

Legalism

(by Bob Pulliam)

The term 'legalist' has been employed in times past to condemn and ridicule members of the church who seek to follow the Bible alone. It is thought, by those who use such terminology, that they are making a remark that has the spirit and sanction of God's word. The reason for their thinking is an erroneous view of grace. It is assumed that grace excludes law, and therefore keepers of law do so unnecessarily and are 'legalists'. But let's see what God's word says about such matters.....

First of all, notice that we *are* under law today! Paul told the Corinthians:

"and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;" (I Cor 9:20 & 21)

Paul first said that he was not under the Law. This is a reference to the Law of Moses. He and we are not under the Law of Moses, but we are under the law of Christ! Those who say they are not under law have a different master than Paul had. Paul also wrote that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death." (Rom 8:2).

Many folks will go to passages like Romans 7:6 to try and prove that we are not under any law. But when the context is examined you will clearly see that Paul is writing about the Law of Moses and not all law in general. There is nothing wrong with law and the Bible never ever condemns law in general. The ineffectual law that the New Testament speaks of is the law that could not make provision for the full removal of sins (Heb 10:1-4). But didn't Paul say that we are not under law? Yes, but that isn't all he said in that context. In that regard, you need to read *The Relation of Law and Grace*.

The law of Christ provides the means for the removal of sins - the blood of Jesus Christ (Heb 10:10 - 14 & Mt 26:28). The law-keeping that is condemned in the New Testament is the attempt to earn salvation by keeping the law perfectly. When one does this, the blood of Christ is excluded and the individual tries to save himself by his own ability. The new law is based on the blood of Christ and must be kept with a view of the redemption that can only come by Christ's blood.

Do you remember what Jesus said he would tell men in the judgment in their condemnation?... "depart from me, ye that work iniquity." (Mt 7:23). The word "iniquity" means "lawlessness". When the judgment day comes, I would much rather have been a "legalist" who kept Christ's law, than a heckler of those that kept Christ's law! How about you? (see also [Pharisees: Then and Now](#))