

Abbeyville Road Christian Church
551 Abbeyville Road Lancaster, PA 17603-6399
717-393-8821 FAX 717-393-8660
email: office@abbeyvilleroad.com
web site: www.abbeyvilleroad.com



Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

News of His

Vol. 47: No. 13 July 2, 2008

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Lancaster, PA
Permit No. 1324

Dancing on the Edge

Legalism is defined by *Webster* as "strict, often too strict, adherence to a code or a law." When we hear the term in Christian settings, if our minds do not gravitate to the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they certainly gravitate to their modern counterparts; self-righteous and overbearing people who impose their narrow interpretations of biblical teaching on others as the only expression of appropriate Christian behavior. However, at this precise point in time, the world and the church at large have largely tuned out the overbearing legalist. Few people will allow some spiritual bully to affect their liberty to do as they please. But, this does not mean that legalism is powerless over them, for legalism has a quirky flipside equally capable of stripping God's glory from their lives.

There is a kind of preoccupation with "the letter of the law" that causes some people to want to live right up against the boundary of right and wrong. There is a line they insist they will not cross, but they are captivated, nevertheless, by pushing the envelope. Masterfully, they articulate the arguments of the spiritually childish. Such arguments are not centered so much in what the Bible condemns as they are in what it does not "technically" condemn.

So long as a man does not venture into the realm of physical sin, he may argue that there is no danger in the provocative entertainment mediums with which he amuses himself. A married person may carry on a deeply emotional relationship with someone of the opposite gender that is not his or her spouse and insist that so long as there is no sexual contact, no breach of God's law has occurred. We do not condemn the use of alcohol, because the Bible speaks only to drunkenness. Obviously, that opens a door to numerous and subjective interpretations of where the line should be drawn that separates moderation from inebriation.

In fact, life at the edge of the boundaries may be a violation of the most basic law of the Kingdom of Christ. Jesus did not call His people out of the world to live as they please. Jesus called us to live to His glory as the light of the world by first dying to ourselves. We must always give heed to the possibility that Christ is scandalized before an onlooking world by our willful lives. We must always give heed to the bewilderment, even emboldenment, that is produced in others by what they see in us.

With all our appropriate preoccupation with "new life" and with the freedom that is ours in Christ Jesus, it is treacherously easy to overlook what it means for us to die to ourselves. The center of God's eternal scheme of redemption was Christ's death. Without the cross, the empty tomb would be amazing, but what would it mean? Equally meaningless is any rhetoric of new and eternal life that does not squarely and daily face bearing one's own cross or dying to oneself. Whether we are speaking of our initial redemption secured by Jesus or of our growth as believers, the order is absolute: First, there is death. Only then, can there be new life. Paul wrote:

... don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too may live a new life.

- Romans 6:3, 4

On these verses, the late Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer observed:

"I think I perceive that most Christians even read the first half of these verses faster, in order to get to the second 'happy' part of the verses, but this is a mistake. We love to skip along, but one does not get on the other side of a door without going through it, and we do not get to the joyous second part of these verses without passing through the first part."

It is not my place or anyone else's to tell you what you may or may not do in areas where the Bible is silent or even gray. But, as we make those judgments for ourselves, may we each be honest with ourselves. Is the calling of Christ upon my life simply to do as I please, or is it to bring glory and honor to Him in everything I do?



Karl's Korner