

“Shellfish and Polyester/Cotton”
Galatians 3:1 – 5; Leviticus 11: 11:9; 19:19

Ed met Pastor Joe while he was still in High School back in the early ‘70s. I’d given his life to Christ about two years before but was still wore the clothes and hairstyle that were popular for my generation. And Pastor Joe was concerned.

So one day Pastor Joe said, “I’m concerned about you, Ed. I feel like you are still carrying the marks of worldliness. The Scriptures tell us to love not the world neither the things that are in the world. And I fear you are in love with the world.”

Ed was taken aback because in Ed’s mind he had really sold out for God in my heart, “Why do you think that?”

“Why, look at how you are dressed – and your hair. You look like a hippie. You are communicating rebellion, sexual promiscuity and drug usage everywhere you go.”

Ed writes:

I was certainly not dressing lewdly (remember the baggy legged dishevelled hippie look of the ‘70s?) and though I looked like what was associated with drug addiction and youthful rebellion in Pastor Joe’s mind, I was just dressing the way kids my age dressed.

Pastor Joe went on to ask, “Don’t you admit that what we wear speaks to people?”

“I guess,” Ed replied.

“Well, what do you think your clothing is speaking, versus what I am wearing.”

Ed’s reply, “I think my clothing is saying, ‘I like to be comfortable.’”

But Pastor wasn’t buying it.

He told me Ed that Ed needed to wear what he was wearing.

Pastor Joe always wore dark pants; black shoes; a pressed, white shirt; and a plain, dark tie. He would have looked like a stand-in for The Blues Brothers, but he had a 1961 haircut, so he wasn’t nearly as cool. Ed told him he couldn’t imagine wearing what he had on.

Then Ed said as kindly as he could... that if he tried to dress like him Ed's friends would think that I thought it was Halloween.
The conversation went south from there.

I don't but have you ever had a conversation similar that, or heard one like that?

Tell the person next to you.

I heard similar anecdotes around clothing and a strong expectation around what you wear to a church service.

Playing cards anyone?

Dancing?

Drinking alcohol?

Watching movies with a rating higher than a PG rating?

There is an fervent expectation that if you follow Jesus this is what you should do and if you don't, well... the implication is there is something wrong with you or your relationship with God.

What's the word we use for that?

I think the word is *legalism*.

For clarity, here is what legalism is not.

For one, it's not simply the presence of commands or rules or boundaries.

Jesus said, "If you loves me will keep my commands"¹ and "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."²

As we heard from the Sermon on the Plain in Luke, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"³

I'm fairly sure they to some extent we have rules in our homes, especially when children are involved – "In home we..."

We culturally, as a generalisation, have this aversion to the rules.

Part of it is as I've said before, we don't like to be told what to do!!!

Part of it is because the rules seem so arbitrary at times and quite stupid.

And we also think that 'rules' will inhibit our freedom.

But they are there in the form of laws and regulations and so on.

So these boundaries and rules absolutely have their place.

¹ John 14:15.

² John 14:23.

³ Luke 6:46.

When it comes to legalism it's the status or the place we give to these rules and boundaries especially in terms of our faith.

'Legalism' is the belief that in order to be "saved" – either to *attain* or *maintain* relationship with God *and* (this is important) to be accepted in a faith community – certain behaviours have to be observed, regulations have to be followed and rules obeyed.

The basis – the whole basis – for your relationship with God and others is what you *do*.

It's all on you!

What you do to meet the standard that God requires?

Are you doing enough?

Are you wearing the appropriate clothes (do you look like a hippy☺)?

Are you refraining from inappropriate behaviours?

The form we encounter most in Scripture has to do with the Old Testament or Jewish laws.

When you read Galatians you discover there were those in that church teaching that both Jews and non-Jews had to continue to observe the law – especially circumcision – to be saved, to be accepted by God the church.

Paul's hears of this and he is apoplectic!

I mean, he does not hold back!

"You foolish Galatians!... Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard?

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by human effort???"

That's what legalism does; it throws us back on ourselves.

The good news is that we no longer have to rely on human effort.

Our human efforts are at the best of times a mixed bag.

Does that mean the Old Testament law no longer applies?

Well, yes.

Well then, what parts?

Turn with me to Leviticus 11:9 – 12:

“Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams you may eat any that have fins and scales.
But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales—whether among all the swarming things or among all the other living creatures in the water—you are to regard as unclean.
And since you are to regard them as unclean, you must not eat their meat; you must regard their carcasses as unclean.
Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be regarded as unclean by you.”

My apologies to those who love shellfish...😊

And now Leviticus 19:19:

“Keep my decrees.
Do not mate different kinds of animals.
Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.
Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.”

Polyester/cotton clothing?

Out of the question.

So what people say is this, “You Christians you make a big deal about sexual immorality but then you go and eat shellfish and wear polyester/cotton clothing.”

“How would you respond to that?”

How did the Jewish law operate?

Well for one, the laws on clothing, sexual, ethical, financial dealings from Leviticus and elsewhere were given to the Jews, God’s people, to make them distinct from the nations around them and to teach the Israelites (the Jews) that they were God’s people.

The Israelites were God’s people and were to be set apart and special for God – holy.

The laws were given to show this distinction.

What about food laws?

Was it for health reasons?

Well, despite what is often said, it wasn’t around health issues.

We live in an age and a country that has some pretty vigorous food tests.

Our issues with food are often how we cook it and the high fat-high sugar foods we’re eating.

Nor was it because the animals listed were related to pagan religion. If that was the case then the bull would have been off limits since it was central to Canaanite religion.

Nor was it because there was anything particularly evil or impure in the food itself. After all, God has declared that everything created is “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Again it was a marker.

It defines people.

These are some things a true Israelite eats and doesn't eat. All societies have foods that define or disgust them: think of whales, dogs, frogs, locusts, horses and so.

It was an identity statement.

The Israelites and Jews could say, “We are different! We don't eat like you do and we don't live like you either!”

Food for the Israelites (and practicing Jews today) was an ethnic boundary marker. It was also way of saying, “We live in a clean, pure way – not like you do!”

What about mixed fibre clothing?

The law was a constant symbolic reminder that the Israelites were set apart to the Lord; they were not to become *mixed up* with the pagan nations around them.

The reason being that the nations that Israel was to encounter in the Promised Land were depraved in ways that we can hardly imagine.

Occult practices were embraced. All kinds of sexual immorality was the norm, including temple prostitutes who offered both hetero and homosexual acts to as way of worshipping their gods. Child sacrifices were offered to some deities.

The Israelites were not mix the worship of the Lord with pagan worship that was occurring in Canaan.

Every time a Jew put on clothing, cooked a meal, went shopping at the market, sowed a field or thought about sex they were reminded by these cascading laws that they were God's people, set aside for him.

These laws taught God's people that holiness meant difference and distinction. They taught what it meant to be set apart and special *for* God.

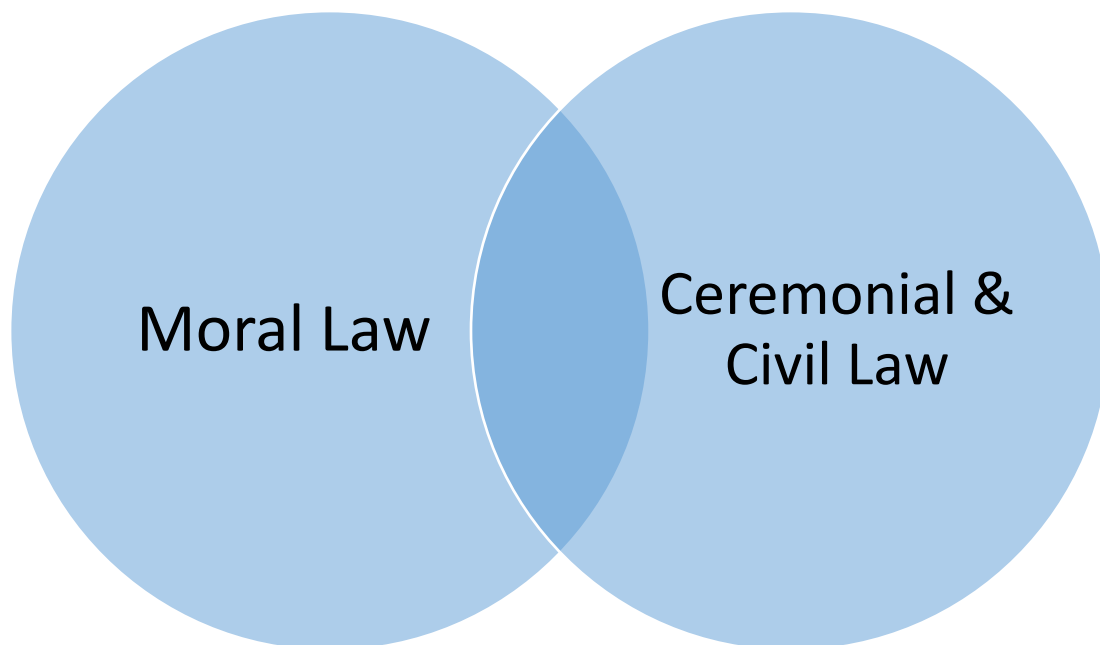
That said one way of understanding the law is that the law can be divided up into different categories: the moral law and the ceremonial law and civil law.⁴

Ceremonial law was about what you had to do to come near God, like sacrifices, especially in a temple setting. The temple was seen as the place where heaven and earth meet. The closer you got to God the higher the demands became.

Civil law covered what it meant to be live as an Israelite in the land and covered disputes between individuals.

It was about how Israel would live as a society.

The Moral law is the Divinely given code of ethics, defining right and wrong, good and evil, that expresses God's good, beautiful and holy character.



The ceremonial law has been fulfilled in Jesus.

Animal sacrifices are no longer needed.

Food laws serve have served their purpose. Jesus declared all food to be 'clean'.⁵

Jesus spoke of his body as the true temple – the true place where heaven and earth meet – and his death as the ultimate sacrifice for sin.

His death opened the way for us to approach God, making Old Testament regulations concerning the temple and its sacrificial system obsolete.

⁴ [What are the main divisions of the Old Testament Law? | carm.org](http://carm.org)

⁵ Mark 7:17 – 19.

Israel's civil law has been repealed as God's people are now spread across the globe. In the Old Testament they were a nation-state, in the New Testament they are a universal Church embodied in numerous local gatherings around the world. We can still learn from it (and many of our current are based on them) it is not workable today.

The moral law *remains*.

What Jesus did was he deepened and broadened the law.

Consider his teaching around adultery.⁶

Even if you look at someone lustfully – you don't lay finger on them but your mind moves all over them – you've committed adultery in your heart.

Love God and neighbour are highest commands.

Idolatry, stealing, lying and sexual sins are still condemned.

In writing to the Galatians and challenging their legalism, would also go on to write:

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”⁷

Timothy Keller writes:

‘In short, the coming of Christ changed how we worship, but not how we live.

The moral law outlines God's own character – his integrity, love, and faithfulness. And so everything the Old Testament says about loving our neighbor, caring for the poor, generosity with our possessions, social relationships, and commitment to our family is still in force.

The New Testament continues to forbid killing or committing adultery, and all the sex ethic of the Old Testament is re-stated throughout the New Testament (Matthew 5:27-30; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; 1 Timothy 1:8-11). If the New Testament has reaffirmed a commandment, then it is still in force for us today.’

⁶ Matthew 5:27 – 30.

⁷ Galatians 5:19 – 21.

The moral law remains but *not* as way of attaining relationship with God but from a place of gratitude and recognition that God's character and ways are best for us and others.

What the Law pointed to is the need for purity but also human inadequacy.

Jesus through his perfect life – not in the sense of being free from pain or hurt – a pure life, totally dedicated life, took on himself all of the obligations of the law and meet them completely.

And then he offered up himself as a sacrifice for our sins – our failings, our inability to meet what God demands – on the cross and in his resurrection.

And in his resurrection and ascension he gave us not only the gift of forgiveness but the gift of the Holy Spirit as our helper to do what is right.

Legalism is the toxic fruit of religion.

Legalisms power is that it makes you proud.

You're keeping all the rules while others aren't and so can blind us to our need of God.

But here's the thing, legalism will also crush you.

While you're keeping the rules you're feeling great; when you fail you have no other place to turn.

You see legalism doesn't change us – it can only manage us.

Legalism is like setting up a fence around an ever increasing sink-hole called 'sin' that exist in our hearts and matter what rules we put in place or boundaries we put around it's still there, threatening and growing.

I didn't need anyone to tell me that there was something wrong with.

Legalism can never address the heart.

But Jesus can.

Romans 8 verses 3- 4:

“For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful humanity to be a sin offering.

And so he condemned sin in human flesh, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

There’s the story of this guy's walking down the street when he falls in a hole. The walls are so steep he can't get out.

A doctor passes by and the guy shouts up, 'Hey you. Can you help me out?' The doctor writes a prescription, throws it down in the hole and moves on.

Then a priest comes along and the guy shouts up, 'Father, I'm down in this hole can you help me out?' The priest knells down and says a prayer and moves on.

Then a friend walks by, 'Hey, Joe, it's me can you help me out?'
And then the friend jumps in the hole.

The guy says, 'Are you stupid? Now we're both down here.'

The friend says, 'Yeah, but I've been down here before and I know the way out.' "

For us – *for us* – Jesus does the same.

You feel you’re in a hole this morning and all the fences and rules and the boundaries have never helped you but Jesus knows the way out.

And what you need to do with him this morning is to cultivate two things: confession and a closer relationship with him.

Not a law or rules.

So in this moment we’re just going to pause and if you’re in that place this morning we just trust that you will meet with him and then we’ll finish.

Let’s pray.