**Are You A Legalist?***by Brett W. Hogland*

Most Christians have, at one time or another, been accused of being a “legalist”. Of course, the term legalist is used in derision intending that we would run backwards in horror of being connected with the denominational implications of this word. In most religious circles, the term legalist is connected to the Pharisees and its meaning is assigned as being necessarily devoid of love or any proper motive. Obviously then, no one wants to be characterized as a legalist. But have you ever stopped to think about what legalist really means?

***What does “legalist” mean?***

First, it is important to realize that this word is not even used in the Bible. Since the word is not found in the Bible, we will have to define it from the English language. Webster defines legal as: “*deriving authority from or founded on law”; “conforming to or permitted by law or established rules”*. So then, a legalist is one who *derives his authority from law, or founds his authority on law*. The true legalist *conforms to the law or established rules*. He does those things that are *permitted by law or established rules*. Now you will obviously see that, while this word is not found in the Bible, the concept of “legalist” is definitely found there (Col. 3:17; Heb. 8:5; Jn. 4:24; Matt. 28:18-20).

**“…*teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”*** (Matt. 28:20). It is also interesting that the *concept* of legalism or legalist is not used in derision in the Scriptures! We can often learn a lot about a term or a phrase by examining its antonym or opposite. The opposite of legal is illegal. There is no such word as “illegalist” (which is what our accusers really are) so what is a person who is not a legalist? We can see from the definition that one who is not a legalist is one who DOES NOT *derive his authority from law*. He DOES NOT *conform to the law and*DOES NOT *do only those things permitted by law*. The Bible actually has a term that describes a person who does not *found his authority upon law* – that term is “lawless”. This word is used in (Matt. 7:23) where Jesus says “depart from me, you who practice *lawlessness*”. The KJV translates this word “iniquity”. It is the Greek word *anomia* which means *without law*. A legalist conforms to law, thus one who is not a legalist is essentially *without law* or *lawless* – a *spiritual outlaw*! John tells us that “whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness” (1 Jn. 3:4). The Bible tells us that Jesus “hated lawlessness” (Heb. 1:9). Would that make Jesus a “legalist”? You see a legalist is not necessarily devoid of love or any proper motive.

The word “legalist” simply describes a person who finds it important to conform to the proper law or authority. A man’s motive, love or lack thereof does not inhere in the word. There is no doubt that our motive to keep God’s law must be love (Matt. 22:37), but love without law keeping is condemning (Lk. 6:46) and really isn’t ‘love’ at all (Jn. 14:15). Jesus did NOT rebuke the Pharisees for their strict attention to law. When He spoke of their tithing of mint, anise and cummin (Matt. 23:23), He did not criticize their tithing but their failure to show mercy, justice and faith. Jesus said “these you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone”. We should not pursue law keeping and ignore justice, mercy and faith, but neither should we pursue justice and mercy while ignoring law keeping. Jesus never criticized law keeping, but rather, He himself kept the law perfectly. I ask again, was Jesus a legalist? I believe He was and I am satisfied to be as Jesus. The alternative to being a legalist is to be lawless, which is the reason that many who hate legalism will also tell us that we are not under law. This effort to escape the accountability of Christ’s law is lawlessness and lawlessness is sin. Are you a legalist or are you lawless?

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**“Take Heed How You Hear”**

*by Harry Osborne*

One of the first lessons we have to teach children is how to listen. In most cases, they have no problem learning to talk, but learning to listen is not so easy. We must teach them to cease other activities and concentrate on what is said. Then they must learn to properly react to the message.

Jesus noted that the hearer of spiritual truth must also learn to listen properly. He said, *"Therefore take heed how you hear"* (Luke 8:18). If we are to listen as Jesus wants us to listen, we must "take heed" to **how** we hear. Where can we go for instruction on how to hear God's truth?

James tells us several things about becoming acceptable hearers. In James 1:21-27, the principles are recorded for us.

*"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls"* (James 1:21). We cannot receive the word of God as we ought if filthiness and wickedness abide in our lives. The message of Christ reproves such evil and cannot coexist with it.

Just as filthiness and wickedness are inconsistent with God's truth, "meekness" is an essential quality for all who desire God's word to have a lasting impact upon their lives. The word translated "meekness" in our Bible refers to the strength of character that is brought under the controlling harness of God's will. It is the willingness to let God direct our path.

James does not stop at that point. He goes on to instruct, *"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves"* (James 1:22). God wants us to be the kind of hearers who put His instruction into action. He does not want His truth to merely change our intellect. Proper hearing of God's word should change our lives! Notice how useless non-active hearing is to God:

*"For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was"* (James 1:23-24). Why would we look in a mirror if we did not intend to correct that which is amiss? It would make looking in the mirror a waste of time.

So it is with those who read the Bible, but never intend to change the things they find to violate the will of God. The word of God is designed to scrutinize our heart and prick us to change our ways (Hebrews 4:12-13). It was never meant to satisfy mere intellectual curiosity.

James goes on to show the way we should react to God's message. *"But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does"* (James 1:25). God demands that His message be remembered in our day-to-day activities, not forgotten upon closing our Bible.

James shows how we must "**continue in**" God's word*. "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"* (James 1:26-27).

According to the inspired writer, proper hearing demands that we cease actions not approved by God and do those things which God does approve within His truth. We must be seeking to let God direct our actions in order to please Him as is shown within His word. It is just that simple.

If we claim to hear God, we will not reject any instruction found within His will for us today. We may not put evil into our lives and still be true hearers of God. We must honestly listen to learn what God desires in our lives and determine to let His will change us in heart, soul and action.