

**LEGALISM VS. FAITH -- BOOK REVIEW**  
**By Frank Abel**  
**August, 2003**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Regardless of the label that others may attach to me, I believe in rules, in works, and in standards of conduct. This belief has nothing to do with 'earning' a reward for we are all the bond-slaves of Jesus Christ and thereby not eligible to 'earn' a reward. **"So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."** Luke 17:10

The author of 'Legalism vs. Faith' tries to classify all of us, no doubt himself as well, as being either a **'legalist'** or a **'faithist'**. From the characteristics that he assigns to them he creates 'straw men' and then goes about his work of confirming or refuting what in reality does not exist. At times and for these reasons, I found his book to be very confusing.

The author generalizes about the 'paradoxical' teaching of the master so as to conclude that true faith cannot develop through a cause-effect scenario. However, the scriptures teach the very opposite. **"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."** Rom 10:17 KJV. Faith, of Biblical quality has a cause and that cause is directly related to hearkening to the Word of God.

Faith is the effect of which the word of God is the cause. Abraham's faith was not without cause, for he 'believed' and trusted that God would perform what he had promised. Our faith similarly comes from a simple belief in the Word of God. Want to increase your faith? Read the cause, the word of God, and let it have its effect.

The author denies that reward seeking is in the way of righteousness. However the scriptures teach the opposite. **"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."** Heb 11:6

If God insists that we must believe he rewards diligent service, can it be wrong to so worship him?

Needless to say more, I have found a lot of problems with this book and wish to alert other readers to the fact that the author does not correctly present the truth of God's word. To see the evidence, please continue reading.

**BRANDING:**

One of the chief problems I have with the book is the 'branding' that is encouraged, with or without, the intent of the author. By the constant reference to the characteristics of 'the legalist' and 'the faithist' the reader is encouraged to

think of people we know through these descriptions. This was borne out in the article that appeared in the Christadelphian Tidings (Vol.66, No.7) entitled **“Confessions of a Legalist”**. The fact is however, that the ‘legalist’ and the ‘faithist’ we are introduced to in this book are completely fictitious: there is no brother or sister alive who has all, or even most, of these characteristics. Nevertheless, for those who are familiar with the book, when some of the characteristics attributed to the ‘legalist’ are evident, the label will follow.

There are brethren and sisters who live a life where details, yes even rules, are important, but who by no means hold the letter of the law above the spirit of its teaching (one of the definitions of a legalist). Similarly, there are brethren and sisters who see a cause and effect relationship for their faith, but who by no means believe that their salvation is obtained through good works alone (another of the meanings of a legalist).

Based on the reasoning of the author, if a brother tends to find rules more useful than another, he is likely to be refuted as being a ‘legalist’, and his position despised thereby, without respect to it being right or wrong. When branding like this occurs, it provides an easy-out for those looking for an escape, it stifles thinking, and quenches smoking flaxes.

Many issues that people divide over have at their root a term or two that have different meaning for those involved. Therefore, before ‘branding’ gains momentum it would be good to have an independent authority define a few terms. At least when non-Biblical terms like ‘legalism’ are injected into discussions about Biblical interpretation it is essential to provide a clear definition. No clear definition for *legalism* is given in the book *Legalism vs. Faith* and where attributes of legalism are introduced, no authority is cited. My dictionary (Webster’s Universal College Dictionary – 1997 Random House) definition of legalism states the following:

Definition 1: The strict adherence to law, or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.

Definition 2: The theological doctrine that salvation is gained through good works.

The legalism the author refers to appears to be defined in the author’s mind but, it is only conveyed to the reader through a number of contrasts with faith. Although the Bible does contrast ‘righteousness of the law’ with the ‘righteousness of faith’, it does not say that the opposite of faith is legalism. The opposite of faith (*Grk. Pistos*) is faithless (*Grk. Apistos*), and is used in the case of the unbelieving husband or unbelieving wife in 1Cor.7. Any connection between the faithlessness of these unbelievers and them also being ‘legalists’ would be completely arbitrary. Similarly, brethren and sisters who are inclined to use rules should not be thought faithless because they think rules are good and helpful. Branding is a horrible thing and not much different from the Pharisee, mentioned by the author, who had to classify every behaviour as right or wrong.

## CONJECTURE:

When a brother uses speculation to establish or strengthen his argument, it should caution the reader concerning the reasoning which is to follow. It is true that God purposefully made His Word hard to understand as a device to sort His creatures into the wheat and the chaff. However, it is also true that the Word of God is clear enough that speculation should never be needed to provide a key piece of one's thesis.

The author of 'Legalism vs. Faith' speculates that Eve in answering the serpent with the words, **"God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die"** **Gen 3:3**, added the words **"neither shall ye touch it"** of her own volition. Although the record attributes this comment to Eve alone, it does not confirm that she was the author of it. Just as reasonably, she could have been relating words that were also spoken to her by the elohim. Surely we would all agree that very little of the actual life of Adam and Eve is recorded anywhere. However, taking his cue from the words **"Touch not; taste not; handle not;" Col 2:21** the author sees Eve as being the first legalist. How sound is that Bible exposition?

First of all it is based on the conjecture that Eve alone was the author of these additional words and secondly, it would make the apostle Paul quite a legalist as well for he also says, **"it is good for a man not to touch a woman"** **1Cor.7:1**. Likewise, the apostle uses the expression **"touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"** to make a vital point about separation to the Corinthians (2 Cor 6:17).

By citing the case of these words of Eve, it would appear that the author was trying to fit a preconceived theory concerning legalism to the Bible rather than allowing the Bible to speak for itself. If Eve had added these words in the true style of a legalist, that is, in keeping the letter of the law, then she would have been less likely to have eaten it. The Apostle Peter, even after the ascension of Christ, retained his lifestyle concerning food, as he says, **"Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean"** (**Acts 10:14**). The author fails to show how Eve, even if she had legalistic tendencies, would have been more likely to eat of the fruit having determined not to touch it.

## RULES:

The author states, ***"Rules don't operate on our thinking, rules are worse than useless."*** (14)

He also states, ***"While we have asserted throughout this book that the New Covenant functions by faith, not laws, we would not want to imply this equates to anarchy. Neither do the three "Rs" of legalism – rules, rituals, and rewards – entirely lack utility."*** (167)

These two statements show the struggle that is going on in the author's mind. In the first statement he throws out the bath water and the baby, while in the second he goes out to retrieve the baby. There is an imbalance in the first statement that needs to be corrected as it flavours the majority of the author's work.

The Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 are a set of rules. To say that they don't operate on our thinking is to believe that they were given as a set of logic commands written in a programming language and intended only for robots. Doesn't the psalmist capture the truth when he says, "**But his delight is the law of the LORD, and in his law doth he mediate day and night.**" (Psalm 1:2).

Rather than teaching the reader that rules like the ten commandments are worse than useless, the author should have either made an exception or retracted his words. The rule, "**thou shalt not covet**" can and should operate on our thinking to remind us of God's standards in a world steeped in subconscious advertising. As long as people have not already ruined their conscience, the rule will testify to the righteousness of God's standards and call upon our will to submit.

God's rules are better than just useful because by meditating upon them our life can be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bears fruit in due season and whose leaf does not wither.

The author finally gets to a valid point about rules when he states, "**Christadelphian do rules tend toward the legislation of worthwhile activities: do the readings, attend class, go to meeting, serve the ecclesias, etc. Necessary activities all, but thinking that they are commands to be ticked off so that one pleases God reduces them to the works of the flesh.**" (157) It is not the making of rules therefore, that is bad, it is not the rules themselves that are bad, neither is the keeping of the rules bad, but ticking them off when they are kept in a self-righteous way, is bad. Now that admission is hardly consistent with the author's statement of page 14 of his book.

## **LAW OR FREE WILL?**

The writer says, "**We can't make a rule that says, 'You must be a willing giver'**" (95)

This is an interesting statement because that very rule was made by the Canadian government during World War II. In parts of Ontario our brethren who were conscientious objectors were told to sign a statement that they willingly gave \$20 per month to the Red Cross. My dad was one of those who objected to giving this money because he said that in all good conscience he could not say he would do it willingly. For him it meant falling below the ability of providing for his family. The Red Cross was obliged to include the word 'willingly' as they had

no power to demand it. Other brethren 'willingly' paid the money in order to avoid the hassle over refusal.

My experience has shown me that being a willing giver is achieved every time you give of your own volition. Being a cheerful giver is more difficult, sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't. Many times giving is a matter of a choice between two or more alternatives of which one alternative was the matter for which you were saving and the second became the one which was more expedient. At times like this, the call of duty is louder than the call of cheerfulness, but is nonetheless done purposefully, willingly, and not grudgingly.

## **DO RULES OPERATE ON OUR THINKING?**

The writer says, ***"Rules don't operate on our thinking, therefore, they miss the mark."*** (10)

Strictly speaking, it is correct to say that rules can't operate upon our thinking. Rules we don't know about, or that we don't understand, or we do not remember, cannot affect us – rules are not of themselves able to influence us at all. However, when our minds operate on the rules, many good things can start to happen. Even with a little thought one can come up with areas where thinking about the rules is an essential part of the process. Consider an example from the world of sport. In Canadian football, games are won or lost on how the players understand the rules and apply them in key situations. Stopping the clock by running out of bounds, for instance, gives a team precious extra seconds in order to come up with a big play. Again in football, a player can make a great play and gain sufficient ground to earn a 'first-down', however, if one of his team mates illegally blocked in the process, all is for nought. Football like many other sports teaches the players and spectators that it pays to know, understand and execute according to the rules.

Even the apostle Paul must have been familiar with this aspect of sport for he takes hold of that analogy and applies it to our spiritual life with the words, ***"And also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."*** (2 Tim 2:5) Yes, there are rules to be followed even in our walk 'in Christ'. Firstly, one must follow the rule of worshipping God in Truth as Jesus said, ***"Those that worship him must do so in Truth"*** (Jn.4:24). Those who have not been careful in this respect are likened to the workers of iniquity: ***"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."*** (Matt 7:22-23)

In Corinth, during ecclesial meetings the disciples didn't respect the principle of 'doing all to the glory of God'. When they allowed the Holy Spirit to work through them it was done in a way that brought confusion and dishonour.

In order to set things right, the Apostle Paul introduced rules of behaviour which when observed would bring honour to God (1Cor. 14).

## THE TESTIMONY OF JOB:

The writer says,

***“The three friends understood the same theology of suffering as did Job. All four believed in the classic paradigm of rules, rituals, and rewards. They all believed that if one did right, then God owed that person blessing now, in this life, for God rewards the upright and punishes the wicked. Wealth and well-being surely marked the upright.” (108)***

***“His criteria for righteousness is entirely self-created; he had become his own God” (110)***

***“Fully righteous, and fully devastated, Job sat in the ash-heap of his theology” (110)***

***“Job felt God owed him blessing, and when God delivered evil, Job judged God! (e.g. Job 10:2-7)***

But do these statements rightly represent the theology of Job? Where in the quoted section Job 10:2-7 does Job say that God owed him anything? Does not this section teach that Job was searching for an explanation from God? Had not Job already acknowledged, that apart from his (Job's) righteousness, God had a right to send evil. **“What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips.” (Job 2:10)**

The author himself acknowledges the Bible rule that faith without works is dead. So the works that Job mentions (Job 31) could be either the works of law-keeping or they could be the works of faith. The author has put no work into establishing, whether or not, they were the works of law-keeping, he just assumed it and condemned Job in the process. But what if the works Job refers to were the works of faith?

Consider a couple of the things that Job says he did in Job 31 and decide whether these are law-keeping works or the works of faith. In verse 1 he says, **“I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I look upon a maid?”** Is the mind-set represented by these words of Job just the result of law-keeping **“Thou shalt not commit adultery.” (Ex 20:14)** or is it more likely the outworking of his faith? **“That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” (Matt 5:28)** Bondage to the mindless routine of rule, ritual, reward, cannot explain Job's words. No, his words show an understanding well beyond the simple fact of law-keeping, they were the works of faith.

Job says, **“If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contended with me; What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that**

**made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?” (Job 31:13-15)** Does this reasoning sound like a man who is only interested in following the rules to get his reward? Or are these words expressing the attitude of the ‘faithist’ who looks for ways to serve his God?

The author would have us believe that Job was merely following rules for a reward, but the reasoning declares otherwise. Works are essential for those who approach God in faith. Job who lived prior to the giving of ‘the law’, amply illustrates that his works stemmed from his faith. The author takes his seat with those who wrongly condemned Job.

## **LEGALISM TAKES LOVE OUT OF THE EQUATION**

The author states:

***“When we introduce the expectancy of reward for doing right, we remove the possibility of love. We can no longer do good simply because it’s the right thing to do; we have the reward factor ever lurking to sully our motives.” ( 111)***

The author’s theory suggests that doing things for the sake of reward removes the possibility of doing it out of love. Since he did not cite a passage to support his claim this becomes another example of the wisdom of men contesting the statements of God.

The example of the Lord must always be the ultimate way to test a hypothesis. Did the Lord Jesus serve God out of love? Yes, certainly, for the scriptures say, **“This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13)**

Did the Lord Jesus lay down his life for reward? Yes, certainly, for the scriptures say, **“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb 12:2)**

In another place it says, **“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” (John 10:17-18)**

Did the apostle Paul believe one should serve God out of love? Yes, certainly, the Scripture says, **“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Gal 5:13-14)**

Did the apostle Paul serve God for reward? Again, a simple reference to the Scriptures shows us that he did. **“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give**

**me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (2 Tim 4:7-8)**

Can we serve God out of love and look to him for a reward at the same time? Yes, we can for the scripture states, **“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” 1 Cor 2:9**

The testimony of these Scriptures is lethal to the argument of the author. There may be many times that we do something out of feelings of gratitude alone and there may be many times that we do something because we know it's the right thing to do and consistent with our hope of being accepted at the Judgment Seat. Either motivation is right because they are consistent with the Divine Mind. Whether or not the action meets a human criteria, is unimportant.

## **LEGALISM WOULD CREATE AN IMPOSSIBLE WORLD**

In this section the author overstates his case to the exclusion of some vital teaching of the scriptures. He says,

***“Suppose that all blessing accrued to the holy, and the sinners received swift and certain punishment. So someone falls sick, you know they sinned. Someone cuts their finger making dinner; perhaps they just sinned a little. Someone's house burns – big, bad sin.” (111)***

One cannot immediately conclude that evil in our lives is a result of sin, simply because, there are other possibilities. That there are other possibilities is one of the main lessons in the book of Job. Evil that comes upon us may be the result of God putting our faith through the refining process, but it may also be because of our sins. The author mocks this latter possibility without fairly looking at the Scriptures involved. Consider the following passages:

**“In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.” (Deut 30:16-18)**

Could anyone in Israel at this time mistake the teaching of this passage? If you serve God you will be blessed, if you forsake his teaching you will perish. This type of thinking originated with God. God cannot and must not be faulted in what he has said.

**“And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. “And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses. “ (Num 15:32,36)**

Is this not an example of exact retribution? What is wrong about what God instructed the children of Israel to do?

**“ If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;” And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.” (Deut 13:6,10,11)**

Was this teaching of the Almighty not an example of exact retribution? Did it make the world an absurd place to live in? Certainly not, for if it was carried out, it made the world a better place to live in.

**“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.” (1 Cor 11:28-32)**

Paul's understanding of the reasons why some in the ecclesia were sick and even why some died was due to their lack of discernment concerning the breaking of bread. It involved the chastening of the Lord which he does out of love, that we might be partakers of his holiness. (Heb.12:5-11) So on what basis does the author quickly dismiss the idea that the burning down of one's house could not be related to their sin? – It may very well have been for that reason. On the other hand it may not have been the reason. In the light of the words of 1Cor.11:28-32 we should certainly give ample thought to the possibility of the relationship between sin and evil. Mocking the possibility publicly does not rightly represent our God.

Consider these two statements.

***“Job did not suffer randomly or maliciously. He suffered to show that life cannot hold any one-to-one correlation between sin and suffering, or rules and rewards” 112***

**“Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” John 5:14**

These two statements speak for themselves. Only one of them correctly expounds the attitude of God. Jesus is obviously strengthening the link between sin and disease, between 'continuing in sin' and 'a worse thing' befalling the sinner. It is not that all suffering is directly related to sin for he also said the following: **“Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:3)**

Consider the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

**“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.” (Acts 5:5)**

According to the author’s reasoning, this event should not have happened for it clearly shows a one-to-one relationship between sin and suffering, between rules and rewards. It would be far better that we come to the Bible to be taught about the righteousness of God and not with a preconceived idea of how God must act.

## **LAW OR FREE WILL (96)**

***“Once we make a rule, we have removed the possibility of free will from the equation. We have short-circuited love. We have killed motivation. We have replaced the New Covenant with rules, because we have gone back to the realm of behaviour. We have substituted the pseudo-righteousness of works.”***

***“If you have been told to do something, then you can’t think of doing something of your own free will.”***

Since he is the father of the faithful, let’s test this hypothesis with the example of Abraham. When Abraham was commended for his faith and subsequent works was he acting out of love, or in obedience to a command? Consider the following scriptures.

**“And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Gen 22:2**

**“But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.” James 2:20-24**

It is obvious from the first passage that Abraham was following a direct command of God. He chose to be obedient and do what God had instructed him to do. In his works, his obedience, he acted out of faith and was thereby fully justified. Since Abraham is the example to follow the hypothesis of the author is false and misleading.

## **THIS BOOK IS UNECESSARILY CONFUSING (149)**

In trying to illustrate that the New Covenant teaching is by paradox the author finds it necessary to illustrate what paradoxical teaching is and he states, ***“True paradox is a recursive statement that lives in a circular (that is, without cause-effect status, but only a continuing system) world, without beginning or end, that represents the infiniteness of our God and His***

*universe.*” It makes me happy to know that Jesus never said he was teaching by paradox, for his sayings are much easier to understand.

The author goes on to say, ***“Legalist thinking says, “I’m righteous because I don’t sin.”. Faithful thinking says, “I’m righteous because I acknowledge my sin. But this must be a confession from the heart, not a mechanical confession. Then I become righteous through faith, which makes me unrighteous again, because the righteousness of faith states that I’m unrighteous ...”***

What Bible statement is the author really working with here? Is he looking at the whole picture? Where would Christ fit? Consider the statement and ask yourself - by the author’s definition would Christ be a legalist or a faithist? If the statement does not fit Christ, it is not likely going to fit his disciples either.

### **SINS OF OMISSION**

The writer of the book says,

***“Can we be guilty of sin when we have done nothing wrong or even has a wrong thought? Absolutely yes, and the realization of this circumstance is a watershed issue in our maturity in Christ” (102)***

***“If you could have, but didn’t, then that’s an omission. The omission is what we haven’t grown up to in Christ. Now we’re getting at the main theology of sin in the New Covenant. It’s not so much what we’ve done amiss, but what we haven’t yet done or even thought of doing, but could be doing.” (102)***

***“The sin of omission, though, occupies an even larger domain than specific behaviours. It also includes failing to take steps to increase our faith. The greatest sin of omission lies not in the specific lack of any certain act or deed, it lies in our failure to become whom we ought to be in Christ” (103)***

What seems to be omitted in the writer’s work is Bible references. The Apostle John states, ***“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.” 1 John 3:4*** If sin has been committed, there should be a law that says so. In the light of what the Apostle has stated what could the author mean when he says, ***“sin is no so much what we have done amiss”?***

The Apostle James states, ***“Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” James 4:17.*** If a person knows he should have done something and didn’t do it, that is sin, it is also a sin of omission. But the author has greatly broadened sins of omission to include what “we haven’t even thought of doing, but could be doing”. That would put us all in a state of continual sin, for none of us could ever say that we are doing everything we possibly could be doing. In fact, by his definition, even when we are doing things in the Lord, we could have done other things possibly more important, we could have worked harder, we could have worked longer. Did we really need to stop for lunch? Did we need to stop for sleep? That reasoning, would bring a burden

of guilt down on us all. Why can't we satisfied with what the Word of God says and leave it there.

The Apostle Paul states, **“And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” Rom 14:23.** The context of the Apostle's remarks is found in verse 22 of the same chapter, **“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth” Rom 14:22.** The context then for “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” occurs when we allow ourselves to be involved in an action that condemns us.

The author, however, says: **“Sins of omission, in terms of the New Covenant, don't have a crisply defined category. Scripture says, “All that is not of faith is sin.” This means that we define sin in the context of faith, not law. Sin goes beyond breaking a commandment. It now includes failing to live according to faith; this emphasizes performance rather than avoidance. We have a view of sin that exceeds the scope of sin as defined by law.”(103)** This definition unwisely ignores the context in which it was given. The context is not about sins of omission, that is things we haven't even thought of, for the sin being referred to in this passage involved ignoring what was known to be right and carrying on anyways.

#### **AVOIDANCE:**

**“Believing that some things out there really are inherently sinful, avoidance strategies rank high for the legalist, and these require vigilant cataloguing and labelling. This is good, this is bad. Things, objects, people, activities become subject to ritual rejection. The Pharisees' avoidance agenda listed certain foods, clothes, work, houses, and so on. Our lists tend more to entertainment and educational choices, career goals, and only occasionally do we trivialize down to dress styles, facial hair, or holiday observances. Nonetheless, it's usually not too hard to find someone who's glad to tell us what evil to avoid, but its all in a vain attempt at creating holiness in the heart (Col.2:20-23). The faithist knows problems come from within, not from the environment (Mark 7:20,21). This fundamental first principle applies to daily life. No amount of avoiding can make him clean or give him a reward; he knows that he doesn't avoid anything for the sake of staying undefiled, and he carefully nourishes his spiritual growth through wise choices. The faithist also knows not to avoid something because it is evil, which it isn't, but only to involve himself in practices and activities that promote spiritual growth. We call this overcoming, not avoiding (Romans 13:10). You outgrow TV, for instance, rather than preach its evils – which might actually arouse people's interest in watching (Rom.7:8,9, same principal at work).” (155)**

The whole section under the title 'Avoidance' is reproduced above because this is a prime example of the author's bad advice. From what the

author suggests, he is against avoiding 'worldly entertainment' and that because it isn't evil. The reader is therefore, led to believe, we should not avoid entertainment. Any brother or sister in Christ, aware of the entertainment page in a newspaper ought to quickly see from the advertisement alone that most of what the world has to offer, if not all of it, is offensive to the spiritual mind. It is bad, it is evil. Who would want to be there?

The Apostle Paul stated, **“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret” Eph 5:11-12.** Has the author never experienced the fact of how the images of modern entertainment stay in the mind and war against the mind of the spirit? Is he prepared to sacrifice his children to the 'god of this world' by not restraining their desire to experience the worldly way? Is he really prepared to let them find their own way until they grow out of TV?

Similarly, what brother or sister in seeing what the world really wants from those pursuing a career, would not advise against, or at least caution young people against the evils to be experienced in that endeavour. **“Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.” Col 4:5** Does he not recognize the ladder of promotion in the working world for what it is? Does he not see the dangers of brethren and sisters working in a career with women and men so that they see more of someone else's spouse than they do their own? Is he not aware of the number of careers that are related to the development and production of munitions? Out of love for our brethren and sisters, we must continue to speak against the careers where we have witnessed brethren and sisters make shipwreck of their faith – yes, out of love!

Again what group of administrators of a Bible School would not consider putting boundaries on the clothing that brethren and sisters wear during swimming or during meals and classes? Does the author really think that all brethren and sisters get this right such that they would never offend their brethren and sisters? Is it right when a brother or sister who speaks to a person who is not suitably attired that his or her advice be rejected because that kind of reaction is legalistic thinking?

The author says, ***“The faithist knows problems come from within, not from the environment (Mark 7:20,21). This fundamental first principle applies to daily life. No amount of avoiding can make him clean or give him a reward; he knows that he doesn't avoid anything for the sake of staying undefiled, and he carefully nourishes his spiritual growth through wise choices.”***

The above statement wrests the scripture from its intended meaning. It is therefore, important to see what the Lord actually said on this occasion. He said, **“whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him”** and his remarks were qualified by that which **“goeth into the belly”**. The context of the chapter shows that the Pharisees were taking issue with the Lord's disciples not washing before they ate. The Lord was talking about what a person

eats, not what goes into his mind. Thoughts do not go into the belly but into the mind.

The author does not address a very important and connected point concerning defilement which is expressed by the Apostle Paul when he said, **“do not be deceived, bad company ruins good morals.” (1Cor.15:33 RSV)** What comes out of a man is related to what goes into his mind – the two are connected. The fact that we can be defiled by the company we keep is a consistent teaching of the scriptures. Lot found that out first hand. Dinah had a similar experience. Joseph stayed separate as much as possible. Moses pleaded with the children of Israel to keep separate from the people of the land. (Deut.7:3-6) On a number of occasions the Apostle Paul directed brethren and sisters to withdraw themselves from those who corrupted the Truth. (2Thess.3:6; 1Tim.6:5; Rom.16:17)

The author says, one ‘outgrows TV’. He does not explain what he means by ‘outgrowing’ but if he means he throws it into the garbage then he has spiritually grown to see its real worth. If he thinks one can master it and still watch it, then he joins a long list of brethren and sisters who have to relearn the depths of the deceit of the human heart.

## **IS IT POSSIBLE TO SEEK A REWARD AND REMAIN IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS?**

***“When we introduce the expectancy of reward for doing right, we remove the possibility of love. We can no longer do good simply because it’s the right thing to do; we have the reward factor ever lurking to sully our motives.” Pg.111***

***“So we can expect nothing immediate in return for our works of faith, knowing that we “will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14), provided we don’t do our works for the sake of receiving recompense, which would violate the motive of grace.” Pg.180***

These two statements appear contradictory. The first statement excludes the expectancy of reward outright on the author’s claim it would sully our motives and could thereby never produce love. The second statement is quite a modification of the first, whereby we are only to exclude immediate rewards and not those which we have been promised at the return of the Lord.

Do these remarks square with the scriptures? Do the rewards God offers to the righteous sully our motives? If they do, it is of no consequence to God for the Lord stated, **“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” Luke 12:32.**

The above statements of the author do not come from the Bible. He apparently in belief of the above statement, wants the reader to accept that if we think of an immediate reward for what we do we are not working out of faith. Now the question has to be asked, how immediate is immediate? How far must the reward be removed from the act in order to qualify as a work of faith? Maybe

you can see the workings of a legalist mind in asking this question, but I see the author's view to be at odds with what I read in the scriptures.

Consider the following reference:

**“Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.**

**And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.” Mark 10:28-30**

Here the Lord promised Peter a hundredfold, now, as a reward for discipleship. According to ‘Legalism vs. Faith’, the Lord got it wrong for he offered an immediate reward to Peter and the other disciples for following him. Did the Lord not know that offering a reward would ‘sully’ their motives? Or has the author of ‘Legalism vs. Faith’ got it wrong?

Consider this passage from the book of Haggai:

**“Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomegranate, and the olive tree, hath not brought forth: from this day will I bless you.” Hag 2:18-19**

The Lord challenged the people of the land to note the blessings that would occur from that very day onward, that is, if they would be obedient and get down to the work of building the temple. Was the Lord wrong in offering this reward? When obvious Biblical references are overlooked, the work of the author of ‘Legalism vs. Faith’ should not be taken seriously.

**“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” Luke 18:28-30**

Consider the following passage:

**“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” Heb 12:11**

It is essential that people take chastening seriously, and it should be an experience of all the potential sons of God to experience firsthand the peaceable fruit of righteousness, the present day reward of genuine service rendered through the learning achieved through chastening.

## **IN CONCLUSION:**

The Lord made it very clear that the Pharisees had got it wrong.

**“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” Matt 23:23**

There is no question that the Apostle Paul was very disturbed by those who abandoned faith and went back to keeping the Law of Moses.

**“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Gal 2:16**

As Peter remarked to all assembled at the Jerusalem Conference none of them could keep the law as God had set it out, and continuing to try to do so was to fight against God.

**“ Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Acts 15:10**

It is clear that salvation was not offered to us based on our righteousness, but on God’s mercy and grace which he provided through Jesus Christ.

**“But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” Titus 3:4-7.**

It is also true, that we must produce ‘works’ to accompany our faith and attest to the fact that it is genuine.

**“Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” James 2:24.**

These are the straightforward teachings of the Scriptures, what do we need more?

Frank Abel