
The Story of Jesus

Published By Evangelist Van Billingsley

Fall 2010

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.”

Psalm 119:97

In God’s Word we find that the

law condemns us with it’s penalty of death, but Jesus paid that debt leaving the Law as simply our instructions for pleasing God!

Are the Dos and the Don'ts Legalism?

by *Evangelist Van Billingsley*

For the past several years I have been working on a book that I hope to complete soon. For this issue, I will print some excerpts from one chapter late in the book that I have just about completed. The book is entitled "A Vessel Unto Honour" and is based on Paul's passage to Timothy using that phrase. My work in progress deals with the Christian life in general, namely the believer's relationship with God based on living in a way that is pleasing unto God and his testimony before the world.

I hear a lot these days about the "dos and the don'ts" in Christianity. It is most always used negatively in statements such as, "It's not about the dos and the don'ts." My question is, "What is it about then?" One might say, "Well, it's about winning the lost," and to that I say, "That's one of the dos!" Another might say, "It's about loving people." Again, I say, "That's one of the dos!" You see, I am afraid it is about the dos and the don'ts, but the carnal man just does not like being told what to do. Looking at the Word of God as merely a book of dos and don'ts will make it a dreadful book, especially to the carnal Christian; looking at the Word of God as a revelation of how to please a Saviour we love and adore is an entirely different matter. The text to follow

comes from chapter five of my coming book which is entitled "A Play of Words."

Never should we underestimate the power of words, as the old adage goes, "The pen is mightier than the sword." This can be true in many ways and it really doesn't matter if the words are written or spoken, especially in these modern times when recordings preserve and distribute words as well as or beyond that of the printed page. Individual words can be used to clarify a matter or they can just as well be used to cloud and confuse a matter. So often we find that a play of words can twist the meaning one way or another. Many times the meaning of words are shifted in a way that one person means a totally different thing than another when making the same statement, and often a statement can be quoted as having a completely different meaning than was intended by the source. Teachers of cults are very crafty in using the same terms a true Christian will use, only with different definitions to those terms.

It is amazing how the simple concept of right and wrong can be such a controversial area among Christians. There are many terms used to manipulate the teachings of right and wrong in the scriptures. Some false teachers have certain terms they use to promote

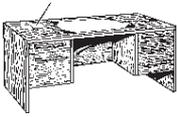
-- continued on page 3

Inside This Edition...

- **Scripture Thought**, cover
- **“Are the Dos and the Don'ts Legalism”**, cover, pages 2, 3 & 4
- **News From the Editor’s Desk**, p.2

Our Ministry News...

From the Desk of the Editor



Since I am a little long winded in my sermon article in this issue, I will try to be brief in my news update. I do apologize for missing the summer edition this year, but my schedule and available resources at that time had postponed it until I felt it was too late to accomplish.

We did have a busy summer as usual, taking our children from the mission church to camp, working in our home church's VBS and helping with a few other meetings plus doing our annual VBS/Revival at our mission church. In an attempt to draw more adults to the mission church, we focused on the revival aspect of our summer meeting, but we still used our usual contesting for verse memorization, visitors, etc.

We have faced a decline in attendance over the past six months or more, but I have found this to be true in other places as well. I am glad to see growth and abundance of fruit in other ministries and I have learned that attendance and followings are not a good measure of the will of God. That's one of the first lessons in God's Word that we learn from Noah.

Our mission church, Gospel Light Baptist Mission is celebrating its 9th anniversary as I pen this, and I trust you will pray for us as we begin our 10th year.

Please pray for our evangelism ministry as well as the work we do in the ministry of helps which includes Web site work among other things.

A Servant of Christ,
Evangelist Van Billingsley

	<p>Evangelist Van Billingsley Proclaiming The Story of Jesus</p>	<p>www.sojministries.com Featuring Christian News Center Radio Broadcasts • Christian Radio • Links MP3 Sermons • Newsletters • Articles</p>
--	---	---

“Are the Dos and the Don'ts Legalism?”
(continued from cover) --

their doctrines of loose living, terms that are meant to intimidate Christians who desire a holy life to please their Lord and decry those who teach and preach standards and separation.

I mentioned that carnal Christians often use certain words to intimidate those who desire to please God in their actions and appearance and those who teach and preach doing so. The most common word used for this assault is "Legalist" or "Legalism." Again, this is a word which does not come from our English Bible, so that will direct us to other sources for understanding its use and true meaning.

Of the three definitions given in the Unabridged Webster's Dictionary, the first is identified as theological while the second as pertaining to government or judicial terminology and the third to Chinese Philosophy. Obviously, the first is the only one relevant to this discussion which defines legalism as, "The principles and practices characterizing the theological doctrine of strict conformity to a code of deeds and observances (as the Mosaic law) as a means of justification." An older edition of The Oxford Universal Dictionary gives its first definition as, "(Theology) Adherence to the Law as opposed to the Gospel; the doctrine of justification by works, or teaching that savours it," while its second definition states, "A disposi

tion to exalt the importance of law or formulated rule," which leaves room for some interpretation. These two top authorities on the language we speak give a specific theological meaning to legalism which is often used by Bible teachers and authors dealing with those Jews who wanted to add Law to salvation and passages which deal with salvation by grace alone such as The Epistle to the Galatians. (I deal with this issue in depth in the book that is coming.) Many study Bibles will refer to legalism in this way and use it in headings around relevant passages. Legalism always means adding works to salvation in these cases.

The accepted theological meaning clearly identifies legalism as a false doctrine. Since it is understood in our vocabulary as a false doctrine and something to be rebuked, now some want to use legalism to refer to any teaching or practice of standards and convictions to which they disagree. They will usually consider anyone a legalist who holds one conviction which they reject. This now places the preacher or Christian identified as a legalist in a shameful position and deemed to be in doctrinal error when those using the term know well those standards are not taught as a means of salvation. Is this an honest use of this label? It is a malicious false attack upon God loving Christians.

Those who want to pull this negative and derogatory term away from its accepted theological meaning to use as a weapon may look for a broader definition as found in Funk & Wagnalls New Practical Standard Dictionary which gives the following definitions for legalism:

1. Close adherence to Law; strict conformity to Law.
2. The theological doctrine of salvation by works, as distinguished from that by grace.
3. The tendency to observe the letter rather than the spirit of the law.

The second definition, in this case, is just as clear as our previous sources, but the first definition is very generic and if it stood alone would leave one question. For what purpose?

If the purpose of adherence is to obtain salvation, then that's false doctrine; but if we allowed the answer to be obedience to God and pleasing our Saviour, and that was the accepted meaning, then I'd plead guilty and wear the label as a badge of identity. This would be irresponsible and confusing to say the least, since there is already an accepted theological meaning. The third definition may appeal to those who want to use this powerful weapon since it appears to use Bible language, but just exactly what does that mean. I can imagine how they could explain this as not keeping all those commands literally, but having a spirit of love in your heart instead. After all, man looks on the outside but God looks at the heart, right? Well, let's see what scripture says about the letter and the spirit of the law.

Paul declares all men to be lost in the first three chapters of Romans and he later deals with the condemnation of the law being removed through salvation, but the responsibility to live in righteousness is now brought to life. This is declared in Romans chapter six. We need to remember to keep what we examine here in its context. While Paul is dealing with their lost condition, after declaring the wicked heathen to be lost then making the transition from the moral gentile to the religious Jew he concludes, "But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God" (Romans 2:29). Paul has spent several verses explaining that the physical act of following the instructions of circumcision does not make a man a Jew, but it must be of the heart. Remember, he is exposing their need of salvation in preparation for revealing salvation's plan. He will soon reveal that salvation must be of the heart and by the Spirit. If there remains any confusion of the point Paul is making, he clears the matter after continued discussion as he writes, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28). His point and purpose to all this discourse is that the law cannot save you. A few verses earlier he had written, "Therefore

www.sojministries.com *On-line Since 1995*

“Are the Dos and the Don’ts Legalism?”
(continued from page 3) --

by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Romans 3:20). Its very purpose is to reveal sin, and as we move through the epistle we are further taught that the law condemns us, but grace removes the condemnation of the law. It is in this context we read the popular text, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). He soon contrasts the letter and spirit again as he writes, "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." (Romans 7:6,7). We are to serve in newness of spirit as we live in obedience. We are not made free to covet or lust, the law still reveals sin; but we are freed from the condemnation of the law. This is echoed to the Corinthians as Paul writes, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter; but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). The letter reveals the wages of sin, the

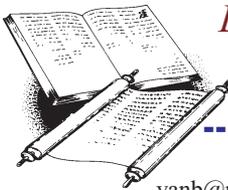
Spirit reveals the gift of God. The Spirit is later defined by the words, "Now the Lord is there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17). I can't go into detail for this article what is covered in my work in progress, but Jesus and the Apostles taught that we are freed from the bondage of sin, not freed to commit or live in sin. There is no teaching of scripture that we no longer obey the written commands of God or that we keep the law in our hearts without concerning ourselves with our outward deeds.

All this leaves no room for the broad use of the label "legalist" for a weapon against those who hold Bible convictions to please and obey God.

This issue is all about love. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). To love God, which is the first and great commandment, is to live according to His Word. Now we know that we must rightly divide the Word of Truth, and some commands were specifically to the Jewish nation. Those commands are clearly given as such, but from the beginning God began revealing His ways to His people, and God does not change.

--VB

IFB Sermons.com
Independent Fundamental Baptist Sermons



Evangelist Van Billingsley
proclaiming

The Story of Jesus
-- A Missionary to our Homeland --
(334)644-2391 • (334)644-4913

Independent
Fundamental
KJV

vanb@mindspring.com • <http://www.sojministries.com>
1906 South First Avenue, Lanett, Alabama 36863
Working out of
Oakside Baptist Church - LaGrange, Georgia