

## **What Does Legalism Mean?**

Currently, "legalism" is a popular subject. But just exactly what is meant by "legalism"? We often are made to wonder if all those who firmly preach anti-legalism are agreed as to the meaning of legalism?

Let us consider three possible meanings of the term in question. By so doing, we can determine the scripturalness or unscripturalness of each legalism:

(1) Does legalism mean strict adherence to God's law? If this is the meaning of the term, it represents a scriptural principle. Jesus told His disciples: "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven . . ." (Matt. 16:19 and 18:18). To this end the "Spirit of truth" came to guide them unto all the truth (John 16:13). In this sense Jesus and His ambassadors were legalists. But where does this place the anti-legalists? It puts them in direct opposition to the authority of Christ. Furthermore, this meaning of legalism renders the anti-legalist a double-minded man. He refuses to accept the idea that anything is bound in religion - with one major exception, anti-legalism! He reminds us of the skeptic who says that the only possible truth is the truth that there can be no possible truth! (?) So if the doctrine of legalism is defined as "strict adherence to God's law," it is scripturally sound. Let modern thinkers (?) say what they will, it is still God's will that, "This is the end of the matter: all hath been heard: fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13).

(2) If legalism is the disposition to make laws where God has made none, it is unscriptural. Consistent with the statement of Jesus cited above (Matt. 16:19 and 18:18), it is unscriptural to bind law when such has not been bound in heaven (and thus recorded in the New Testament). In this case, all who believe in and submit to the supreme authority of God's word are anti-legalists! That is to say, we are opposed to making and binding laws not bound in heaven. This type of legalism is a form of unbelief in that it assumes that God's laws do not go far enough.

(3) If legalism is depending on works of merit in order to be saved, legalism is unscriptural. This meaning of legalism is closely connected to the second, but not entirely the same. One might depend on added law for salvation (as with circumcision in Acts 15 and the Galatian letter), or one might regard the New Testament as a book of rules which one must keep perfectly in order to earn salvation. In both cases this type of legalism is firmly denied in the New Testament. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9). See also Acts 15; Gal. 2:16 and 3:21; and Rom. 8:3.

At this point many become confused. Realizing that we are saved by "the free gift of God" (Rom. 6:23), it is assumed that any conditions would nullify grace. Thus the assumed principle: any free gift is received apart from any effort. This is both unreasonable and unscriptural. Think about it the next time you submit an application or agree to a 'trial offer' in order to receive a 'free' gift. You have not earned that gift but have merely availed yourself of a favor. So it is when we obey the gospel.

Again, those who believe what God's word sets forth on the matter of grace, are anti-legalist in this third sense. We object to the idea that man can earn his salvation. Such a doctrine makes void the cross of our Lord. However, at the same time we must affirm that God's grace is received by man's obedience. Thus Peter wrote: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth . . ." (1 Pet. 1:22).

The subject of 'legalism' needs our careful investigation. We need to be as precise as possible when we employ terms that might have varied meanings. As in all things, tell us exactly what you mean, then we can search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. Will the real anti-legalists please stand up-and tell us what you mean?

**- by Warren E. Berkley**

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## **Why The Conscience?**

For years we have opposed the false standard of those who say, "Just let your conscience be your guide!" We have pointed out that Saul of Tarsus (Paul) "lived before God in all good conscience" (Acts 23:1) while he was "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1). We read verse like Jer. 10:23 to show that man cannot guide himself.

We turn to 2 John 9 and show the word of God is the proper standard for our lives. We do all of these things but to no avail. Men still cry "just let your conscience be your guide."

Interestingly, letting one's conscience be one's guide would in many cases be an improvement. This is true because most men do not live as good as they know to live. They steal, lie, and cheat – even when they 'know better.'

In fact, **even** many Christians would be improved if they "just let your Biblically educated conscience be your guide." They know they should be giving liberally (2 Cor. 9:6), studying more (2 Tim. 2:15), telling others the good news (Mark 16:15; Acts 8:4; 2 Tim. 2:2), joining with the saints every time they assemble (Heb. 10:25), etc., Yes, "just let your conscience be your guide" would be an improvement for many folks.

**- by William V. Beasley**

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## **Camouflage**

We are all familiar with camouflage, or 'camo' as we like to call it. We most commonly see it when hunters are preparing to hit the field in search of game. But this special clothing was originally perfected by the military. The main idea, of course, is to blend in with your surroundings so that you are not so easily detected by the enemy. More recently, since our army has been fighting wars in the desert, the patterns have been modified to help hide soldiers in that environment. There are even special camo types for arctic or snowy conditions.

This effort to disguise oneself to avoid detection by enemies is a good thing in the armies of men. But a problem arises when soldiers in God's army (2 Timothy 2:3) try to do the same. Remember, 'camo' is designed to make one 'blend in' to the surroundings. But, Christian soldiers should make no effort to do so. Unfortunately, many do. We see too many who want to talk, dress, and act like the worldly folks around them. They want to go to the same places and do the same things. In short, they want to hide their real identity and avoid detection as true disciples.

Why would a Christian do this? Jesus targeted the problem when He said: "*Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels*" (Mark 8:38). Sadly many are "ashamed" to show their attachment to the cause of Christ. The outcome for them, as Jesus warned, will be eternal loss.

May we all develop the unwavering devotion of the apostle Paul, who boldly said: "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ*" (Romans 1:16). May we, like him, be able to say in the end: "*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith*" (2 Timothy 4:7).

**- by Greg Gwin**