

GRACE

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI ◇ DEO ◇ GLORIA

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sermon Notes

The Arrest, Trials, and Crucifixion of Jesus Christ

Legalism and Irony in the Trials of Christ

John 18:28-32

August 27, 2006

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” Matthew 23:23

The Gospel Accounts of the Trials, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Christ:

Matthew 26:30-27:66

Mark 14:26-15:47

Luke 22:39-23:56

John 18:1-19:42

I. THE SIX PHASES OF THE TRIAL(S) OF JESUS

a. The Jewish (Religious) Trial(s)

- Peter’s denials begin
 1. Matt. 26:69-71a; Mk. 14:66-68; Luke 22:56-57; John 18:16-18
- ii. Before **Annas** – the former High Priest in Jerusalem
 1. John 18:13-23
- iii. Before Joseph **Caiaphas** – the current High Priest in Jerusalem
 1. Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; [Luke 22:67-71]; John 18:24
- Peter’s final denial at cockcrow
 2. Matt. 26:71b-75; Mk. 14:69-72; Luke 22:58-62; John 18:25-27
- iv. Before **the Sanhedrin** at dawn – the Jewish governing body
 1. Matt. 27:1; Mark 15:1a; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:28b
 2. Sentenced to Death
- Remorse and suicide of Judas Iscariot
 1. Matthew 27:3-10; Acts 1:18-19

b. The Roman (Civil) Trials

- i. Before **Pontius Pilate** – the Roman Governor / procurator
- ii. Before **Herod Antipas** – the tetrarch of Galilee
- iii. Before **Pontius Pilate**
 1. Sentenced to be Crucified
 2. Nailed to the cross at 9:00 a.m.
 3. Jesus gives up His spirit at about 3:00 p.m.

- Few places in the New Testament demonstrate the legalism of the Pharisees [and the Sadducees (Scribes)] more than the trials of Jesus Christ.
- It is absolutely essential; however, that one have an accurate understand of LEGALISM. Legalism is **NOT** strict adherence to the Law of God, *per se*.

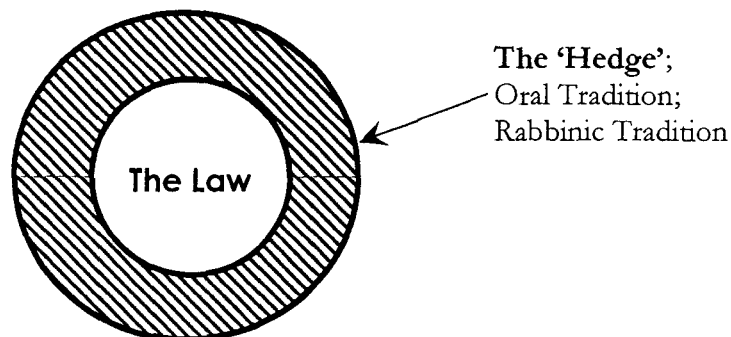
Legalism is NOT firm obedience to the explicit Laws of God, and expecting others to obey that same standard – that is biblical accountability and fellowship.

Legalism is rightfully defined as the creation of laws in addition to those in Scripture, and the adherence to those [created] laws [and the insistence that others do the same] with the same degree of conviction as the laws of God. In short, it is the elevation of man’s laws to the level of God’s laws – regardless of how ‘good’ our intentions are.

- This was the main problem with the Pharisees in the New Testament. In fact, it is fascinating that Jesus saved His harshest criticism, not for the pagan on the street, but the Pharisees who *appeared* to be so ‘close’ to God.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.” Matthew 23:23

- The Pharisees developed and adhered to a Rabbinical [extra-biblical] tradition that was, basically, a ‘hedge’ around the Law. The rationale was simple: if the Law of God commanded something, then the Pharisees would **add to that law, forming a ‘hedge’**, so that if one kept the hedge, in theory, they would not even come close to breaking the Law.
- Unfortunately, the Pharisees began focusing on the hedge, not the Law.



- Example of the Law vs. the Rabbinical Tradition
 - iv. Law: Remember the Sabbath and Keep it Holy.
 - v. Rabbinical Tradition: Is it lawful to eat an egg layed on the Sabbath?

**Therefore, the Pharisees obeyed the Law as far as appearances were concerned;
however, their hearts were far from God**

- As one examines the trials of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of John, the Legalism and Irony are quite apparent.
- **Legalism** reveals the guilt of the Jews; while
- **Irony** reveals the sovereignty and control of God throughout the entire series of trials and crucifixion.

Verse 28

- John does not record the trials with Caiaphas, the current high priest that year, or the Sanhedrin, where Jesus is sentenced to death.
- John tells the reader that they [the Jewish authorities] led Jesus from Caiaphas into the Praetorium.
 - The Praetorium was the headquarters of the Roman commander of the Roman army.
 - Pilate's permanent headquarters was in Caesarea Maritima, in the palace built there by Herod the Great; however, it was common for the Governor to stay in Jerusalem during the Jewish festivals. The reason for this was to ensure that there would be no violence or rioting due to the rise in religious fervor.
- John then tells the reader that 'it was early.'
 - Technically speaking, the Greek word for 'early morning' [*proi*] referred to the fourth watch of the night [3:00 a.m. until 6:00 a.m.]. Therefore, it is most likely that Jesus is brought by the Jews to Pilate sometime before 6:00 a.m.
 - First century Roman courts began very early in the morning, so this verse is quite consistent with extra-biblical historical records.
- "and they [the Jewish authorities] themselves did not enter into the Praetorium so that they would not be defiled, but might eat Passover."
 - There are several reasons as to why the Jews would have been 'unclean' had they entered into the Praetorium:
 - According to F.F. Bruce, there would have been yeast in the Praetorium, which would have made them unclean (in accordance with Exodus 12:19; 13:7; Mishnah *Pesachim* 1:1; 2:1)

- Also, there would have been dust from the road brought in by foreign visitors to Jerusalem, also rendering the Jews unclean (*Mishna Berakoth* 9:5).
 - However, both of these ‘contaminations’ would have disqualified the Jews for only one day. Thus, they would have still been able to participate in the Passover celebrations of the coming week [NOTE: The Feast of Passover AND the Feast of Unleavened Bread AND the Feast of Firstfruits together lasted one week. Many Jews referred to this week-long festival as Passover.]
 - Yet, according to the Mishnah [the body of Rabbinical Law], Jews entering into the homes and dwelling-places of Gentiles were ceremonial clean for **one week**. The Mishnah states, ‘the dwelling places of Gentiles are unclean because they throw abortions down their drains’ [*Oholoth* 18:7]. And, according to Numbers 19:11, any Jew who had contact with a dead body or corpse was ceremonially unclean for one full week.
- So, the Jews were unwilling to enter into the Praetorium because they would become ceremonially unclean and would not be permitted to partake of the Passover...
- NOTICE the incredible IRONY here:**
- The Jews go to extremes to ensure that they are ceremonially unclean in accordance with the Law; yet they seek to kill the very One who has perfectly kept the Law!
 - Furthermore, they keep the portions of the law regarding ‘ceremonial’ cleanliness, all the while twisting, manipulating, and quite clearly breaking the Law in order to [unjustly] condemn Jesus. In other words, they may be ‘ceremonial’ clean; but they are, in reality, unclean and wretched.
 - Finally, as John Calvin puts it: “They observe the shadow of the *Passover* with a false and pretended reverence, and yet not only do they violate the true *Passover* by sacrilegious hands, but endeavor, as far as lies in their power, to bury it eternal oblivion.”

Verse 29

- So, Pilate, ‘went out’ to the Jews and asked them, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’
- For the remainder of the narrative with Pilate, John will present seven ‘units’ alternating between outdoor public scenes [with the Jews present] and indoor private scenes [only with Pilate]: outside (18:29-32); inside (18:33-38a); outside (18:38b-40); inside (19:1-3); outside (19:4-7); inside (19:8-11); and outside (19:12-15).

- This is quite interesting, for it demonstrates at least three points: (1) that Pilate and the Jews were united in their ‘alliance’ against Jesus, demonstrating that that the Jews were as guilty as the Gentiles, and vice versa; and (2) interestingly, the Jews never hear Jesus’ self-disclosure to Pilate; and (3) from the perspective of Pilate, we see the ultimate human ‘predicament’ we can either follow the world [while Jesus and Pilate are outdoors] or Jesus Christ – it is either one or the other.
- Pontius Pilate was the Governor or prefect of Judea. He was appointed to this post by Tiberius in AD 26 and held it until AD 37. From both the Scriptures and extrabiblical records, he was morally weak, ruthless, and hated by the Jewish people. The account, here, in the Gospel of John will certainly confirm this understanding of the man.
- It is interesting that John tells us that Pilate ‘went out to them’ when they brought Jesus to him. However, this is not of any great surprise, as the local Roman authorities would have been willing to appease the Jews in such minor ways during the Festivals in order to ensure that they would not riot or cause problems.
- But, ironically, **Pilate is more accommodating to the Jews than they are to their own Law.**
- Then, Pilate asks, ‘What accusation do you bring against this Man?’
 - Another ironic point is this: **Even though he is a pagan Gentile, Pilate is acting in accordance with the Law, unlike the Jews, asking the witnesses what fault they find in Jesus. In other words, Pilate is more just and fair than the Jews. This is even more incredible when one understands the ruthless reputation of Pontius Pilate.**
- There is no doubt that Pilate knew a little bit about the case against Jesus, as Roman soldiers were used in His arrest.
- Also, Pilate’s question, asking for specific allegations and charges against Christ, must have come as a great surprise to the Jewish authorities who, given their response to Pilate’s question, no doubt expected that he would simply affirm their judgment against Christ and then have Him immediately crucified.

Verse 30

- The Jews then respond to Jesus, ‘If this Man were not an evildoer, we would have not have delivered Him to you.’
 - Pilate asks for **specific accusations** and the Jews responds: ‘He is an evildoer... trust us!’
 - And this reveals why legalism is heinous: **Jesus had not transgressed the Law of God – for He was its perfect fulfillment. However, He had transgressed the Law that the Jews had CREATED.**

- The Law of God is a DIRECT reflection of God's character, nature...His holiness.
 - Therefore, when we created ANOTHER Law, **we make ourselves out to be God!**
 - Therefore, legalism is not just adding to the Law, but it demonstrates the CREATION OF A FALSE GOD – OURSELVES!
 - It is again ironic that the interaction between the Jews and the Gentile Pontius Pilate that God reveals the diabolical, evil plans, and therefore, the guilt of the Jews.
- As Calvin again puts it, 'They [the Jews] wish that Christ should be reckoned a malefactor, and for no other reason but because they accuse him. But if we come to the truth of the matter, what deeds of a malefactor shall we find in him, except that he has cured every kind of disease, has driven the devils out of men, has made paralytics and the lame to walk, has restored sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, and life to the dead? Such were the real facts, and those men knew them well; but...when men are intoxicated with pride, nothing is more difficult than to arouse them to form a sound and correct judgment.'

Verse 31

- Here, Pilate does something quite interesting, **he humiliates the Jewish authorities by forcing them to admit their lack of authority in the Roman province of Judea, for he says, 'Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law.'**
- Most certainly Pilate knew exactly what the Jews were wanting him to do...they wanted him to sentence Jesus to crucifixion. But it is as though Pilate wanted to take them time to 'toy with' the Jewish authorities to build up his ego, for Pilate knew how the Jews would **have to respond to his statement** - in essence, 'WE CAN'T [crucify Him]...BUT **YOU CAN.**'
- Notice as well, that Pilate says, 'judge Him according to **your** law.'
- No doubt, Pilate was drawing a distinction between Roman law and Jewish law.
- However, it is, once again interesting, and may be intended by John, that such a statement parallels something that Jesus has said to the Pharisees in John 8:17: 'Even in **your** law it has been written that the testimony of two men is true.' [emphasis added]
- It was as though, in John 8:17, that Jesus was drawing a distinction between **the Law** [the true, righteous law] and the law of the Pharisees [which they, not God, had created].

- It may be that John is demonstrating that even Pilate recognizes that this is a law created by Pharisees by which they seek to condemn Jesus.

* * * * *

- After Pilate tells them to judge Jesus according to their law, the Jews respond in the only possible way, ‘We are not permitted to put anyone to death...’
 - No doubt, these are the very words that Pilate wanted to hear the Jews say – WE CAN’T, but YOU CAN.
 - But this begs the question: **The Jews are not permitted to put anyone to death IN ACCORDANCE WITH WHAT LAW? The ROMAN LAW!!!**
 - In other words, they are now following the Roman Law as opposed to the Law of God!
 - If, in fact, Jesus were a blasphemer, the Jews were then **REQUIRED**, in accordance with the Law of God, to put Him to death by stoning.
 - Yet, **this scene demonstrates that the Jews fear the Roman government more than God Himself. They revere Rome more than Yahweh.**
 - **Not only have they created their own Law by which they JUDGE Christ, they created their own Law [that included pagan (Roman) influences] by which they SENTENCED Christ.**

Verse 32

- Finally, John tells us WHY these events are occurring the way they are: ‘to fulfill the word of Jesus.’
- All of this is not happening to, primarily, reveal the guilt of the Jews and Gentiles, but to **demonstrate the righteousness, sovereignty and great glory of Almighty God.**
- Had the Jews done what the Law of God commanded them to do, they would have executed Jesus **by stoning**. However, since they have handed Jesus over to the Jewish authorities to be executed, He is going to be **crucified**.
- It is very likely that the **Jews wanted Jesus to be crucified as opposed to stoning, and would have probably opted for crucifixion, even if given the opportunity to stone Him.** The reason goes back to Deuteronomy 21:23, which states, that ‘anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.’
- Yet, this verse, further demonstrates that complete control of Jesus Christ in this situation, for He has already prophesied that He would die through crucifixion:

‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.’ (John 3:14) [*also* John 8:28; 12:32-33]

- Yet, this is also fully consistent with the Old Testament as well:
 - Read **Isaiah 52:13-15**