

# Losing My Religion: The Incompatibility of Legalism & the Gospel

## Luke 5:33-39

### 1. Hook to Start Conversation

**Begin by asking:** “Have you ever felt pressured to follow a rule or tradition just to ‘look good’ as a Christian, even if it didn’t feel meaningful to your faith? Maybe it was about how you dress, what you say, or how you act in church. How did that make you feel?”

**Teacher Hint** (Middle & High School): Encourage students to share personal experiences by relating the question to their world. For example, ask, “Have you ever felt like you had to act a certain way at school or church to fit in with what others expect?” Keep the tone light and safe to encourage openness.

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### 2. Outline and Summary of Luke 5:33-39

In Luke 5:33-39, the Pharisees question Jesus about why His disciples don’t fast like John the Baptist’s disciples or the Pharisees themselves. Jesus responds with a parable, comparing Himself to a bridegroom whose presence calls for celebration, not fasting. He uses two illustrations—patching an old garment with new cloth and putting new wine into old wineskins—to show that the gospel He brings is incompatible with the Pharisees’ legalistic traditions. Legalism adds burdensome rules where God gives freedom, fosters prideful comparison, burns out believers, and prioritizes rule-keeping over loving God. Jesus reveals Himself as the bridegroom who loves His people entirely, exclusively, and enduringly, inviting them to a relationship of grace rather than rigid ritual.

**Teacher Hint:** For younger students, simplify the summary: “The Pharisees were upset because Jesus’ followers weren’t following their extra rules about fasting. Jesus said He’s like a groom at a wedding—and it can’t be earned by our rule-keeping!” Use visuals like a wedding picture or a wineskin (or a balloon to represent bursting) to make the parables concrete.

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### 3. Discussion Questions

**1:** The Pharisees added extra fasting rules (two fasts per week) beyond what God required in the Old Testament (one fast per year). Why do you think they felt the need to add these rules? How can adding rules where God gives freedom affect our relationship with Him?

**Teacher Hint:** Guide students to see that legalism often comes from wanting to control or earn God's favor. For teens, relate this to peer pressure: "Have you ever added 'rules' to fit in with a group, like dressing or talking a certain way? How does that feel compared to being free to be yourself?"

**2:** Jesus warns that legalism can burn out new believers by piling on rules too soon (Luke 5:36-38). How can we, as a church, help new or young Christians grow in faith without overwhelming them with expectations?

**Teacher Hint:** Encourage practical ideas, like being patient or mentoring gently. For students, ask, "If a new kid joined your youth group, how could you help them feel welcomed without making them feel like they have to be perfect right away?"

**3:** Jesus calls Himself the bridegroom (Luke 5:34-35), showing that He desires a loving relationship with us, not just rule-following. How does seeing Jesus as a loving bridegroom change the way we view obedience to God?

**Teacher Hint:** Help students connect this to God's love. For middle schoolers, use an analogy: "Imagine a parent who loves you no matter what—how does that make you want to obey them?" For high schoolers, tie it to identity: "How does knowing Jesus loves you completely change how you see yourself?"

**4:** The Pharisees compared their fasting to others' to feel superior (Luke 5:33). Where do you see comparison creeping into your life (e.g., social media, school, church)? How can we focus on God's grace instead of comparing ourselves to others?

**Teacher Hint:** Teens are especially prone to comparison. Ask, "Have you ever compared your grades, looks, or faith to someone else's? How can remembering Jesus' love help you stop?" Use a whiteboard to list ways to focus on grace (e.g., prayer, gratitude).

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## Additional Notes for Teachers

**Middle School:** Keep discussions short and active. Use role-playing to act out the Pharisees' question and Jesus' response, or have students draw the wineskin/garment parables. Emphasize Jesus' love to build their confidence in God's grace.

**High School:** Dive deeper into application. Teens may wrestle with legalism in their desire to "perform" for parents, peers, or God. Encourage honesty by

sharing a personal story (if appropriate) about struggling with legalism. Use small groups to foster deeper discussion.

**General:** Always point back to the gospel—Jesus' love and grace free us from earning salvation. End with a simple prayer inviting students to trust in Jesus as their bridegroom who loves them fully.