NOAH, THE "LEGALIST"

When theological liberals (brethren or otherwise) want to cast the strongest possible aspersion on one who still believes God said what He meant and meant what He said in the Bible, they call him a "legalist." Understanding the true meaning of this term, God's faithful servants accept his term as a compliment. Its primary meaning is one who believes in "strict adherence to the law." The hurler of this term thereby implies his own disregard for the Bible. Liberals imagine they can read between its lines for the "true meaning," regardless of its words. They also look upon the Bible as a "living," rather than a "once for all delivered" message from God, and that men are to "interpret" it according to current mores, philosophies, and conditions (compare this attitude toward the Bible with the attitude of political liberals toward the US Constitution).

In the view of theological liberals, every Bible character who carefully followed God's commands was a "legalist." **That being so, it follows that every Bible character who disobeyed God (disregarded His law) was a liberal.** In fact, the essence of liberalism in religion is "freedom from tradition and authority in matters of belief."

Let us consider Noah, the famous builder of the ark that saved a remnant (indeed all) of mankind from the great flood. Genesis 6:5 tells us that men had become so consummately wicked that God could no longer tolerate their existence. However, Noah was the exception, and God looked upon him with grace or favor (v. 8). Moses stated the basis of God's grace toward Noah: "Noah was a righteous man, and perfect in his generations: Noah walked with God" (v. 9). God was obviously pleased with Noah **before** he built the ark. Just as obviously, we learn here that God's grace toward Noah was conditional, based upon his obedience. If grace were unconditional, then God would have spared all of that wicked generation—liberals all.

God specified the ark's materials (gopher wood and pitch), dimensions (300 x 50 x 30 cubits), and layout (1 window, 1 door, 3 floors, various rooms) (vv. 14–16). Moses described Noah's response to these specifications: "Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (v. 22). God was also obviously pleased with Noah **after** he built the ark. According to liberals, Noah was therefore a dyed-in-the-wool legalist. Let us suppose Noah decided to build the ark 51 cubits wide and 250 cubits long. Had he been a liberal, he would have done so without a second thought. Would he have continued to be in God's grace?

Noah built the ark "by faith" (Heb. 11:7), which God's Word produces (Rom. 10:17). He did not "read between the lines"; he read—and obeyed—only what God ordered "in the lines" that God revealed to him.

What have we learned from Noah's behavior and God's response?

1. God was definitely pleased with Noah's obedience to His commands.

2. By definition, Noah was thereby definitely a "legalist" in the best meaning of the term, not a "liberal."

3. God approves of "legalists" and "legalism" that represents "strict adherence" to His law.

4. God rejects liberals and liberalism that urges "freedom from tradition and authority in matters of belief."

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