

yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Eph 2:8-10)

a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. (Gal. 2:15)

“The righteous will live by faith.” (Gal 3:11)

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love. (Gal. 5:4-6)

**“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”** Yes, faith in Christ is the only way that we will ever be accepted by God because we will never perfectly keep the law of God, especially the law of love. However, faith also implies that we will continue **to try** to keep the law of love—both toward God and toward our neighbors—for we have been newly “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”

## **II. JOY IS THE RESULT OF EXPERIENCING THE LOVE OF GOD**

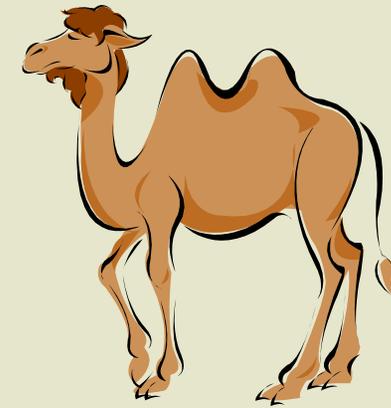
**I**n the text the people rejoiced when they experienced the love of Christ for this suffering woman. Joy is the natural result of being in the presence of Christ who perfectly keeps the law of Love—for He is Love Himself.

On the other hand, there is no joy in legalism. The text says that the ruler and the crowd with him only experienced shame. Legalism breeds judgment and criticism of others, legalism elicits self pride and arrogance, legalism leads to fear, anxiety, and despair. The fruit of legalism is never joy.

Joy comes only when we experience the love of God for mankind and follow Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

**J**ust like the ruler of the Synagogue in our text and his group we as Orthodox Christians can also strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. We can be so persnickety about the details of kissing icons, fasting, making the sign of the cross, prayer rules, canons, that we miss the whole point—i.e. uniting with Christ Jesus who loves us and gave Himself for us. The keeping of the rules and details is not wrong or sinful, but keeping the rules is only a tool to reach the goal—which is a personal relationship with Christ, and it is only when we have that personal relationship and are surrounded by God’s love in Christ that we can truly experience joy! Amen!



# OF GNATS AND CAMELS

*“Just like the ruler of the Synagogue . . . we as Orthodox Christians can also strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. We can be so persnickety about the details of kissing icons, fasting, making the sign of the cross, prayer rules, canons, that we miss the whole point—i.e. uniting with Christ Jesus who loves us and gave Himself for us.”*

## †GOSPEL : LUKE 13:10–17

*At that time, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, He called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrite! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" As Jesus said this, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the people rejoiced at all the glorious things that were done by Him.*

### INTRODUCTION

In the text above we see two approaches to the law of God, one represented by the ruler of the synagogue and the other by Jesus. The first group is concerned with the precise interpretation of the law, the other group is concerned with loving people.

Is this really a comparison between those who keep the law of God and those who break it—between legalists and antinomians? Is the ruler of the synagogue the law keeper and Jesus the law breaker? Or might this be a conflict between the traditions of men and the more ancient and deeper law of God—the law of Love?

### I. THE LAW OF GOD AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THAT LAW

The ruler of the synagogue was not necessarily a bad man. The rules that he was upholding were legitimate. In the Old Testament book of Exodus and in many other places the prohibition of work on the Sabbath was clear.

For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. (Ex. 31:14-17)

The problem that was faced by the Rabbis and teachers of the Jews was the precise definition or interpretation of work. If all work was forbidden then a case could be made that only those who stayed in bed all during the Sabbath were keeping the law. Obviously, this was not meant. So the process of defining work began and continued even up to Jesus' day. The definitions of work became more and more specific and more refined. Eventually the very reason for the prohibition to work on the Sabbath—i.e. to worship God—was lost or obscured by the vast number and minutia of interpretations. It became more important to keep the precise interpretations of the Rabbis rather than to truly worship God—the Rabbis interpretations of the law became more

important than the law itself.

This happened over and over again with all of God's laws given to Moses. The Rabbis and priests felt compelled to make the laws more specific not more general. However, there was a strong teaching in the OT Scriptures that moved in the opposite direction and summarized all of the law as love for God and love for neighbor (see Deut. 6:5 and Lev. 19:18). This was the deeper more ancient law of God that was behind all the other words, and commands, and laws of God. But as happens so often, this deeper law was too general for the teachers of the law and was eventually obscured by the minutia of Rabbinical and priestly interpretations. Truly, as Jesus would later observe:

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (Matt. 23:23-24)

In our text, we see this situation clearly illustrated. Jesus who is really the law-Giver himself—the One who gave the law to Moses in the beginning—ignores the Rabbinical interpretation in order to keep the more ancient law of love. He does not break the law; He perfectly fulfills it by healing this woman who had been afflicted for 18 yrs. On the other hand, the ruler of the synagogue by keeping the man-made interpretation of the law, specifically no healing on the Sabbath, broke the law of love for this woman.

### II. MANKIND'S FAILURE TO KEEP THE LAW OF GOD AND GOD'S GRACE

It is not wrong to want to keep the law of God. But we must be clear what the law of God is and what the interpretations of man are. In Orthodox terms this would be expressed as knowing the difference between large "I" traditions and small "t" traditions.

However, even if we are able to separate the law of God from the interpretations of man, Jesus clearly taught that no one would ever be able to keep the law perfectly and that only a perfect keeping of the law would justify a man before God. St. Paul wrote to the Galatians:

"All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.' Clearly no one is justified before God by the law . . ." (Gal. 3:10-11)

The only person who has ever kept the law perfectly is Jesus Christ himself. Since we are law breakers—all of us—our only hope of justification and acceptance before God is to believe in Christ and to hold onto Him. Christ is our righteousness, not our keeping of the law. Again, St. Paul wrote to the Ephesian and Galatian Christians:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from