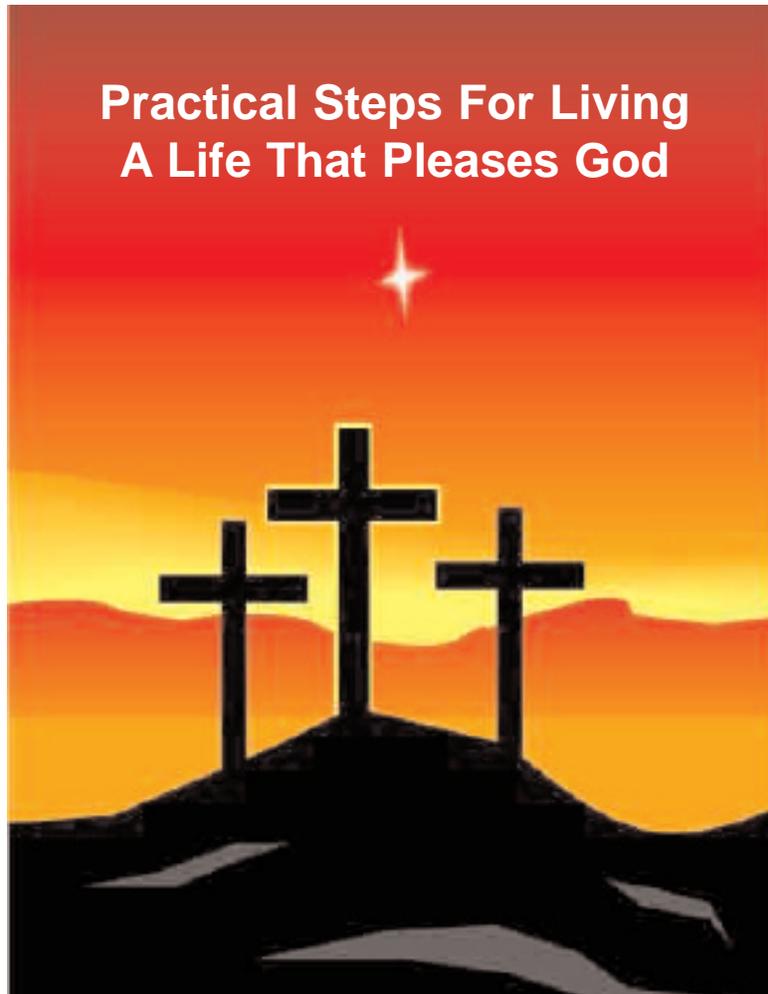


Lifebytes

17. Freedom In Jesus Video Series (Part 1) Certain Of What We Do Not See

Satan's Strategies (Part 3)



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Satan's Strategies (Part 3)

Let's continue investigating the strategies of our adversary, Satan. So many today who call themselves "Christian" are ensnared by one of two especially insidious traps.

The first of these satanic schemes is **self-justification**. Some refer to this as legalistic perversion. The other is **lawlessness**.

Deception: Self-Justification/ Legalistic Perversion

When you give in to the deception of self-justification, you're trying to EARN GOD'S ACCEPTANCE. Or, you FEEL GOOD ABOUT YOURSELF through meticulous rule keeping.

If you've been deceived by this satanic strategy, then you don't believe that Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is sufficient in our Father's sight. In your heart, you conclude you have to ADD TO Christ's work in order to be more acceptable to God. So self-justification is either doing things to gain your heavenly Father's acceptance, or rigidly adhering to God's laws to feel good about yourself.

Our Lord HAS given us commands to live by that are holy, righteous and good. But we can never gain acceptance in our Father's sight by trying to prove how well we're keeping those commands!

That effort becomes LEGALISTIC PERVERSION: transforming your trust-based relationship with Him into SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS by meticulously keeping His commands. In other words, you pervert the purpose of God's holy laws.

This is the strategy the devil used to trap many of the Pharisees. They were so deceived in their rule keeping that they added even more rules to God's commands, rules they themselves could not

keep. (Matthew 23:4). And they used their religious position to draw attention to THEMSELVES! (Matthew 23:5-7).

Do you remember what our Lord Jesus called these self-righteous, religious powermongers who perverted God's Word? "Hypocrites!"

SELF-JUSTIFICATION is at the heart of many faith communities today. You find it wherever people are deceived into trying to justify themselves by making themselves more pleasing to God through their own efforts.

The true fruit of this trap is that they look down on others who don't measure up to THEIR actions. Jesus would call these prideful people "Hypocrites!" as well.

The idea of FREEDOM in Jesus really frightens self-justifiers — because they are NOT totally dependent on what our Lord accomplished for them.

Deeply consider these two questions:

- In your innermost motivation, do you ever find that you're trying to EARN ACCEPTANCE from God?
- Do you ever try to negotiate with God? "Lord, if I do thus-and-such, will YOU do what I'm praying for you to do?"

Do you ever find yourself dismayed over the sins or foolish choices of people who KNOW they have NO RELATIONSHIP with our Lord? Then perhaps your memory is too short about your OWN life prior to His Spirit's indwelling, and you've forgotten just how much Jesus has done on YOUR behalf!

The idea of FREEDOM in Jesus really frightens self-justifiers — because they are NOT totally dependent on what our Lord accomplished for them.

Don't be deceived into thinking your actions make you better in God's sight than someone who has yet to encounter Him! If you AREN'T experiencing full acceptance by our heavenly Father, be careful that you aren't giving in to the deceit of legalistic perversion and self-justification.

The ONLY justification that's acceptable before our Father is that which Jesus made possible by His atoning death on the cross:

*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is **no difference**, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are **justified freely by his grace** through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Romans 3:22-24).*

If you give in to self-justification, you nullify Jesus' suffering on your behalf. The person who's struggling to do everything right in order to be justified by God is overcome by heaviness when he feels he's failed. He pedals twice as hard to make up for it! This self-powered rule-keeping is LEGALISTIC PERVERSION.

Legalistic perversion DISTORTS God's good laws and commands. Your heart is never at peace because you're always struggling to earn His favor through your own good works. You're convinced that salvation is based on your own efforts to DO good and to BE good.

Self-justification emphasizes personal performance rather than trust in God. And creating a crowd of rule keepers was NEVER our Father's intent when He established His laws.

God intended that His laws show us how much we need to TRUST Him and walk in union WITH Him in ways that are for OUR GOOD. The self-justifier

strives to keep God's standards WITHOUT relating in loving union with Him. He's doomed to fail, because relating to God means relying on the empowerment of God's grace through the Holy Spirit — and that takes humility and trust.

(See: Newsletter: 2001-09/10, "Making Level Paths For Our Families")

Our loving and holy God gave His people the Law to provide boundaries and freedoms that were good for His beloved sons and daughters. His commands showed them how to have loving, righteous relationships with each other and with Him.

This was the clear teaching of the Older Testament, which was carried on in the Newer Testament as well: Walking with God was a HEART issue, as binding for today's followers of Jesus as when it was first proclaimed.

*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with **all your heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be **upon your hearts** (Deuteronomy 6:4-6).*

Many Newer Testament passages describe the enduring connection between love and obedience. Listen to Jesus' promise:

If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23).

The perversion of the Law into rule-keeping was practiced by what we call the Judaizing Stream BEFORE the com-

ing of Jesus. Many Pharisees had long operated out of this stream. Instead of fully relating to God in loving trust, they turned to self-righteous rule keeping without relationship. And as we mentioned earlier, they added burdensome rules to God's laws, and demanded obedience that far surpassed what God had called for!

(See: Newsletter 1999-03/04, "Trust-grounded Obedience")

The key command of Jesus — love for God and love for others — was conspicuously absent. The Pharisees used rules and traditions to maintain their power and control over the people. And many congregational leaders today attempt to do the same thing through religious traditions and practices not founded on Scripture.

Many Pharisees were blind to the loving trust that embodied the relationship their ancestor Abraham enjoyed with God. Jesus GRIEVED over the hypocrisy of these religious leaders, and chastised them severely for putting such a burden on His people.

Not only were these religious leaders on the way to hell, but they were leading flocks of others down that path as well!

*And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you **load people down** with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them (Luke 11:46)*

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much **a son of hell** as you are (Matthew 23:15).*

The early followers of Jesus, as many are today, were constantly plagued by Judaizers who claimed to be Christians. Satan was scheming through them, trying to add to our Father's stipulations for embracing the Covenant that was made possible through Jesus.

This legalistic perversion infuriated Paul! Listen to his anguish as he addresses his beloved spiritual children in Galatia:

*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be **eternally condemned!** (Galatians 1:8).*

Paul's LOVE for these people motivates him to speak so strongly to them!

*You **stupid Galatians!** Who has put you under a spell? Before your very eyes Jesus the Messiah was clearly portrayed as having been put to death as a criminal! I want to know from you just this one thing: did you receive the Spirit by legalistic observance of God's commands, or by trusting in what you heard and being faithful to it? Are you **that stupid?** Having begun with the Spirit's power, do you think you can reach the goal under **your own power?** (Galatians 3:1-3).*

A lot of people today might cringe at Paul's tone and his harsh words, and even judge him as "unloving"! Yet it's that intensity of LOVE that moved him to write so strongly!

Paul is STILL speaking to a large segment of Christendom today. Don't let anyone entice YOU into legalistic perversion. God's law is NOT a burden of rules to be kept as an end in itself.

Paul already wrote his letter of warning. He won't be writing another one!

Just a reminder:

Our holy and loving Father intended to show us the path of righteous living so we could lovingly relate to Himself and to others.

But self-justification fans the flames of pride in your own abilities. And Satan knows that God resists the proud.

Don't let anyone entice YOU into legalistic perversion. God's law is NOT a burden of rules to be kept as an end in itself.

Remember, if you give way to legalistic perversion, you'll be tempted to compare YOUR success in rule keeping to others: *"The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector'"* (Luke 18:11).

HORIZONTAL COMPARISON is how you'll be tempted to measure your spiritual life. But what you'll discover in the end is that you're like the person who scrambled up a ladder only to find he'd placed it against the wrong house. Be careful!

Our book, *Christian Halakhahs*, shows you how to study and apply God's commands for yourself, your family, and your faith community while focusing on a heart motivation of love. We encourage you to read it and apply that which the Spirit confirms to your life. It will help you avoid Satan's scheme of legalistic perversion, as well as lawlessness, which we'll discuss shortly.

The Hebraic Stream Versus The Judaizing Stream

Let's discuss for a moment the HEBRAIC stream of Judaism. We've written and spoken about this elsewhere.

Like their Hebrew ancestor Abraham, the Hebraic stream chose to relate to God out of their LOVE FOR HIM. And BECAUSE of that love, they obeyed His commands.

Let's look at an example of the Hebraic stream compared to the Judaizing stream. You may be able to discern where YOU are in the two streams.

God commanded Moses,

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:9,10).

Say you and we were walking through Israel five hundred years before the coming of Jesus. We see a farmer who's just finished harvesting his vineyard, and didn't go back over it again for more grapes. We ask him, "Why didn't you go back over your vines one more time?" He replies, "Because the law commands me not to." This is the *rule-keeping* reply of the Judaizing Stream.

We go a little further and encounter another farmer who's just finished harvesting HIS vineyard. We ask him the same question. This farmer joyfully replies, "It's because of MY LOVE for my



heavenly Father. And because HE loves the poor and the alien, I don't glean my vineyard a second time." That's the *love-based* answer of the Hebraic Stream.

Like their Hebrew ancestor Abraham, the Hebraic stream chose to relate to God out of their love for Him. And because of that love, they obeyed His commands.

Deception: Lawlessness

We introduced you to the insidious snare of lawlessness in a previous Lifebyte. This is the strategy Satan is using among so many religious leaders today for whom **SIZE EQUALS SUCCESS**. The Spirit of Lawlessness is behind the unprecedented growth of mega-churches.

People are attracted in large numbers to congregations that **IGNORE GOD'S HOLINESS**. These religious leaders refuse to confront people to turn away from their sin. Their entertaining anecdotes may interest churchgoers, but no one is brought to conviction or repentance over violations of God's Word or sinful hearts.

Instead, lawless leaders convince people that they're accepted by God "just as they are" with **NO NEED TO REPENT**. So no one is confronted by his or her own sinful depravity. If you are trapped in Satan's scheme of lawlessness:

- **You won't own the *guilt of your sinfulness*.**
- **You won't come to a *full understanding of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on your behalf*.**
- **You won't respond to the Spirit's conviction to **TURN AWAY** from**

your sin and TURN TO your Father for the cleansing and reconciliation provided by the shed blood of Jesus.

- **You'll CONTINUE sinning. The religious system around you will back you, and Satan's scheme triumphs.**

Tragically if you're in a lawless faith community, you'll believe you're okay with God. But if you're abiding in unconfessed sin, you aren't experiencing biblical grace; you're being deceived into a **LICENSE TO SIN**.

Satan himself is the embodiment of lawlessness. By violating God's commands and ways, he was driven from heaven down to earth. And it's on earth that he enticed Eve to violate God's law, with Adam following suit. He's been doing the same with everyone else ever since.

Paul warns us that the spirit of lawlessness deludes those who choose to **BELIEVE** the work of Satan rather than **LOVE** the truth of God:

*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the **work of Satan** displayed in all kinds of **counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders**, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they **refused to love the truth** and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will **believe the lie**" (2 Thessalonians 2:8-11).*

There's a wealth of insight to be learned from this passage! The spirit of lawlessness is able to perform all kinds of counterfeit miracles. In the spiritually

adulterous time that we live in, so many who call themselves “Christian” run to conferences and “holy sites” where miracles and signs and wonders are promised.

If they could only have the eyes of the Holy Spirit to see the demonic trap they’re stepping into. They’re looking for the soulish gratification Satan offers rather than for the intimate relationship with God that’s based on love-grounded obedient trust. Jesus’s warning is echoing today: “*A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign*” (Matthew 16:4).

Many who call themselves “Christian” are perishing because they refuse to compare the religious teachings they receive with GOD’S WORD as their standard. They’d rather believe the deceits of Satan that appeal to their sin nature.

So God, in accordance with His Word, sends them a powerful delusion. Then they REALLY believe the lie they embrace.

This is happening among so many who complacently fill pews in large congregations. Their sin is never confronted, and they bask in the lie that God has no standards by which they should live. Pay attention to the warning our Father gives us through the Apostle Peter:

*Therefore, dear friends,...**be on your guard** so that you may not be **carried away** by the error of lawless men and **fall from your secure position** (2 Peter 3:17)*

Peter is warning believers that they CAN fall away if they give in to the error of lawlessness. The way for you to avoid this trap is to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus, and make sure your EVERY faith practice is based on the Bible.

Jesus declares that even those who perform mighty religious acts will be rejected at the Judgment Throne IF they’ve done them with hearts of lawlessness.

Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, only those who do what my Father in heaven wants. On that Day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord! Didn’t we prophesy in your name? Didn’t we expel demons in your name? Didn’t we perform many miracles in your name?’ Then I will tell them to their faces, ‘I never knew you! Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:22,23).

Many who call themselves “Christian” are perishing because they refuse to compare the religious teachings they receive with God’s Word as their standard.

Some of you may be thinking, “We read and hear from so many Christian teachers that we’re no longer under the law, but under grace.” Certainly our walk with Jesus is NOT dependent on how well we keep His commands, for by our Father’s grace we are saved through our ongoing trust.

(See: Newsletter: 1998-10 “The Almost Christian”)

But sadly, so many Christians have bought into Satan’s marketing scheme, the lie that the OPPOSITE of grace is the Law. The Scriptures reveal the truth:

The opposite of the Law is lawlessness.

God’s grace gives us the DESIRE and the POWER to keep His commands. Contrary to what the teachers of lawless-

ness proclaim, God's grace is NEVER an excuse to allow us to go on sinning.

Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law, but to give it full meaning. It's important that you grasp this! On one side, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had perverted God's commands into rule keeping. As we mentioned earlier, PRIDE motivated this snare.

On the other side are the lawless. Lawlessness thrives in REBELLIOUS HEARTS. Remember, it was Satan who led the rebellion in heaven. One-third of the angelic hosts followed his lead and were thrown down to the earth. In the same manner, demons want to entice as many as possible to break God's laws and rebel against His ways.

The opposite of the Law is lawlessness.

Recap:

Each of these two Satanic strategies—self-justification on one side, and lawlessness on the other — are two deadly paths that lead you AWAY from the narrow gate to eternal life.

Keep in mind that Satan is always on the prowl for ways to destroy the relationship of followers of Jesus with our heavenly Father.

He'll stop at nothing to hinder Christians from completing their pilgrimage to salvation. With deceptive strategies of **self-justification** and **lawlessness**, Satan has created two different highways that lead to hell.

For followers of Jesus today, it's THIS truth of love-grounded obedient trust in union with Jesus that enables us to relate to our Father as He's always desired.

At the same time, this heart motivation enables us to resist Satan's strategies. Then we can finish our earthly journey through the narrow gate, and rejoice in our Lord's welcome.



May none of us ever hear our Lord say, "***I never knew you! Depart from me.***" Each of us needs to not only recognize Satan's strategies. We need to know if we've been trapped by any of them.