

16. The Beginning of the End

- Part 3 Pride

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The outward appearance of legalism is so pious, lofty and religious, but the inside stinks to our God and the people around us. According to Jesus, it is a white washed tomb. The definition of legalism is "strict, literal or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code"

Legalism has no pity on people. Legalism makes my opinion your burden, makes my opinion your boundary, makes my opinion your obligation, makes my opinion as the only rules for others to follow. If they don't do what my opinion dictates, they are wrong.

Nothing will keep a Christian more immature than trying to keep a list of "Dos and Don'ts" for others to follow my ways.

But there is a clear distinction between what the Word of God says to us and what the people say.

A. A FOOL RUSHES IN

1 Sam 14:24 And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, "Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies." So none of the people tasted food.

On the surface, this sounds so spiritual. "We want God to do a great work, so we should fast today." What could be wrong with that?

It was wrong because Saul's focus was wrong. Saul shows that even in the midst of doing something spiritual like fasting, his focus is on himself, not the Lord. Saul's desire is not the glory of God. It is the glory of Saul. He was not the first one, nor the last one, to command "religious" or "spiritual" acts for his own glory, not the glory of God.

It was wrong because the day of decisive battle is not the day to command the troops to fast. They need the energy, and they need the focus on the job at hand.

1 Sam 14:25-26 Now all the people of the land came to a forest; and there was honey on the ground. And when the people had come into the woods, there was the honey, dripping; but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath.

This was provision from God! The Israeli army was hot on the pursuit of the fleeing Philistines. They were all tired and hungry. They needed energy to continue the pursuit and finish the battle. And here is honey on the ground!

Yet Saul's foolish oath prevented them from receiving what God had put right in front of them! This must have been torture for the soldiers. But a foolish, legalistic command from Saul kept it from them.

1 Sam 14:27-30 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath; therefore he stretched out the end of the rod that was in his

hand and dipped it in a honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his countenance brightened. Then one of the people said, "Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats food this day.' " And the people were faint. But Jonathan said, "My father has troubled the land. Look now, how my countenance has brightened because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?"

Jonathan was exactly right! King Saul had indeed troubled the land with his pseudo-spiritual command to fast. Because of his command, the people were faint on a day when they should have been strong. They were weak and distracted. The victory could have been greater if the people could have eaten!

B. LEGALISM CAUSES PEOPLE TO SIN

1 Sam 14:31-35 Now they had driven back the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. So the people were very faint. And the people rushed on the spoil, and took sheep, oxen, and calves, and slaughtered them on the ground; and the people ate them with the blood. Then they told Saul, saying, "Look, the people are sinning against the Lord by eating with the blood!" So he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a large stone to me this day." And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people, and say to them, 'Bring me here every man's ox and every man's sheep, slaughter them here, and eat; and do not sin against the Lord by eating with the blood.' " So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night, and slaughtered it there. Then Saul built an altar to the Lord. This was the first altar that he built to the Lord.

God specifically commanded Israel that they should always properly drain the blood from an animal before they butchered it. Instead, it was to be given to God by pouring it out on the earth. Life belongs to God, not man, and this was a way to declare that.

Deut 12:23-25 Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water. You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord.

On this day of battle, because of Saul's foolish command, the people were so hungry they broke this command. Their obedience to Saul's foolish command led them to disobey God's clearly declared command. This is always the result of legalism!

Jesus said it plainly to the legalists of His day.

Mark 7:8 For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men--the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do."

We often think that legalistic rules will keep people from sin. Actually, the opposite is true. Legalistic rules lead us into sin, because they either provoke our rebellion, or they lead us into legalistic pride.

Paul said it powerfully in Colossians 2:23.

Colo 2:23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

If Saul's legalism that made his people to sin against God is not bad enough, Saul is blaming the people for what is really his own fault. He should have never made such a foolish commandment, and his commandment provoked the people into sin. Of course, this does not excuse the sin of the people. They are accountable for their own sin before God. Yet Saul is also accountable. Jesus referred to this principle in Matthew.

Matthew 18:7 Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!

C. ONE STUPIDITY DESERVES ANOTHER STUPIDITY

1 Sam 14:36-37 Now Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." Then the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here." So Saul asked counsel of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?" But He did not answer him that day.

Saul inquired of the Lord through the priest. It is likely that the priest used the Urim and Thummim to inquire of the Lord.

The use of the discerning tools of Urim and Thummim is described on a few occasions (Exodus 28:30, Numbers 27:21, 1 Samuel 28:6; Ezra 2:63, Nehemiah 7:65) and their use may be implied in other passages (Judges 1:1; 20:18, 23).

The names Urim and Thummim mean "Lights and Perfections." We aren't sure what they were or how they were used. Most think they were a pair of stones, one light and another dark, and each stone indicated a "yes" or "no" from God. The High Priest would ask God a question, reach into the breastplate, and pull out either a "yes" or a "no."

1 Sam 14:38-39 And Saul said, "Come over here, all you chiefs of the people, and know and see what this sin was today. For as the Lord lives, who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But not a man among all the people answered him.

Why did the Lord not answer him that day? Saul was convinced the problem was that some violated his commanded oath. When he said, he was convinced the sin was among the people instead of in himself.

If Saul knew that it was Jonathan who had violated his oath, he would never had said this. But he was so caught up in being right, that he adds this foolish vow to his previous foolish commandment.

1 Sam 14:40-42 Then he said to all Israel, "You be on one side, and my son Jonathan and I will be on the other side." And the people said to Saul, "Do what seems good to you." Therefore Saul said to the Lord God of Israel, "Give a perfect lot." So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. And Saul said, "Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me." So Jonathan was taken.

Saul was willing to kill his son rather than to humbly admit that he is really at fault. Saul started out as a humble man, but now his once impressive humility is being overtaken by pride.

Why did God allow the lot to pick out Jonathan? Not in answer to Saul's prayers, because God did not value it. But, first, to show that He is the dispenser of lots, and second, to expose Saul's hypocrisy.

1 Sam 14:43-45 Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done." And Jonathan told him, and said, "I only tasted a little honey with the end of the rod that was in my hand. So now I must die!" And Saul answered, "God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan." But the people said to Saul, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the Lord lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die.

The people finally stood up to Saul's foolishness. They simply would not allow Jonathan to be executed. They knew that Jonathan was working for the Lord that day, not against the Lord.

D. SAUL'S SOVEREIGNTY

1 Sam 14:46-52 Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place. So Saul established his sovereignty over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, against the people of Ammon, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he harassed them. And he gathered an army and attacked the Amalekites, and delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them. The sons of Saul were Jonathan, Jishui and Malchishua. And the names of his two daughters were these: the name of the firstborn Merab, and the name of the younger Michal. The name of Saul's wife was Ahinoam the daughter of Ahimaaz. And the name of the commander of his army was Abner the son of Ner, Saul's uncle. Kish was the father of Saul, and Ner the father of Abner was the son of Abiel. Now there was fierce war with the Philistines all the days of Saul. And when Saul saw any strong man or any valiant man, he took him for himself.

Saul's strength was broad over many areas, yet it was shallow. Because Saul was not a man after God's own heart. Because his own relationship with God was more about image than faith in God. Thus his kingdom could not last. The weakness of Saul has been seen here and there, but in the next chapter it will be fully exposed.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) If it is nothing more than a person's preference, it is not a fact, nor God's truth. Let's respect each other's opinions and preferences.

Let's not impose our own preferences to other people as guidelines and facts. If God needs our opinions, He will give them to us. God made us uniquely. Let's respect individuality within the body of Christ.

Legalism uses intimidation and manipulation to bring others into our conformity with prideful attitude and elitism in our hearts. It stinks to God's nostril and push away people from our Savior. Let's not get into legalism.

2) When our opinions are turned out to be wrong, let's admit that the opinions were wrong and we were wrong.

Insisting our own ways for the sake of our pride add nothing more than another stupidity over former one.

3) Even though we respect individuality and the differences, that does not give a license to ignore the final authority, the Word of God, the truth.