

# Be Discerning - Know

[Hosea 14:9b](#); [Romans 14:10](#)

Read [Romans 2:17-23](#), A Portrait of a boaster

Read [Romans 4:1-6](#), *“But not before God...”*

## **Systems of Legalism**

There are four principal spiritual transactions in which works are not accepted by God: Salvation, Spirituality, Maturity, and Reward.

### **Legalism in Salvation:**

There are many religious systems which teach salvation by works, or which try to mix works with faith, such as:

- Believe + keep the Law of Moses
- Believe + be circumcised
- Believe + water baptism
- Believe + confess your sins
- Believe + give up your bad habits and fully surrender
- Believe + make a public display or have great sorrow or a show of tears
- Believe + church membership

But the Gospel is – believe plus *nothing!*

## Be Discerning - Know (Continued)

### **Legalism in Christian living:**

Here are some types of religious legalism imposed on Christians:

1. **Taboos:** thinking one is spiritual because he doesn't do certain things or follows a certain do's and don'ts.
2. **Imitating Personalities:** the idea that living the Christian life is conformity in dress, mannerisms, speech, etc.
3. **Relative Righteousness:** "your sins are worse than mine, therefore I am more spiritual" or "I am spiritual, and you are carnal."
4. **Ecstatic:** spirituality by speaking in tongues, groaning, getting in a trance, fainting.
5. **Asceticism:** spirituality by self-sacrifice or extreme self-denial; giving up normal activities or even necessities in the mistaken notion that God is impressed.
6. **Ritual:** idea that one is spiritual because he goes through various forms of ceremony or ritual. In the Apostle's day, the Jews promoted circumcision as necessary to the Christian walk. These days, baptism is used, or one of the other sacraments.

**Confusing means with results:** the idea that you are spiritual if you are faithful in praying, giving, witnessing, attending church, and so forth. But – these legitimate activities are a result of Christian growth and the filling of the Holy Spirit: They are not the means for spirituality or growth in Christ. It is important to distinguish this difference.

The grace principle is this: when you are in fellowship, occupied with Christ, and controlled by the Holy Spirit, all of your activities bring eternal reward (gold, silver, precious stones). You are producing divine good, and the spiritual power for your efforts comes from God as a grace provision.

## Be Discerning - Know (Continued)

When you are out of fellowship (sin not confessed), you are occupied with yourself, you control yourself, everything is chaos. You produce human good (wood, hay, and stubble). There is no spiritual power supporting your efforts, and there is no reward for them in heaven.

Obedience to God's Word is not legalism. Remember the [definition](#). Everything you do has the potential for reward in heaven, under the right circumstances. But the legalist thinks that the good works he does for God will not only keep him in fellowship and walking with the Lord but will also make him more spiritual and a great Christian.

### **Characteristics of the weaker brother – Romans 14**

(We now consider a summary of [Romans chapter 14](#).)

Romans [Chapter 14](#) has a splendid description of the characteristics of a legalistic person who is called the “*weaker brother*.” This is a great passage about how to think grace toward someone who does something obnoxious or “unspiritual.” Remember – we all have areas of weakness. You may be the stronger believer in some of your areas of strength, and a weaker brother in areas of weakness. The idea in both cases is to avoid legalism and judgmental-ism.

The strong believer in [Romans 14](#) is mature, oriented to grace and the plan of God, occupied with Christ, and operates in fellowship most of the time under the power of the Holy Spirit.

## Be Discerning - Know (Continued)

The weaker brother is disoriented to grace, especially in the area of spirituality, and practices one or more forms of legalism. He is not comfortable unless he is judging the stronger believer in some grey area of behavior. The weaker brother has one or more of the following characteristics:

1. The weaker brother is strong on scruples but not well informed about doctrine or divine viewpoint.
2. The weaker brother operates on criteria of feelings, emotions, traditions, experiences and background instead of Bible truth.
3. The weaker brother operates from within the energy of the flesh, producing human good (wood, hay, stubble) which he thinks is divine good (gold, silver, precious stones).
4. The weaker brother is proud and critical of the strong believer, always judging him.
5. The weaker brother sticks his nose into the affairs of others by gossiping, maligning, and judging.
6. The weaker brother likes to set up a mold and try to squeeze everyone into it, so he is a bully.
7. The weaker brother has a guilt complex, so he is emotionally unstable; he is sensitive and demands attention; he is full of self-pity and lusts for approbation in his sin nature.
8. The weaker brother is jealous of others and tries to discredit them; he nitpicks and condemns the activities and projects of others.

Note: the weaker brother is weak because he resists grace concepts. He can recover quickly by confessing sin, being controlled by the Holy Spirit, and pursuing a program of intake of Bible truth which will make him spiritually strong.