**EYES ON JESUS – “THE NEW LEGALISM”**

[EYES ON JESUS GRAPHIC]

Review of Mark 6

* He was rejected in Nazareth
* Sent the twelve out two by two
* John the Baptist was beheaded
* They tried to get away for rest and solitude, by the crowds kept following them
* Jesus fed the 5000 in the miracle of Fish and Bread
* Jesus walked on water and calmed the wind.
* They went across to Gennesaret (Ginosar) by *boat.*

Matt 6:53-56 “**53**When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. **54**As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. **55**They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. **56**And wherever he went—into villages, towns or countryside—they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.”

Chapter 6 was jam-packed with adventure, challenges, tragic loss, and many miracles. It was also very exhausting. Jesus could not escape the crowds who were pleading with Him to teach them and heal them. As much as He wanted to get away for rest and solitude, there is no mention of that happening.

When chapter 7 begins, the disciples were tired and hungry. They have now been away from their families for many months in order to follow Jesus and pursue God with everything they had. Just when they sat down to eat, they got a visit from the scribes and the Pharisees.

**MARK 7:1-6**

**1**The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus **2**and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. **3**(The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. **4**When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles).

(The Pharisees, much like Modern Orthodox Jews placed a lot of emphasis on cleanliness (Kosher = “clean”), especially in hand-washing (*Netilyat yadayim*). Today in synagogues, communities and at the Western wall, you will see a two-handled cup at the sink called a “Natla” for ritual hand-washing.

This is as much about adhering to tradition than it is about actual cleanliness.)

**5**So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with defiled hands?”

**6**He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about “*you hypocrites”*!

(a surprisingly harsh reaction to a seemingly harmless question...)?

…as it is written: “‘These people honor me with their lips,
    but their hearts are far from me.” (Isa. 29:13)

These Pharisees came from Jerusalem (likely sent by the Sanhedrin) to investigate what was happening in Galilee. Apparently, they heard reports of this man Jesus who was astounding people with His teaching and doing miracles throughout the region. They knew that he had many followers, some whom he called disciples whom he was teaching as a Rabbi teaches his students.

Upon seeing Jesus, and observing his disciples who left behind their families and gave everything they had to seek God, their first reaction was “to condemn, not commend” them.

Jesus knew that these men considered themselves to be the authorities on the ways of God, yet the spirit they were operating in was that of the accuser who brings condemnation.

He did not even respond to their question by debating the biblical basis for ritual hand-washing (a debate he would have easily won, by the way). Instead he immediately addressed the motives of their heart. They came do *condemn*, not *commend* his followers. He did not even engage in an argument with them, instead He used a scripture from Isaiah 29:13 to expose them.

**Isaiah 29:13“**The Lord says: “These people come near to me with their mouth
    and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.”

They were operating in a spirit of religious legalism, that was clearly not of God.

What does “legalism” look like for us?

Legalism *– “dependence on moral law rather than on personal religious faith.”*

There was a time when *Christian legalism* was prevalent in the church. Not only traditionalists demanding that church traditions be kept strictly and solemnly, but any appearance of worldliness was harshly condemned.

That included;

* The length of your hair. (I was a longhaired guy)
* The clothes you wore. (no jeans in church)
* The music you listened to. (never anything “worldly”)
* The company you kept. *(non-Christian friends = “bad company, corrupts good morals” 1st Cor. 15:33)*

This was not just in very strict fundamentalist churches, this was common on *almost all churches*.

If you looked or acted anything like those in the world, you were considered “worldly”, and were condemned for it by other Christians.

In my first church, you were called out if you listened to secular music or even “Christian Rock”.

If you went to the movies or attended a concert, you were judged by how “edifying” your decision was to do so.

You were expected to look, act, and behave like a “Christian”.

*[ example of the old lady from ZA ]*

That was many years ago, now things have changed.

We wear jeans to church, are encouraged to have non-Christian friends, and we are free to listen to both *“Christian and ~~Satanic~~ music,… I mean Christian and Secular music. : ) There is very little of the “Old World Religious Legalism” in today’s churches.*

I personally think that it’s swung a bit too far. I’m not comfortable with some of the things people accept as normal; movies that are being watched, and music that is being listened to. I feel that in some ways popular culture has way too much influence on the church. In some areas, we have actually proven in 1st Corinthians 15:33 to be true in the church, (*“bad company, corrupts good morals”),*  morality in the church has been greatly corrupted by friendship with the world.

[One Church-planting seminar suggested starting with a keg party for the local guys with beer, secular music, and cigars. I don’t *condemn* those people, but it was not the way God was leading *me* to plant a church.]

So, if everyone is so freed up from religious legalism, does that mean we are now completely free from legalism bringing condemnation on other Christians?

NO!

It is still just as strong as it ever was, but it is coming from a completely different direction. But just as we’ve seen in many generations before us, the legalistic eye has swung from “personal holiness and social justice”.

Here’s how:

* We live in a time where Christians have rightfully taken up many great causes.
* We are usually the first to respond to natural disasters and the plight of the needy.
* We have more people doing self-funded relief work in third world countries than probably any other “organization” in the world.
* We have thousands of food pantries and outreaches to the needy and homeless, with millions of workers throughout the world.
* We are many times the first to speak out against injustice and oppression and statistically donate more to charitable organizations than non-Christians.

I think it is fantastic that Christian churches and organizations are leading the world in areas of Social Justice and Mercy Ministries because this is so very close to the heart of God.

However…

The problem is, that unfortunately, we are *also* very quick to *boast* about all the great things we do, and condemn those who in our opinion, *“don’t”.*

This is where legalism and condemnation come in.

When our “righteousness” is steeped in pride, then we are like those whom Jesus mentioned that “*honor me with their lips, but whose hearts are far from God”.*

Then…when our pride leads us to *accusing, criticizing and condemning* others for not living like us, and doing the things we do, we have become like the hypocrites that Jesus accused the Pharisees of being here in Mark 7.

**Matt 6:1**“Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.

**2**“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others.”

*How does this apply to us?*

 *I Personally live in the best manner I know how to experience God’s blessing in my life and upon my family.*

*We have values and guidelines in place that help us direct the decision I make for our household regarding;*

*Schooling, movies, music, television, giving, church priorities, etc.*

*Not everyone’s values are the same as ours, and that’s OK.*

*I also have spent my life pursuing ministry opportunities over career objectives and have travelled to many countries around the world to care for the poor, and preach the gospel (including multiple trips to Haiti and Israel).*

*I even eat Kosher, and have for 45 years.*

I’m only telling you this only to say that, this is the path God has lead ME to follow.

If I try to place this as a burden upon you to do exactly as I do, it would be wrong.

If I did all these things to bolster my spiritual pride, and then tried to shame you for not doing it, not only would it be wrong, it would be hypocritical. (As Jesus clearly pointed out to the Pharisees.)

Criticism, Condemnation, Accusation – These are not from God, but from the Devil.

Satan is the “Accuser of the Brethren” you are right to reject him.

**Rev. 12:10** “Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.”

Jesus did not come to condemn the world, but Satan DID!

***“Condemnation is from Satan (reject it).  Conviction is from God (accept it)”***

*Sometimes I feel more condemned by other believers*

*for what I do or don’t do, Say or don’t say, post or don’t post*

*than I do from unbelievers. Even when I do it from a pure heart.*

That’s why Paul writes:

Eph 5:15-16 “**15**Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, **16**making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

You should never feel *condemned*, *accused*, or *shamed* by anyone concerning the things of God, especially another believer.

That is not of the *spirit*, it’s of the *flesh*.

You *should* however feel *convicted* by the Holy Spirit, especially if:

* You are doing things you shouldn’t. *(Sin)*
* Not doing things you should. *(Righteousness)*

OR

* Need to discern the difference. *(Judgement)*

John 16:8 “[The Holy Spirit] will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”

You don’t need someone to condemn or shame you into doing what the Holy spirit is convicting you to do. He is quite capable of doing His job.

There is so much God has for each of us as we surrender to the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

As he Sanctifies us more and more, He cleanses us and gives us power to live a life where we experience His presence in our lives and the blessing that comes with it.

He empowers us to do works of ministry including:

* preaching the gospel,
* teaching His Word and bringing
* healing to desperate people.

He also gives us opportunity to be His hands, feet and voice in the world. Bringing relief to the poor and needy, praying and speaking out against injustice, and as Jesus quoted in Nazareth…

Isaiah 61:1”…

* *to proclaim good news to the poor.*
* *Binding up the brokenhearted,*
* *proclaiming freedom for the captives and*
* *release from darkness for the prisoner.”*

We don’t do this however, through legalism and condemnation according to the flesh,

We do it thought Power and Freedom according to the Spirit.

Closing:

Romans 8:1 “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. **2**For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.”

**Remember: Whom the son sets free is free indeed,**

**Let’s walk in freedom through the spirit of life in Christ Jesus!**