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WHAT IS LEGALISM?

*When Obedience Becomes an Attempt
to Earn Righteousness*

Legalism must be carefully defined. Every commandment is not legalism. Obeying Christ is not legalism. Living morally is not legalism. Rejecting sin is not legalism. Teaching believers to live godly lives is not legalism.

Legalism occurs when human obedience or religious performance is treated as the means of obtaining, establishing, completing, or meriting righteousness before God.

The Apostle Paul confronted this directly.

**GALATIANS
2:18 (KJV)**

*"For if I build again the things which I destroyed,
I make myself a transgressor."*

Paul had already abandoned justification through the Law. Returning to that system would rebuild what the gospel had torn down.

**GALATIANS
2:21 (KJV)**

*"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness
come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

Consider the force of that statement. If human beings could become righteous before God by keeping the Law, the death of Christ would have been unnecessary. But humanity could not save itself.

Legalism subtly changes the Christian question from:

THE GOSPEL ASKS

"What has Christ done?"

TO

LEGALISM ASKS

"What have I done?"

Instead of resting in Christ's righteousness, the legalist continually examines his own performance as the foundation of acceptance before God.

**GALATIANS
5:3-4 (KJV)**

*"For I testify again to every man that is circumcised,
that he is a debtor to do the whole law.
Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of
you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace."*

Paul's argument is devastating to selective legalism. You cannot take one portion of the Law as the basis of justification while ignoring everything else. If your righteousness depends upon Law, you become a debtor to the whole Law.

**The gospel offers something entirely different—
RIGHTEOUSNESS THROUGH CHRIST JESUS.**

LEGALISM IN PRACTICE

Legalism may sound spiritual,
but its focus is self-centered.
It measures spiritual worth by:

- Personal performance
- Religious activity
- Rule-keeping
- Comparison with others
- Moral achievement

*But the Bible declares:
Righteousness comes
through faith in Christ alone.*



*"There is none righteous,
no, not one."*

ROMANS 3:10 (KJV)

THE TRUTH

Our righteousness is not found
in what we do,
but in what Christ has done.
Salvation is not wages
we earn; it is grace
we receive through faith.

*"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."*

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (KJV)