



Don't Hurt Your Witness!

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness, and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable..." (Luke 18:9).

Once upon a time, somewhere in suburban America (also known as *the burbs*) two Christians lived next door to each other. Peter believed himself to be spiritually superior to Paul. Peter looked down on Paul on the basis of his own diligent obedience to a more exacting set of rules and regulations.

One Saturday summer afternoon, after finishing a long day of gardening and maintenance, Paul popped open a beer and walked over his front lawn to admire the newly trimmed grass and the freshly planted flower beds. Peter, his next door neighbor, happened to be in his own front yard.

When Peter looked at Paul's front yard he didn't see beautiful flowers and a lush green lawn. He saw Paul, beer can in hand, "hurting his witness." Peter briskly walked over to "lovingly admonish" Paul.

Peter: "Paul, you call yourself a Christian. But here you are in your front yard, drinking a beer. What if others, who are not Christians, see you? What will they think? Don't you think you are hurting your witness?"

Paul had received "admonishment" from Peter before. So, with a hint of a smile, Paul responded: "Are you suggesting that I enjoy this beer inside my house, behind closed doors, so no one can see me? Is expressing my freedom in Christ 'hurting my witness'?"

Peter: "Paul, I don't want to argue with you. I've told you before where I, my church and denomination stand on alcohol. Nothing good ever comes from alcohol. You may think you are not being hurt by alcohol, but you are kidding yourself if you think that way. And, what about others who see your example? Don't you care about the kind of negative example you are setting for them? Alcohol is the appearance of evil. There are many unbelievers in our neighborhood who

see us leave for church with our families every Sunday morning. Well, I should add at least that's what my family and I do—my wife and I have noticed that many Sundays when we leave for church and then we come back, your car hasn't even moved!

"And, in addition to the Sundays when you just decide to sleep in, it's obvious there are many other Sundays when you head to the golf course instead of church. If I have noticed you can bet other neighbors have, too! Our neighbors know that you at least profess to be a Christian. But now they see you out here with a beer can in your hand! If you must drink alcohol, do it in private."

Paul: "How private does it have to be? Can I tell my wife? What about my children—is it wrong if they see me drinking a beer? Peter, let's talk about 'hurting our witness.' First of all, what 'witness' exactly am I hurting? Am I hurting the gospel of Jesus Christ—the gospel of our Lord and Savior who, for his first miracle, created huge quantities of wine? Or am I 'hurting the witness' of legalistic religious innovations that some churches have added to the gospel, which have little if anything to do with the gospel?"

"Let me tell you something about 'hurting our witness.' It's possible that my being honest—rather than doing one thing in public and another in private—it's just possible that some of our neighbors who are fed up with religious hypocrisy might see a bit of Jesus in me when they see me being a normal guy. That's my hope. As I see it, there are far more people who are fed up with all of the religious stuff that misguided zealots try to cram down their throats, and as a result are turned off of anything and everything that they see as Christian. Maybe it's time for people to realize that Christianity doesn't turn you into a judgmental prude who condemns other people—I see that as a product of religion.

"Hurting our witness to what? Our witness to a Christ-centered life, or our witness to a

When Peter looked at Paul's front yard he didn't see beautiful flowers and a lush green lawn. He saw Paul, beer can in hand, "hurting his witness."

Now you can enjoy these in-depth, thought provoking *Plain Truth Commentaries* on audio cassette tapes.

GALATIANS



Discover the joy of authentic Christianity—without all the rituals, baggage, trappings, tradition and spiritual barnacles that humans have added to the gospel. These tapes can help you see through the fog of religion and avoid the pitfalls and traps of man-made traditions.

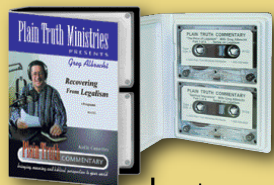
Book of GALATIANS Series

four cassettes—six 26-minute programs



Galatians exposes the futility of trying to earn God's favor. Galatians tells us about true freedom in Christ that liberates us from living with guilt.

- Is freedom in Christ a license for sin?
- Is salvation achieved by a combination of what Christ did for us plus what we do?



Recovering from Legalism Series

two cassettes—four 26-minute programs

Legalism is a spiritual virus—one of Christianity's greatest enemies.

- Do you think God's love for you depends on what you do?
- Do lists of do's and don'ts cloud your relationship with God?
- Are you living a life of spiritual poverty—too much form and too little substance?
- Are you enslaved by religious tradition and teaching?

• Send your order to
Plain Truth Ministries
Pasadena, CA 91129

• Or for credit card orders call us
toll-free at
1-800-309-4466

(All prices include shipping)



PLAIN TRUTH MINISTRIES

PASADENA, CA 91129

Send me the following *Plain Truth Commentary* tapes:

- Book of Galatians Series (6 pgms) RS082.....\$20 All Prices Include Shipping
- Recovering from Legalism Series (4 pgms) RS102.....\$15
- Both Galatians & Legalism Series (10 pgms) M139.....\$30

Plain Truth magazine PIN number: **P**

Name

Address

City State Zip

(Available only in the U.S. and Canada)



life of performance-based religion, a witness to a life enslaved to humanly imposed restrictions? If that's our witness, you better believe I want to hurt it! Peter, I hope that a few people in this neighborhood whom you have 'evangelized' with your religion will see Christ shining through me. By the way, if you are so concerned about what I am drinking, are you judging me by what you can see externally? How do you know I haven't put Diet Coke in this beer can?

"And one more thing, if going to church turns me and others into the kind of narrowed-minded rule-enforcing self-appointed religious critic that you seem to be, if that's the witness the kind of church you go to produces, then I for one need less of that kind of influence."

The next morning both Paul and Peter pulled out of their driveways at about the same time and, together with their families, headed to church.

Two men went up to the temple to pray... (Luke 18: 10). After lunch with his family, Paul enjoyed a round of golf with a close Anglican friend and his Lutheran brother-in-law. After 18 holes all three men enjoyed a beer at the "19th hole." Paul had told his brother-in-law and friend about his front yard confrontation with Peter the previous day. Paul's Lutheran brother-in-law gave Paul a card that featured a family saying, passed down through many Lutheran generations, written in German with an English translation: "In heaven there is no beer, that's why we drink it here."

Consider Peter and Paul. Which man do you believe most "hurt the witness" of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? □

—Greg Albrecht

Note: This parable is based on an actual experience related to the author by "Paul." Our prayer is that Jesus will get though to "Peter"—and offer him a "witness" protection program, so that his legalistic identity by which others have known him can be transformed into a new life in Christ.

THE PLAIN TRUTH