

Summary

This sermon from Mark 2:23 through 3:6 examines the danger of legalism in the Christian life. The pastor defines legalism as elevating personal traditions and preferences to the level of biblical commands, looking for faults in others to criticize and condemn, and focusing on outward behavior rather than the condition of the heart. Through two encounters between Jesus and the Pharisees, the sermon shows how legalism is rooted in arrogance, judgmentalism, and even hatred, and how it ultimately demotes Jesus and His sufficient righteousness by suggesting that the Son of God and the Word of God are not enough on their own. The pastor challenges believers to recognize that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and that we must also grow in Christ by that same grace. Legalism creeps in when Christians begin adding unbiblical standards to what it means to follow Jesus and then impose those standards on others. Drawing on Galatians 2:20, the sermon calls believers to live by faith in the Son of God rather than by man-made rules, to guard their hearts, and to experience the deep joy and freedom that comes from following Christ and His Word alone.

Intro Prayer

Heavenly Father, we come before you today grateful for the gift of your Word and the freedom found in your Son, Jesus Christ. As we open our hearts and minds to discuss what it means to live free from legalism, we ask that your Holy Spirit would guide our conversation. Help each of us to set aside our own assumptions and preferences, and to be truly open to what you want to teach us today. Convict us where we need conviction, heal us where we have been wounded, and draw us closer to you and to one another. May this time together bring glory to your name. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ice Breaker

What is one tradition or habit from your upbringing that you once thought everyone followed, only to discover later that it was just your family or community's way of doing things?

Key Verses

- Mark 2:27
- Mark 2:28

- Mark 3:4
- Mark 3:5
- Galatians 2:20

Questions

- How would you describe legalism in your own words, and have you ever experienced it personally, either as someone who imposed it or someone who was on the receiving end of it?
- The Pharisees accused Jesus' disciples of breaking the Sabbath for picking a few heads of grain. What does this tell us about how legalism can distort something that was originally meant to be a gift from God?
- Jesus said in Mark 2:27 that 'the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.' What does this reveal about God's heart and His intentions behind the commands He gives us?
- The pastor identified five characteristics of legalism: promoting unbiblical standards, promoting personal performance and self-righteousness, promoting division and strife, and ultimately demoting Jesus and His sufficient righteousness. Which of these do you think is most damaging to the church, and why?
- In Mark 3:5, we read that Jesus looked at the Pharisees 'in anger and deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.' What does it say about Jesus that He was moved by both righteous anger and deep grief in the same moment?
- The pastor pointed out that legalism often involves unwritten rules that we carry around but cannot find in Scripture. Can you think of any unwritten rules you have held or encountered in a church setting? How did those rules affect the community?
- Galatians 2:20 says, 'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.' How does living by faith in Jesus practically protect us from falling into legalism?
- The pastor said that legalism can squeeze the joy out of our walk with Jesus. How have you seen this to be true, and what steps can a person take to move from a rule-driven faith to a grace-filled relationship with Christ?

Life Application

This week, take a few quiet moments to ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any area of your life where you may be holding others to a standard that is not found in Scripture. Write it down honestly. Then bring it to God in prayer, confess any self-righteous or judgmental attitudes connected to it, and ask Him to replace those

attitudes with grace and compassion. Consider reaching out to someone you may have judged or criticized because of a personal preference, and choose to extend the same grace to them that Christ has extended to you.

Key Takeaways

- Legalism elevates personal traditions and preferences to the level of biblical commands, and it imposes those standards on others as if disagreement equals sin.
- The Pharisees' response to Jesus reveals that legalism is driven by sinful attitudes including arrogance, judgmentalism, and hatred, and it blinds people to the genuine needs of those around them.
- Jesus is Lord even of the Sabbath, and His Word is sufficient. We do not need to add man-made rules to Scripture in order to please God or grow in our faith.
- We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and we must also grow in Christ by that same grace. Sanctification is not achieved through rule-keeping but through a living relationship with Jesus.
- Legalism ultimately demotes Jesus by suggesting that his sacrifice and His Word are not enough. True freedom comes from running to Christ, repenting of self-righteous attitudes, and living by faith in the Son of God.

Ending Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank you for this time together and for the truth of your Word that sets us free. Forgive us for the times we have added to your Word, judged others by standards you never set, or allowed pride to masquerade as righteousness. We confess that we need your grace not only for our salvation but for every step of our walk with you. Heal those among us who carry wounds from legalism, and free those who may still be caught in its grip. Help us to leave this time with hearts that are softer toward others and more surrendered to you. May we be people who are known not for our rules but for our love, reflecting the grace and truth of Jesus in everything we do. In his name we pray, amen.