

# Legalism

HOSEA 6 VERSE 6

For I [God] desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

## INFORMATION

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines legalism as “*strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code.*” The term often comes up when people talk about Christianity. The word is often used to describe the way some churches or Christians appear to have a strict set of rules that they live by. Sometimes non-believers and believers alike view church practices as being too legalistic because they appear to require followers to obey a strict code of behavior. Some people even view the common traditions of church and the relative repetitiveness of church services as evidence of legalism. Others may view individual Christians as legalistic because of their beliefs on certain subjects. As a whole, the term is derogatory and when used in reference to Christians or Christianity, it is often used to defend ones’ choices against being a Christian. Legalism is not what Christianity is about.

Legalism shuns love and replaces it with a form of self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is not something for which Christians should be known. Let us love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, not shun them because they do not practice their faith in the same way we do. Every believer and every church has traditions and routines that they follow. We must never believe that these traditions and routines are what establishes us as Christians. The traditions are not bad unless they are used as a means of self-righteousness or as a shield for sins or as a means of exempting us from practicing discipleship as the Bible instruct us. Traditions that do that should be abandoned in favor of ones that Biblically exemplify Godliness, discipleship and brotherly love, all of which draw us closer to God.

As Christians, we should understand what God truly wants from us. God wants us to have an inward desire to be like Christ, which is why we are called Christians. In other words, have a heart like Christ, one that has a compassion towards our fellow man, a desire to please God, a desire to live peaceably, (though there are limits), a desire to be close to God and a desire to bear spiritual fruit.

As Christians, we are free from the burden of the law. The law never saved anyone; only grace does that because no one can live up to the requirements of the law. As such, we should avoid legalism and embrace the fruits of the spirit. We should also embrace the freedom we have in Christ. Our freedom is not a freedom to sin, it is a freedom to bear spiritual fruits and to not live in fear of violating the law.

So what of the apparently legalistic beliefs and practices that are found in some churches and with some Christians today? We need not worry about what others do. We need to be concerned with our individual relationship with God and our freedom to bear spiritual fruits. We should examine ourselves and act in accordance to Biblical principles regardless of how that lines up with the traditions and regulations of others.

## WHAT IT MEANS TO OUR FAMILY

Read Galatians 5 and Romans 14. Galatians 5 and Romans 14 tells us about our freedom and how we should exercise that freedom. Legalism is a yoke of bondage that we are not bound to. We are FREE in Christ to bear good fruits! Let us focus on that and not tradition and rules and regulations.

## Relevant Passages

### **Proverbs 11:9**

An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.

### **Matthew 3:7-10**

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: 9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. 10 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

### **Galatians 5:1**

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

### **Galatians 5:6**

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.

### **Galatians 5:12-18**

I would they were even cut off which trouble you. 13 For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. 14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 15 But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. 16 This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. 17 For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. 18 But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

### **Romans 14:19**

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.