



“Buzzwords”

Part II

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We continue our study today on buzzwords in modern religion. Let me quickly redefine the topic. A *buzzword* or *buzz phrase* is a word/phrase that becomes very popular and through overuse or abuse, it can lose its meaning or begin to convey the wrong ideas. In corporate circles, buzzwords can become a smokescreen, as with an emotionally exciting phrase that is used to manipulate people into buying or noticing a product. In politics, buzz phrases can be used for the purposes of propaganda.

The same is true in religious discussion. It’s not that the words themselves are illegitimate. Not at all. But by being turned into popular buzzwords, they begin to convey ideas that are not always accurate. They can be used for sophism, or perhaps to emotionally bias people against a doctrine or idea that is actually true. On the other hand, the Bible says that we are to speak truth and in so doing, we are to be careful how we use words.

II Timothy 1:13 “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.”

Our words are to be *sound words*, which Paul defines as *words that come from God Himself*. We are to be careful to only *speak as the oracles of God* or how God has already spoken (**I Peter 4:11**).

Unfortunately, we are not doing much of that in modern speech. Today, we’ll notice some more terms and phrases that are bandied about—often unfairly and inaccurately. We’ll see how these inflammatory words/phrases cause many to be deceived about the truth of the Lord.

IV. Legalist/Legalism

That has a cold, lifeless and stuffy ring to it, doesn’t it? This has become a buzzword to describe those who insist on following the scriptures to the letter. It’s often applied to those who say that the Bible provides a pattern for the church to follow in its work and worship. You might have heard something like

this: *People who believe in keeping rules are attempting to get to heaven through their legalism, as opposed to grace through faith.* Is that a true and fair characterization? Is there really a contrast there? Is striving to keep the rules of scripture in contradistinction to “salvation by grace”?

Let’s define *legalism* first. *Legalist* and *legalism* NEVER appear in the Bible; they are NOT Bible words. They are words that men have come up with and have since used to describe people who believe in rigidly following the scriptures. Merriam-Webster defines *legalism* as *a strict literal or excessive conformity of the law or to a religious or moral code; the institutionalized legalism that restricts free choice.* Many religious leaders define it as *an effort to merit salvation through works instead of by grace.* Keep in mind that we’re talking about a word that is NOT used in the Bible to begin with, but is used often in religious culture today, often unfairly and inaccurately. Let’s establish some truths here:

1. We are indeed saved by grace through faith.

Ephesians 2:8-9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

That is truth number one, and remember that all truth harmonizes. Truth does not contradict truth. So, *we’re saved by grace through faith, not of works,* Paul said.

2. Faith without works is dead.

James 2:26 “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

So, if *salvation is by grace through faith and not by works,* yet James tells us that *faith without works is dead,* and will not save or justify, then we can conclude that the works of **Ephesians 2** which Paul has under consideration are NOT the same works that James is talking about in **James 2.**

You see, one is talking about man’s works of merit in which a man could indeed rightly boast if they did bring about his salvation. If his works indeed caused him to please God, then he could boast in what he has done. For example, human efforts at goodness and virtue in an attempt to merit salvation.

But the kind of works that James is talking about are the works of faith, in which man cannot boast. Take, for example, baptism. Baptism is a command of Christ to all sinners who believe and repent (**Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38**). Of course, all kinds of people will tell you today, *Oh no, you don’t have to be baptized in order to be saved because that would be salvation by works, and Paul said that we’re saved by grace through faith NOT of works.* But let me ask: when one is baptized in obedience to the command of Christ, is he performing a work to merit salvation? Not at all. In fact, in baptism, I am submitting in faith to the hands of another. Paul beautifully shows the picture:

Colossians 2:12 “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

When we obey the command of the Lord out of a sincere heart, we are saved *in baptism through faith in the operation of God*. It's not what WE have done; it's what God does IN US when we in faith submit to Him and obey Him.

Yet, when you preach what Jesus told the apostles to preach in **Mark 16:15-16** that *he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*, someone will accuse you of imposing rules in a legalistic effort to try to "earn" salvation. Friend, don't be deceived by all of that. Don't be prejudiced against the words of Jesus Himself by someone accusing you of legalism simply because you see that it's necessary to obey the Lord.

3. The Bible tells us that we must obey the Lord to be saved.

Friend, if you deny that, you are in direct opposition to the plain statements of inspired scripture.

Hebrews 5:9 "**And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;**"

Salvation comes from God, by grace, through faith and through obedience to Christ.

Matthew 7:21 "**Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.**"

II Thessalonians 1:8 "**In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**"

Do not these passages say that people who do not obey the gospel or the will of Christ WON'T be saved?

So, what is *legalism*? Can that word legitimately be used to describe some people in religion today? According to its English definition, it can accurately describe some people, for sure. A *legalist* would be *one who stresses obedience without acknowledging that his salvation does come by grace*. I believe with all of my heart that we're saved by grace through faith. None of us could be saved, but by the grace of God. None of us could be saved but through faith in Christ. But I also believe that faith moves, submits and obeys or it is not faith. That's what James teaches us in **James 2**. Look at **Hebrews 11**—the great "roll call of faith"—read that chapter and see how many times the word *faith* is connected to the obedience of the Old Testament saints it describes. It doesn't just mean "to mentally assent." Rather, **Hebrews 11** tells us that *by faith Abel offered (v.4), by faith Noah moved (v.7), by faith Abraham went (v.8), by faith Abraham offered Isaac (v.17), by faith Jacob worshipped (v.21), by faith Moses chose, forsook and endured (vs. 24-27).*

You see, faith is not at variance with works of obedience; they go hand in hand. One is NOT a legalist simply because he believes that one must seek to obey the Lord to be saved. If so, sign me up! Call me a legalist if that's what one is, because it's what the Bible teaches. No, *legalism* is rather *the rote keeping of rules without faith; attempting to earn heaven by rules alone*. But obedience alone will not save any more than faith alone will save.

James 2:24 “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.”

Again, that verse is talking about works of faith, and not by faith alone.

Another form of *legalism* is to ignore the spirit of the law. The Pharisees were guilty of claiming to keep the letter of the law while ignoring its intended application. Actually, they were keeping their own traditions and not the law itself. They found loopholes in the law and ignored the law when it suited them. They totally ignored the spirit of the law itself when they DID claim to obey the law.

A person who searches the word of God to find loopholes instead of allowing it to govern his heart and his mind and in humility submitting to the will of God would be an example of a *legalist* in the negative sense. I believe with all of my heart that baptism is necessary to salvation. But I would never suggest that a person can merely be baptized without faith and repentance, without an inward operation of the heart, and be saved. It's not just an outward ritual.

A third kind of *legalism* is to *impose human laws in religious requirements*, which consequently Jesus said makes ones' worship vain and useless. If there is any passage in the New Testament that comes close to naming and applying a word like *legalism*, it would certainly be this one:

Colossians 2: 20-21 “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not;”

That sounds like Paul is saying that there are no rules or ordinances to be kept in order to be pleasing to the Lord. But that can't be what he was saying because he enjoined the Corinthians to “*keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you (I Corinthians 11:2).*” You see, Paul isn't talking about doing the will of God in **Colossians 2**. Rather, he's talking about doing the will of men. Let's read a little farther.

Colossians 2:22-23 “Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.”

Will worship that he speaks of is *worship or service that is according to the will of MAN and not the will of GOD*. In other words, worship that is not authorized by Christ. Worship and doctrine that comes from men and not from the Lord. Yes, the religious and denominational world is full of that today. But not the true church.

Friend, do not let someone falsely label you or anyone else a legalist simply because you believe in strictly following the scriptures. The scriptures ARE to be followed; to not follow them is to depart from the faith. We are to do Bible things in Bible ways and call them by Bible names. That is not a bad thing; that is a good and necessary thing. But the word *legalist* has surely become a buzzword in religion today. That brings us to the next buzzword we will discuss.

V. Religion

Any time you suggest that Christianity involves any kind of structured obedience or following a specific set of teachings, someone will come along and say, *Oh, what you have is religion; what you need is*

Jesus. As though Jesus and religion are opposed to each other. In fact, like these other words, *religion* has pretty much become a dirty word among believers today.

To be sure, there is a great deal of false religion all around us today. If you're contrasting Jesus with false religion, with insincere religion or religion that does not involve a man's heart, soul and mind, I am on board. I agree with you. But to contrast Jesus with all kinds of religion is simply not accurate. As I said, there is a great deal of false religion in the world; corrupt, shallow and vapid religion abounds. But the word *religion* itself is not a bad word. James used it twice in regard to Christians.

James 1:26-27 "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

James' first use of the word here is in a negative sense; *religion* can be empty or vain. The Greek word simply refers to *the ceremonial observance of Christianity* or whatever system of faith you may be talking about. It really signifies the outward aspect of religion—what we do. James said that it's possible for a man to seem religious, pious and devout, but his religion be vapid, empty and vain. On the other hand, James says that there IS such a thing as *pure religion*. What kind is that? religion that emanates from the heart and takes in and observes the inward then outward aspects of serving the Lord. It takes both.

The word *religion* has become a buzzword today to mean that one can have some kind of inward relationship to Jesus without any outward demonstration of that relationship. That's really what it's about. People who say *Jesus and not religion* will often downplay the importance of the church and one's involvement in the work and worship of the church. They will say, *I am spiritual, not religious*. Listen: you can't be spiritual without being truly religious in the true sense of the term. You can't have a relationship with Jesus if that relationship does not demonstrate itself in outward service and obedience. The kind of religion we want to avoid at all costs is the type that consists ONLY of the external. It's true: rules without relationship are spiritually toxic, and at the very least are vain and ineffectual. But a relationship with Christ involves DOING the will of the heavenly Father.

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