

Christian Myth Busters
Love and Legalism
Romans Chapters 13 and 14

In this series, we deal with:

Generational Curses
Prophecy Corrections
We are Provisionists

Today: Love and Legalism

-I want you, within yourself, to define legalism among believers as you understand it,
-.... and then compare it to this study afterwards.

-In our study today, we are primarily drawing from the Book of Romans, chapters 13 and 14
-The book itself can be broken up into four major sections:
-The **1st.** section is chs. 1-8, The Foundational Theology of the Church....
-..... All have sinned; no one can earn or work for their salvation.
-Justification is by faith alone in the completed work of Christ Crucified.
-The **2nd.** section is chs. 9-11 regarding the salvation of God's chosen people, Israel, individually and as a nation.
-The **3rd.** section is chs. 12-15:7, which begins the application portion of chs. 1-8 in particular.
-The **4th.** Section is chs. 15:8-ch. 16 are his closing remarks, personal greetings, salutations, and final words.

The Third Section begins with Chapter 12....

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God [as expounded in chs. 1-11], that you present your bodies [and all that is you within your bodies] a living sacrifice, holy [set apart to God and], acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And do not be [or stop being] conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind [through the Word and the Spirit], that you may prove what is that good and acceptable [or well pleasing] and perfect will of God.

-In 12:3-8, the transformation process continues with God giving us tools or gifts of the Holy Spirit to aid Him in transforming us.
-Then, in vs. 9-21, while being transformed, we learn about what our love looks like towards each other and towards a hostile world.
-Chapter 13, then gives us direct commands that are part of the laws of Christ that we are under,
-... laws to keep us transformative lights in a dark world-well pleasing to our Lord.
-These are unalterable dos and don'ts that are good for us and are His pleasing will.
-Chapters 14-15:7, addresses the role of love with regard to disputable things among believers.

-We will do a light exposition in chapter 13, but a more extensive exposition of portions of chapter 14.
-We are struck by the distinctions between the two chapters:
-Chapter 13 presents indisputable, legal commands from God.
-Chapter 14 is about disputable things or amoral things
-Chapter 13 is black and white
-Chapter 14 is gray, but is governed by love and Paul's black and white Apostolic Decree in v.14.

Let's first look briefly very at all of the moral commands of God in Romans 13

#1- v.1 Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.

[Why?] For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

#2- v.3 Do what is good [or beneficial]

Romans 13:7-10

#3- v.7 Render therefore to all [governing authorities] their due:

Be more specific, Paul

v.7 cont. ... taxes to whom taxes are due,
customs to whom customs,
fear [healthy respect] to whom fear [is due],
honor to whom honor [is due].

#4- v.8 Owe no one anything [pay what you owe]
[except be constantly in debt] to love one another,

Why?

For he [or she] who [constantly] loves another has fulfilled the law.

Which laws Paul?

v.9- For the commandments [which govern our earthly relationships are:],

#5- "You shall not commit adultery,"

#6- "You shall not murder,"

#7- "You shall not steal,"

#8- "You shall not bear false witness,"

#9- "You shall not covet,"

and if there is any other commandment, [besides, numbers 3-8 that involve our relationships with each other, they] are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

What is the summary of these commands so far?

v.10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Other Personal Commands from God in Romans 13:12-14

v.12 The night is far spent, the day [of the LORD] is at hand.

#10- Therefore, let us CAST OFF the works of darkness,

#11- and [simultaneously] let us PUT ON the armor of light [as in Ephesians 6:13-18].

#12- Let us walk properly [as children of God], as [we would] in the day [of His return],

What works of darkness are you talking about, Paul?

#13- not in revelry [licentious behavior] and drunkenness,

#14- not in lewdness and [sexual misbehavior, stemming from the temptations of] lust,

#15- not in strife and envy.

#16- But [instead] put on [the armor of light which is also] the [mind of the] Lord Jesus Christ [1 Cor. 2:16],

#17- and [by doing so] MAKE NO PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, TO FULFILL ITS LUSTS.

-There are approximately seventeen commands in chapter 13 of Romans

-Out of over 700 Laws Under Grace in the New Testament for us, the church.

-Question: Are we legalistic if we obey and teach obedience to these commands of God? No!

We transition from chapter 13 to 14 with these words from....

13:14 put on [the armor of light which is] the [mind of the] Lord Jesus Christ, and [by doing so also] make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

- All of us on a daily basis need to put on the mind of Christ,
- which means being filled with His daily Manna and His Spirit.
- In doing so, we often discover that we need extra personal rules or hedges,
- ... in the battle against the lust of our flesh.
- We often rightfully put up extra hedges around us because we recognize our weakness in certain areas.
- We seek to prevent sin by setting hedges around ourselves that others perhaps do not need, but we do.
- We hedge ourselves by denying certain disputable things,
- that could lead to temptation, then temptation may lead to sin, thus fulfilling the lusts of our flesh.
- These hedges are good, and we who are stronger need to respect the hedges of the weaker, ...
-and then do chapter 14 verse 1....

14:1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes [led by the one who is weak] over doubtful things.

- When someone is weak in faith, he or she may falter in certain areas of their earthly life.
- We are to receive and, might I add, applaud their efforts to prevent fulfilling the lusts of their flesh.
- To receive them is to intentionally come alongside of them with personal interest.
- If a fellow believer is weak in faith, he or she is to be accepted by mature believers with love.
- Acceptance is not for the purpose of judging the opinions of the weaker brother or sister.
- The weaker find success, they find victory with their sanctification rules and hedges.
- They may write books, blogs, and do podcasts, to insist that everyone build hedges, follow their rules.
- That may lead to disputes, led by the weaker against the stronger who do not need their rules.
- Receive them, but not to disputes over doubtful things, amoral things.

Paul, give me an example

v.2 For one believes he [or she] may eat all things, but he [or she] who is weak eats only vegetables.

- Verse 2 is a study in contrast:
- Some believers have no problem eating everything from anywhere.
- There are other believers who have problems with eating certain foods....
- especially if the origin of the meat is from an animal sacrificed to demons.

v.3 [Therefore, the summary of the problem is this] Let not him [or her] who eats despise him [or her] who does not eat, and let not him [or her] who does not eat judge him [or her] who eats; for God has received him [or her who eats].

- Believers who are free to eat anything are not to judge weak believers as being narrow-minded.
- And believers who abstain from eating certain foods are not to judge those who eat everything.
- This would apply to all amoral, disputable things, for God has accepted them both equally.

Paul next elaborates on the principle of freedom in Christ in vs. 4-13a.

- He begins with an admonition in...

v. 4 Who are you [oh weaker one] that judges the servant of another? To his [or her] own Lord, he [or she] stands or falls. Indeed, [the one who doesn't follow your rules] he [or she] will be made to stand, for God is able to make him [or her to] stand.

- The basic message of this verse is that believers are not to judge one another on amoral issues.
- Paul's question, "Who are you?" suggests that the weaker one is taking the place of God as judge.
- Only the servant's master has the right to judge him or her, especially concerning disputable things.

Again, we are dealing with amoral, disputable things and issues

- The Bible does not say that believers are never to judge others.
- Passages such as I Corinthians 5:1-5 and Matthew 18:18 state the opposite.
- Under certain conditions, we are to judge unrepentant, moral sins,
- But he or she who sins and they are repentant will judge themselves, and not be judged by others (1 Cor. 11:31).

Paul adds another example...

v. 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his [or her's] own mind.

v. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he [or she] who does not observe the [particular] day [of choice], to the Lord he [or she] does not observe it. He [or she] who eats, eats to the Lord, for he [or she] gives God thanks; and he [or she] who does not eat, to the Lord he [or she] does not eat, and gives God thanks.

-Dave taught extensively on this a couple of weeks ago...

In verses 7-8, Paul cautions us about our freedoms

v. 7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself [we do not own ourselves].

Paul, please explain verse 7....

v. 8 For if we live [zao, spiritual life], we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are [purchased by and therefore we are] the Lord's.

On what basis does every believer belong to the Lord?

v. 9 For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, [to what end?] that He might be Lord [and therefore Judge] of both the dead and the living.

- This shows that the believer's first responsibility is to Christ our Lord.
- This truth applies to both strong and weak believers.
- Ultimately, all believers will have to answer to Him.

This raises concerns that need to be addressed about the weaker and the stronger

v. 10 But why do you [the weaker] judge your [stronger] brother? Or why do you [the stronger brother or sister] show contempt [because of their additional rules] for your [weaker] brother [or sister]? For we shall all [weak or strong] stand before the [the bema] judgment seat of Christ.

v. 11 For it is written [from Is. 45:23]: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God."

v. 12 So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.

- The Holy Spirit asks two questions, the first of which was aimed at weaker believers:
- "Why do you judge the strong brother who is free to partake of certain things?"
- Then to the stronger believer he asks: "Why do you regard your weaker brother or sister with contempt?"
- All believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, ...
- only He has the authority to judge in amoral areas, over disputable things.

The application of this truth comes in verse 13a

v. 13a Therefore, let us not judge one another anymore [in particular, judging the stronger brother or sister],

- Weaker believers have no right to judge their brothers and sisters in the area of amoral things or issues.
- The admonition and challenge to the believer is to accept the positions,
- ... of both the strong and weak brothers and sisters, and to pray for and love each other.

In Christendom, most believers have weaknesses

-by abiding within certain hedges, they have learned by experience or from others,

-They may sincerely be setting up hedges for themselves against,

-..... **“making provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts”**, as Paul stated at the end of chapter 13.

-That is a good thing to do for themselves; they are NOT legalists or legalistic at this point.

-When they begin to be judgmental towards others or towards the local church's style or practices,

-When they insist that these disputable things are a sin, they are then being legalistic in a bad way.

-They will whisper and insist that their rules apply to everyone.

-They often move from personal legalism to ‘how run a church’ legalism.

-They begin to impose what they believe is the correct way to conduct church, ...

-.... when the Scriptures give no such rules.

Legalism is NOT living by a set of rules that are not in Scripture and do not contradict Scripture

-Rather, legalism is living by rules that are not in Scripture, and insisting that others do likewise.

-They become legalistic when trying to force and enforce these rules on other believers or even the church.

-They whisper, they try to gain a following, they are divisive, but think they are doing the Lord’s work.

-Legalism, then, is imposing your rules, your hedges, on other believers or the church.

To Be Clear

-Weak believers (and who isn’t weak in some areas of their life)....

-... have the right to set up a system of rules by which they wish to conduct their lives,

-and these rules may or may not be found in Scripture, but do not contradict Scripture.

-But they are sinning, being legalistic when they try impose their rules on others.

Can the Local Church Itself be Legalistic?

-Mishnaic Judaism of Jesus’ day follows thousands of what is called the Oral Law,

-which is not in the inspired Old Testament.

-But Mishnaic Judaism, which was practiced in the times of Jesus, and was treated as the Word of God....

-...by everyone except Jesus!

-He was accused of breaking their legalistic laws (ref. Luke 6:1-2)

-Local churches today often have non-scriptural rules that they have codified as “thus saith the Lord”.

-... which are not stated in the Apostles’ Doctrine in the New Testament Laws of Christ.

-When a church judges a believer’s faith or spirituality on the basis of laws not found in Scripture,

-.... the local church itself has become legalistic.

-Obedience to man-made rules and regulations, whether they are Mishnaic rules or church rules, ...

-.... might make a person look or sound spiritual on the outside, but they change nothing on the inside.

-What changes the inside of us is the Word of God and applying it: The Weak then become stronger.

-Keep your hedges, but strengthen the inner man and woman and become mature!

Up until now, Paul has primarily addressed weaker believers; he now turns to the strong in faith v. 13b but rather resolve this [you strong ones, to] not to put a stumbling block [giving offense] or a cause to fall in our brother's way [or path].

-In contrast to what he had said before about the believers’ freedom,

-He now instructed them to refrain from causing offense or by stumbling the weaker in faith.

-The strong in faith are free to do anything or use anything they wish,

-.... in areas or things that are morally neutral....

-.... as long as we stay within the limitations of the law of love towards the weaker in faith.

-True freedom, immersed in love, means we are free and willing to restrict our liberties.

In vs. 14, Paul gives the Apostolic truth straight from the Lord regarding amoral things or issues

- He answers the question, Is it ok for the weaker to remain ignorantly weak?
- No, we are all to grow up in the Lord, and we start with true doctrine that will correctly build our faith.
- We are to grow our faith, whether our faith is incomplete through ignorance or if it is being corrected.
- The goal of these corrections to our faith is to love Him more, and each other more, and to be free.

Paul will now issue an Apostolic, Christ sourced decree regarding disputable things

v. 14a I know [and have known for some time now] and am convinced by the Lord Jesus [directly] that there is NOTHING unclean of itself

- This decree should be a part of our faith box of what we believe.
- It should correct the weaker brother who has a faulty faith system regarding amoral things.
- Truth is established by two or three witnesses, so Paul gives us additional witnesses in 1 Corinthians,....
- ... and with these additional witnesses, he gives us some guidelines....

1 Corinthians 6:12 and 1 Corinthians 10:23

6:12a All [amoral, disputable] things are lawful for me, but all [these] things are not [necessarily spiritually] helpful [for me or others].

-Why? because the kingdom of God is spiritual, it is immaterial, it is not things.

-We are the most material aspect of the Kingdom of God!

-What is the Kingdom? It is righteousness, peace, and joy per Romans 14:17

He continues in 1 Corinthians 6....

12b All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power [or ruling authority] of anything.

1 Corinthians 10:23 All [amoral, disputable] things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful [or spiritually advantageous for me]; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify [or build me up].

-We are all to consider carefully how we use all neutral, amoral, disputable things!

-Neutral things can be positive or they can become negative to us spiritually

- You must judge yourself and your usage of amoral things!

-Take 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23 as guiding lights.

Back to Romans 14...

v. 14b. BUT to him [or her] who considers anything to be unclean, to him [or her] it is unclean [or defiling].

-What is unclean to the weaker arises out of the conscience, ...

-Our conscience remembers our former life & the bondage to things before we walked with Christ.

-The stronger believer, out of love, limits his or her freedom by exercising the higher law of love.

-The stronger believer may have their own areas of weakness, but different than yours or mine.

-They may have their own rules, their own hedges, which is good as long as they are not imposed on all.

Paul then exhorts the stronger in verse 15

v. 15a Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food [and now you know it], you are no longer walking in love.

-Their grieving over the partaking of disputables may cause them to stumble in their spiritual lives.

-Which in turn may hinder them from growing in their faith and ruining their witness.

What are the potential issues the exercise of freedom may cause the weaker?

v. 15b Do not destroy [or better, spiritually ruin] with your food the one for whom Christ died.

-One should abstain from partaking of certain things at certain times,

-... so that it will not cause a weaker believer to stumble in their faith.

v. 16 Therefore, do not let your good [that which you can do by faith] be spoken of as evil;

In verse 17, Paul explained why believers should be willing to give up their rights in any given situation:

v. 17 for [here is the reason you refrain from your liberty, because] the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking [or clean things], but righteousness and peace and joy [spiritual things] in the Holy Spirit.

-Food, drink, neutral, clean things in and of themselves are not the essence of His kingdom.

-Rather, the sum and substance of God's kingdom are moral purity, loving harmony between members.

-Neutral things can be positive, or they can become negative, as we read in 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23

That is as far as we can go today, but we need to make some observations:

-But let's close out our exposition with verses 22 and 23 of chapter 14, which read:

v. 22 Do you have faith [oh, stronger one, with regards to amoral things]? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he [or she] who does not condemn himself in what he [or she] approves.

v. 23 But he who doubts [and is not convinced just yet] is condemned if he [or she] eats, because he [or she] does not eat from [a corrected] faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.

Some Observations

#1-What do the following have in common?

-Dressing up special on Sundays

-Drinking alcohol

-A strict adherence to a particular day of the week

-Dancing

-Playing cards

-All kinds of music and musical instruments

-Sports

-Your smart phone

-TV

-Internet

-Computers

-Being a Raider's fan

-Money

-Hunting

-Make-up

-Tattoos, piercings

-Kids sports, especially on the weekends

-a strict diet

-a not so strict diet

Answer: They are all disputable things, neutral, clean in and of themselves, but they need context!

We need **1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23** applied to all of these things with all diligence.

6:12 All [amoral, disputable] things are lawful for me, but all things are not [necessarily] helpful [for me or others]. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power [or ruling authority] of anything.

10:23 All [amoral, disputable] things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful [or advantageous spiritually for me]; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify [build me up].

-The weaker brother or sister is not the judge of these things for you; Jesus and His word is!

#2-Legalism regarding Salvation is where you must keep laws to earn salvation and to remain saved.

-That is not the legalism we are focused on here.

#3-Legalists use general, all-encompassing Scriptural principles to rationalize the imposition of their laws

-Like whatsoever you do in word and deed, do all to the Glory of God,

-And they reason we cannot always, 24-7, glorify the Lord when doing or using these disputable things,

-Therefore, you are sinning if you violate our rules.

-BUT He has given us all good things to enjoy in Him! (1 Tim. 6:17)

#4-Legalists, when confronted about their judging, retort with, "You tell me not to judge, but you are doing so right now, what's the difference?"

-The context of judging has to do with creating 'thou shalt not' rules about amoral things,

-We are to judge unrepentant sins against the clear commands of God as they affect us.

-We are not to be sin sniffers and flesh finders!

#5-Legalists get many of their rules from reading other books or listening to internet teachings or podcasts of church traditionalists who are subtle legalists.

-Most legalism, like false teachings, comes from other books, from well-intentioned dragons,

-but they do not come from the simple reading of the Bible.

#6-Many church wide legalists claim that the way 'church' was done in the past is the correct way,

-Even though the New Testament does give us specific rules for how to conduct church, only principles.

#7-Again, individuals who set up hedge-rules to protect themselves from fulfilling the lusts of the flesh

-..... **they are not legalists**, unless they insist others do as they do then they are sinning.

#8-At some point, the legalist's faith needs to become knowledgeable, or corrected or convinced, and then adhere to what the Laws of Christ say is clean or unclean.

-This still may mean they have the need to maintain certain hedges, but only for themselves.

#9-The stronger are not to stumble the weaker by exercising any freedoms in their presence that they know may stumble them.

#10-Again, the final word on what is moral law in these two chapters is **Romans chapter 13**

-and what is clean or unclean regarding disputable things is, **Romans 14:14**

I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him [or her] who considers anything to be unclean, to him [or her] it is unclean.

-Unclean can lead to deeper temptation, to entertaining certain lusts of the flesh, which could lead to sin.

#11- When in doubt, communicate.

-When we started this study, we asked you to define legalism regarding believers, as you understand it.

-How did your answer stack up with this message? Discuss these things in your Community Group.

Let us pray.