalism turns us into uptight people who turn others off to Christ rather than turning them onto him. Our task is to be encouragers, joyful, full of grace, ready to display God's mercy and to show others/ introduce to Jesus.

Matthew Henry, "There is a strange proneness in us to make our opinion and practice a rule and a law to everybody else, to judge of all about us by our standard, and to conclude that because we do well all do wrong that do not just as we do."