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**LEGALISM**

By Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)

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[First](one.html) of all, legalism must be defined. Legalism is, according to *The Dictionary of Religious Terms*, by Donald Kaufman:

1) Emphasis on the [letter](letters.html) rather than on the spirit of the [law](law.html);

2) Belief in [salvation](salvation.html) by obedience to the [law](law.html) rather than by the [grace](grace.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html) or by faith;

3) Undue stress on legal details without balancing considerations of justice or mercy.

Let me give an example:

Mr. Lawabider, a devout [law](law.html) abiding citizen is out for a Sunday drive when he comes to an intersection with a red light. There are no oncoming cars and there are no cars approaching from the left or the right. But the man notices a large truck [coming](coming.html) up from the rear. The truck driver is obviously approaching at a high rate of speed and Mr. Lawabider notices the truck driver honking his [horn](shofar.html) and waving to him to get out of the way. It is clear the truck driver has lost his brakes. Now Mr. Lawabider takes the last few seconds he has to decide what he will do. He decides that the [law](law.html) says a car must stop at a red light until it turns green. Therefore, he stays put and does not move because the light is still red. Mr. Lawabider and the truck driver collide and are

killed.

The Bible says the [letter](letters.html) killeth but the Spirit bringeth life. Mr. Lawabider has just learned how the [letter](letters.html) can kill! The spirit of the [law](law.html) refers to the intent of the lawgiver. [One](one.html) must [know](daat.html) the lawgiver and have the same [heart](body.html) in order to properly interpret the [law](law.html).

Now what was the intent of the red light [law](law.html)? The intent of the [law](law.html) was to provide safety for drivers and to [save](salvation.html) lives. If Mr. Lawabider had decided to run the red light, he would have actually been OBEYING THE SPIRIT OF THE [LAW](law.html) THOUGH THE [LETTER](letters.html) OF THE [LAW](law.html) WOULD HAVE BEEN CONTRADICTED. As it occurred, he disobeyed the intent or spirit of the [law](law.html) because he did not understand the intent. He only understood the [letter](letters.html) of the [law](law.html) which said to stop at a red light. Mr. Lawabider is a legalist.

Here are some fruits of legalism to watch for:

1) Denying your own guilt while openly broadcasting the other man's guilt. Legalism condemns. Therefore, it causes the person to always see other's faults, but triggers a self-preserving denial of self guilt as a protection from the same condemnation legalism would bring on [one](one.html)'s self.

2) Doing evil that good may come while accusing [one](one.html) of the same.

3) Whitewashing your sepulchre and thanking [HaShem](hashem.html) you are not as the other man.

4) The inablility to give [grace](grace.html) allowing God to work with a person where they are, in order to take them into perfection. Requiring instead that the person correct their inability before being allowed to move in the move of [HaShem](hashem.html). This also involves judging motives.

Legalism demands payment for [sin](sin.html) but leaves no room for the fact that we are all sinners and fall far short of [HaShem](hashem.html)'s glory. Legalism does not take into account the fact that [HaShem](hashem.html) has caused us to be washed in the [blood](body.html) of [Mashiach](mashiach.html) so we can be free of condemnation for not being experientially perfect while on our trek to perfection.

Legalism also does not take into consideration the tremendous [spiritual](physical.html) battle we are in. Legalism does not care that our flesh is weak but our spirit is willing. Legalism only demands that the [law](law.html) be satisfied.

Whitewashing the sepulchre has no affect on the dead men's bones inside. The bones have to be forced out into the open and dealt with. [HaShem](hashem.html) [wants](needs.html) to make and mold us into the bride of [Mashiach](mashiach.html). At [first](one.html) the sight will not be pretty. It will be ugly and embarrassing. That is [one](one.html) reason why we should be doing the opposite of legalism --covering each other, especially when we have put our trust in others to protect our [hearts](body.html). Legalism will not cover [sin](sin.html) but expose it and judge it. But [HaShem](hashem.html) is the judge and He has chosen to extend [grace](grace.html) to us in this age. [Sin](sin.html) is not ignored by [HaShem](hashem.html), but [HaShem](hashem.html) knows the pure [heart](body.html) of an individual and is not judging imperfect sons and daughters who are not yet perfect. If the [heart](body.html) is not pure -- [HaShem](hashem.html) is the only [one](one.html) who [knows](daat.html). We cannot judge [one](one.html)'s [heart](body.html) and motive.

LEGALISM IS NOT...

1. Hating [sin](sin.html) and the [world](worlds.html). The Nazarean Codicil says, "the friendship of the [world](worlds.html) is enmity with God" (James 4:4)

2. Careful [Jewish](gen-jew.html) living.

3. [Praying](prayer.html) often.

4. An ordered life.

5. Following a schedule or a budget.

6. Striving to conquer the sinful [desires](needs.html) of the flesh.

7. Foregoing fun and parties in order to [pray](prayer.html), counsel, or keep an [appointment](appointm.html).

8. Diligently keeping your word.

9. Refusing to compromise even a little bit.

10. Carefully keeping every [law](law.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html) and the [church](church.html).

11. Running a "tight ship", whether a [church](church.html), a [esnoga](synagog.html), a family, or a life.

12. Having a lot of rules and procedures to follow.

LEGALISM IS .....

1. Misapplication of the spirit of the [law](law.html). The example of the Sunday driver shows that although the [letter](letters.html) of the [law](law.html) written on paper was followed, the result was to completely violate the intent of the [law](law.html).

2. Overemphasis of legal details. Demanding perfection from people with no consideration of their age, ability, understanding, maturity, environmental pressures and temptations. This may cause an OUTWARD compliance, but inside, hopelessness will set in and legalism becomes a tool of the [devil](demons.html) to steal away the joy of our [salvation](salvation.html).

3. Trying to earn [salvation](salvation.html). This really involves any works done to achieve favor with [HaShem](hashem.html) (as opposed to being motivated out of love for [HaShem](hashem.html), which is not legalism). "For by [grace](grace.html) are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast".[[1]](#footnote-1)

4. Straining at a knat and swallowing a camel. The legalistic Pharisees tithed even the most insignificant herbs (mint, anise and cummin - Mat 23:23), but at the same [time](time.html), they omitted the weightier matters of the [law](law.html): Justice, mercy and faith.

To avoid legalism, have the [heart](body.html) of [HaShem](hashem.html). [Know](daat.html) the intent of the lawmaker. Consider the circumstances of the case, but avoid trying to find loopholes in the [law](law.html), rationalizing away its true intent (a [sign](signs.html) of impure motives).

This [study](study.html) was written by

Rabbi Dr. Hillel ben David

(Greg Killian).

Comments may be submitted to:

Rabbi Dr. Greg Killian

12210 Luckey Summit

San Antonio, TX 78252

Internet address: [gkilli@aol.com](mailto:gkilli@aol.com)

Web page: <http://www.betemunah.org/>

(360) 918-2905

Return to [The WATCHMAN](http://www.betemunah.org) home page

Send comments to Greg Killian at his email address: [gkilli@aol.com](mailto:gkilli@aol.com)

1. Eph.2:8,9; see also Gal 2:16 and Titus 3:4,5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)