

Legality, Liberty and Diversity

In a free society promoting liberty and diversity, “legalism” is a common cry. If something is judged as absolutely right or wrong, not respecting personal choice, it’s now labeled legalistic. If it doesn’t include diversity of thought it’s branded legalism. But a corrupt culture leaves God out of its thinking. But is legalism and legality the same?

For the Christian who has a heart for the mind and will of God, how does Holy Scripture present legality, liberty and diversity? The following is a short summary of what these concepts are and aren’t in holy Scripture.

Legality is of God

God is a legal God. Legality upholds right and wrong which is justice. God is revealed as “*just and right*”, Duet. 32:4. The Lord’s law to Israel upheld social justice: “*what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous?*”, Deut. 4:8. God ordains government to uphold civil justice in punishing evil, Rom. 13:4. Even the Lord’s universe operates by absolute laws like the law of gravity, etc. Jeremiah 31:35 says, “*the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night*”. The loving gospel of Jesus is also legal (just). It required punishment for sin (His death) before offering forgiveness “*that he might be just*”, which upheld the law that requires death for sin, Rom. 3:25, 26, 31. Legality doesn’t function by bias or mood but by justice, which can protect and secure.

LEGALISM: the perversion of Legality. Legalism is to impose man’s way as law on God’s people. Legalism is to restore Israel’s law in principle with works or rituals as a requirement to secure God’s salvation of grace, Rom. 3:28. It includes binding Israel’s or man’s traditions on the church, that contradicts God’s way, as the way to worship and serve, Matt. 15:8, 9, Col. 2:14-17. It can involve man’s professional hierarchy which restricts the liberty given to the NT church by limiting the practice of the priesthood of all believers in the assembly meeting, Heb. 10:19-25, 1Pet. 2:5, 1Cor. 14:23-40 (note vs. 36-38).

CAUTION: what legalism isn’t. To obey the Word and traditions of the Lord Jesus (not to secure salvation) is not legalism but love, John 14:15, 1Cor. 14:37, 2Thes. 2:15. Don’t be intimidated by dubious cries of legalism. Love the Lord Who died for you by obedience .

Liberty is of God

Consider Israel. The Lord wanted them to leave Egypt. Why: “*let my people go that they may serve me*”, Ex. 8:1. But Pharaoh said no as he was their slave master. Israel couldn’t serve God if they wanted to. They were restrained by another power. So the Lord freed them from that power (Egypt). They then had the freedom from the bondage that restrained them from serving the Lord. They now had the ability to freely serve the Lord: this is liberty. Now also the church has been “*called unto liberty*”, Gal. 5:12.

Liberty is being made free from restraints that keep one from serving God. There is the restraint of the power of master sin. “*Being made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness*” is what the gospel of Jesus Christ accomplished. Free to serve! There is the restraint of the authority of OT law to form a relationship with God. “*But now we are*

delivered from the law ... that we should serve in newness of spirit", Rom. 7:6. The law, with its principle of judgment, stirs up our flesh rather than produce fruit unto God. Able and free to serve the Lord His way is God's style of liberty.

LIBERALISM: the perversion of liberty. Liberalism is based on my right to choose what I want. My *choice* of what to believe, what lifestyle I will live, how I worship or how church should be. The Lord's liberty is not freedom to choose my choice – but being free to choose God's choice. It's not freedom to sin but freedom from sin, Rom. 6.

Diversity is of God

Diversity is including a variety – but a variety of what? The world is made up of diverse nations, peoples, families and languages, Rev. 5:9. One blood (human race) with different nationalities. This happens naturally by God's choice apart from our choice, Acts 17:26. The church also has a diversity of spiritual gifts. "*There are diversities of gifts*", 1Cor. 12:4. This happens supernaturally apart from our choice – but His choice, 1Cor. 12:11.

The Lord's diversity in the gospel of Christ is the equal inclusion of all *believing* nationalities into the body of Christ. It's without bias or discrimination. All groups are equally united in the Head, Jesus the Lord with all grace. All are given the same blessings regardless of color, culture, class, gender, prior religious heritage, or sins committed.

Each member of this one mosaic body will have the manifestation of the Spirit with gifted abilities to serve, but the gifts will differ. Yet it is the inclusion of all believers equally in the church though they don't have the same gifts and ministries from the Lord. The body of Christ is a diversity of God's choosing forming the unity of the one body.

INCLUSIVISM: the perversion of diversity. Biblical diversity is not the inclusion of diverse immoral lifestyles. God's church, as the holy temple of God, is not to be tolerant of "believers" living in sin. Immorality and other sins of the flesh are ***our choice***. We refuse to seek God's solution and then choose to obey indwelling sin with its lusts. Our choices are not God's diversity.

The Lord's diversity is not equal roles for men and women in the home or the church but diverse roles. God's diversity is not the toleration of unscriptural practices in the church. The church, while made up of diversity, is called to a unity (oneness) in its Head. The thinking and wisdom of the Lord Jesus Christ alone is to govern us. "*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*", 1Cor. 1:10. The church is designed to be a diversity created into a unity expressed with unanimity of speech and thinking from its Lord.

The Lord Jesus Himself is not pleased with a doctrinal diversity of choices or practices by His churches. While it exists, He calls them to repentance by hearing His voice by the Spirit in the written Word, Rev. 2 & 3. What Paul taught in one church, he taught in all, 1Cor. 4:17. The church is not an "American unity" of all united in a freedom of choice, which includes all lifestyles and religious ideologies. It's a unity of truth. Amazing grace!