



Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.

News:

Special Service on Saturday, February 22, at 2:00
Wednesday Nights at 6:30

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Legalism has nothing to do with the particulars; it has everything to do with intention.

Noah's three sons, Japheth, Shem, and Ham

Abram, and his wife Sarai from Ur

The land of the Canaanites

Hagar and Ishmael

Isaac, his son Jacob (renamed Israel), and his grandson Joseph

Moses and Mount Sinai

King David and Jerusalem

Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate, or the prayer/suggestion box in the entryway, or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.

God Bless You!

GALATIANS 4:21–31 ~

The Jews were born into slavery *TO* the Law, whereas Christians were reborn into freedom *FROM* the Law.

Paul acknowledged in verse 24 that what follows is allegorical (technically, a typological allegory).

If you take it too literally, or if you press the analogy too far, you'll miss the point.

GALATIANS 5:1–6 ~

God doesn't Save us just to Save us and here, Paul puts it in terms of freedom.

Jesus Saved you so you could be free of sin, death, and the grave. That very freedom, when understood, accepted, and embraced as reality, enables freedom from the endless folly of you trying to earn His favor.

The attempt to produce your own righteousness will only make you a self-righteous legalist in some areas and a self-loathing legalist in other areas.

What does Paul say is the solution? "Stand Firm!" "Stand Firm!" against the human tendency towards legalism.

There can be no mixing of the system of human performance with the system of Christ's performance. A sure sign that your focus is on you is when you find yourself _____.

Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

Name _____ Address _____
Phone _____ Email _____

If you cry out, with the Holy Spirit, a constant refrain of Abba Father! and mean it, while also knowing that it is not because of you, but because of Christ... that's a good start.

Verses 2 through 4 constitute a personal plea pointing out that there are two completely different systems of being justified before God.

As Paul has already proved in this Letter, the Law was never a means of justification. Its purpose was to show that human performance could never result in Justification before God.

The Law pointed us to God.

Ironically, many legalistic people use these three verses to prove that legalism is necessary.

It isn't a balancing act of Grace and works.

Anyone trying to improve their Salvation through their own efforts severs themselves from Christ.

We do that all the time. It doesn't mean that Christ abandons us.

Verse 5: For we Christians, filled with the Breath of God, have the kind of faith that results in a sure and certain hope. A hope in God's character.

Paul is talking about the last day when all true Christians will be declared perfectly righteous in Christ... For all to see.

While we are perfectly righteous right now, it is only in God's eyes, but on that day, everyone will see that it was always true.

Verse 6: Is the basis for verse 5 but also informs us that there is as much danger in not getting circumcised as there is in going through with it, if we allow such a position to lead to self-righteousness – legalism, again.

All that matters is whether you are Justified before God through believing God's declaration concerning you.

That's faith.

Faith works through Agapê love.

First, it means that you have accepted enough of God's love for you, that your faith can handle sharing His love.

Second, it means that demonstrated love proves your faith.

Galatians 5:6 ~ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but (what matters is) faith working through love."

I Corinthians 7:19 ~ Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God.

Galatians 6:15 ~ For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but (what matters is) a new creation.

Last week we finished Paul's argument against legalism in Christianity. The specific form decried in Galatians, of course, is a slavish subservience to Judaic Law, but that is merely the flavor of legalism condemned here.

Legalism is human beings thinking that they have the power or ability to move God. As we have repeatedly seen, legalism, while appearing to be a devotion to God, is actually a devotion to ourselves.

Not only do we think that we have this power or ability, we actually use it to appease God, not for His sake, but in order to get Him to give us what we want for our sake. It is egotistical, self-serving, and blasphemous.

Again, it has nothing to do with the particulars; it has everything to do with our purpose or motivation. Paul Himself continued to observe many Jewish customs, traditions, and Laws, for the rest of his life. It's just that, as a Christian, he didn't ever do any of that in order to gain God's favor, because, as a Christian, he already had all of God's favor through Christ.

For me and perhaps for you we get it at this point, and we might think that Paul should wrap things up and close his Letter. We talked about the inadequacy of written communication last time. Paul couldn't judge whether his argument was effective and so he launched an additional argument from another direction to ensure that the Galatians got it.

Obviously, the Holy Spirit thought it necessary and I'm sure that it was. In the first century the biggest threat to Christianity was the Judaizers pushing the church towards a legalistic Jewish sect with a little Jesus thinly spread over it as a topping.

The Judaizers weren't going to give up easily and I'm certain more proof was needed to combat their arguments. This understanding provides a backdrop to the next section. It is likely that the Judaizer's would counter Paul by saying that Abraham's heirs and so, God's people, were reckoned through Isaac, not Ishmael and the Law was given to those descended from Isaac and not Ishmael.

Now, we will see Paul address that contention. In making this as understandable as possible, I'm

going to prep you with some background review before we dive in.

In an oversimplified explanation, let me remind you that, after the worldwide catastrophic Flood, Noah's three sons, Japheth, Shem, and Ham, together with their wives, began repopulating the earth. Best guess, Shem's descendant Abram was an Akkadian from the city of Ur, located just under 200 miles southeast of modern-day Bagdad, Iraq.

Back then the Akkadians and the Sumerians were in constant competition for control of the fertile region between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Each nation conquered the other in a series of back-and-forth victories. God told Abram to leave his hometown, and in faith, he did.

Abram, and his wife Sarai, eventually settled in the land of the Canaanites in modern-day Israel, arriving there about 4,000 years ago. God changed their names to the more familiar Abraham and Sarah.

God promised them a whole slew of descendants, but nothing seemed to indicate that God's promise would be fulfilled in a natural fashion. After living 10

years among the Canaanites, Sarah, then 75, suggested a solution to her then 85-year-old husband.

The two were reasonably wealthy and owned a number of slaves. One of them was Sarah's personal attendant, an Egyptian woman named Hagar. Since Sarah knew that she was well past child bearing age she convinced her husband to father a child for them through her slave. Notice that nowhere along the way did God hint at this as a possible remedy.

Abraham agreed and at the age of 86 became the father of Ishmael. Hagar took advantage of her importance as the mother of the family heir. Sarah was displeased and eventually ran Hagar off along with her son Ishmael after Sarah, at the age of 90, miraculously, underscore miraculously, became the biological mother of Isaac.

God made it absolutely clear that His covenant of promise was to be fulfilled through Isaac and not through Ishmael.

Isaac's grandson Joseph would eventually become second only to Pharaoh himself in Egypt and because of that, and because of a famine in Canaan, Joseph's father, Isaac's chosen son and heir of God's Promise, Jacob, renamed Israel, moved his whole family to Egypt.

After a time there, new rulers conquered Egypt and enslaved the Israelites. The family who once owned slaves became slaves.

Four-plus centuries later, Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt. God directed them to Mount Sinai where He gave the people, through Moses, the Law. Because they were a practically faithless people, God had them do laps around Mount Sinai for 40 years.

After that, God brought the Children of Israel into the Promised Land of modern-day Israel. The very land that God had guaranteed to their ancestor Abraham. This is where they settled roughly 3,500 years ago.

Over the next 500 years the Israelites, known for their Hebrew language and their Jewish religion, established a nation, built a capital, a royal palace

and most importantly a Holy Temple in Jerusalem completed roughly 3,000 years ago. The area of Canaan became known as Judea.

That's a quick overview. Let's read...

Galatians 4:21–31, 21Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the Law? 22For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and one by the free woman. 23But the son by the slave woman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. 24This is speaking allegorically, for these women are two covenants: one coming from Mount Sinai giving birth to children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. 25Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is enslaved with her children. 26But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. 27For it is written: “Rejoice, infertile one, you who do not give birth; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For the children of the desolate one ARE more numerous Than THOSE of the one who has a husband.” 28And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29But as at that time the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the

Spirit, so it is even now. 30But what does the Scripture say? “Drive out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” 31So then, brothers and sisters, we are not children of a slave woman, but of the free woman.

The gist is easy enough to grasp. Paul was using the early history of the Jews to point out that Jews were born into slavery TO the Law, whereas Christians were reborn into freedom FROM the Law.

The implication is since you are reborn as a free Christian and child of the Promise, why on earth would you re-shackle yourself as a slave?

The hard part is seeing how Paul can take the children born through Isaac and equate them with the children born through Ishmael.

Without wearing you out by going through a bunch of technical minutiae, it has to do with Paul acknowledging in verse 24 that what follows is allegorical.

He was taking a real-life example and reassigning the particulars to fit his analogy to illustrate the point that he's been making all along. If you take it too literally, as people sometimes do, it becomes a mess.

Clearly the Jews were the children of Promise in reality. Paul is asking us to suspend reality and go along with his allegorical example to help us understand his point.

He adds that Hagar and Ishmael were hostile to Sarah and Isaac. So too then should enslaved Jews be hostile to free Christians. Hence the reason is that the Judaizers are causing the Galatians harm.

Again, you cannot press the analogy too far because we know that Sarah, and ultimately Abraham, were none too kind to Hagar and Ishmael.

Galatians 5:1–6, 1It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. 2Look! I, Paul, tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. 3And I testify again to every man who has himself circumcised, that he is

obligated to keep the whole Law. 4You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by the Law; you have fallen from grace. 5For we, through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 6For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

I've said many times that God doesn't Save us for no reason or without a purpose. Here Paul puts it in terms of freedom. Jesus took your sin as though it was His and He paid the penalty of tortuous death required and then He put His Own Robe of Righteousness upon you as though it were yours.

He did that so you could be free of sin, death, and the grave. That very freedom when understood, accepted, and embraced as reality enables freedom from the endless folly of you trying to earn His favor.

It is a fool's errand. The freedom Paul is focused on here is the freedom from the impossible task of producing your own righteousness and securing your own justification and winning your own sanctification.

You cannot do it, and if you try you will only end up as a strange combination of a self-righteous legalist in some areas and a self-loathing legalist in other areas.

You will be bitter, jealous, and unbearable. It is the number one reason given by the non-Christian and unchurched masses for why they don't want anything to do with church. Christians have a reputation for being incredibly judgmental, unloving, and hypocritical. The opposite of what Christ commands us to be and the primary reason for it is that we are legalists at heart.

We refuse to completely surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ as both our One and Only Savior and as our One and Only Lord. What does Paul say is the solution? "Stand Firm!"

In this case, it is to "Stand Firm!" against the human tendency towards legalism. You will be continuously tempted to be legalistic, and you must, as a command from the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul, continue to resist that temptation.

There can be no mixing of the two. You cannot mix the system of human performance with the system of Christ's performance. It is an all or nothing proposition. You cannot mix Grace with a little Law keeping for your status before God.

You might think, "Well, I'm not at all legalistic." You might think, "I'm not 100% sure what being legalistic means." Legalism is when your focus shifts from Jesus to you. A sure sign that your focus has slipped is when you judge others. There, I've given you another secret where behavior reveals belief. If you are judgmental, you are not focused on Jesus.

Bitterness, jealousy, judging, gossip, backbiting, negativity, hypocritically, and using a double standard, are all signs of legalism. When you focus on you and your performance rather than on Jesus and His performance you will become a pain, and worse, you will tarnish Christ's reputation.

I hope that you can see that verse 1 is the conclusion and summary action for the end of chapter four that we started with today. Verse 1 is also the beginning of this next section functioning as a hinge or a transitional verse.

How do we avoid legalism? We continue to vigilantly “Stand Firm!” against its constant insidious infiltration of our mind, refusing to fall victim to its relentless attacks.

Here’s another secret... The best defense, in this case, is a stellar offence. If you cry out, together with the indwelling Holy Spirit, a constant refrain of Abba Father! Father of mine! Mine own Father God in Heaven! And mean it while simultaneously knowing that its true, not because of you, but because of Christ that’s a good start. Own the freedom you have been given as a beloved child of God.

It cannot all be offence though so remain alert and continuously stand firm against any hint of legalism.

Verses 2 through 4 constitute a personal plea from Paul, who was an absolute expert on the Law and obeying it as a super high performing legalist. His point here, which is very easy to recognize once you do, but is often misunderstood until it’s explained, is that there are two completely different systems of being justified before God.

There is the legalistic obedience to the Old Covenant Law and there is the surrender to God's provided justification through Christ Jesus. As Paul has already detailed in this Letter, it turned out that the Law was never actually a means of human justification. It turned out that God gave the Law to prove beyond any doubt at all that human performance could never result in Justification before God.

The Law was given to show that mankind definitely could not ever Save themselves and so the only one to ever earn their justification under the Law was God made man. Jesus perfectly obeyed because while being fully human, he was also fully God.

The Law pointed us to God. It then becomes completely nonsensical for people who have already embraced God to then want to be subjected to the requirements of the Law which only existed to point them where they already are.

To do that would be to put themselves under a legalistic system of trying to earn what was already given as a gift through Jesus. Jesus therefore would

be of no use to them because their very intentions and actions would be a rejection of the total Salvation found in Him. It would be the same as if they had never received grace – as if they had fallen from grace.

Again, my friends, there can be no mixing of the two systems. It is either human performance or it is Christ's performance. It is an all or nothing proposition. You cannot mix Grace with a little Law keeping for your status before God.

Ironically, many legalistic people over the centuries right down to the present day use these three verses to prove that legalism is necessary. It's outrageous. There are many places in the Bible where people bringing an agenda completely twist God's Holy Word to mean the opposite of what He intended. This is one such case.

Many people, particularly Catholics, but plenty of Protestants too, take these verses to mean that a fully Saved, Born Again, and Spirit-filled Christian crying out Abba Father can lose their Salvation and be cut off from God forever.

Notice please, the only way that could happen is if God was fickle, or if your Salvation rests in your hands. The first case is blasphemy because God is faithful, not fickle. The second place is blasphemy because you become a participant in your Salvation thus diminishing the role Christ Jesus plays in that effort. It is legalism pure and simple. It is no different at all from mixing Grace with a little Law keeping.

What's wrong with this picture? Everything! It isn't a balancing act of Grace and works. The Law has absolutely nothing to do with Grace except that it pointed you to it. Even if we erased the word Law and replaced it with doing good it is the same legalistic nonsense. It's all Christ or it is all you – choose.

Well then, if Paul wasn't saying that Saved people could lose their Salvation, what was he saying here? Paul was trying to dramatically show that in no uncertain terms, grace as a gift, and human works to earn grace, are diametrically opposed – they cannot coexist at all.

He wasn't saying that a genuinely Saved person would lose their Salvation, he was saying that

anyone trying to improve their Salvation through their own efforts was severing themselves from Christ.

And my dear friends, we do that all the time, to one degree, or another. It doesn't mean that Christ abandons us just because we're morons. It means that we are abandoning Him to the degree that we are focused on ourselves. We are not living as we could live in His freedom.

Here's the proof... Verse 5, For we... We who are Christians filled with the Breath of God, we through that indwelling Holy Spirit are by faith waiting for the hope of righteousness.

The word choice and phrasing mean that Paul is talking about the Great White Throne Judgment on the last day of the physical universe. On that day, all true Christians will bypass that Judgment Seat as they are formally, publicly, for everyone to see, declared perfectly righteous in Christ.

That is the Christian hope that we hold because we trust God. We like Abraham before us believe God. We believe His promise of eternal Salvation

bestowed upon us as His very own children through the sacrifice of Jesus. It is called faith.

A total reliance and dependence upon God and zero reliance and dependence upon ourselves or anyone or anything else.

Make no mistake about it we are perfectly righteous right now... In God's eyes, but certainly not in the eyes of others. Particularly not in the eyes of unbelievers and if we're honest, not in our own eyes.

But praise be to God, we trust that it is true even though there is so little evidence for it because we believe that God will declare us perfectly righteous on that day and on that day, everyone will see that it was always true.

Verse 6 is so beautiful it would be impossible to overstate it. It functions as the basis, or foundation, for verse 5. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love."

First, let me say that there is every bit as much danger in not getting circumcised as there is in going through with it, if we allow such a position to lead to self-righteousness – to a superiority complex.

How many Christians fall prey to thinking too highly of themselves because they are so much smarter, wiser, or more enlightened than others. Looking down on a person because they are not embracing their freedom in Christ as well as you are, is proof that you've, once again, made it about you, instead of about Jesus. Once more, it is the insidious and deceptive whisper of legalism.

Now, on to the basis... For the person who is found IN Christ, the things that we do or that have been done to us are irrelevant for Salvation. Our nationality, our ethnicity, our culture, our gender, our individual personality are meaningless when it comes to eternity.

All that matters is whether you are Justified before God through believing God's declaration concerning you. Where is that declaration of your righteousness

now? It is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit. God testifying with your spirit that you are His.

Where will we see that declaration of your righteousness again? On the final day when God the Father boldly declares it to all the Heavenly Host and the earthly multitudes.

That's faith. Faith that gives us undeniable hope. But how can we know that for sure right now? Faith works through Agapê love. If you have a non-native, unnatural care, concern, and love for God and for the church and for the lost the Spirit of God is at work in you.

It means that you have accepted enough of God's love for you that your faith can handle sharing that love.

In two other places Paul makes the same point, each from a slightly different angle. Here what matters is "faith working through love." In I Corinthians 7:19, he wrote, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." Then in Galatians 6:15, Paul said, "For neither is

circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but (what matters is) a new creation.”

At first blush that might seem like three very different things – even contradictory things. To Love God, and then others, is the keeping of the commandments of God and it is only possible as a new creation in Christ Jesus.

It is all the very same thing. You cannot obey God’s commandments to love unless you believe in Christ enough to be transformed into a new man born from above, born again by the Holy Spirit.

As a new creation in Christ, you can obey His command to love if through faith you let go of you and make everything about Him.