Liberty and Legalism
Introduction

From the initial interaction of God with humanity, there have been expectations communicated by God for humans to obey. Humanity differs from all other creatures in one essential point – God created Adam in the image of God. This *imago Dei*, however damaged by the fall, gives every person reason and morality. Thus he cannot escape ethical responsibility. This is the theological basis for moral conduct.

Human experience affirms this, for the questioning of right and wrong is a universal experience, however different the answers may be. The different answers are the result of the distortion of sin. John noted that the Logos gives light to every man who comes into the world (John 1:9). Paul spoke of a law written in humans' hearts (Rom 2:15). There is a sense of moral responsibility in every person in that each person knows the righteous judgment of God (Rom 1:32). This is witnessed to by the conscience (Rom 2:15, Gentiles "shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.").

Definitions:

Legalism 1: The obedience to a code of ethics and conduct to produce salvation.
Legalism 2: The obedience to a code of ethics and conduct to produce sanctification.
Standards: The means by which we apply the truths of Scriptures to our current situations.

Our Problem: The charge against Fundamentalism of Legalism is too often a valid one: our people follow the standards we have laid down for them, too often with no or little understanding of why.

Our Challenge: To develop in the lives of our people a methodology of continually applying the truth of Scripture to events and circumstances which constantly confront us, and to establish a means by which we can develop a biblical response to those situations, and to do so without becoming 21st century Pharisees.

Legalism

Legalism: using law-keeping to make myself righteousness; I use my works to secure, maintain and enhance God's attitude toward me.

The Pharisees are an example of how some religious groups have dealt with the problem of what a believer must do to be holy.

Seyag "fences"

Gezerot, "fill in the gaps"

Matt 15:1-3 is one of many confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees because of the *seyag* and *gezerot*.

Standards

At the coming of Christ expectations changed – Matt 5

Murder –

Adultery –

Divorce –

Oaths –

Revenge –

Hatred –

Applications

Culturally driven

Biblically based

A Simple Methodology

Identify the problem to be solved

Collect all the relevant data

Identify the clear teaching of Scripture

Identify any theological implications

Identify the cultural response to the problem

Development an initial rough draft

Create the final version of the standard

License

What is License?

Jude 4 –

License is lawlessness.

Two sources:

Disobedient Christians

Hermeneutical difficulties

Laws versus commandments

Law has a penalty; a command does not.

You are walking down the sidewalk. When you cross the street, you are confronted with a wooden fence, actually a wooden wall, next to the sidewalk. There is a hole in that fence, with a sign above it that states, "Under no circumstances is anyone to look through this hole!"

What is your natural response?

Liberty

      Liberty understands

      Liberty recognizes

      Liberty focuses on

What Christian Liberty is not (Gal 5:13-16):

Christian Liberty is a subset of Soul Liberty.

Soul Liberty

Political	Personal	Ecclesiastical
Religious Liberty	Freedom of Conscience	Christian Liberty

A Way to Think: Precepts, Principles and Preferences

To clarify the areas in which Christian Liberty may be applied, let me suggest that the Christian's actions be placed into four broad categories: explicit precepts, implicit precepts, principles, and preferences.

Explicit Precepts

"Explicit Precepts" are the clear commands of Scripture, those actions which must be done or conversely which are clearly prohibited.

Implicit Precepts

The implicit precepts of Scripture are the logical conclusions of the explicit teaching of Scripture

Principles

General Commands

A succint statement of a universal truth

Application

Example

Preferences

No Biblical basis

Preferences should never be a basis for non-fellowship.

Categories for Fellowship and Separation

	Explicit Teaching of Scripture	Implicit Teaching of Scripture	Principle Drawn from Scripture	Preference
Biblical Statement	The Bible undeniably states	The logical conclusion from the data of Scripture	The general teaching of Scripture	In my humble opinion
Basis	Clear teaching	Clear interpretation	Interpretation	Immaterial
Position	Orthodoxy; tightly held conviction	Beliefs; conviction	Principles	Opinions
Importance	Absolutely Essential	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Example	Giving to the Lord's work	Tithing	Giving more than we think we can	Giving to the Building Fund
Example	Salvation by Faith	Church membership after salvation	Every believer should be a member of a local church	Right hand of Christian fellowship for new members
Practice	Total Obedience	Obedience	Optional	No Obligation
Denial	Heresy or Willful Rebellion	Significant Disagreement	Disagreement	Not worth Discussing
Believer's Response	Avoid, Discipline, Oppose, Denounce	Avoid, Oppose; perhaps discipline and denounce	Disagree	Discuss
Biblical Response	Separation Required	Separation Recommended	Separation Possible	Separation not Recommended or Required
Level of Fellowship if Denied	None	Limited	Possibly Limited	Unlimited

Striking the Balance
Romans 14:1-17; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Christian Liberty becomes evident in the areas of Principle and Preference

There are several important issues here

Paul is discussing our relationship to a **weaker** brother, not to a **disobedient** brother

These issues are not addressed in Scripture and thus are areas of Christian Liberty

The believer is accountable to God, not to other believers

"Do not offend your brother"

Liberty, Not Rights

Conclusion

Some acts, themselves neutral, can become either right or wrong because of other principles in Scripture which come to bear upon the specific situation.

1 Cor 8:1

While some activities may thus be seen to be morally neutral, each of these can become right or wrong because of an underlying motivational factor.

Governing principles for liberty

Use liberty when it is profitable, not merely convenient.
Use, but do not abuse the world – Jn 17:11, 16, 18

Do not use liberty for your own gratification.
Enjoy, but do not love the world – 1 Jn 2:15-17

Use liberty to benefit others first.
Never hinder the growth of another Christian – 1 Cor 8:13

Do all to the glory of God – 1 Cor 10:31

Follow Paul's example – 1 Cor 11:1

Actions + Academics   =   Intellectual Do-gooder

Actions + Attitude   =   Ignorant Do-gooder

Attitude + Academics   =   Arrogant Intellectualism

Academics (Knowing) + Attitude (Being) + Actions (Doing)   =   True Spirituality