

## Legalism Exposed

### John 5:1-18

	Recipients	Motivation
<b>Under Law</b> (not for today)	<i>The Israelites</i>  Over 600 stated commands found in the Mosaic Law	Basically: “I have to”  Prompted by <i>fear</i> . . . empowered by the <i>flesh</i>
<b>Under Grace</b> (for today)	<i>Believers in Jesus Christ</i>  Hundreds of equally specific principles and commands found in the New Testament	Basically: “I want to”  Prompted by <i>love</i> . . . empowered by the <i>Holy Spirit</i>

#### Observation:

1. The need presented. John 5:1-5

*<sup>5</sup> Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. <sup>2</sup> Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. <sup>3</sup> Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. <sup>[4]</sup><sup>5</sup> One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.*

2. Jesus’ response. John 5:6

*<sup>6</sup> When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”*

3. The Man’s response and Jesus’s answer. John 5:7-8

*<sup>7</sup> “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” <sup>8</sup> Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”*

4. The outcome. John 5:9

*<sup>9</sup> At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,*

5. The religious leaders in true form. John 5:10

*<sup>10</sup> and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”*

The religious leaders’ response to Jesus’ miracle epitomizes the harsh attitude of legalism. Refusing to acknowledge the wonderful miracle, they instead insisted on indicting the man who had been healed for breaking the Sabbath. John sets up a

[Adapted from Insight from Living: Searching the Scriptures Study](#)

classic literary contrast between the response of Jesus to the man's need and the reaction of the legalistic leaders to a clear demonstration of the power of God.

### **Interpretation and correlation:**

The religious leaders' response to Jesus' miracle epitomizes the harsh attitude of legalism. Refusing to acknowledge the wonderful miracle, they instead insisted on indicting the man who had been healed for breaking the Sabbath. John sets up a classic literary contrast between the response of Jesus to the man's need and the reaction of the legalistic leaders to a clear demonstration of the power of God.

1. Describe a time in your life when you believed you were the victim of a judgmental attitude. How did it make you feel? What was your response?
2. How would you contrast Jesus' response to this man's desperate need with the response of the religious leaders.?
3. What did Jesus claim in his response? John 5:17  
*<sup>17</sup> In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."*
4. How did the leaders respond? What charge did the religious leaders level at Jesus?  
*<sup>18</sup> For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.*

### **Homework:**

#### **Application: Finding Yourself in the Story**

Sometimes it helps to apply the truths of a Scripture lesson by thinking about where you'd fit into the story. In the account of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, with whom would you most identify?

From the list below, circle the description that best represents who you would be in the story. Then write a sentence or two explaining your choice.

- One among the crowd of crippled and hurting people

- A religious leader holding people accountable to the “rules”
- An indifferent bystander choosing to remain quiet and observing
- One of the disciples, unsure of how to respond
- The lame man offering reasons why healing is not possible

Below are three principles that emerge from this story. Following each one, write in your own words how they can be applied to your life.

**To expose legalism, truth must emerge.**

How can truth expose the error of legalism in a church setting? In your home? In your relationship to others?

**To combat legalism, conviction must be employed.**

How does maintaining a conviction about the truth help you confront errors in spiritual teaching, such as legalism?

**To overcome legalism, grace must be embraced.**

How can you embrace a more gracious attitude toward people who are different from you or who are living their lives apart from the Lord?