



ROMANS

Lesson 3: God's Case Against the Legalist

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A. CENTRAL QUESTION

If religion doesn't earn God's favor, then what does? How does one gain a right relationship with a holy God if not by being religious?

B. ROMANS CHAPTER 2

Definition: "Legalism" is a system of _____ for achieving both salvation and spiritual growth, (e.g., Pharisees and Sadducees).

The legalistic person (2:1)

"You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

God's perfect justice against the legalist (2:2-5)

²Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.
³So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? ⁴Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant

heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.

God's judgment of reward or punishment based on deeds (2:6-10)

⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.

God's judgment is impartial (2:11-16)

For God does not show favoritism. ¹² All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. ¹³ For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous. ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. ¹⁵ They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them.) ¹⁶ This will take place on the day when God judges people's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

The legalist proudly displays his "religion" (2:17-20)

"Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and boast in God; ¹⁸ if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; ¹⁹ if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, ²⁰ an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of little children, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth-

The legalist fails to live what he professes (2:21-24)

...you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? ²² You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³ You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

The legalist believes that a ritual (circumcision) is the way to secure God's approval (2:25-27).

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. ²⁶ So then, if those who are not circumcised keep the law's requirements, will they not be regarded as though they were circumcised? ²⁷ The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker."

The legalist misses the whole point: a truly religious person is one who is righteous inwardly (2:28-29).

A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. ²⁹ No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God."

C. THE SIX PURPOSES OF THE MOSAIC LAW



1. Purpose #1: To reveal _____ (Romans. 7:7).
2. Purpose #2: To reveal _____ to the nation of Israel (Leviticus 19:2; 20:7–8).
3. Purpose #3: To provide _____ through sacrifices and offerings (Leviticus 1–7).
4. Purpose #4: To _____ the nation of Israel as distinct from all the other nations (Exodus 19:5).
5. Purpose #5: To provide a way of _____ for Israel through the yearly feasts (Leviticus 23).
6. Purpose #6: To provide God's direction for Israel's _____ (Exodus 21–23; Deuteronomy 6:4–19; Psalm 119:97–104).

D. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. (2:2) God's judgment is based on truth. How would you respond to someone who said truth is relative and each person should do whatever is right for them? How does John 14:6 relate to this?
2. (2:5) What does Paul make clear about the day of God's wrath?
3. (2:15) In what way do people instinctively have a sense of right and wrong that produces guilt? How do they sometimes deal with this guilt?
4. (2:17-20) What forms of legalism, if any, have you seen in churches?
5. (2:25) Why is circumcision so important to the Jews? (Hint: see Genesis 17:11).

E. SUMMARY



The word "legalism" does not occur in the Bible. It is a term Christians use to describe the belief that a system of rules and regulations will achieve both salvation and spiritual growth. Legalists believe in and demand a strict literal adherence to rules and regulations.

Doctrinally, it is a position essentially opposed to grace. Those who hold a legalistic position often fail to see the real purpose of the law, especially the purpose of the Old Testament law of Moses, which is to be our "schoolmaster" or "tutor" to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

Even true believers can be legalistic. We are instructed, rather, to be gracious to one another: "*Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters*" (Romans 14:1).

Sadly, there are those who feel so strongly about non-essential doctrines that they will run others out of their fellowship, not even allowing the expression of another viewpoint. That, too, is legalism. Many legalistic believers today make the error of demanding unqualified adherence to their own biblical interpretations and even to their own traditions.¹

F. OPTIONAL EXERCISE



On a piece of paper (not on your computer) write out in pencil Romans Chapter 3. Did you see any benefit from doing this?

¹ "What Does the Bible Say About Legalism <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html>.