

How To Be Happy 04
Deal With Legalistic Attitudes
By Bill Denton

INTRODUCTION

A. We've been talking about how to be happy

1. Happiness is not all that easy to understand – some people are happy who have no apparent reason to be, and others are unhappy who have every reason to be happy
2. Get your perspective on right
 - a. walk by faith not by sight
 - b. seek things above not things on earth
 - c. make eternal things your goal
3. Three keys to happiness
 - a. learn to elevate others
 - b. learn to admire others
 - c. learn to be grateful

B. One more lesson in this series, and I want to talk about one of the most destructive attitudes or ways of thinking – something that can kill every positive emotion

1. It goes by various names, but I'm going to refer to it as "legalism"
2. Dictionary.com
 1. strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence, to law or prescription, esp. to the letter rather than the spirit.
 2. *Theology* .
 - a. the doctrine that salvation is gained through good works.
 - b. the judging of conduct in terms of adherence to precise laws.
3. It's hard to get complete agreement on exactly what Legalism is
 - a. Legalism is not "doing what is right"
 - b. Legalism is a strict adherence to the idea that a person's performance level is what makes them acceptable to God (and more importantly, acceptable to us)
 - c. Legalism almost always seems to be a system of criticism and judgment of others rather than self (though that is not completely true)

C. Baseline problems with legalism

1. It sets up an unreasonable standard that others are judged by
2. It creates unrealistic expectations guaranteed to produce disappointment
3. It causes a person to see only personal failure, or failure in others
4. It fosters a negative, critical, point of view that is seldom satisfied

I. HOW TO KNOW WHAT WE'RE LOOKING AT

A. Galatians 2:11–14 (NAS) — 11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

1. Peter (even Barnabas, Mr. Encouragement), gave in to what other people were going to think, so he quit eating with Gentiles and hung out with Jews
2. Paul condemned this behavior because it was wrong
3. Right and wrong is not determined by what other people think!

B. 2 Timothy 1:8–9 (NAS) — 8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity,

1. The Bible is as clear on this as it can be – your salvation and calling is not based on your works, but according to God’s purpose and grace granted to us in Christ Jesus
2. But there are countless Christians who seem to think that their own salvation, and especially the salvation of others, is based on how well they perform – how “good” their works are
3. The reason this doesn’t work is that sets up an impossible standard
 - a. does God want you to do good works – absolutely, that’s not in question
 - b. does God expect you to be saved because you’re so great – NO!

C. John 9:13–17 (NAS) — 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who was formerly blind. 14 Now it was a Sabbath on the day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also were asking him again how he received his sight. And he said to them, “He applied clay to my eyes, and I washed, and I see.” 16 Therefore some of the Pharisees were saying, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” But others were saying, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And there was a division among them. 17 So they said to the blind man again, “What do you say about Him, since He opened your eyes?” And he said, “He is a prophet.”

1. The Pharisees couldn’t even be happy with a miracle!
2. It didn’t fit with their traditions, so it couldn’t be the work of God

II. WHY ARE SO MANY MODERN DAY CHRISTIANS SO UNHAPPY?

A. They're busy being the enforcers of other people's faith

1. Over the years, I don't know how many people have talked to me about what somebody else was or was not doing
 - a. years ago, people were upset with me because I wasn't preaching sermons about what people were doing in California – never mind we lived 3,000 miles away!
 - b. we have a traditional practice of criticizing our religious neighbors
 - c. one of the religious papers that was once printed and distributed among our brethren was called The Heretic Detector
 - d. one reason I quit reading most all our brotherhood papers is because almost all have a “witch hunt” mentality

2. I promise you, these are seldom happy people – they're too unhappy with the world, the church, sometimes even themselves

B. They're caught up in a system of unreasonable standards

1. We need to be able to make a distinction between what is ideal and what is real

2. **1 John 2:1–2 (NAS)** —
 - a. 1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.
 - 1) that's the ideal, brothers and sisters
 - 2) it's exactly what God desires for each of us
 - b. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.
 - 1) here's the real – you're not perfect, and won't be until Jesus comes and takes you to heaven
 - 2) make allowances for mistakes and failure – for sin
 - 3) if you don't you're going to be awfully unhappy
 - 4) if you believe that God will keep on helping you even when you fall flat on your face, that will be the sweetest news you can hear – and I think it will help you be happy though may cry the bitterest tears of repentance

C. They're held prisoner to guilt and the too-real memory of sin

1. Today we're told that guilt is not a good thing, so we try strange things
 - a. we deny we've got anything to be guilty for – except our conscience keeps bugging the daylights out of us
 - b. we repress or suppress our guilt, stuffing our feelings deep inside, but you can't escape the truth that can wake you in the middle of the night

2. **Mark 2:9–12 (NAS)** — 9 “Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven’; or to say, ‘Get up, and pick up your pallet and walk’? 10 “But so

that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the paralytic, 11 “I say to you, get up, pick up your pallet and go home.” 12 And he got up and immediately picked up the pallet and went out in the sight of everyone, so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, “We have never seen anything like this.”

- a. this is the passage about the paralytic who was carried on a stretcher to be healed by Jesus
 - b. Jesus had told him, “Your sins are forgiven”
 - c. it caused an uproar – “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”
 - d. Jesus asked which was easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven,” or to say, “Take up your pallet and walk”
 - e. So he healed the man to demonstrate his ability to forgive sins
 - f. question – while the man carried his pallet back home, did he start to doubt whether he was actually walking?
 - g. If not, then why do we question whether we’re forgiven?
3. Drop your guilt at the cross of Jesus and move on – be happy in the knowledge the blood of God’s son has washed you clean

D. They’re so focused on themselves, they can’t see God or his Son

1. Listen to the things church members fuss and fall out about
 - a. most of the time, it’s all about what one person likes or dislikes as opposed to what somebody else likes or dislikes
 - b. we recently had a discussion that basically related to worship style especially as it relates to singing
 - 1) here’s my question I put to our song-leaders: where in the Bible do we get song-leaders and worship styles
 - 2) answer: it’s not there – so evidently God didn’t think it was all that important
 - 3) the real truth is that if the only worship that makes you happy is worship measured by your standard, then I doubt you’re ever going to be very happy
2. We employ those unrealistic standards against one another and create reasons to not have fellowship with one another, or put a crack in the unity of the congregation
 - a. I don’t know anybody who gets happy about that
 - b. it’s a sure-fire prescription for unhappiness

CONCLUSION

A. Ephesians 4:25–32 (NAS) — Here's a passage that can create happiness for all
25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his
neighbor, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry, and yet do not sin; do
not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not give the devil an
opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor,
performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to
share with one who has need. 29 Let no unwholesome word proceed from your
mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of
the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. 30 Do not grieve the
Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let
all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you,
along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each
other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

B. Invitation