**Is It Wrong To Be A Legalist?**

I had a caller on my March 4 Bible Crossfire SiriusXM radio program accuse me of “legalism.” What he meant by that term is that I was trying to follow God’s law too strictly. Most of us should know this accusation is absurd. We should inherently know that being legalistic with God’s law is not a bad thing. What do you think God would want us to be – illegal? Of course God wants us to obey His law in all aspects. John 14:15 reads “If ye love me, keep my commandments.”

Many people equate being legalistic with Phariseeism. But the Pharisees were never condemned for following God’s law too strictly. Jesus said in Matt 23:2-3 – “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” So the Pharisees were condemned for not obeying God’s law, the very opposite of legalism.

It is actually a good thing to follow God’s law strictly, to the letter. Jesus goes on to say in Matt 23:23 – “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” The Pharisees were indeed criticized for ignoring many weightier matters of the law, and so they were encouraged to start following the weightier matters, but not to ignore the lighter (smaller) matters either.

We are instructed to follow all of God’s New Testament laws, no matter how unimportant we might deem one of them to be. Such careful obedience is a matter of respecting God (Eccl 12:13 “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”). James 2:10 confirms this by saying “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.”  Jesus put it this way in the great commission (Matt 28:20) – we are to “observe ALL things whatsoever I have commanded you” – not just the commands we deem important.

The same strictness was also expected under the old law – Matt 5:18-19 said “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

I think we would realize this if we just understood that John 8:32 is saying that only “the truth shall make you free.” So we can never be too careful in learning, obeying, and teaching the truth. Jesus made an argument in Matt 22:32 for the truth of the resurrection just based upon the fact that a word was in the present tense. And Paul made an argument for the truth just based upon the fact that a word was singular (not plural) in Gal 3:16.

Legalism (following God’s law strictly) is a good thing, not a bad thing. Jesus said as much in John 15:14 – “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.”