

# Legalism

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[0:00] Ephesians 2, 8-10 For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them.

Now these verses are really foundation stones. It describes what a Christian is and is not. And it goes to the heart of what is grace?

What is salvation? And from this verse I would like to put a position to you tonight. That it also tells us about legalism.

Legalism. What is legalism and what legalism is not. And it tells us of some commonly misunderstood truths about grace and about what is called legalism.

[1:20] Grace is what makes all the difference. For by grace are you saved, saved through faith, and that not of yourselves.

And importantly, salvation has nothing to do with man's works. That's legalism, isn't it? Salvation has got nothing to do with man's works.

So today we want to look at what legalism really is and what it is not. And then about finding the balance. I want to urge people to a right understanding of what salvation really is.

Of authority, of works, and of grace. My aim is to urge people to not be tying themselves up in legalistic knots, but instead finding the true liberty and freedom that's in Christ.

To chase after grace and to grow in loving obedience to the Lord. So let's look firstly, number one, at what legalism is, what actually is legalism.

[2:31] It's a word people use a lot. And misuse, I'll put it to you too. Legalism can be a mean, an excessive adherence to law or formula.

Someone has defined it as seeking to achieve forgiveness from God, justification before God, and acceptance by God through our obedience to God.

It's actually going about it the wrong way. Because we're saved by grace through faith. So clearly, salvation is not of works, lest any man should boast.

Legalism is the belief that you can do something to change yourself, so that you can improve your standing and favour with God. Legalism is an excessive and improper use of the law.

I'm okay, Stuart. I've got a drink here. Yeah. Thanks.

[3:42] Legalism, the bottom line is, legalism is works. That's what I'll put to you tonight. Legalism is works.

Legalism is where someone tries to keep the law in order to attain salvation. It's where someone tries to keep the law in order to maintain salvation, as if you need to, of yourself.

Legalism is where a Christian judges another Christian, or a person judges other Christians, for not keeping the certain codes of conduct that he thinks need to be observed.

That's legalism. Some people condemn others and act like a judge over others, over what is right or wrong with other people. That is legalism.

Legalism, I put it to you, is making laws or regulations where God does not make them. It's a mixing of works with grace for salvation.

[4:44] That is what legalism is, and Paul warns against it. He warns against turning from the grace of Christ to the church in Galatians 1 verse 6.

He shows to us that salvation is not of works or of law keeping, but by the grace of Christ alone. In Galatians 2 verse 16 he says, By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

God says we are justified by faith. And this is the danger, this is what happens with some, that legalism is when people add works to salvation.

They add works to the grace that we have in Christ as Christians. And legalism is when people promote unbiblical standards and practices and performance. And add that to the salvation work, which is by grace through faith. Legalism is when people add human tradition to the word of God.

[5:46] We see that in Matthew 15 from verse 7. Christ says, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you saying, draweth nigh to me with their lips but their heart is far from me they draw nigh to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips but their heart is far from me but in vain they worship me teaching for doctrines the commandments of men our one authority for faith and practice is the Bible this is the one authority the one ultimate absolute authority for faith and practice but the Pharisees taught that salvation was by the keeping of the law and their own traditions they had many sets of rules and very burdensome cumbersome rules that tied people up in knots the Pharisees at that time they were basically adding works or rules to salvation instead of trusting in the grace of God that was in Christ and so brothers and sisters tonight legalism is a very real issue some have said it's one of the really dangerous things that can happen in Christianity and legalism is where we follow the letter of the law but we neglect the spirit of it and in doing so we miss the whole point of what God is saying to us we miss the intent of God's word when we nitpicking in effect because really what we do has nothing to do of our salvation it has nothing to do to save us the problem with legalism is when people make requirements where God does not make them it's really a basic problem of this thinking is a lack of respecting the authority of God because really it disregards the authority of God's word when we do that doesn't it when we try to add man-made thinking to what God actually says in the authority of his word so back in Acts 15 there was a situation of difference in Acts 15 when the brethren were discussing where the circumcision should be required of the Gentiles and some it was said of them that they were trying to put a yoke on the necks of others so to speak and what a powerful picture that is isn't it a yoke and we think of that picture that it is of animals ploughing ahead of a plough yoked together in a wooden construct around their necks and this is how it was seen to be a burdensome thing to put a yoke on the necks of others where God actually didn't require that that is a picture of legalism it's like a yoke not the kind of yoke that our Lord would give us but a yoke that is man-made a powerful picture for us today and the apostles appeared to this situation and they brought people back back to the authority of the word of God and to God's evident leading as we see that evidently the Gentiles were received by God they didn't need that physical sign of circumcision and so that issue was dealt with by the authority of the word of God and friends today 2 Timothy 3 tells us that all of scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect thoroughly furnished unto all good works so the scriptures are complete for us they're sufficient

for us they're authoritative everything we need to know for our correction for our reproof for our doctrine for our instruction in righteousness are found in this book so we see then what legalism is it's an adding to that it's an adding to salvation it's really contrary to the spirit of grace that we see in the word of God so we see what legalism is secondly what legalism is not this is also important to know and to understand and I put my position to you along this line about what legalism is not nowadays some people use this term legalism and they misapply it there's a common misunderstanding around this term legalism sometimes people use it to describe churches such as this one or preaching such as this because it's wrongly applying this term legalism it's wrongly applying legalism to where bible believing

Christians have a zeal and a love for sound doctrine for pure doctrine it's where godly bible believing Christians want to maintain holy standards of living in a wicked hour that is not legalism brothers and sisters that is not legalism now the word legalist some people misuse it and overuse it to describe where a church or an individual has stricter views than they do they want to label a person or a teaching as legalism and they misapply the term legalism and they condemn such people as legalists those people who are actually just simply trying in good conscience and conviction to follow the scriptures that is not legalism tonight brothers and sisters it's important that we understand the difference here sometimes people will as it were pull the legalist card you know if they hear something or they interpret something that is against their thinking they'll say oh that's legalism they want to attack a Christian who has a strong personal conviction because it's unsettling for them because they might actually get convicted about it sometimes such people can take this extreme and careless position about their liberty and come to a place where they have little or no biblical convictions and they want to justify their own worldliness and disobedience so they call another Christian who in good intention and godly motivation actually wants to set a high standard for themselves they call that person legalistic because they cherish their worldliness they cherish their disobedience to God because to obey God's biblical commands is not legalism but notice God's commands God's not men's commands that's the important difference isn't it as we say what legalism is is men's commands but we must obey God's commands that's not legalism that's Christianity it's not legalism when we call people to the scriptures to obey them it's not legalism when a bible preacher calls God's people to obey the truth of God's word it cannot be legalism that's what the truth is that's where we stand as long as it's done in the spirit and grace of Christ it's not legalism brothers and sisters so really this is precisely what God requires of us now much of some of this content I have adapted from a source David Cloud he's a preacher you can look at on the internet and much of this is sourced from some of his message so I want to give credit to him for that legalism is not when a preacher urges people to write for bible authority because it's true and it's due when we are exhorted to the bible that is needful and right and proper legalism is not an effort to be obedient when we strive to obey the lord from a heart that yearns to please him and honor him and glorify him it's not legalism when we get that christian discernment and conviction about what god is telling us to do that accords with his word it's biblical obedience and that's a good thing for you it's a good thing for me it's a characteristic of those who are saved to obey the bible in hebrews 5 verse 9 it tells how the lord jesus is the author of eternal salvation until all them that obey him there's a wonderful joy and liberty and freedom in coming to know christ and following him it's not burdensome it's actually liberating legalism is not where a church is careful to follow the scriptures to follow the scriptures and to command the scriptures to people and to urge the believers to walk carefully or circumspectly it says in ephesians 5 verse 15 circum talks about going around it's having those eyes peeled that watchfulness that awareness that looking all around you that circumspectness that clear looking and searching and thinking that clear mindedness we're urged to walk in such a way and to be wise legalism is not following law in a burdensome way yet god's word actually is called a law so there's a sense where this is the law this is the law and this is a good thing for us for example psalm 19 verse 7 it says the law of the lord is perfect converting the soul the testimony of the lord is sure making wise the simple the law of the lord is perfect bless god so if you love the word of god if you love the law then you have no reason to shy away from it or to discard it and neglect it but rather receive it i was saying to julie just today how a friend of mine he's got a facebook page and he has this love of putting on his facebook page how horrible the government is because of the speed cameras in south australia and how wrong it is and how difficult it is for people having speed cameras what a what a horrible thing speed cameras are he's a rabid hater of them and he thinks that they should be banned but really let's face it speed cameras are a good thing they are a good thing they save lives and they make money for the government which pays for public servants so that's a good thing the government needs your money to be able to keep public servants pay to keep public services running so speed cameras are a good thing brothers sisters tonight I can say thus saith the lord speed cameras are a good thing they're a good thing for you they're a good thing for me the only people who have a problem with speed cameras are people who speed so friends tonight the only people who need to be worried about speed cameras or think that speed cameras are a bad thing are people who break the law we need them god's word is actually called a law we may not like everything that god says it's all for us to do that really is not the point it's not the point god's word is actually called a law the

law of the lord is perfect converting the soul psalm 119 verse 97 it says oh how i love thy law it is my meditation all the day i love thy law in psalm 119 113 it says i hate vain thoughts but thy law do i love psalm 119 163 it says i hate and abhor lying but thy law do i love psalm 119 verse 165 it says great peace of they which love thy law and nothing shall offend them it says of god's law that the blessed man delights in the law of god psalm 1 verse 2 it says but his delight is in the law of the lord and in his law doth he meditate day and night so there is a good sense where god's truth is a law for us a law for us in james 1 25 it talks of it as being the perfect law of liberty it's a law not of bondage but a law of liberty for us and so the idea of living strictly by what the bible says has been branded by some as legalism but it is not so it is not so to have a love of god's law of god's truth and to endeavor to obey it in good conscience and grace is not legalism brothers and sisters it's actually biblical obedience obedience it's a good thing so people mistakenly think that it's legalistic to strive after holiness in our daily living as a means of honoring the lord but no to strive after holiness in our daily living is not legalism it's obedience to god and his word it's good it's heavy that's pretty heavy let's face it

[21:04] but it's good legalism is not establishing truly biblical guidelines for church conduct and we're not talking about nitpicking things we're talking about biblical principles for how we are to live and conduct ourselves so how our church is to conduct itself that it is in accord with that which is scriptural and orderly and godly and truth legalism is not teaching people against sin and worldliness legalism is not endeavouring to proclaim and exhort to sound doctrine legalism is not urging people to cease from lying and stealing and immorality and such things such teaching is not a means of our justification but it's part of the process of our sanctification because don't we want to be more like Jesus don't we want to be more like him don't we want to be more Christ like don't we want to be more filled with his spirit walking in his light growing in our faith we need to be exhorted in such things and that's not legalism it's actually biblical preaching it's biblical

Christianity legalism is not the pursuit of personal holiness and godliness we are to pursue holiness and godliness it's commanded of us that we be those living sacrifices it's actually a command that we surrender to his grace and his power working in us and that is what we'll see it happen not our own striving and fleshly effort but his grace grace there is the grace grace that changes us that transforms us that converts us you see we see that it's the grace of god that makes us his workmanship as we read in Ephesians 2 for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which god hath before ordained that we should walk in them so many misunderstanding will be quick to call someone a legalist who strives to obey what god has put forth in his word but they are the ones who are in the wrong legalism is not adopting strong personal convictions you know there's some in our number who have stronger convictions than me there's some people who think that we should you know there's some in Christian circles who think that we should only sing from the book of praises otherwise known as the book of sars there's some people who hold that women are to wear head coverings they have their honest and genuine convictions from an understanding of the scriptures and some people would accuse such people of being legalists

I do not I do not it is their personal conviction before God the same goes on for those who have particular views about what constitutes modest clothing or speech some who make that personal resolution to not have a television in their house even let alone watch it or the movies that involve immorality and such things the some who have got very strong views about how a father should be engaged in the courtship of his daughter rather than using the worldly dating system the son who determined to keep a sabbath unto the Lord as a means of praising him and of resting their body this is not legalism not at all it is their personal conviction before God and that is something between them and the Lord let's not call such a brother or sister a legalist because it is not so a believer has to make their decision on all manner of topics and subjects and to seek prayerfully to come under the instruction of God's word to seek prayerfully and spiritually what God's will is and to find his way for them to understand and conform to God's commands it is not legalism to do that it is a good and godly thing to do and each of us may make different stands

I may not see eye to eye with Jimmy you know he's yet to be you know I've yet to convince him of some things you know but you know when we all get to heaven you'll all believe exactly like Andrew Craig does you know you'll get it all right all of you who believe differently from me well God will straighten you all out of course not of course not I'm sure that I've got some areas that need a bit of correcting there's some areas in me that need a bit of tweaking and a whole lot of tweaking Julie would say amen there's a whole lot of work to be done in Andrew Craig as well as in you and me we're a work in progress we're a Christian under construction and this is the case and yet each of us can choose to take different stands or different issues or different subjects that Christians differ about we might have different convictions and stands of conscience as God leads us along the old me was believing a number of different things that I've changed my stand upon and the future me will be different again possibly on some matters and so

God is developing us he's moving us he's shaping us he's changing us we're learning Christianity is a learning process and the issue really though is our motivation what's your motivation in your stand of conscience and conviction is it a love for Jesus Christ that motivates you to hold certain truths to count them important for you that's a good thing then if your love for Jesus Christ motivates you then that's a good thing if we stand strong in personal holiness personal convictions this is not legalism if it's with the right intent the Lord Jesus says in John 14 15 if you love me keep my commandments there's a sense where God has given us really not much wiggle room not much wiggle room there is there if you love me keep my commandments don't try to pick and choose take the whole book it's a good and godly thing to want to please the Lord to have that as your motive and ambition of course we know we rightly divide it there's things we're not to go out killing lambs or slaying oxen and such things because that was for that dispensation that time period of God's working with his people and yet there's that sense where if we can take it and understand it in the

[28:10] New Testament faith of it good and godly things will happen as we let ourselves be conformed to the word of God instead of to the world that we live in so it's wrong then brothers and sisters I put it to you for professing Christians to use the term legalistic whenever they are told something they do not like let's search the scriptures and come to a godly mindset on it so we see then what is legalism it's really adding to grace it's saying your salvation is grace plus words it's not legalism is a serious error and we ought to avoid it but we ought to be wary of what legalism is not it's not when some of your brothers and sisters have got stronger convictions than you on some things so we see thirdly wrapping it up it's all about finding the balance it's finding the balance and by saying that

I'm not saying we sit on the fence because that's pretty uncomfortable finding the balance it's working through that tension between what is legalism and what is not what is grace and what is works what is the right understanding of authority and the right understanding of grace because really it does boil!

down to those two things I'll put it to you tonight people got an authority problem and they got a grace problem they misunderstand such things they misunderstand authority and they misunderstand grace a preacher has been given a solemn charge before God he has been given an authority outside of himself and it is to God that he must give account for this solemn charge 2 Timothy 4 it says Paul to Timothy I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead at his coming and his kingdom preach the word be instant in season out of season reprove rebuke exhort with all long suffering and doctrine so the preacher has a solemn responsibility whoever ministers in this place has a solemn responsibility before God for his preaching that he reprove rebuke and exhort with all long suffering in other words patiently and with doctrine and friends he will give account to God that's a very dreadful thing that's a very awesome thing very telling thing so if I'm wrong the Bible says that I'll have a heavier judgment and that's a very sobering thought yeah and so the preacher is called to preach the word and apply it to people's lives people's everyday lives and so sometimes the preacher will hit a nerve in you the preacher will make you feel uncomfortable sometimes the preacher may offend you not willfully but sometimes it gets a bit personal doesn't it when the word of

God has to be actually applied to our lives it does it does it it does it it does it it affects our everyday lives it affects our family our employment our service for Christ our companionships our entertainment choices our dress our music you name it it does impact all of those things when the word of God is delivered sometimes it can speak to those areas of our life and sometimes God convicts us sometimes we reject it but when the preacher exhorts you I pray it's not the case when I preach that it's not legalism it's trying to exhort the people to seek after

[32:38] God and to search for him and to aspire to that which is more godly for their lives to seek to attain a deeper love a deeper walk a deeper relationship with God and to be willing to surrender those things of our lives that don't accord with his glory they don't accord with his praise and they're not worthy of his name and we can't do them to the glory of God and those things should drop off us so when the word of God speaks to the areas of our life whether it's through the preacher or through the reading of it friends let's be receptive to it let's be receptive to it it's not legalism so a strict obedience to God's word through his grace is actually a liberating thing it actually sets us free it's not bondage there's freedom in that and so we see it's about understanding authority this is the authority there's no other authority this is the source of it and secondly it's about understanding grace understanding grace now some have got the view of grace that's like you become a

Christian and of course in the strict sense of it it's not grace plus works that saves us but as a godly Christian if we truly love our Lord if we call him Lord if we use that expression that he is our Lord our master then that has to change our relationship towards him doesn't it that we become his servants we actually become submitted to him and grace is all about that too in Titus 2 we read that grace teaches us some things grace actually teaches us in Titus 2 verse 11 it says for the grace of God that bringeth salvation how appeared to all men teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust we should live soberly righteously and godly in this present world looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our

Lord great God and Saviour Jesus Christ notice that grace teaches us that denying ungodliness and worldly lust we should live soberly righteously and godly in this present world looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works these things speak and exhort and rebuke with all authority let no man despise thee I think sometimes I don't preach enough with authority because I can say thus saith the Lord I can say it is written and there's no higher authority than that you can't get any higher authority than that there's nothing higher than that and the spirit of

God exhorts us against ungodliness and worldly lusts we're to be exhorted that way it's not legalism for me to speak or whoever exhorts you to exhort you along that vein of course not putting you under a yoke of bondage and saying things that the word of God doesn't actually say there's some quarters where that does happen but as a church as a ministry we teach separation from the world a separation from false teaching you know I don't join the local minister's fraternal I think it would not accord for me to be praying with someone who bows down to idols and says Hail Mary I don't believe that is right for me to pray to the God that he prays to because it's not my

God the God I love is the God the great I am it's not rightful for me to be joining together with a minister's fraternal with people who believe things that are contrary to plain doctrine such as the doctrine of the Trinity as a church we believe that God is Father Son and Holy Spirit for me to join in some kind of network in some kind of meeting whatever kind of meeting and for our church to join in any kind of meeting where they would brush things like that under the carpet and think that there's nothing to that it's something that my conviction is and our church stand is against that separation from false teaching and such things godly discipline there's need for that we want a church that's got a purity to it and that's not a purity that is condemnatory but a purity that we want to love the [38:05] Lord more we want to love him more we want to grow closer to him we want to obey him and his grace teaches us how to live not a living carelessly but a living in accord with his word in godliness and so it's rightful that we examine our lives it's rightful that we consider our

convictions and our conscience and we look at what does the bible say and tune in with that try to adapt to the word of god instead of trying to counter it or trying to explain it away or justify it now Christians will always differ on some matters for example as Christians amongst us who may differ in terms of how they regard things such as alcohol for example and how they consider issues such as music or children's schooling or dress or how they spend their money or the celebration of holidays for example like Christmas or Halloween even or of what entertainment they choose there are areas where all of us have to come to a biblical conviction a prayerful conviction on all of these things you know in Romans 14 it tells how let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind there's some things that you'll make your mind up on different from me there's nothing wrong with personal convictions in these things and there's nothing wrong with you following your conviction and your conscience to glorify

God and if it be true for you that you can say whatever I do I'm going to do it all to the glory of God 1 Corinthians 10:31 then that's a rightful thing you're not being legalistic as long as our freedom doesn't violate the scriptures there's an absolute freedom and liberty in Christ as we find that balance brothers and sisters it's finding that balance that balance between grace and law it's not legalism to exalt people to good works grace teaches us to do good works grace teaches us to do right for by grace you're saved through faith that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works you're not saved of works but you are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works saved by grace without works saved unto good works so there's a wonderful truth there I pray that I'm making it clear enough tonight it's not legalism for a preacher to urge you to a deeper walk with God that's a rightful thing you may not agree with everything the preacher says but it's rightful and proper and godly and scriptural for you to be exhorted unto good works and there's many commands in the scriptures someone has put it as some 88 commands in Ephesians alone the book of

Ephesians 88 specific commands someone's calculated and one of them is have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them that's pretty heavy isn't it that's far reaching have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness you know we talked this morning about the light of God you are the light of the world you know this world is a dark dingy ever darkening ever benighted places I know someone likes to pray benighted world it's night and you are of the day children of God you are to not have fellowship with the works of darkness and so we're living in a world that's hostile and conflicting with God constantly and we are to renounce such things and not have any part with them and so there's times you're going to be called a stuck up Pharisee a legalist a buddy duddy a freak cake they're going to condemn you because you've got standards about how you live about how you speak about where you go about how you conduct yourself but it's not to save you it's because you love God you love the law you love his biblical authority you love the God who's given you his word it's not that man is justified through the deeds of the law but by faith Romans 3:28 and Romans 10:4 says Christ is the end of the law for righteousness so everyone that believeth he fulfills it he completes it so to wrap up just think please of these simple truths tonight salvation is by grace through faith not of yourselves you've got complete liberty in that salvation that you have and you've got an authority that is grace grace teaches you how to live grace teaches you the truth shall make you free John 8 grace saves us not at all your works a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law we operate under that dimension of grace there's a wonderful liberty that we have a wonderful liberty that you have in Christ we're not bound by some big rule but what the

Pharisees of old had but there's a wonderful bond of grace there's not a bondage of law but there's a bond of grace that he wraps us in his arms of grace doesn't he and he transforms us from the inside out and because of his grace his grace that wraps us in his arms and holds us dear to his heart that grace that love of God to us prompts a love towards him and his truth a love for our Lord and Saviour and this one that we love who loves us it says this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not grievous in other words his commands are not heavy and burdensome and hard they're actually liberating they set us free and because we know his grace his grace teaches us this is the authority you know you might not like those speed

cameras but they're good they really are you know it's helpful for me when the speed cameras helps me do the right thing or at least not get caught when I do the wrong thing no no speed cameras are a good thing great sisters you know

[44:58] I sometimes try to excuse my conduct you know it says the king's business requireth haste you know from running awake but no speed cameras are a good thing and the law of the lord is a good thing it's perfect converting the soul and oh how I love thy lord it is my meditation all the day we can't get enough of it we can't get enough of it we love the law it's our meditation all the day so friends trust his grace and honour the authority of his word have a love let his grace teach you the choices of life for by grace are you saved through faith that not of yourselves it is the gift of God not of works lest any man should boast for we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them let us pray