

TOXIC

Consider attending Pastor Paul's midweek teaching (*this Wednesday night 6:30-8pm*)
MAKING SENSE OF GROWING UP FUNDAMENTALIST as a next step.

DAY 1

READ Galatians 5:22-23.

Where love is absent law becomes central and simply the best we can do.

What rules/laws have been established in your family because "love was absent"? (I.e. No hitting or pushing each other.) We no longer have a no hitting or pushing rule in our house. Why? As love and respect for one another grew, it was no longer necessary. The rule isn't what keeps us from hitting or pushing, love does. **Where love is central, law loses its power and its necessity.** Does that statement scare you or maybe worry you? Why or why not? How can we live without rules? Some of us love rules! They make things clear, measurable, and even controllable. What comes to mind when you think about rules? What emotions are stirred up? Rebellion? Frustration? Joy? Do you find joy in following rules or making sure others do? Or do you find joy in breaking rules and encouraging others to do the same? Jesus calls us to the heart of the issue and to become better people -- good people from whom love and good things naturally flow. READ today's scripture again. WRITE out the **fruit of the Spirit**. CONSIDER memorizing this scripture or writing and posting it somewhere you will see it daily.

PRAY: Father, search my heart. Bring to light the motivations that cause me to focus on rules. Also, show me the motivations that cause me to rebel and challenge the rules. Holy Spirit, fill me and take control that I might know Jesus and replace my legalistic motivations with an overflow of the fruit of Your Spirit.

DAY 2 -- TECHNICAL FOUL!

When our kids were younger, conversation could quickly get derailed by our youngest focusing on the tiniest technical detail rather than the central issue. Not only would his insistence on this technical detail render the central point of the conversation to be nowhere in sight, this perspective would also establish him in a position of certainty that polarized the conversation. In order to encourage him to think about the central issue and the entire conversation, we began issuing TECHNICAL FOULS.

READ Mark 8:14-21. (*Do you think Jesus would have liked to give his disciples a technical foul?*) Concrete (or technical) thinking emphasizes facts. On the other hand, mature thinking dives below the facts to discover the issues. It seeks to understand, find the solution and the right motivation. Mature thinking understands that a person can be technically right but still wrong. *Have you ever had a conversation with a person who is focused on a minor point that keeps him/her from seeing the main issue? Have you ever been THAT person?*

Jesus consistently brings our attention back to the deeper meanings -- away from simple externals -- and back to our real motivations which are at the heart of the main issues. *In what situations do you see people taking an issue beyond the true meaning and becoming focused on the irrelevant? Do you ever use a technical point to avoid dealing with a deeper issue of motivation or behavior? Have you ever been sidetracked*

in this way? Do you ever need to give yourself a technical foul? Next time you become passionate about a rule/law, check to see if you're venturing into TECHNICAL FOUL territory. What's at the heart of the issue? Is there a relationship in which you've been too focused on a technicality? Has it kept you from being a loving person? Do you need to confess this and ask for forgiveness?

DAY 3

LEGALISM: strict adherence, or the principle of strict adherence, to law or prescription, especially to the letter rather than the spirit.

READ Mark 2:23-27. By narrowly focusing on the technicalities and the external, the Pharisees had completely lost the whole point of the law. Our faith becomes toxic and in danger of legalism whenever we're preoccupied with outward behaviors rather than issues of the heart. We become so focused on non-essential and/or insignificant behaviors that we lose sight of the central issues that matter to God.

READ the following statements. *Do you recognize signs of legalism creeping in?*

- I spend a lot of emotional energy thinking about what the religious rules are.
- I don't like to think about the WHYs. Just give me the rule.
- I can get pretty passionate about customs, rituals, and rules.
- I can become fired up more easily about HOW we do things in church than WHY we do them.
- I tend to enforce rules (which I adhere to) onto others.
- I tend to judge or look down on those who don't follow the rules I follow.

DAY 4

READ Mark 7:6-8. Legalism destroys a person's emotional, mental, and spiritual wellness by establishing a standard of performance which creates a conflicted mix of self-righteousness and self-condemnation. It warps our understanding of God, moving it away from a loving Heavenly Father and reducing Him exclusively to a harsh disciplinarian and judge. It destroys love and makes us small, self-absorbed people. Rule-based living is toxic stuff! READ John 5:39-40. THINK about what Jesus is saying. **"... yet you refuse to come to me to have life."** In an effort to find life, the Jewish leaders had become so narrowly focused, they missed God Himself. We also can fall into that same trap if we're not careful. We can become so entrenched or committed to religious behaviors and rules that we no longer have a real relationship with Jesus.

"Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." *Mark 7:13*

DAY 5

The great thing about our family's use of TECHNICAL FOULS (see day 2) was that once you'd been called out and issued the foul, you had no choice but to be quiet and listen. Any arguing or justifying the technicality only ensured you were promptly issued another TECHNICAL FOUL! Saul might have preferred a TECHNICAL FOUL to his experience on the road to Damascus. READ Acts 9:1-9. It's only during those times of silence (*interrupting our own justifications & certainties*) that we can hear what Jesus is truly saying to us. With certainty comes the danger of desiring to be **right** more than desiring **God Himself**. Saul desired God more than anything else. What if Saul refused to let go of his certainty? READ Matthew 13:12-15.

PRAY: Father, I confess those times when it actually feels safer to cling to rules and certainties. Allow me to recognize when I'm in danger of slipping into TECHNICAL FOUL territory. Help me to be quiet and listen to you.

April 2/3, 2011