

The heart of the legalist.

Introduction

Quote by Spurgeon: The poor sinner trying to be saved by law is like a blind horse going round and round a mill, and never getting a step further, but only being whipped continually. The faster he goes, the more work he does, the more he is tired.

Something I've often battled with was that I tend to relate to God based on my performance rather than the gospel.

So, at heart I tend to struggle with legalism

I think if I just obey God it will go well with me.

If I have a sinful day then I think that I am not a Christian any more

I then live expecting God to punish me with some bad event.

This is something I believe is engraved in the human heart.

It's as natural as breathing air to think like this.

We work for a salary, or for school grades.

So, it's natural for us to think that we need to work to be saved or to work to stay secure in our relationship with God.

Every false religion, every cult and every sect at its core are legalist in that they think by performing some kind of work or deed they will obtain salvation.

This simply tells me that this is a all pervasive problem of the heart and even in this church, many of you may even this morning be struggling with the idea that you need to perform in some way to be saved or remain secure in your salvation.

Read

Mark 3:1-6

Propositional statement

4 characteristics of the legalists heart, reveal the need for a transformed heart

1. The Legalist heart is accusing
2. The Legalist heart is self-centred

3. The Legalist heart is hardened
4. The Legalist heart is murderous

1. The Legalist heart is accusing

1 Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a withered hand. 2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him.

Mark 3:1–2 (ESV)

Again, he entered the synagogue

Jesus had just come from been confronted by the Pharisees in the grain field because His Disciples were plucking grain on the Sabbath.

Jesus enters the synagogue **again** implying that this had been done before.

This time it would however be a head on showdown with the hardened hearts of the Legalists (The Pharisees and Scribes) and their legalistic traditions.

The religion of the Pharisees centered on their own ability to become worthy of entering the kingdom of God by meticulous legalism.

synagogue

The Jewish synagogue was the religious gathering place for Jewish communities.

- It was the hearts of local communities for worship, reading the Torah, pray and to administer justice which developed after the temple had destroyed in 586 BC
- This also was the place that the Pharisees would teach their traditions.

Synagogues were constructed on high ground, and constructed so that people could sit facing Jerusalem.

There normally was a portable chest containing the Scrolls and a raised platform for reading the Torah.

and a man was there with a withered hand.

Luk 6: 6 indicates it was **His right hand** that was withered.

GK term **withered** means something that became dry to the point of being immobilized or paralyzed.

It was in other words **a stiff and deformed** hand.

The deformed hand made it very **difficult for the man to earn a living.**

But it was not **a life-threatening situation.**

An old tradition suggested that he was a stone mason who had lost the ability to work and was reduced to begging.

2 And they watched Jesus, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath

They refer to the **Pharisees and the Scribes**(legalists). Luk 6:7

watched The Gram implies they **kept on watching Him**- They were hanging in suspense:

What were they watching for?

whether he would heal him on the Sabbath

God had originally created the Sabbath for:

- For **man's good**: to rest, restore Him and to refocus man's attention upon God.
- For Israel, it was a sign:
 - The fact that God had created the earth in 6 days
 - Gods deliverance from Egypt,
 - Of the Mosaic covenant

The legalists however had **developed traditions called the traditions of the elders.**

They believed in keeping these traditions **they could be saved.**

But these traditions had **become a burden for the Jews**

Concerning the Sabbath, the Mishnah and Talmud **listed 39 classes** of work that would **profane the sabbath.**

In Ex 31:15,35:2 we see that any person found working on a Sabbath faced the **death penalty.**

Keeping Sabbath then became the showcase for Pharisaic legalism and obedience to their traditions.

- Medical assistance was allowed for:
- Birth of a baby
- Life threatening situations
- But efforts for a cure were regarded as work and had to wait until the passing of the Sabbath.

so that they might accuse him

They were **intentionally watching** so as to make a legal case against Christ.

This obviously not a life threatening. Case.

If Jesus was to heal this man publicly on the Sabbath, he would violate the Sabbath traditions, and could be charged as profaning the Sabbath traditions.

All eyes were on Jesus.

Like people watch a man walk a tight rope to see if He would fall.

Principle

The heart of the legalist is a heart that watches others to judge and accuse them.

It's a heart that sets itself as the ultimate standard of what is right and wrong, what is allowed and what is not.

Its an accusing heart playing the role of the inward accuser.

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. Revelation 12:10 (ESV)

It is the heart that follows the example of Satan who seeks to accuse believer's day and night before God.

Application

1. Our hearts hate opposition and will rather than confess our wicked ness look to see how we can accuse others

- a. Conflict with my wife, especially if she points out a sin area, seeks to point fingers to her sins rather than mine.
 - b. You see it clearly in children when their hearts are quick to accuse the other of not having been fair, or not playing according to their rules.
2. We see it often in the work environment when no **one takes the blame** or responsibility and there is **the natural tendency to accuse** others so quickly.
 3. We see it in church when we measure people based on **our preferences**, our **standards of what is right** and wrong behaviour rather than God's standards in the Word.

2. The Legalist heart is self-centred

³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here." ⁴ And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. Mark 3:3–4 (ESV)

³ And he said to the man with the withered hand, "Come here."

- Jesus knew the Legalists **were plotting and so He initiated** the show down.
- There is no indication that the man with the withered hand had asked to be healed.
- According to Mat 12:10-12 The Pharisees were asking Jesus whether it was **lawful to heal on a Sabbath** so that they **could accuse Him**. Mark simply records that they were **watching so as to accuse him**.
- All the **initiative comes from Christ**
- Jesus **summons the man to center stage** of the synagogue.
- Jesus then asks a question **that is formulated in terms of the halakha**(Jewish **law that guide the way to behave or the way to walk in.**)

⁴ And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill

- Formulated in this way **demanding an answer** as determined by the Scribal studies.
- **The first part of the question** "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm" refers **to healing the man with the crippled hand**.

- Clearly the Bible encourage people to do good and prohibited them from doing harm.
- Jesus's question implies that they were morally required to do good in light of this mans need, especially on the Sabbath.
- But in the face the face of this need the legalists were silent.
- This exposed their calloused attitude towards suffering and pain. Their Rabbinical traditions caused harm to those who were trying to follow them.
- They were more interested in bringing harm to Jesus than helping this man in need.
- The 2nd part of the question "to save or to kill" refers not to the man but to Jesus Himself.
- Since Jesus was violating the Sabbath traditions of the legalists, they had now the reason to harm and kill Christ.
- Jesus subtly and powerfully links the framing of the question with the fate of the man with the bad hand.
- To do good or evil refers to Jesus response to the man, to save or kill refers to the legalist's response to Jesus.
- Jesus's response to the man's hand will determine their response to him.
- How ironic that the so-called protectors of the Sabbath secretly wanted the Messiah to violate the sabbath so that they could one day put Him to death.

But they were silent. Mark 3:3–4 (ESV)

- IF they acknowledged the truth that it was lawful to do good and save a life, they would be unable to accuse Jesus of wrongdoing.
- This would have contradicted their rabbinical traditions and would have affirmed his act of healing as acceptable.
- If they stated it was lawful to do harm and kill, they would be contradicting the OT and publicly admitting their own wickedness.
- The silence of the legalist proves that their religion is about fulfilling their own traditions, their own standards and not God's standards.
- At the core the legalist heart is more concerned about its own laws, its own traditions that the good and benefit of other people

- **Principle:** The legalist heart at its core is proud and selfish and self-preserving.
- Its self-focussed, worshipping self, unmoved by the needs of others.

Application

1. You and I should know that our hearts are naturally more concerned with our needs than the needs of others.
2. That's why we create the laws using our self as measuring stick rather than God's word.
3. Our hearts are quick to create our own standards by which we judge others as less mature, less spiritual when they don't conform to our standards.

³ Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3–4 (ESV)

4. As believers we should purposely deny self and be more concerned with interests and needs of others.
5. With our lips we should ask how will my words build the other person up and provide grace for the moment (Eph 4:29)
6. In our thoughts are selfish, we should purposefully choose to instruct our mind by God's word and change our thinking to be in line with God's Word.

3. The Legalist heart is hardened

⁵ And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. Mark 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ And he looked around at them with anger

- Mark emphasises Jesus looking at them in anger.
- The gram indicates that it was a momentary look of anger.
- He did not mistake their silence, thinking that they agreed with Him.

- This was not a **sinful anger** but a **righteous and holy anger** directed at the **hardness of hearts** and the **indifference to divine grace**.
Tells us that Christ holy and just response to sin is anger.
- They had forgotten the **mercy and grace of** God extended to man and were more **concerned with the legal details** of their traditions.
- They were **esteeming man-made ritualism** above **God ordained concern** about a man's welfare.
- For the **sake of piety** (Religiousness) they had become **insensitive to the purposes of God and the sufferings of men**.
- Their **consciences must have burned** under the weight of His gaze.

grieved at their hardness of heart

- But Jesus was also **deeply grieved**. (Gk Intensely **afflicted/grieved**)
- This reveals our Compassionate Saviour.
- The Grammar indicates **that it was a continues us abiding deep seated grief**
- The anger was monetary, but **the grief was continuing**.
- The GK term for **hardness= term coming the idea of the hardness of minerals or rock or bone structure**. means **to render insensitive**, its a state or **condition of complete** lack of understanding, dullness, insensible obstinacy.

Paul uses the term to describe the **condition of unbelievers**.

18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. Ephesians 4:18 (ESV)

- He indicates a **due to the hardness of heart** (Inner control centrum) people are **ignorant which** leads to them **being darkened in their** understanding and **alienated from** God.
- A Hard heart is **a dangerous condition**, because it **rejects the gospel**.

25 Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. Romans 11:25 (ESV)

¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 2 Corinthians 3:14 (ESV)

- We read that there is a partial hardening upon Israel currently.

¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Mark 8:17 (ESV)

- Jesus confronted even his own disciples lack of understanding and perception and asked them if their hearts were hardened

If the seat of discernment and spiritual insight is hardened it cannot accept new insights.

The legalist is set in their ways.

A hardened heart does not want to change.

It starts off normally you choose to harden your heart, but eventually it may become a permanent condition in which God then hardens your heart so that you don't listen to God.

¹³ Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 7:13 (ESV)

¹⁵ But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. Exodus 8:15 (ESV)

¹² But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had spoken to Moses. Exodus 9:12 (ESV)

¹⁰ Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh, and the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land. Exodus 11:10 (ESV)

A hardened heart produce:

- Ignorance

- Lack of understanding
- The condition in which a person does not don't listen to God or His word
- Alienation from the life of God because it rejects the gospel.
- Understandably Jesus was grieved because this condition of the heart would eventually lead to the eternal destruction of these legalist.

The legalist hearts in essence is a stubborn heart, it is wilfully blind to God and His Word.

One translation renders it obstinate stupidity.

Have you been hardening your heart?

Jesus was not only angry at their insensitivity towards suffering, but the entire system of legalism, where the letter is more important than the spirit.

- A chilling silence must have prevailed in the synagogue
The man with the withered hand was standing in front of them.
- SO, after Jesus had looked at them in anger and grieving over their hearts.

... said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored

This was once again instant complete healing.

This must have caused a commotion.

Jesus was openly opposing the Pharisees.

In application

1. Choose not to harden your heart towards God and His word. Every time you choose not to obey God, in a sense you harden your heart.
2. Over time you train yourself not to listen to God.
3. You have created habitual sin patterns in your life and in essence your hardening your heart more and more to disobey God.
4. Eventually you may reach a situation in which God may harden your heart, like we see God having done with Pharaoh, And Paul describes God handing over the sinner to the lusts of His heart in Romans.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, Romans 1:24 (ESV)

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; Romans 1:26 (ESV)

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. Romans 1:28 (ESV)

4. The Legalist heart is murderous

⁶ *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him. Mark 3:6 (ESV)*

- Their hardened hearts left them callous towards Christ miraculous healing.
- One would think that the Pharisees would have responded in faith after witnessing the supernatural healing.
- But instead we see them responding in sinful anger.

¹¹ *But they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. Luke 6:11 (ESV)*

They were angry because their authority had been publicly challenged.

James tells us the path way to conflicts , quarrel and even murder.

¹ *What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? ² You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. James 4:1-2 (ESV)*

Its starts with a desire in the heart for something that you cannot obtain.

Jesus public action had openly torpedoed their hypocritical legalistic system of works righteousness

Their whole lives were wrapped up in keeping these traditions, their sense of identity, self-worth, authority came from this legalistically works based system.

They trusted in **in their self-righteous** works and **rabbinical traditions** and shut their ears to the word of God and the Son of God.

Unable to refute Jesus' public arguments, Mark emphasis's that **they simply leave**. the synagogue, embarrassed and outraged.

If they could they would have killed Jesus there and then but Roman law would have prohibited it as well as Jesus's popularity.

They leave and immediately consult surprisingly with the Herodians.

The Herodians were an irreligious **worldly political party** that supported Herod's dynasty and by extension Rome.

They were viewed by fellow **Jews as traitors to their religious heritage** and would have normally been regarded by the Pharisees as arch enemies.

But these **2 groups join together** because they found a **common enemy in Christ**.

Here we see the marriage of **state and religion** coming together to plot to kill Christ.

Modern day example would be radical Islam, which combines religion and politics and are known for killing especially followers of Christ.

The Pharisees hated Christ because He openly opposed their traditions.

The Herodians hated him because his popularity among the people made him a potential threat to Herod and Rome.

For different reasons both groups rejected the Son of God and plot to destroy Him.

Just as Cain became angry, because God accepted the offering of Able and rejected Cain's offering, Cain decided to kill Able.

So these 2 groups plot to kill Christ.

For both the Herodians and the Pharisees, desired different things, and felt it threatened and so they contemplated murdering Christ.

A legalist heart is murderous because when it cannot have its way, it erupts into sinful anger, which people will plot and even scheme murder.

In summary

- We have seen that a legalist heart watches other and accuses them based on its own man-made standards, which they have set up as their ultimate source of authority.
- The Legalist heart is self-centered and more concerned about fulfilling its own traditions, its own standards and deeds, its own works-based righteousness, than Gods Word.
- The legalist heart is hardened initially by choice in time may even be hardened by God.
Its a heart condition that makes you deaf to God's Word, to Christ and the Gospel.
- The legalist heart is murderous because in essence when it cannot have its own way, it becomes sinfully angry and will even plot to murder.

So what is God's solutions to the problem of legalist heart.

1. The Bible records that even **though these legalist plotted to kill Christ** and eventually killed Christ, God worked out His greatest display of Glory, displaying His Holiness, His justice, His grace, His love by killing Christ on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for man's sins.

Keeping the law cannot save you since all it does is reveal how sinful you are and is a tutor to lead you to Christ.

³ For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Romans 8:3–4 (ESV)

2. It is through repentance and faith in the gospel, (Christ death and resurrection) legalist like Paul was transformed from a murderer to a Christ proclaimer.

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age

among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ **But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,** ¹⁶ **was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; Galatians 1:13–16 (ESV)**

3. It takes a divine act of God, based on His mercy, because of His great love to make you alive, by His Grace and to change your heart from a legalist heart to a heart that relates to God on the basis of the gospel. (Listen to this promise given to Israel)

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone (Hardened) from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. Ezekiel 36:26–27 (ESV)

Application

1. If you don't believe in Christ as your savior, If you think your good enough or can do some kind of good deed to be saved, then at the core of your being, you're a legalist.
Every time you rejecting the gospel and Christ, your choosing to harden your heart.
Every time you become sinfully angry to protect your human standards that you measure others by, in your heart you have an accusing murderous heart.
God is in His Mercy and love calling you this morning , commanding you , urging you to repent, to believe and trust in Christ alone so that he can change your heart of stone(your hardened heart) to a heart of flesh.
2. If you're a believer and you find that you have stopped relating to God based on the gospel, and are doing things to feel reasonably secure with God in your relationship, or when your had a bad day spiritually, you feel insecure.
3. The message is simple: preach to yourself the gospel again. Our relationship is secure because of what Christ did, not because of what we did. Or do.

In conclusion

4 characteristics of the legalists heart, reveal the need for a transformed heart

1. The Legalist heart is accusing
2. The Legalist heart is self-centred
3. The Legalist heart is hardened
4. The Legalist heart is murderous

WE all tend to be legalist to some degree or not.

That's why the gospel is both the answer for the unbelieving legalist and the believing legalist.

The cardinal error against which the gospel of Christ has to contend is the effect of the tendency of the human heart to rely on salvation by works. Spurgeon.