

# Between Legalism and License

by Richard E. Bieber

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying on the Narrow Road of discipleship, avoiding the dangers of Legalism and License, and trusting in Jesus to guide us.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 7:13, Matthew 11:29, John 14:6, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 3:1

**Topics:** "Legalism", "Christian Liberty"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the two dangerous roads that veer off from the Narrow Road of following Jesus: Legalism and License. Legalism leads to a loveless, cold, and dark path where people become trapped in a merciless prison of rules and regulations. On the other hand, License offers a false sense of freedom and leads to aimless wandering, spiritual indulgence, and isolation from the Body of Christ. Bieber emphasizes the importance of staying on the Narrow Road with Jesus, trusting Him alone, and abiding in His words to avoid being misled by false Christs and to find true rest for our souls.

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## Transcript

Jesus said to him, "I am the Way and the Truth, and the Life;

no one comes to the Father but by me."

Praise God that we never have to walk the Narrow Road alone. Our Lord goes before us to show us the way,

to encourage us,

to comfort us,

to warn us of things we need to know.

If our eyes are on Him, we can't go wrong.

"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

But there are moments when we seem to get preoccupied with ourselves and our own affairs, when we start taking for granted the One who goes before us with the scars of His Cross in His hands. Our eyes begin to rove off to the left and right and we begin to imagine strange pleasures waiting for us in one of those grassy groves, and to picture terrible dangers up ahead on the Narrow Road.

Suddenly we are tempted to take one of two roads branching off to each side. On each road is a false Christ who seems much more appealing than the nail-scarred Christ on the Narrow Road.

The false Christ says, "Come, this road is the answer to your desire. This road will give you the security you're looking for."

The road to the left is called Legalism, and the false Christ who beckons you to follow it is very clear-cut. He has an answer for everything. And the people who travel this road are all very sure of themselves.

- They know what they're doing.
- They know where they stand.
- They know exactly how to go about everything.

"Ah, at last I've found it! I've found the road where everything's clear, where it's all down in black and white. All these years I've been floundering and now at last I've found clear-cut answers."

But, as you travel along this road, where everything seems so clear, you notice that the walls on each side of the road become higher and higher as you go along. Pretty soon you no longer see the sun. You're at the bottom of a canyon of gloom. People take on the pallor of death.

- Their jaws are set.
- Their eyes are dull.
- Their voices are monotonous.
- Their steps are heavy.

They seem to be praying, but they're merely adhering to regulation # 17 which says you must put in so much time in prayer. And the ones who are reading their bibles are obviously performing a chore. They're not feeding on the Living Word of God, they're carrying out regulation # 31 which requires so much time spent in the Word.

Over here is a little group singing songs and praising the Lord- the same songs and the same words of praise they use up there on the road of life, but here it's only regulation # 27 which requires attendance at fellow-ship.

From time to time you see men and women who appear to be ministering to others but there is no warmth in what they're doing. They're merely following the letter of the legal code.

How many people who start out on the road of discipleship, walking in the power of the Spirit, in the footsteps of the living Christ, let themselves get sidetracked into this canyon of legalism!

- Driven by this lust to have an answer for everything.
- Driven by this craving to have a club of Law to beat their brothers and sisters with.

The farther we travel this road of legalism, the higher the walls become, the darker our path, the colder the atmosphere, until even the false Christ who urged us on melts into nothingness and we find ourselves in a hopeless, loveless, merciless prison.

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now ending in the flesh?"

If there is anyone reading this who is stuck in the canyon of legalism face it, admit it, and believe that the same Christ who first made you to know God's grace will show you the way back to the road of Life.

But there is another road that leaves the Narrow Way and veers gradually off to the right. It is the road of License - a road where there are no limits,

no disciplines,

no absolutes.

The false Christ who beckons you to follow this road speaks with great tenderness and assurance. He quickly puts your conscience to sleep and wraps your mind in the delusion that you are just a wonderfully inspired person.

"The Lord showed me that I may do this."

"I have a peace about doing that."

"I don't care what anyone says, I'm not listening to what man says, I'm listening to God."

- What God?

The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who taught His own sinless Son obedience through the things which He suffered?

The God before whose glory the angels bend their dazzling faces?

The God who said, "Let there be light" and there was light?

Did that God give you license to do your own thing?

As you travel this road of License, it gets wider and wider until it is not a road at all. You notice that the people are going in many different directions.

- There are those who are pursuing spiritual experiences.

- Others are busy asserting their new-found "freedom" by indulging their flesh to the limit.

- Others are into the latest Revolution.

- Others are sitting on the ground with their backs propped against rocks staring into space. They've tried everything and now they don't know what to do.

There are whole fellowships of believers that are drifting down this road - heading for that wilderness where no compass on earth can find North.

It all starts with the fallacy which believes that the Spirit will show me something that He shows to nobody else. That my private inspiration is valid even if no other man or woman of God bears witness to it. The minute you buy that, you're on your way down the road of License and soon you'll be using God as an excuse to do anything you want.

Notice the Holy Spirit didn't tell Paul alone that he was to be sent out as a missionary. The Holy Spirit told a group of godly men. And Paul wasn't sent out alone - he was sent out with Barnabas.

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," not license to do anything you please.

Liberty from fear, sin, guilt, to obey God's will.

God's will is to fit in with God's program in the Body of Christ. Any Spirit that inspires you to move away from the rest of the Body, or to deviate in the slightest way from the Cross of Christ is coming from the Pit.

If you should find yourself on this road of License. If the inspiration you are getting is taking you around in circles farther and farther away from the Cross, admit it and cry out to the living Christ, who has those scars in His hands, to bring you back to the road of Life.

I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life;

no one comes to the Father but by me

Not many ways to the Father - there is only one way. Not many truths that are equally good - there is only one truth. And though there are many roads that claim to be life, all roads end in death save one, Jesus Himself.

Surely we should be able to tell the difference-betweenÂ these false Christs that try to lure us off the track and the true, crucified, and risen Son of God. What kind of God would this be who would allow us to become misled when we truly desire to follow His beloved Son?

- If we ask our Father for bread, we're not going to get a stone.

- If we ask for a fish, we're not going to get a serpent.

And, if we cry out to the living God for help in knowing and following the one He sent to this earth to save us and redeem us from death, He will give us His Spirit and will open our eyes to see His Son clearly.

Note, there is only one thing we need to see clearly.

- Not rules and laws.

- Not visions about the future.

- Not mysteries about our own souls, or other people's souls.

- Not secrets of the universe.

One thing we need to see clearly, all the time: Jesus Himself.

And we will see Jesus clearly if, as the Spirit reveals Him, we trust Him.

Don't trust your knowledge of the law.

Don't trust your grasp of spiritual mysteries.

Don't trust your experiences.

Trust Jesus. Put your life into His hands.

And once you begin to trust Jesus again, discipline your heart to stay with Him.

"If you abide in me and my words abide in you...."

"Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life."

That's why we read the Word.

That's why we pray.

That's why we gather together.

That's why we worship Him.

That's why we minister in Jesus' name.

Not to fulfill regulation # 17, or 31, but to stay close to Him who alone is our life.

And once you've drawn close to Jesus, get under the yoke with Him, the yoke of humility that obeys the Father even unto death.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me,

for I am meek and lowly of heart and you

shall find rest for your souls....."

You got sidetracked in the first place because of your pride and you'll get sidetracked again if you hang on to that pride.

- Give it up!

- Get under the yoke!

As long as you're under the yoke with Jesus, you'll stay on the Narrow Road. You won't be sidetracked. You'll reach your journey's end.

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

No one comes to the Father but by me."

"Follow me. Walk with me, and I will keep you on the right road."

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-e-bieber/between-legalism-and-license/>

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