FIRST SAMUEL
Lesson 23: Chapter 14:24-46, Legalism vs. Liberty

9 December 2016

Every Christian ought to strive to obey the commandments that God has laid out in the Holy Scriptures. But when MEN attempt to make their OWN rules and force them on Christians, those rules become a hindrance to a true spiritual life and cause people to leave the church and go back to the world.

Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). —We need to follow Him instead of trying to follow men who have their "own way" (Isaiah 53:6) which is full of rules and regulations that place a heavy burden on God's people.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT LEGALISM

1. **The legalist will drive their flock into a barren land just to exercise control over them** (1 Sam. 14:24).
    a. The true shepherd leads the flock into green pastures and feeds them (Matthew 15:32-39),
    b. Legalists set rigid rules that push people away before they ever have an opportunity to come to Jesus for salvation.
    c. Saul forbid his people to eat. This is a doctrine of devils (1 Tim. 4:1-3). God prepared feasts for His people (Exod. 23:15-16), not fasts. The Pharisees boasted of fasting (Luke 18:12, Mt. 9:14), but God didn't command the fast.
        i. Christians can get prayers answered by fasting, but God never commanded the fast.

_____

2. **Legalism instils fear into the hearts of people** (vs. 25).
    a. A Christian under legalism cannot enjoy their Christian life because they fear that God will smash them for breaking a rule created by the preacher.
    b. God has honey for the Christian to enjoy (in the Bible, in the hymns, in fellowship, etc.). Legalism forbids the honey and turns good things into drudgery.
    c. It may look spiritual when men create rules and regulations and standards for holiness, but the Bible tells us not to be subject to the ordinances, commands, and doctrines of men (Colossians 2:20-23). We ought to concern ourselves with the commands of God.

_____

3. **Legalism causes the people to faint** (vs. 28, vs. 31).
    a. God renews the strength of His people (Isaiah 40:29-31).
    b. Legalism (forcing rules upon people) cannot satisfy a true spiritual hunger.
        i. We need to feed on God's word. Let the Holy Spirit mold you into someone who desires to keep God's commandments.
    c. Legalist denominations are diligent to read and study the Bible, attend church services, and work for God. (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, etc.). Unfortunately, they're worn out from service, they're starving to death spiritually, and they have no real relationship with God.

_____

4. **Legalism will lead you to sin against God** (vs. 32).
    a. Eating blood was expressly forbidden for the Children of Israel (Deut. 12:23-25), but they were so famished from the prohibition commanded by Saul that they disregarded God's command.
    b. There are people in churches who claim that they never sin. When they sin, they call it a "*mistake*" or they attribute the sinful act to an "*act of the flesh*." They pervert the word of God and lie about their sin to maintain their position of "*sinless perfection*." This is a result of legalism.

_____

5. **Legalism will cause you to miss out on blessings where you once received them from God** (vs. 31).
    a. Israel's victory stopped in the very place where God wrought a wonderful victory for them once before (Joshua 10:12).
    b. You'll lose the joy of your salvation if you get out from under the grace of God and the blessings of God and turn toward obeying a set of man-made rules and regulations.

_____

6. **Faith will be sentenced to death by legalism** (vss. 38-44).
    a. Jonathan was victorious against the enemy because of his great faith in God. Saul resolved to kill Jonathan for disobeying his man-made rule.
    b. Churches stop acting by faith when they grow to a size where they decide they need to set up some rules—rather than to continue doing things by faith. At that point, the Lord departs (1 Sam. 4:21) and the church stagnates.

_____

7. **God's people ought to stand up against legalism and fight to keep it out of the church** (vs. 45).
    a. That's how you'll be able to continue operating by faith and winning victories.

_____