



Scripture Nugget – Legalism hardens our heart and hinders growth in spirituality

Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” So the Pharisees said to Him, “You testify on Your own behalf, so Your testimony cannot be verified.” Jesus answered and said to them, “Even if I do testify on My own behalf, My testimony can be verified, because I know where I came from and where I am going. But you do not know where I come from or where I am going (John 8:12-14).

Legalism blinded the disbelieving Pharisees against the truth. The disbelieving Pharisees made their stand against Jesus publicly by citing a Mosaic law which says that a matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15). At this juncture, Jesus did not declare it to them directly that in fact, though He is the Truth and does not need witnesses, He was testified to by more than two witnesses. His mighty works testified to what He claims to be: Son of the Almighty God. At His Baptism, the Holy Spirit testified to Jesus by taking the form of a dove, alighting on His shoulders (cf. Matthew 3:16). Simultaneously, God the Father testified to Jesus, declaring: “This is My beloved Son with Whom I am well pleased.” (cf. Matthew 3:17). John the Baptist testified to Jesus by calling Him the Lamb of God Who takes away the sins of the world (cf. John 1:29-31). Even the evil spirits unwittingly testified to Jesus (cf. Matthew 8:29).

Legalism is unloving and not from God. Jesus teaches us to do everything out of love for God and others, and to see God in others. The will of God must always come first. Love is the foundation of all His commandments. Once we base our thoughts and actions on fulfilling the letter of the law and forgetting about the spirit behind the law, we are tempted by legalism. When we fall into the pit of legalism, we become self-righteous and make demands and judgement of others not because we care for their good or we are motivated to fulfil God’s will but to satisfy our own unloving desires of seeing others fall into line. Thus, St Paul, before his conversion, pursued the early Christians zealously and actively persecuted them, blindly believing he was doing the right thing. Legalism hardens our heart, and makes us satisfied in doing the minimum, perhaps just to avoid the fires of hell. It prevents a soul from living a full Christian life that is only possible when the heart is fully open to the workings of God’s mighty grace.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, legalism is the unsavory fruit of pride, shallow faith and lack of a personal relationship with You. Unless I know, love and adore You as a Personal God, I face the temptation of living my faith to fulfill a set of rules instead of out of love for You. Open the eyes of my heart to understand Your personal love for me. Help me understand that Your love for me is as if I am the only one in the world! You tried to explain this in human terms by Your parable of the shepherd who left his flock and went in search of the one lost sheep. Your bloody, holy death on the Cross is a wonderful testament of this amazing divine love. Give me the grace to love You as You love me! Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.