

## John Chapter 5

Legalists measure spiritual growth against a yardstick notched incrementally by good works. Like rigid grade-school teachers, they rap their students' knuckles when they don't measure up.

### **Legalism-Let's Understand It**

#### **A. What is it?**

Legalism is conforming to a code of behaviour for the purpose of exalting self. Legalists make lists of dos and don'ts based not on Scripture but on tradition or personal preference-then they judge themselves and others on their performance. In a nutshell, it's "checklist Christianity."

#### **A Balanced Perspective**

Law and grace are opposite living standards. But this does not mean that there was no grace for those who lived under the Law (see Psalms 51;103).

Grace never promotes a do-as-you-please philosophy or a loose life of selfishness, sinfulness, and licentiousness. Romans 6: 12-18 confirm this act. The major differences, however, between living under the Law and living under grace lie with the recipients of the commands and their motivation to obey. Today, believers in Jesus Christ receive grace. Although the New Testament also contains hundreds of commands, we are motivated by love and empowered by the Holy spirit.

#### **Tradition of Sabbath**

Slipping in between the Old and New Testaments, the Pharisees amplified the Sabbath law by adding thirty-nine categories of unpermitted work, along with a number of tedious restrictions.

Let's turn to the story in John 5 that shows how they valued their traditional principles more than people.

#### **1. The need (vv1-5)**

The opening scene is piercing, even depressing. For thirty-eight years, this pathetic, bruised reed of a man has lain here in poverty and despair. Yet within him flickers a dimly burning wick of hope.

#### **2. The miracle (vv. 6-9)**

It was just such bruised reeds and dimly burning wicks that Jesus came to help and to heal (see Isaiah 42: 1-3). When Jesus saw him lying there, He said to him, "Do you wish to get well?"

#### **Walking away from Bethesda**

Just as distance was no barrier to healing the royal official's son, so time was no obstacle for Jesus to overcome in healing the lame man. Thirty-eight years

of misery, shame, embarrassment and despair... in a split second, that was all history. No matter how miserable your life has been— no matter how lame your spiritual life or how long you've been limping—Jesus can change it. The real question is: Do you wish to get well?

It's easy to become accustomed to life around the pool of misery. The peer group there certainly won't criticise you. People will make space for your pallet and then leave you to yourself—or even commiserate with you.

But maybe, after years of inner poverty, you're looking for a change, longing to be restored to everything God created you to be. If so, Jesus is the ticket out of that slum.

## **FOR DISCUSSION**

**In what ways do people today try to be healed spiritually outside of Christianity?**

---

**How would you respond to someone who said all sickness is a result of sin?**

---

**What was the result for Jesus of healing the man in verses 1-15?**

---

**Has your joy in God ever been squashed by someone's concern over religious rituals and traditions?**

---

## **THE CLAIMS OF THE CHRIST**

### **1. Background**

Preceding Christ's remarkable claims was the miraculous healing of a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years.

### **11. Discourse**

In the calm eye of this gathering storm of criticism and treachery, Jesus begins a discourse that is life-changing in its implications.

#### **A. General answer (vv. 17-18)**

Replying to the Pharisees' accusations, Jesus makes some amazing claims, the first of which is general in nature. "My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working." (v.17).

#### **B. Specific claims (v.19-30)**

**1. "I am equal with God" (vv.19-20).** Throughout the passage, Jesus never refers to God generically as our Father.. It is always *My* Father or *the* Father (see vv.17,19). In doing so, He claims a unique relationship with God.

**2. "I am the giver of life! (vv.21,16).** An example of the "greater works" in verse 20 is given in verses 21 and 26. To assert His equality, Jesus claims to have the same power the Father does over the dead. This statement comes from the germinal seed of truth buried in John's prologue, stating that "in Him was life" (1:4).

**3. "I am the final judge" (5:22-23)**

Jesus next delivers perhaps His most striking claim thus far: "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgement to the Son." (v.22). Most people mistakenly believe that God the Father is the final judge of humankind. But this verse, along with many others in the New Testament, indicates that Jesus will be the judge (see Acts 10:42; 2Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 4:1).

**4. "I determine everyone's identity" (John 5:24)**

Not only does Jesus claim to be the judge, He claims to be the ticket out of the courtroom for any who stand guilty.

**5. "I will raise the dead" (John 5: 25-29)**

In another dramatic "hear ye, hear ye" announcement, Jesus gives us some of the Bible's clearest information regarding resurrection.

**6. "I am always doing the will of God" (John 5:30)**

As a shadow does not move on its won initiative, so Jesus moves only in cadence with the Father's footsteps.

**FOR DISCUSSION**

**In what ways is Jesus equal with the Father?**

---

**What terms are used to show the kind of relationship between the two? How does this relate to John 1:1 and 1:8**

---

**What claims does Jesus make about himself in vv.22-24?**

---

**What is the promise in v.24?**

---

**When does someone start to possess this promise?**

---

**Who has the right to judge another person (John 5:22, 27)?**

---

## WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENSE

### 1. Bearing Witness: The Law

In His defense, Jesus makes a startling statement. "If I alone bear witness of Myself, My testimony is not true." (v.31). Jesus does not mean that His claims are false, only that His testimony alone would not be valid in a court of law.

### 11. Hearing the Witnesses: Their Testimonies

In John 5:32-47, the Lord appeals to five witnesses in His defense.

**A. Witness number one:** God the Father. (v.32)

**B. Witness number two:** John the forerunner. Jesus next calls John the Baptist to the witness stand.

**C. Witness number three.** Jesus' own works. The defense now moves from verbal to visual evidence. Verse 36 of chapter 5 presents Exhibit A.

**D. Witness number four:** the Scriptures. "You search the Scriptures" (vv.329-44).

**E. Witness number five:** Moses (John 5: 45-47)

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**How does Jesus use their interest in food to illustrate what He wants them to understand?**

---

**What are the similarities and differences between "manna" and "the bread of life" (v.35).**

---

**What claims does Jesus make in verses 35-40?**

---

**How is the "bread" He gives greater than that of Moses? (vv32,49).**

---

"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life" (John 5:39 NIV). These words of Jesus are every bit as relevant today as they were when He first spoke them, aren't they?

Do you ever get the feeling that many of us Christians today are more interested in becoming Bible students rather than disciples of Christ? We wind up studying the road but never following it to Christ. We underline it, memorize it, paraphrase it, and quote it at people. We take its words apart and put them back together again. We say, "The Bible saves!" But it's really not the Bible that saves; it is Jesus Christ who saves.

It is Jesus who atones for our sins, Jesus who forgives us, Jesus who gives us eternal life, Jesus who guides us by grace. If we miss Him, as the Jewish scholars did in Jesus' days on earth, we miss the whole message of His Book.