

# LEGALISM VS. LICENSE

## The two dangers: Finding the Narrow Path

*"Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law." — Romans 3:31*

### I. THE PENDULUM SWING

#### Avoiding the Second Deception

We have explored the first danger: **Legalism** (trying to earn salvation by mixing grace with works). But there is a second, equally deadly danger: **License**.

- **The Error:** Believing that because we are **saved by grace**, we are free to disobey God's law.
- **The Warning:** Peter warned of "lawless men" who **promise** freedom but are slaves to corruption.
- **The Reality:** We do not obey to get saved; we obey because we are saved. **Carelessness in obedience is not a sign of freedom, but a sign of misunderstanding the Gospel.**

### II. THE WIND AND THE TREES

#### An Analogy of Nature

- **How do Faith and Works actually relate?** Consider the wind blowing through the trees.
- **The Wind = Faith:** You cannot see it, but it is the driving force.
- **The Movement = Works:** When the wind blows, the branches must move.
- **The Lesson:** You cannot make the wind blow by shaking the tree (doing works to create faith). But if the wind is truly blowing, the tree cannot remain still (faith always produces works).

*"Faith without deeds is dead." — James 2:26*

### IV. THE DIAGNOSTIC

#### Which Faith Do You Have?

The Bible describes two types of faith. Which one is yours?

- **Intellectual Assent:** "Even the demons believe—and shudder" (James 2:19). This is merely agreeing with facts. It does not save.
- **Saving Faith:** A commitment that yields control to God. It naturally produces a changed life, just as a healthy root naturally produces fruit.

### III. A TALE OF TWO SINNERS

#### Simon vs. Mary (Luke 7)

Jesus dined with Simon (a Pharisee) and was anointed by Mary (a known sinner). Their actions revealed the quality of their faith.

Simon (The Pharisee)	Mary (The Repentant)
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Saw himself as "righteous."

Saw herself as a "wretch."

Felt little need for forgiveness.

Knew she needed much forgiveness.

**Result:** Showed little love.

**Result:** Loved much (washed His feet).

**The Principle:** We do not love God to get forgiveness. We love God because we have been forgiven. The one who realizes the depth of their debt loves the most.

### V. THE SOLUTION

#### Go to the Source

If your "branches" aren't moving (lack of good works), don't try to shake the tree yourself

- **Don't:** Focus on "trying harder" to be good.
- **Do:** Go to the Cross. Meditate on His love.
- **The Promise:** "The more our sense of need drives us to Him... the more fully we shall reflect His image".

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

## For Small Groups & Personal Reflection

**Objective:** To help the group avoid the trap of “cheap grace” while maintaining a reliance on Christ alone.

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### 1. ICEBREAKER: THE PENDULUM

**Ask:** In your spiritual journey, have you ever swung from one extreme to the other? (e.g., trying to be perfect vs. giving up and being careless). Which ditch is easier for you to fall into?

**Discuss:** Why is “License” (thinking sin doesn’t matter) sometimes more attractive than Legalism?

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### 3. SIMON AND MARY

Read: Luke 7:36–50.

**Contrast:** Simon thought he was okay; Mary knew she wasn’t.

**The Paradox:** Jesus said, “He who has been forgiven little loves little.”

**Deep Dive:** Does this mean we need to go out and sin more so we can be forgiven more? (See Romans 6:1-2). No! It means we need to see the sin that is already there. How do we get a clearer view of our true need for God?

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### PRAYER FOCUS

**Focus:** Instead of praying for “better behavior,” pray for a “better view” of the Cross.

**Prayer:** “Lord, take us to the foot of the Cross like Mary. Let us see how much we have been forgiven, so that our love and obedience flow naturally, like wind moving the trees.”

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### REFLECTION NOTES



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### 2. THE WIND AND THE TREES

**Visual:** Refer to the “Wind” section of the handout.

**Application:** The text says, “You can no more produce true faith by doing good works, than we can make the wind blow by shaking the branches.”

**Question:** Have you ever tried to “shake the branches” in your own life? (i.e., forcing religious behavior when your heart wasn’t in it). How did that feel?

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### 4. INTELLECTUAL VS. SAVING FAITH

**Challenge:** The text notes that even demons have “intellectual faith”—they know Jesus is the Son of God.

**Discuss:** What is the specific ingredient that turns “belief” into “saving faith”? (Hint: It’s the difference between knowing a bridge exists and actually walking across it).

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### 5. CLOSING APPLICATION: THE OPEN DOOR

Read Revelation 3:20.

**Reflect:** Jesus is knocking on the door of the church (believers), not just unbelievers. He wants to come in and sup (dine/fellowship) with us.

**Action:** *A view of our sinfulness drives us to Him who can pardon; and when the soul, realizing its helplessness, reaches out after Christ, He will reveal Himself in power.* White, E. G. (1892). Steps to Christ (pp. 65–67). Run to Jesus and make your confession to Him. He promised to forgive and cleanse for all sins. If you are afraid of failing remember God is faithful from start to completion. *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:* Philippians 1:6 (KJV)

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