

Legalism Destroys - Philippians 3:1-9 – January 13th, 2019

- I want to talk to you about something I wish I would have understood much earlier in my life concerning the matter of legalism.
- Specifically, how that living a legalistic life can have the propensity to cause tremendous damage to the Christian and church.
- Such was the case with the church in Philippi, which is why Paul's words are so strong as it relates to what was taking place.

- The text before us today is one that requires a bit of an explanation so as to better understand its application to us in our day.
- It seems there were those who were causing trouble in the body of Christ, by imposing and adding the law to ones salvation.
- Namely, that of the legalistic teaching that there is righteousness that one can attain by way of the law vis-à-vis circumcision.

- If there was ever a man who could speak to this false teaching it was the Apostle Paul who himself was the epitome of legalism.
- This is why Paul basically says, "I've been there done that, bought the t-shirt" and it was all just rubbish, or if you prefer, "dung."
- As one so aptly said it, "we can climb the ladder to the top only to realize the ladder we climbed was up against the wrong wall."

- I suppose the question becomes one of what will cause the Christian to want to climb this ladder of legalism in the first place.
- The answer to this question is pride and the reason for this is that it comes packaged with the bragging rights of having done it.
- In other words, one can now boast in what they've done because legalism and religion says, "do," but Jesus says, "It is done."

Ephesians 2:8-9 - 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—
9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

- I am personally of the belief that it's virtually impossible to overstate just how destructive legalism can be in the life of a believer.
- The reason being is because of the damage legalism has caused in my own life over the years especially as a young Christian.
- If you'll kindly indulge me for the remainder of our time in Philippians, I would like to share three ways legalism is so destructive.

1. Joy of the Lord (1-3)

1 Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. 2 Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. 3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—

- I'm struck by what the Apostle Paul says in verse one about his sincere desire that his brothers and sisters rejoice in the Lord.
- It seems that his chief concern is for their protection and safeguard from the mutilators of the flesh who Paul calls "those dogs."
- The reason for the strength of Paul's words is the common denominator with pride-fueled legalism is a joyless Christian life.

2. Trust in the Lord (4-6)

4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: 5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; 6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

- To me, Paul really hits the proverbial nail on the head in these verses when he talks about putting ones confidence in the flesh.
- What he's saying is when we are given over to legalism we will also be given over to trusting in our own works based on law.
- In other words, instead of placing our trust and faith in the Lord and His grace, we transfer that trust and place it in ourselves.

3. Relationship with the Lord (7-9)

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

- If you were to ask me what I thought was the most destructive about legalism, our relationship with the Lord would have to be it.
- This because, instead of a relationship based on God's agape love for me, I'm always looking over my shoulder out of my fear.
- By that I mean I'll always have the fear that my legalistic self-righteousness is never enough, which is religion not relationship.

- In closing, let me hasten to say that we would err greatly were we to dismiss works of righteousness under the banner of grace.
- Let me explain it this way, instead of our works or deeds of righteousness being a "got to," they under grace become a "get to."
- Perhaps better said, legalism says I have to have works under the law, whereas faith says I want to have works under grace.

James 2:14-24 - 14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.