

The Whole Christ

By Sinclair Ferguson

Lesson 4: Danger! Legalism

The error of legalism goes much _____ than we think. During the 17th century the Lord used the Marrow controversy to uncover a hidden form of legalism that was consuming much of the church of Scotland.

“In its own way this disturbance was itself proving a litmus test: reactions to it indicated the mind-and-heart condition of many preachers and pastors.”

The issue of legalism is not merely one minor pastoral concern but should be seen as one of the _____ errors that must be addressed through pastoral ministry.

“He (Boston) knew from experience that a ‘legal frame’ or spirit can pervade the whole of an individual’s life.”

“The root of legalism is almost as old as Eden, which explains why it is a primary, if not ultimate, pastoral problem. In seeking to bring freedom from legalism, we are engaged in undoing the ancient work of Satan.”

The goal of Satan was to get Eve and Adam to no longer see God as good and the _____ of all blessing but to only focus on His laws. Instead of remembering who God is, Satan wanted Eve to focus on what God said she couldn’t do.

“Now all Eve saw was a negative command. One small object near the eye can make all larger objects invisible. Now it was the sight to the forbidden tree blocking her vision of a garden abounding in trees...Now her eyes were on God the negative lawgiver and judge. In both mind and affections God’s law was now divorced from God’s gracious person.”

“What was injected into Eve’s mind and affections during the conversation with the Serpent was a deep-seated suspicion of God that soon further twisted into rebellion against Him. The root of her antinomianism was actually the legalism that was darkening her understanding, dulling her senses, and destroying her affection for her heavenly Father.”

“For what the Serpent accomplished in Eve’s mind, affections, and will was a divorce between God’s revealed will and His gracious, generous character. Trust in Him was transformed into suspicion of Him by looking at ‘naked law’ rather than hearing ‘law from the gracious lips of the heavenly Father.’ It is thus-a failure to see the generosity of God and His wise and loving plans for our lives-that lies at the root of legalism and drives it.”

The heart of legalism is the _____ of the law of God from His character. When we do this we will not trust that God is really good but will see Him only as a Judge who is always trying to limit us.

“Legalism is simply separating the law of God from the person of God. Eve saw God’s law, but she has lost sight of the true God Himself. Thus, abstracting His law from His loving and generous person, she was deceived into ‘hearing’ law only as negative deprivation and not as the wisdom of a heavenly Father.”

“Thus the essence of legalism is rooted not merely in our view of law as such but in a distorted view of God as the giver of His law. In the human psyche, truth has been exchanged for the lie. God becomes a magnified policeman who gives His law only because He wants to deprive us and in particular to destroy our joy.”

The truth, however, is that our _____ increases only as we grow to know Him more.

“Legalism can, therefore, be banished only when we see that the real ‘truth about God’ is that when we glorify Him we also come to ‘enjoy Him forever,’ and with Him enjoy everything He has given us. To the unbeliever this is incomprehensible. But it is the happy first principle of the believer’s life.”

This legal frame will impact not only how we think about God but how we _____ toward God. Legalism (wrong thoughts and feelings towards God) is what we must be delivered from.

“It cannot be too strongly emphasized, therefore, that everyone is a legalist at heart.”

Legalism is so ingrained in us that it is possible for us to acknowledge the necessity of grace _____ but at the level of practice to still be a legalist.

“God did not choose His people because of what they were. But their sense of His gracious choice of them very subtly slid into an entitlement mentality that eventually dis-graced grace...As gospel ministers from Paul to the present day have acknowledged, few pastoral problems are as carefully disguised as the subtle mingling of a profession of grace with a legalistic heart.”

Even Christians can say and think this way:

“‘I will now try harder, and I will do better.’ It seems logical: I realized I have failed. I must reverse this failure by doing better. But it is serpentine logic, for it simply compounds the old legal spirit. It is the natural instinct of the once-antinomian prodigal who, when awakened, thinks in terms of working his way back into the favor of His father.”

“It is all too possible to have an evangelical head and a legalistic heart.”

The Marrow of Modern Divinity

By Edward Fisher (notes by Thomas Boston)

Chapter 2-The Law of Faith (the Covenant of Grace)

The questions continue for Evangelista as to the _____ and meaning of the covenant that God made with the nation of Israel on Mount Sinai.

Evan. *“Surely I do believe, that Bullinger spake very truly, when he said that God gave unto these people no other religion, in nature, substance, and matter itself, differing from the laws of their fathers...And as the Lord did thus by ceremonies, as it were, lead them by the hand to Christ; so did He make them a promise of the land of Canaan, and outward prosperity in it, as a type of heaven, and eternal happiness; so that the Lord dealt with them as with children in their infancy and under age, leading them on by help of earthly things, to heavenly and spiritual, because they were but young and tender, and had not the measure and abundance of the Spirit which He had bestowed upon His people now under the gospel.”*

Nomista then asks if the law was given as a “rule of their obedience”? To which Evangelista responds “yes” as long as you see the law not as a coming to you from Mt. _____ but from Mt. _____. The placing of the law in the Ark of the Covenant was a picture of the law coming to us in Christ.

Evan. *“...commanding him to provide an ark to put them into; which was not only for the sake keeping of them, but also to cover the form of the covenant of works that was formerly upon them...for the ark was a notable type of Christ; and therefore the putting of them therein did show that they were perfectly fulfilled in Him...the book of the law now came to them from the mercy-seat; for there the Lord promised to meet Moses and to commune with him of all good things which He would give.”*