



Spot On #19

- ☞ Restoring the Hebraic understanding of God's Word.
- ☞ Reemphasizing obedience-based loving trust in our Lord Jesus.
- ☞ Reaffirming the way of our Lord that glorifies our heavenly Father.

Figuratively, the center of the bullseye is the point around which everything else revolves.

A Life Revolving Around Our Lord Jesus Must Be Free Of Legalistic Perversion!

In Spot On #18 we highlighted the "**Lordship-committed**"— followers of Jesus whose love for Him and for others causes them to willingly sacrifice themselves and suffer if Father wills this in their lives (1Peter 4:19; 5:9,10). This way of life under the Lordship of Jesus was experienced by the earliest followers of Jesus, who were primarily Jewish. For well over two hundred years before our Lord's birth the Holy Spirit had been preparing the hearts of those who were eagerly awaiting Messiah to come. This was the **Hebraic stream** of Judaism, Jews who yearned to walk in the relational intimacy and obedient trust in God which had been lived out by their Hebrew father, Abraham (Galatians 3:6,7).

The Hebraic Stream of intimate, trust-based relationship with God stands in stark contrast to the **legalistic perversion of the Judaizing Stream**. Legalistic perversion means treating God's commands and instructions as a system of obligations and rules which can presumably be obeyed without having trust in God, without having love for God, and without needing the grace of the Holy Spirit. Closely related to legalistic perversion is **self-justification** — attempting to gain salvation through keeping God's Law apart from relying on the sacrifice of Christ and receiving regeneration through His Spirit. Both legalistic perversion and self-justification are deceptive snares which nullify the essential need for Jesus as the Sacrificial Substitute for the death penalty we all deserve by our sins.

Prior to the first coming of Jesus, the Judaizing Stream did not choose to relate to God in His loving and gracious role of Father. Instead, out of fear of transgressing any of His commands and living under a curse (Deuteronomy 27:26), they formed ever more stringent fences of rules which they added to God's laws. That way they could justify themselves by publicly keeping every iota of commands without actually being motivated by love for God or care for others (John 5:42). During the earthly sojourn of Jesus, the Judaizing Stream was epitomized by the Pharisees and the Torah experts for whom obeying God's commands and their own set of traditions was preeminent. Jesus sharply confronted their hypocrisy (see Luke 11:37-52). And so focused were these religious leaders on their own self-justifying self-righteousness, they failed to recognize the very Son whom the Father had sent to them (John 5:39).

Paul too confronted the Judaizing Stream in his letter to the Galatians. Keep in mind, however, that many translations of the Bible misinterpret Paul's letter to the Galatians to make it seem as if any obedience to the laws of God is wrong. Not so! Paul's intent was to expose and warn against the Judaizers and their **legalistic perversion**, especially in their insistence that anyone who followed Jesus had to be circumcised (5:2-4). Even today legalistic perversion and self-justification are twin evils which stand against an authentic way of living in Christ, a topic we'll take up in a bit.

"What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law" (Romans 7:7).

The term "legalism" is often referred to negatively in many segments of western Christianity as "obedience to God's laws" as if His law has been abolished as a way of life for followers of Jesus. Yet Paul himself called God's law (which includes all His instruction and commands throughout the Hebrew Scripture) "holy, just and good" (Romans 7:12; see also 2 Timothy 3:16,17). So why is there this perceived disparity when God Himself expressed these standards as righteous ways to relate to Him and to others?

Unlike the laws in the Older Testament which specifically pertained to the Levitical priesthood, the moral and ethical ordinances of our Father are valid for those who follow Jesus as Lord of their lives. When Jesus became "a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Hebrews 7:17), the Levitical priesthood was no longer needed. As our only eternal High Priest (a role which the book of Hebrews deals with extensively), Jesus fulfilled all the laws applying to the service and administration of the Temple and the Levitical priesthood. Therefore these particular laws no longer apply to us as His Kingdom people. And after His ascension our Lord made sure that the Temple in Jerusalem and the Levitical priesthood were destroyed. His followers had now become the collective temple for His Spirit and each was now a priest to God (1Corinthians 3:16; Revelation 1:6).

(For further insight into the Melchizedek Priesthood of Jesus, see TODAY! What Would Jesus Be Doing If He Were You? Insight 5. *Jesus Christ, Lord, High Priest, and ONLY Head of His Body*).

Please realize that the way of life through which our Father intends to bless His children isn't legalistic, but righteous. First, our Lord Jesus has made righteous we who love and serve Him by bearing our sins for us so that we might become a new creation in Him (2Corinthians 5:17). AND, He has empowered us by His Spirit to progress on our lifelong journey in Him with ever-increasing transformation into His image — His character, His way of thinking, and His actions (2 Corinthians 3:18). From God's Word we know what is good and righteous, and what is sinful and displeasing to Him, by knowing the moral and ethical laws of God. Through grace and the help of the Holy Spirit we can choose to abide by these standards (Philippians 2:12,13). It's because of our love for our Lord that we want to discern what's sinful from His perspective so we can turn away from wrong and walk in His ways.

The core characteristics of our Lord Jesus, *His love, forgiveness* and *compassion*, must be instilled deep within us if we are going to serve as His redemptive followers within a needy and desperately sinful world. Sin has been around since Adam and Eve, and seeing what's wrong in the world and in the people we know should never make us feel we're better than they are (see Luke 18:9-14). And, don't get trapped into evaluating whether one kind of sin is worse than another. In our Lord's view any sin is a violation of God's righteous Law and makes that person a "law-breaker": "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10). Choosing to live by your own rules rather than by God's good and just laws is lawlessness (1John 3:4).

How should you respond to your own sin?

Our Lord Jesus paid the penalty for your sin. But His sacrifice for your sin avails you nothing if you ignore God's righteous commands and live your own way: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1John 1:8). When you are honest with yourself and confess to Him

that you've violated His moral/ethical commands, you will be cleansed of unrighteousness (1John 1:9). You could say that our heavenly Father's willingness to forgive and forget your sins when you confess and repent is Him extending a redemptive hand out to you — something we who love Jesus need to do to others when they sin. It's this perspective that keeps you from becoming a legalistic perverter, judging others without having a redemptive attitude. We who live "Lordship-committed" must never allow ourselves to be ensnared in legalistic perversion!

"Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).

Like Jesus when He called the legalistic perverters who were opposing Him "hypocrites!" (Matthew chapter 23), Paul had the same fiery response to their tactics in his letter to the Galatian believers. The apostle well understood the nature of legalistic perversion in which these new believers would be imprisoned if they gave way to their demands. You can hear his intensity toward those who added to the Good News the requirement that converts be circumcised: "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" (5:12). Legalistic perversion is a slippery slope into darkness you never want to even get near. We who are "**Lordship-committed**" must stay free of the various vestiges in which legalistic perversion has entrenched itself within Christendom today.

When legalistic perversion is allowed to linger in Christianity, whether within a family, a congregation or even a denomination, it takes on a life of its own without Christ. For example, various groups of well-meaning Christians realized that in their relationship with our Lord, ongoing repentance was primary in establishing and maintaining that relationship. Over time, though, their relationship with Christ became secondary to the pursuit of personal holiness. They felt good about their own "righteousness" and found themselves angry and frustrated with people whose behavior was "sinful". And like the Pharisees and Judaizers of old, their religious leaders concocted rules and traditions that further distanced the people from a pure, love-grounded trust in Jesus Christ.

When you talk with members of these groups, you recognize three things: **1.** Jesus doesn't even occur in their conversation, and/or, **2.** they hammer away at you with the particular rules their founders established, and/or, **3.** they exhibit (un)righteous indignation toward others who refuse to embrace their beliefs. Their legalistic perversion completely discards our Lord's stern warning, "How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Luke 6:42). Over time, unchecked legalistic perversion discards the compassion for others which would reflect the love of Christ towards them.

In our May 11, 2017 Prophetic Insight, *Seemingly Disconnected Ways By Which Habitual Mental Deceits Were Infused Into Christianity*, we discuss how legalistic perversion became mainstream in Conservative Christianity and politics via the rise of certain women's groups such as Concerned Women for America and Women's Aglow. These groups espoused legalistic perversion through **Dominion Theology**. Dominion Theology in its simplest form calls for a government and society to keep God's commands *without* the need for the Lordship of Jesus or His indwelling Spirit. In subsequent decades, conservative women's ministries and Bible studies perpetuated legalistic perversion and seduced many wives into believing they are spiritually superior to their husbands. This created tension in their marriage, and led to a number of women divorcing their husbands. (For more on legalistic perversion, see our March 1999 Newsletter: *Trust-grounded Obedience*).

Another sad consequence of legalistic perversion within Conservative Christianity is its detrimental effect on many homeschooling mothers. Christian home schooling at large is primarily carried on by parents who would consider themselves religiously/politically "conservative." Many mothers in particular became unknowingly influenced by Dominion Theology and legalistic perversion. In giving way to this evil, these homeschooling mothers become obsessed with "**perfect Christian behavior**" by their children. Viewing their child's behavior as a direct reflection on their mothering skills, many feel like others are evaluating them according to how their children behave. This is especially true for homeschooling moms who function like their child's "Holy Spirit" right up until the day the child leaves home.

People develop values that guide their way of life by questioning *and* trial-and-error.

Many years ago Focus on the Family reported that only a minority of young adult children were following the religious practices of their parents. They concluded that too many Christian parents were demanding perfect behavior and not allowing their child(ren) to make mistakes. As a result, as the child was growing up, correct behavior was reinforced — but the heart-felt values and character of Christ weren't being developed into the child's own way of life.

If you have children in your home, keep in mind that trial and error is a significant means of helping your child(ren) to own in their hearts what is really important rather than just imitating their parents. It's vital for a young person to learn the consequence of something relatively minor while still under your roof. Your child isn't a "little you." He or she is a unique individual who needs a confident, compassionate mother and a supportive, righteous father to help him or her explore both the possibilities and the potential outcomes of life's decisions, great and small. Many of the things you value in your life came through trial and error learning. You had to take personal ownership to make it part of your life. Within biblical boundaries you need to let your children make mistakes and experience the consequences so they can learn from them.

(For further insight into guiding your child, watch videos 81 thru 87 of our series, *Jesus In Your Home*. Or, read Lessons 42 thru 44 in *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church*.)

Please take this to heart. There is nothing of Jesus or His redemptive attitude toward mankind in legalistic perversion and the ways it is manifested today whether in spiritual or secular circles. Anyone can see what's wrong in the world at large and in the people around you. But it's having a redemptive attitude to help them rather than judge them that reveals whether you are Lordship-committed (Luke 6:36-38).

Mike & Sue