

2016-10-08

You might be a legalistic believer if...#1

Hi all,

At the group home where our oldest son, Chris, lives most of the week, is another Christian, and she and Chris are the best of friends. The bonding in the Spirit of these 2 'mentally retarded' adults, to use the old expression, took place years ago the moment they met at the group home, without any effort on the part of any parent or staff. (Chris is mentally about 4, though nearly 37. His friend similar.)

When she is upset the staff noticed (on numerous occasions that continue to this day) Chris grab her hand and tell her "It's okay _____, Jesus is with us", and he will also just touch her arm and say "Jesus name!" after she has fallen and hurt herself, which happens due to her condition quite often.

When we bring Chris back to the group home after his weekly 2 day visit home, we usually have a meal before - McDonald's or Pizza Hut for instance - and he often insists on bringing her some fries or pizza. Back at the group home I roll him to the table and she sits down next to him, and Chris tells her about his time with us. She shakes her head in agreement, hanging on his every word, eating a french fry here and there, like they were on a date all by themselves at a burger joint. It's so cute and innocent and pure.

We wonder what heaven will bring when they can build on their friendship without the hinderances of damaged 'earth bodies'.

While Chris loves watching Christian TV shows like "Gospel Bill" and "Animated Stories of the Bible", and he looks at picture Bibles - he doesn't know how to read. He has never written a thing in a journal about the Lord, he has no set prayer time, only goes to church occasionally when we bring him to house church functions or one of the staff takes the residents to a local church from time to time.

The same can be said of his best friend. Yet they are two of the most spiritually gifted, pure hearted, genuinely loving people you'd ever want to meet - they put the rest of us 'normal' Christians to shame in so many ways. Chris told me one day "Know what Jesus said to me dad? He's going to walk through the mountains with me, yep, that's what He said, He's going to walk through the mountains with me one day. Yahoo! That's so cool!" (As he laughed to himself) Yet Chris has no structure to his spiritual life at all.

As Chris and she were eating the remains of some french fries one day, the house manager who is also a believer, pulled me aside and told me this story as her eyes welled up with tears due to the beauty and innocence of the moment. Chris' friend had been having some health issue and needed a chest x-ray. As the manager was explaining to her that they wanted to take a picture of her heart, her eyes filled with wonder and great eagerness as she asked with all innocence and sincerity, "Will they see Jesus?"

That's the big question, isn't it? If they looked at our heart, would they see Jesus? Chris and his friend don't measure their walk with the Lord by their spiritual discipline, for they have none. They just walk with the Lord. They remain as children and have not only entered the kingdom of God, but walk with Him in it. It is only we so called 'normal' people who complicate child-like faith with all sorts of encumbrances, so here are 5 points that may help identify legalism and being religious rather than just walking with the Father and our Lord. After these 5 points shared over 3 weeks I'll share a series on how to rid oneself of legalism and 'being religious'.

You might be a legalistic believer if...

1) Your spiritual discipline defines your spirituality, and how you feel about your spiritual condition

This Christian measures themselves by what they are doing. You set rigid rules and/or spiritual goals for yourself like for instance, getting up at 5:00 to pray. Or maybe you 'feel led' to fast every Thursday. Or perhaps someone at church or a small group is reading through the gospel of John, 1 chapter a day together. It may be you go from activity to activity, prayer walk to city prayer meeting

and if there isn't something you're involved with you feel listless, without direction, and rather empty. You measure where you are with the Lord by your spiritual activity and discipline that activity requires.

At the first of each discipline you feel really good about your Christian walk, but after a few days when you are tired, or it is getting harder and harder to get out of bed at 5am, or the church or city prayer meetings are incessant and boring, and you sleep in that first morning or miss that meeting, you feel horrible. You are sure you let God down and He is upset with you - and you feel bad about your walk with Him.

I had a person come to me saying they were sure God was angry with them. I asked why and they said because they made a commitment to get up early to pray, but all week long had just kept hitting that snooze button on the alarm because they were so tired. Now they were sure God was angry.

I asked if He told them He was angry. "No". I asked what they sensed inside, in their spirit. "Normal. Peace. I can feel His presence." So I asked why they thought He was angry since He was still inside and they sensed peace...they suddenly saw it was their mind poisoned by religious training causing themselves to measure themselves by their spiritual discipline that caused them to feel condemned.

Side note

Condemnation is not from God, for it is all about you, what you did or didn't do, and condemnation pulls us away from God. Conviction is from God, is all about sin and repentance and making it right with Him, and draws us to God. Christians will not feel condemnation in their spirit, but they will be convicted.

I've run out of room today, but remember Jesus came that we might be born into the family of God - not born into a set of rules and structure, but into a family. He wants to commune with us 1 to 1, not a relationship filtered through a bunch of rules, regulations, and performance based guidelines we set up thinking that is what He wants - He doesn't. As Paul said numerous times, all that matters is the new creation in Christ...and on that basis He walks with us...until next week, blessings,

John Fenn

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2016-10-15

You might be a legalistic believer if...#2

Hi all,

I was talking with a man who had spent the last couple of years as a 'backslidden' Christian - by his own admission. He had been hurt by church leadership and the politics of the day, and had questioned if he even believed in Jesus any more: If Jesus is Lord, then how could He allow such a messed up system to exist, a system political internally with a facade of spirituality, that made it nearly impossible to experience and know Him?

As we talked I had what I'd call a 'mini-vision' that I could see in my spirit while at the same time talking to him. I saw his condition through his eyes, which looked like him on one side of a room and Jesus talking to him from the other side of the room, yet in the middle of the room between them was a mass of pipes and wires and furniture and people looking as if they had all been tossed like a salad and put in the middle of the room.

This young man wanted desperately to know Jesus, to see Jesus, to walk with Jesus, but couldn't hear nor see Him directly because the pile was so large and as Jesus talked someone in the pile restated what He said but with their own additions and edits, so that the man heard not our Lord, but our Lord combined with these twisted and tangled people's ideas.

As I watched this mini-vision a person who was so completely covered in this debris that only their arm and hand stuck out of it, flung a stinging piece of metal towards the young man, inflicting first one and then more cuts on his body as he and others threw things at the man to the point it seemed the more he tried to experience Jesus the more cuts from the people he received.

Each time he would wince at the cut, for each cut though small, drew blood, and with other people who I couldn't see but whose arms and hands controlled similar pieces of steel, lashed out at him until the cuts were so numerous he realized he had to leave the room or possibly die.

I saw him walk out head down in discouragement, closing the door behind him, muttering to himself "I only wanted to see Jesus". And it ended.

The compassion of the Lord came on me as we talked, and I realized that his 2 years or so away from church had been healthy for him - and I thought what a sad thing that a person is often healthier emotionally and spiritually away from church than in church. During those 2 years the wounds had healed, but they left enough scars he would not go for his own spiritual health return.

He told me that even though he would tell people he wasn't a believer anymore, and sometimes would tell a person he was agnostic, in truth he said he never left the Lord, he just didn't know how to know Him without the structure of the church. He just couldn't jump through hoops and over hurdles anymore.

That day the Lord removed that pile of debris between the two of them, and a great reconciliation and reunion happened, and he began walking with the Lord purely, as two friends might walk through life together, rather than trying to know Him only after first having satisfied requirements he had been told were needed.

You might be a legalistic believer if...

2) You really don't know the Lord on your own, except through the system

The sudden realization that a person knows the system more and better than they know the Lord, is devastating. To realize the faith you thought you had in the Lord is actually faith in a formula, or faith in the structure or history of the institution, causes one to question their faith. This is what I've seen in a wide range of Christians - from missionaries who spent decades in foreign lands only to be 'burned' by their home organization, or the house wife with journals filled with notes from dozens of teachings - when something happens to a favorite person or church or system - their hurt causes them to question everything.

They realize there is a pile of debris they had placed their faith in, human error and traditions they thought were God, that were actually preventing them from knowing the person of Jesus Christ. They had never thought of themselves as legalistic, but realizing they had built a framework of man-made structure through which they understood their faith, devastates them.

The flow goes both ways

In the way in the mini-vision the Lord kept trying to talk to the man but was hindered, the opposite is also true: A Christian sends their worship and prayers up through a doctrine or fad teaching or movement to the Lord, not realizing the filtering effect of what is in truth, the same debris as the man above. It works both ways - sometimes He tries to reach us but it is filtered through error and traditions, and sometimes the only way a Christian has a relationship with the Lord is 'upward' through that same debris.

If you identify yourself to others by the particular teaching or place you have latched onto for the moment, you might be a legalistic believer.

If you get offended when someone challenges your doctrine, you might be a legalistic believer.

If you have lost the ability to exchange ideas, but get defensive and resort to personal attacks when someone questions what you believe, you might be a legalistic believer.

If you place great emphasis on outward appearance, or believe your faith and the outward appearance of yourself and your church are linked and very important, you might be a legalistic believer.

If you believe what a teacher says rather than the chapter and verse you can read for yourself, you might be a legalistic believer.

The thing about legalistic believers is they think they are free, but they are actually in the worst kind of bondage.

I've run out of room, I'll wrap this up next week (I hope) with points 3-5, until then, blessings,
John Fenn
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2016-10-22

You might be a legalistic believer if...#3

Hi all,

Today I'm concluding the 3 part series, You might be a legalistic believer if... The first 2 points were...

- 1) Your spiritual discipline defines your spirituality and how you feel about your spiritual condition.
- 2) You really don't know the Lord (on your own) but know Him through the system.

Let me get to the core of what makes a legalistic Christian.

Legalism is the combination of performance, fear, and condemnation in an effort to please God or please church leadership. (A child can also exhibit these traits in order to please a legalistic parent)

A legalistic believer is focused on actions and how they present themselves, tying these things to the belief God is more pleased with them or more inclined to answer their prayers. If you've had an urgent prayer request and attended a service you would not normally attend in the hope God will see your extra effort or to remind Him a deadline looms, you are in legalism.

Another example would be if you believe financial blessing is a sign of God's personal stamp of approval of your life, you are in legalism. If you've ever tried to buy answered prayer by tying x amount of giving to a healing, the saving of a loved one, and so on...you are in legalism. The Father relates to us through the blood of Jesus and the fact we were both born into and adopted into His family by the blood of Jesus - not by how many spiritual hoops we form of our own doing to jump through.

Legalism causes a person to produce a false identity. They live a facade in public but are often different at home, often trying to make up for the difference between what they believe in their legalism, and the reality of their life. They compensate for the difference by becoming judgmental, condescending, and measuring others by their own standards of what they feel is right or wrong.

Point #3 is therefore: You feel spiritually safe if you focus on just 1 spiritual teaching or discipline at a time.

A person who is unable to simply walk with the Father in conversational ease based on Christ in them, and cannot read or listen to a variety of teachings and beliefs from different sources because they feel threatened by anyone outside of their current focus, might be legalistic. Legalism is intolerant of those who believe differently than they do, and if they can't be won over to their side - they drop the relationship. (Legalism causes anger and these people are generally angry and/or unhappy down deep inside, but well protected in their heart)

They can't see the whole counsel of God in part out of fear they are missing the latest thing heaven is saying, or they feel they alone have a revelation- they fear 'missing it'. Covered in a facade of spiritual knowledge and growth, they are actually motivated by fear of the unknown - and being legalistic helps them pin down all those unknowns. They can't just walk with the Father and trust His peace in their spirit - they are driven by fear wrapped in spirituality.

Point #4: You might be a legalistic believer if...You separate your natural life from your spiritual life

This is a person who only lets their spirituality be seen to those who believe as they do, or to those they think should believe as they- who they try to correct not meekly as scripture says, but as a know-it-all, as one in authority. Often they have been rejected by others and so keep quiet because they

know if they tell what they believe it will be rejected, so like a hawk looking for prey, they hold to themselves until they find a weaker person.

They often feel it is them and God against the world, constantly threatened and they must protect what they believe from others - they have light, they know the higher way and how others may approach God and a holy life.

This leads to point #5: You are all alone because you've shut out everyone due to their imperfections, sins, and doctrinal error. Often they have no best friend, and can't share their beliefs with their spouse.

Surrounded by people, they are alone. Think about the Pharisee's and Jesus - their demand for perfection in others' lives while living a double standard and not holding themselves to the same standard (though they argued to Jesus they were in fact holding themselves to those same standards, but they couldn't see their own hypocrisy) - meant they were all alone in their little group.

It is this isolationism that is worst part of legalism I think. People cover their loneliness by being active in their cause, or in social media (or combine the 2 efforts), but in their heart of hearts, they are lonely and they know it. Cut off social media, church if they attend, and take away their Bible and stacks of notes, and they would have no walk with the Lord. They know Him through the framework of the temple they've built to Him, but don't know He doesn't inhabit their temple - He lives in them yet they are focused on all things 'out there'.

How to walk with Him is next week. Also, I'm doing live teachings on Facebook now, which you can see (the first one 2 weeks ago) by looking me up and/or following what I post.

Blessings,
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