

John 5.9b-16
Legalism And The Precepts Of Men

Aim: to shun legalism and the precepts of men for the true and faithful gospel of Jesus Christ!

Scripture Reading: Matthew 15.1-20

INTRODUCTION:

What is it about man where we feel the urgent need to add too what God has commanded clearly in His Word? It is true that many of us here this morning have good and godly convictions that we live by. But what is it about man that turns those good and godly convictions into legalistic rules for God's favor and righteousness for everyone else?

I wasn't raised in the church, but what I quickly discovered through other friends and the churches that they attended was that there is a dangerous slippery slope when it comes to people's personal convictions and sliding down into the abyss of legalism with those convictions. We see it all around us. Where people take their strong held convictions and put them onto other people's necks and expect them to live by their personal standards of holiness and righteousness.

What is it with man? People even constantly do this outside the church. Have you spoken to one of those 'tolerant' persons lately? They are so "tolerant" it's almost like I don't know what tolerant means after talking with them. And they are so convicted about everyone being so "tolerant" that they can't stand it when people are not tolerant.

I remember years ago one of my favorite pastors, Pastor David Allen in Dallas preached a sermon called Scruples. And he talked about how every single person has scruples. You know what scruples are? They are strongly held convictions that restrain you from doing things. So whatever scruple you have it keeps you from participating or practicing whatever it is that other people do. Often times even if you show someone where they are wrong with their scruples it doesn't really matter, because they have made that scruple a part of their identity. It's very difficult to cut someone away from their scruples. (Titanic Movie)

So in the mind and heart of every single human being is the tendency to have many strong held convictions that are sometimes directly biblical and then sometimes that may not be so directly from Scripture.

The danger with these scruples is to allow them to become a heavy yoke and burden around our necks that God never intended to be there or even worse to put that heavy yoke and burden around other people's necks and then expect them to meet our standards.

Today in **John 5** the Apostle John is going to expose the legalism of the Jews. We're going to see how Jesus totally disregards their legalism, but for a purpose that may surprise you.

Let's read it together....John 5.9b-16

Title: Legalism And The Precepts Of Men

Aim: to shun legalism and the precepts of men for the true and faithful gospel of Jesus Christ!

A Gift To The People (v.9b)

“Now it was the Sabbath on the day.”

Have we already discussed whether or not Jesus was deliberate, purposeful and calculating in everything that He did? Have we discussed that already? Yes we have. I think we've discussed this many times. In this story and in this sign of the healing of the paralytic **man** there is more going on in the mind of Christ than simply a healing. This sign once again is pointing to Jesus Christ. It actually transcends this moment of healing a **man** by the pool of Bethesda. This sign is pointing to Christ and if you can see this truth with me this morning, this healing is pointing to His mission and His purpose for coming.

I'm not quite sure how to say this tactfully, but part of Jesus' ministry was simply to tick-off the Pharisees and the religious rulers. Jesus not only purposely healed this one **man** out of the multitude that was gathered at the pool in the porticoes, but Jesus purposely healed this **man** on a specific day. It was **the Sabbath**. Jesus healed the paralytic **man** on **the Sabbath** and He did so with purpose.

In Jesus' infinite wisdom He could have healed him I'm sure any other day. He could have healed Him the day before or the day after, but Jesus didn't. He healed him on **this Sabbath**.

Now go backwards with me a few thousand years. God gave a specific command regarding a **Sabbath** to the nation of Israel through Moses. He said this to Moses in **Exodus 31.12-17**.

(Read)

God gave **the Sabbath** to His people not merely as a rule for them to follow, but as a gift to them. He gave them a gift to recognize His perpetual covenant with them. They were to recognize on this day God's perpetual covenant with them. And the means by which God established for them to remember His covenant was to cease, to stop and do no work. They were not allowed to do their job on **the Sabbath** day.

MacArthur says, "There is no mention from God of exactly what kind of work they were not allowed to do. It seems, however, that one's customary employment was in view. The Israelites were not to participate in their normal, week-long occupations on **the Sabbath** day." So from God's command through Moses they were to cease from working one day a week.

Now fast-forward a few thousand years, on this day, this **Sabbath** day, by the pool of Bethesda, Jesus healed the paralytic. It doesn't really seem like much does it? Well this is where it gets hairy. Because right here we are about to see what strict extra-biblical rules can turn into if they are left unchecked from God's Word.

Believe it or not there is a great deal of Jewish history that is not recorded in Scripture. In Exodus we read that God gives Moses Ten Commandments for His people to follow and obey. So the Ten Commandments were from God given to Moses that Moses gave to the people and they were written on stone tablets by God. Shortly after the giving of the Ten Commandments that were written on stone tablets the people began to add other rules to follow. These additional rules were oral traditions also called The Oral Torah and they were not written down.

It wasn't until around 217 A.D. that a Rabbi named Yehudah HaNasi gathered together all of these extra-biblical rules and put them into a book that we know today as The Mishnah. The Mishnah is made up of six main categories each of which each breaks down into further sub categories that break down into extra-biblical laws or rules that must be followed.

The six main categories deal with 1.) Prayers, blessings, tithes and offerings 2.) laws of the Sabbath and festivals 3.) marriage, divorce, oaths and laws of the Nazarite 4.) civil and criminal law, functioning of the courts and oaths 5.) sacrificial rites, the temple and dietary laws 6.) laws of purity and impurity, impurity of the dead, the laws of food purity and bodily purity

These are the six main categories of The Mishnah. And when you break down each of these six categories there are usually anywhere from 7-12 subcategories under each of these major categories.

Because of our topic this morning we are dealing with category #2 the laws of **the Sabbath** and festivals. Under this category known as Moed there are 12 subcategories. The first is **Shabbat**, which in English is **Sabbath**. Now pay close attention because within this subcategory of **Shabbat** there are 39 prohibitions of work on **the Sabbath**.

Stay with me....there are six main categories. Under each main category there are anywhere from 7-12 subcategories. And under this one subcategory that deals with **the Sabbath** there are 39 prohibitions of work on **the Sabbath**. Those 39 prohibitions are also categorized into 4 different categories. They are 1.) Order of bread 2.) Order of garments 3.) Order of hides 4.) Order of construction.

So under these 4 headings are 39 different prohibitions of work on **the Sabbath**. Do you remember the only prohibition that God gave in Exodus? It was to cease from your work; that's it. This is what legalism will do to people. Legalism is never satisfied with God's command. Legalism must add to what God has said. Legalism tries to pervert God's commands by going further and further than God goes or restricting more than God does.

Now watch the perversion at work here. Under Moed...the category that deals with **Shabbat** or **the Sabbath** there is the subcategory that deals with the order of construction. They set this up to order people to stop working on the temple, their homes, or anything else they were building. The last rule under the order of construction says that you cannot transfer between domains. This was meant to be an order that prohibited people from transferring supplies in order to construct things. So if you were a construction worker you were not allowed to transfer any supplies from one domain to another.

So watch the perversion of the perversion. **Read verse 10.**

The Perversion Of The Perversion (v.10)

“So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.’”

Do you see the perversion of their created perversion? They perverted God’s law by adding to His law in order to gain God’s approval. They said construction workers could not transfer supplies from one domain to another on **the Sabbath**. And now they are perverting their own extra-biblical laws by telling this **man** that he can’t transfer or **carry** his own **pallet** and move it to somewhere else.

The Mishnah is filled with these extra-biblical rules and laws that people must follow in order to gain God’s approval. As a matter of fact I read somewhere where they actually thought that by obeying the Mishnah that this would facilitate the coming of the Messiah.

Well what did the Messiah tell them?

Matthew 15,7-9 “You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: ‘This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.’”

The Mishnah was the written down Oral Torah that was their tradition. It was additional orders over and above God’s commands in order to gain God’s approval. Listen, don’t get me wrong.

It's ok to create rules and laws to live by, but we cannot create rules and laws to live by as a means to gain God's approval. We cannot add or take away from God's commands in order to be declared righteous before God. There is no other law that should ever trump God's law.

“**The Sabbath** was not the means to God's approval, as the rabbis seem to have suggested. **The Sabbath** was not merely a rule for humans, but a gift to humans. It was to be used to honor God and to benefit His people” by ceasing from their work. ~Gerald Borchert (via MacArthur, p. 176)

Once again “there is no mention from God of exactly what kind of work they were not allowed to do. So as MacArthur believes “it seems, however, that one's customary employment was in view. The Israelites were not to participate in their normal, week-long occupations on **the Sabbath** day.”

So this is the gift of God to His people. That they should cease from their work. They should cease from what they do six days out of the week. This is what was prohibited. This was God's command to Moses to give to the people. Do not work your work on **the Sabbath**.

So when **the Jews**, which we know by now means the Jewish authorities, saw the **cured man carrying his pallet** they flipped out and told him that it was “**not permissible for you to carry your pallet.**” Now let me ask you...did this **man** carry and move pallets for a living? No. He was paralyzed. He couldn't move at all. **Carrying** and moving **pallets** was not his occupation and God's command is that you cease from working your work on **the Sabbath**. Period.

But There Is More Going On In The Mind Of Jesus

Why did Jesus heal on **the Sabbath**? John MacArthur says, “The Lord deliberately chose to heal this man on **the Sabbath** *in order* to confront superficial and bankrupt Jewish legalism.” This is what I meant when I said earlier that there was more in the mind of Jesus than simply healing a lame, sick and paralyzed **man**. Jesus used this **man's** healing as a means to expose the superficial and bankrupt Jew's legalism. We can clearly see the perversion of the Mishnah as a means to gain God's approval and favor. We can also clearly see the perversion of **the Jews** in regards to their extra-biblical laws in forbidding this **man** to **carry** his **pallet** on **the Sabbath**.

But this is what we typically run into today. There is really two major camps of people within Christianity. The camp that does not obey the Lord's command of **the Sabbath** at all and you have pastors, leaders, etc condoning people working their work on **the Sabbath**. And then those who are a lot like **the Jews** and add all kinds of extra-biblical "spiritual rules" and laws to **the Sabbath**. There doesn't seem to be much of a middle ground. Remember...God's command is that you cease from working your work on **the Sabbath**; period. Don't do it. And as you cease from working remember His perpetual covenant. That's it. Don't add to this and don't take away from this. Cease from working your work and remember God's perpetual covenant. So what did **the man** say when **the Jews** confronted him and told him it was **forbidden to carry his pallet on the Sabbath**?

He Blamed The Man Who Healed Him (v.11-13)

"But he answered them, 'He who made me well was the one who said to me, 'Pick up your pallet and walk.' They asked him, 'Who is the man who said to you, 'Pick up your pallet and walk?'' But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in that place.'"

So the **man** blamed the Man who healed him and he did not know who the Man was. This is what legalism will do to those who are under legalism. They first fall to the lie of the legalistic law and then it sometimes squeezes people to blame all kinds of other things. This **man** had no idea that he was indeed NOT breaking the law of **the Sabbath**, at least in regards to **carrying his pallet**. He just thought that the law to not carry anything on **the Sabbath** was what God had said. So rather than instruct the instructors on what the true command of God was he actually fell to their legalism and bought it hook, line and sinker. So in their interrogation of him he puts the blame on the Man who **cured** him and that told him to **pick up your pallet and walk**.

You know what else legalism does to people? Legalism robs people of joy. It robs both the legalist and it robs those who are under the legalists. It robs them of celebrating the good tidings of other people. Notice that **the Jews** were not joyful in this **man's** healing. They did not celebrate the fact that he was no longer sick, lame and paralyzed. They were not moved to tears over this **man's** amazing miracle. They just indicted him for **carrying his pallet** and most likely robbed the **man** of his joy as well.

I read somewhere in the Mishnah that it was allowed on **the Sabbath** to **carry** a sick person and to care for someone who was ill or to deliver a baby. So you could **carry** a sick person on **the Sabbath**, but they couldn't be healed on **the Sabbath**?

How many times in the gospels do you think Jesus healed on the Sabbath? Jesus healed a total of seven times on **the Sabbath**. Seven. That's just perfect! So what more was going on in the mind of Jesus?

Jesus was ultimately preparing the way for His death. As He confronted all of their hypocrisy and all of their false religious rules they slowly began to despise Jesus; to loathe Him; to disdain Him; to hate Him. But as we look back this was how it was supposed to be.

It was God the Father who would crush the Son on the cross. But it was also by the predetermined plan of God that He would use **the Jews**, the religious rulers to kill His Son.

Acts 2.22-24 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.”

Jesus is working the works of God. The works of God is for Jesus to eventually be crucified for the sins of the world. Jesus is working on **the Sabbath**, because **the Sabbath** is not for Jesus. Jesus is Lord of **the Sabbath**. He supersedes **the Sabbath**. Jesus will not cease from working until He is deceased and then will come the Father's resurrection of Jesus and 40 days later Jesus will return to His throne and there He will sit and cease. Although He will work through His Spirit in His people.

Jesus Finds The Man (v.14)

“Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.’”

Afterward, not sure how much **afterward**, but **afterward Jesus found** and confronted the **man** in the **temple**. Jesus tells him and reminds him that he has been made **well**. And then Jesus gives the man a very urgent and dangerous warning. Jesus tells him, “**do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.**”

The first phrase literally means to “stop sinning”. **Jesus** finds the **man in the temple** and tells him to “stop sinning”. The **do not sin anymore/the stop sinning** is tightly tethered to the next phrase “**so that nothing worse happens to you.**” By all indication the man’s sickness was due to sin in his life.

I was telling the men yesterday at Godward that I know that I’m going to have to qualify this statement, but first what we glean from Jesus’ dangerous warning to this man is that his thirty-eight year sickness, lameness and paralyzation was due to sin in his life.

What I mean by this is Jesus tells this man **that he has been made well, do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.** All that we know is that this man has been sick, lame, paralyzed for thirty-eight years. He could’ve been 20 when he was paralyzed. We don’t know. But the textual indication is that sin is what brought about his sickness.

We know from other passages of Scripture that sin can lead to a person’s sickness or even death.

Psalm 32.3-4 “when I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.”

1 Corinthians 11.30 “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number are dead.”

1 John 5.16 “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death he shall ask and God will for him give life to those who commit sin not leading to death. There is a sin leading to death; I do not say that he should make request for this. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death.”

James 5.13-16 “Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”

Scripture is very clear. There are people who at times are sick and ill because of a particular sin in their life. And what I’m saying here is absolutely blasphemous to the scientific and secular humanized world today. That specific sin is the root of some people’s sickness. So here’s my qualifier...not all people who get sick are sick because of a particular sin.

The whole human race gets sick because of the fall of man and the sin of man. But just because you have an illness does not automatically mean that you have unconfessed sin in your life. But it could!

This is where we must fight the fight of faith in our lives. Take everything seriously before the Lord. Let God examine us. Take the Scriptures and let God’s Word search you and know you and see if there is any hurtful and sinful way in you. If there is, then confess and repent of every known sin in your life. Take it to God in prayer. Plead with God over your sin.

Don’t be like King David and try and hide your sin and keep your sin away from God. He already knows it. Confess it. Agree with God that it is indeed sin. Repent of it. Turn away in the opposite direction from temptation and sin and pursue righteousness.

By God’s divine power He has granted to you everything pertaining to life and godliness, so that you have the God-given ability to flee temptation and to stop sinning. Realize and know His great and divine power in you.

You do not have to lust anymore. You do not have to cheat anymore. You do not have to steal anymore. You do not have to lie anymore. You do not have to covet anymore. You do not have to gossip anymore. You do not have to be lazy anymore.

Jesus tells this man **to stop sinning, so that nothing worse happens to you**. It is biblically true that sin can lead to sickness. Sin can lead to death. But sin can also lead to hell.

Anyone who is not covered in the blood of Jesus and remains in unrepentant and unconfessed sinfulness goes to hell. This is the ultimate **worse** for anyone.

This man was trapped under a legalistic system that could not heal him physically nor would it heal him spiritually. Jesus commanded him **not to sin anymore** and what does this man turn around and do immediately?

The Man Sins Against Jesus (v.15-16)

“the man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. For this reason the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because He was doing these things on the Sabbath.”

What else was in the mind of **Jesus** in the healing of this **man**? Infuriating and ticking-off **the Jews**. **Jesus** knew full well that the **man** would not obey his command and that he would run and tell **the Jews** who He was. Remember...Jesus is the one who found him in the temple. The man didn't find Jesus. Jesus presented himself to the man.

So the **man** tried to save his hide with **the Jews**, so that he wouldn't be found guilty of breaking **the Sabbath** and in that effort he ratted out Jesus and that began to bring about **persecution** and harassment against Jesus.

This is what legalism will do. Living under legalism will actually push you against God. The more legalistic you become, the more you think you're pursuing holiness, but all the while you are striving against God and putting the yoke of burden around other people's necks. Because of the legalism of the Jews it eventually led this man to betray Jesus, the very one who healed him.

Rather than be grateful to Son of Man and be loyal to Jesus, this man chose to betray the Son of Man in order to be loyal the Jews. We can only imagine that his sin of betraying Jesus only led to that which is worse for him. There is absolutely nothing in this passage that even comes close to showing that this man was a faithful believer in Jesus Christ. Nothing.

So why did Jesus heal him? I think we're left with the providence of God in exposing the Jews' legalistic ways, Jesus' disrespect of the Jews, and ultimately what will eventually lead to Jesus' death by the Jews. It must be this way.

So this morning we must ask ourselves some self examining questions. Am I a legalist? Do I lord over others with extra-biblical rules in order to gain God's favor? Am I living under legalism? Do those in authority over me place extra-biblical rules in my life in order for me to gain favor with God?

I think this too can be an application. Are you sick in some kind of way and cannot seem to get better? Could it be that God in His Fatherly discipline is bringing this upon you in order for you to walk away from a particular sin? Will you confess that sin to God? Will you repent of that sin to God?

Are you betraying Christ in the face of others? Do you talk a big game here in the church, but out there in the world you submit to the world's oppression and betray and deny Christ?

Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you is a clear warning from **Jesus** to this **man** and I believe to all of us as well. Sin will only lead you to destruction.

Proverbs 11.3 "The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them."

Your life can and will be destroyed by unconfessed sin.

Let's do this today. Let's live in the grace and mercy of God. Not legalism. Let's live knowing that we have been healed by the blood of Jesus and there is nothing within ourselves that can earn God's favor. Let us obey His Word because we love Him and want to honor Him with our lives.

Let's do this today. Let's live our lives no longer forsaking and betraying Jesus when those moments of witnessing and testifying come our way. Let's live with the boldness and courage that Christ gives to us His people and no that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Let's live in His divine power in which He has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Let's pursue righteousness again. Let's pursue holiness again. Let's pursue godliness again. Jesus is worthy of your pursuit. He is worthy.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever....and they kept saying....Amen....and fell down and worshiped.” (Rev. 5.12 & 13)