

# FREEDOM FROM THIS WORLDS SYSTEM

## THE BONDAGE OF LEGALISM

### A SURVEY OF COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

#### **Introduction:**

Legalism is a sin! In our modern church, as in Paul's day, this vice had been coddled, accepted, glutted, engorged, embellished, and even praised. Legalism preaches. Preachers for centuries have waxed eloquent against the "ills" of films, wire rim glasses, drinking. We have imposed upon the scripture rules and regulations that are raised to such a high level of importance that one cannot be a member of a given church unless he or she maintains certain standards.

#### **Legalism Defined:**

- Legalism seeks to make and keep oneself acceptable before God.
- It can express itself through an unsaved individual seeking to gain access into heaven on the basis of his/her works, or through a saved individual seeking to maintain his/her relationship with God on the basis of their works.

#### **Warning against Legalism:**

Paul here implores the Colossian believers to refuse to allow "someone to judge them" in matters of both daily practice and in matters of worship. They were to be on guard lest anyone judged them or looked down upon them regarding what they ate or drank. We are told emphatically by Paul that this should not be the case and we as believers ought stand up, not for ourselves, but for our position in Christ. When we allow these legalists to judge us in these matters we end up condoning their self-centered, opposition to Christ. The same is true of the worship practices of our church or gathering. We often, in today's modern fundamental church, look down our noses at churches that do not follow the same style of worship as we do. We are told to stop this practice and begin to focus on Christ (for to judge someone based upon these criteria is to focus upon culture and not Christ).

Secondly, Paul pleads with the Colossians to not allow themselves to be "disqualified" through reliance upon ascetic practices. When we give up our position in Christ for this deceptive "humility or asceticism" we end up being robbed of our very joy and source of growth. We are told to cling to the "Head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together . . . grows with a growth that is from God." Asceticism/Mysticism can be identified by it's:

1. Inward focus (looking inside to find truth)

2. Focus upon feelings and “conscience” as opposed to one's position
3. Irrational and anti-intellectual approach to spirituality

### **Freedom From Legalism**

When we begin to feel these legalistic tenancies creeping into our thinking (either from our own flesh or from other sources) we are first to be reminded of our position in Christ. The text states that we have “died (with Christ) to the elemental spirit's of this world. . .” If we are to continue standing firm in the grace of God, we must be constantly reminded of our death to these worldly methods of accomplishing “spirituality”. We have no need of such external righteousness when we have the very righteousness of God!

There are certain consequences or results that follow from our position in Christ.

1. Freedom from the “elemental spirit's of this world”. We are no longer bound to follow this world's system of imposed external morality.
2. Freedom from Regulations: Regulation based righteousness is the antithesis of Christ-based righteousness. We are not bound to this world's regulations. They will accomplish nothing for us in this life in relation to conquering our sin nature.
3. Compliance with Human Traditions and Asceticism: Human tradition and philosophy have had centuries to bring about a perfect man – and have failed miserably. We are quick to seek to reform the system, but the system is not worth overhauling. We must jettison this world's philosophy and our legalistic practices for Christ – who is FAR BETTER!

### **This world's system is bankrupt!**

The text concludes by stating that this world's philosophy, with it' legalistic tenancies, can never stop sin. We know this to be true as we have all set up regulations to keep us from sinning. . . and sooner or later we find ourselves back indulging the same sin. This is because legalism:

- Can never deal effectively with sin
- Cannot bring us “closer to God”
- Encourages and protects hypocrisy
- Rob's God of the glory due His name

### **Conclusion:**

Cure for legalism:

- ✓ A thorough understanding of God's Holiness: When we see God has holy will will realize the utter impossibility of our “living up” to this standard. Do not pull down God's holiness by a warped desire to achieve a goodness that will somehow merit His favor.
- ✓ Healthy understanding of our own wickedness: When we see God for who He is, we will, like

Isaiah, realize our own wickedness and total inability.

- ✓ GRACE: God's righteousness is a gift. Relish His work! We are so quick to turn from grace to self. There are generally two responses to grace – disgust and contempt or thankfulness.
- ✓ Standing firm in the work of Christ: Constantly remind yourself of the results of the cross in your life; regeneration, justification, redemption, adoption, propitiation, etc.
- ✓ Relishing in the Lordship of Christ: He is your Lord and Master. This truth eradicates all forms of easy-believism. God's work of regeneration is life changing.
- ✓ Living for the glory of God: When we see ourselves as being in Christ we will then truly see the glory of God (for Christ was sent to manifest this glory).

We, as believers, need to remain vigilant against the sin of self-based, works-centered, legalistic Christianity. Only in Christ will we find true solace for our ever wandering hearts. Flee not to regulations or mystical alter-call experiences but only to Jesus. In Him we find the cure for our fleshly pride. Only then will we realize that

**“God is big** and man is small.”