

01 – AVOIDING LEGALISM

Five Non-Negotiables – a Great Church Is ...

- a.) A Worshipping Church – Worship isn't just singing. Worship ministers to the Lord. (In worship, we put ourselves aside and give back Him.) I don't think you can be a great church without emphasizing that.
- b.) Faithful to the Word – A great church handles the Word faithfully, and rightly divides the Word of Truth. (The Word is “center stage”.)
- c.) Passionate About Jesus – I have no desire to be lukewarm Laodicea.
- d.) A Soul Winning Church – Great churches are mindful of the Great Commission and they impact the world around them.
- e.) A Close Community of People – that love each other.

My Expanded List – a Great Church Is ...

- f.) A Great Church Guards Against Legalism – (So easy to slip into.)

What Does Legalism Look Like?

Mark 7:1-7 – “One day some Pharisees and teachers of the law arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with unwashed hands, they **found fault**. The Pharisees, like all Jewish people, don't eat unless they have properly washed their hands – diligently with the fist, up to the elbow – **holding the tradition** of the elders. When they come from the marketplace, they don't eat unless they have washed first. And there are **many other traditions** which they have received and hold fast to. Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, “Why don't your disciples follow the **traditions** of the elders? Jesus told them, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is pointless, because they're **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men**.’”

Three Characteristics of the Pharisees

- a.) They Overemphasized Tradition – (v. 3-5)
- b.) They Were Fault Finders – (v. 2) – Spent a lot of time and energy being angry.
- c.) They Taught For Doctrines the Commandments of Men – (v. 7) – They **added man-made rules** to the commandments of God.

The Actual Commandment – “Don't Work on the Sabbath”

Exodus 20:8,10 - “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy ... in it you shall do no work.”

The Point Wasn't “Don't Work” – The point was “**rest**” and “**remember**”. (“Take a day off”! And “spend some time with Me.”) God intended the Sabbath to be a blessing (Mk. 2:27). The Pharisees took what God meant to be a blessing and weighed it down with “a million” rules.

Their “Add-On” Rules –

- ✓ “All kinds of things were considered working on the Sabbath. For instance, ‘to carry a burden’ was work. But then, a “**burden**” has to be *defined*. So, the definition runs, a ‘burden’ is: Food equal in weight to a dried fig, enough wine for mixing in a goblet, milk enough for one swallow, honey enough to put on a wound, enough ink to write two letters of the alphabet, enough reed to make a pen, and so on endlessly.
- ✓ “To *write* was to work on the Sabbath. But now *writing* has to be defined: ‘He who writes two letters of the alphabet (with his right hand, or with his left hand, whether of one kind or of two kinds, if they are written with different inks or in different languages) – he is guilty. Even if he should write two letters from forgetfulness, he is guilty. If he writes with ink or anything that makes a permanent mark – he is guilty.’
- ✓ “Healing was considered ‘working on the Sabbath’. Healing was allowed when there was danger to life. Especially in troubles of the

ears, nose, and throat. But even then, steps could be taken only to keep the patient from getting worse. No steps could be taken to make him any better. So, a plain bandage could be put on a wound, but no ointment.”

- ✓ The Book that held these rules was called the Mishnah. (About 800 pgs. in English.) It was considered to be too vague, so a 2,700-page commentary was written on it.

Jesus vs. the Pharisees:

Jesus – Mt. 11:28-30 – “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest** ... my yoke is **easy**, and my burden is **light**.”

Pharisees – Matt. 23:4 – “**They tie heavy burdens onto people’s shoulders that are impossible to carry. They crush people with unbearable religious demands.**”

- ✓ Jesus takes the “heavy laden” and gives them rest. Legalism takes the “resting” and piles on heavy burdens. Legalism adds *rules* and demands compliance. Sadly, legalism didn’t stop with the Pharisees.
- ✓ In the 2nd Century – A ministry student asked his teachers, “What must I forsake, if I’m to follow Christ?” Here’s their answer: “Colored clothes, for one thing. Get rid of everything in your wardrobe that’s not white. Stop sleeping on a soft pillow. Sell your musical instruments and don’t eat anymore white bread. If you are sincere about obeying Christ, you cannot take warm baths or shave.”
- ✓ Legalism Is Still Around Today – When I got saved in the late 70’s, these were the “sins” we were warned about in youth group: Going to the movies, playing cards, dancing, clapping on the backbeat (that was a “jungle beat” and a sin). When I was a Bible College dean, we used to go on weekend ministry tours. On one occasion, we stayed in a home where the mother was of Russian descent. As I was planning the service for the next day, I started to whistle. Her son slipped up beside me and whispered, “If my mom hears that, she’ll throw you out. She was taught that whistling summons demons.”

- ✓ What Is Legalism? – It’s making MY list of rules, handing them to you, and judging you harshly if you don’t follow them.
- ✓ Let Me be Clear: We believe in obeying the Word. If the *Bible* says it, we do it. But I’m not obligated to keep *your list* of rules, and you’re not obligated to keep mine. Where there’s no specific command from God, there’s room for a difference of opinion.

Romans 14:1-4 – “**Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don’t see things the way you do. Don’t criticize them for having beliefs that are different from yours on debatable issues.** For instance, one person believes it’s all right to eat anything. But another believer with a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables. Those who feel free to eat anything must not look down on those who don’t. And those who don’t eat certain foods must not condemn those who do, **for God has accepted them both.** Who are you to condemn someone else’s servants? Their own master will judge whether they stand or fall. And with the Lord’s help, they will stand and receive his approval.” (MSG, CEV, EXB, NLT)

How Do You Judge Unclear Things?

First Filter: The Word – Is there any Scripture? Does the Word specifically forbid it? Are there any principles you’re violating? (Whistling.)

Second Filter: Your Heart – Does it violate your conscience? Note: This isn’t fool proof. You *might* have a seared or oversensitive conscience.

Third Filter: Stumbling Your Brother – Ro. 14:13-14 – “*Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.*”

Fourth Filter: God’s Instructions to *You* – There’s nothing wrong with the practice, but God has asked *you* to set it aside. (Newspapers, make-up.)

Fifth Filter: Can I Control It? 1 Cor. 6:12 – “All things are lawful, but I will not be bought under the power of any.”