

TB – Legalism is for Losers

11/7/21

Galatians 3:1-22

Sunday AM

LEGALISM. Just the word alone causes me to shiver. To be a legalist means you strictly adhere to a list of rules/laws as the means to define your identity and someone else's value. **Theologically** – it's holding yourself/others to a list of do's/don'ts to determine if we're all worthy of God's favor and our acceptance.

W/ apologies to Jeff Foxworthy, this week I stumbled across a list of – ***You might be a legalist if...***

- 1 – You've ever hidden anything in your house before the pastor or another Christian came over for a visit.
- 2 – If you assume people w/ piercing/tattoo need Jesus.
- 3 – If you judge families as either James Dobson or Jerry Springer material based on appearances alone.
- 4 – If you think any translation of the Bible except the KJV is an abomination and not of God.
- 5 – If someone does something you think is wrong, and your first response is to judge or look down on them.
- 6 – If you're better at applying a sermon you hear to someone else than you are to yourself.
- 7 – If these statements make you angry/uncomfortable.

Have you ever noticed how quickly we can turn from grace to law? In every religion, people are often found defaulting to rule-keeping and religious activity to qualify their faith – and when we don't meet the standard, we tend to start hand out scarlet letters.

Shortly after I trusted Jesus as my Savior, I visited an ultra-fundamentalist church where I'm fairly sure their church slogan was – *Don't drink, don't smoke, don't curse or go out w/ girls who do.* I'm kidding, yet I do recall a number of rules that had to be kept to be saved or keep your salvation. Rules like the length of your hair/clothes, and whether/not you wore a tie.

Listen – I'm not poking fun or condemning people w/ strong, moral values – right/wrong and good/evil do exist in our world. But, like Paul, we must confront the lie of **Jesus plus anything** (*like keeping rules*) as the way to God. As Jesus told the Pharisees – *Woe to you, teachers of the law/Pharisees, you hypocrites! You're like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous; but on the inside, you're full of hypocrisy/wickedness.* Mt. 23:27f

We're in a series in Galatians entitled, **Truth Bombs**, looking at some of the most explosive spiritual truths that when dropped, can change our *earthly* lives and *eternal* destinies. In week 1, we looked at the atomic bomb that **there's only one Gospel** – that is, *Jesus is the only way to God.* Then last week, we looked at the truth that the Gospel is for *everyone, everywhere* – and it changes *everything*.

Today, I want to jump into Galatians 3 to find the 3rd Truth Bomb – and that is, ***legalism is for losers!***

You foolish Galatians! Who has tricked you? Before your eyes Jesus was portrayed as crucified. I'd like to learn one thing from you: Did you receive the H.S. by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? ...So, I ask, does God give you His Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Understand, then, those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the Gospel in advance to him: "All nations will be blessed thru you." So, those who rely on faith are blessed along w/ Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who doesn't continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God, b/c "the righteous will live by faith." The law isn't based

on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The man who does these things will live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles thru Jesus, so by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit. Galatians 3:1-14

Here in this text, we discover a real conundrum that occurs too often when people monkey w/ the truth – ***we default to adding effort/rule keeping w/ grace.***

I think the biggest reason this occurs is b/c we can't believe the cross is sufficient to save us. Yet, if good works/human effort were necessary for grace, then it'd no longer be grace. And this is where legalism struggles – b/c the legalist think God needs help in attaining/maintaining a person's salvation.

To help us all grapple w/ the threat of ***legalism***, Paul teaches us the legalism is for losers b/c...

I It **LURES** Us from the Intent of the Law

When we think of the Law, we often think of the Ten Commandments; but in actuality, the Law was ***the-10 plus*** an additional set of **613 laws** (many manmade). And somewhere along the way, mankind got it in his mind that he had the ability and responsibility to keep all of these rules or else God wouldn't accept him.

YET – God never intended the keeping of the Law to be the pathway to salvation.

This is why Jesus took the Law and summed it up into (2) commands – *Love God w/ all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength* AND as a result of loving God... *go love your neighbor as you love yourself*. It was to return His people back to a right intention of the Law.

DMT – the purpose of the Law was **NEVER** to provide a means of salvation or teach people they can be good enough to earn God's acceptance. Instead, the purpose of the Law was to ***reveal*** to everyone their sinfulness and need for God's grace.

This is why God laid down so many rules – to show everyone that it's impossible for *anyone* to keep *everyone* of them – ***showing us that we all fall short.***

The Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. Galatians 3:24

IOW – the Law teaches us that we're sinners in need of a Savior; and it points us to God's solution of the cross – where forgiveness is available and complete.

THUS – the intent of the Law was never to save; but only to reveal our sinfulness and need for a Savior.

II It **TEACHES** We Can be Good Enough

Legalism leads people to believe that we need more than Jesus for salvation – like keeping a list of rules.

A seminary prof of mine said – *Legalism is nailing a sign to the cross that says, 'necessary but not enough.'*

In my own testimony of having been raised in a loosely Catholic/Episcopal home, I was taught good boys go to heaven and bad boys go to hell.

I was taught a person's actions/behavior determine their destiny. Iso, I thought if I followed all of the rules and lived out the Golden Rule, then God would accept me – and I could earn my salvation.

This reminds of the rich, young ruler in Matthew 19, where Jesus had an encounter w/ a man who earnestly thought b/c he had kept the Law his entire life, he was deserving of receiving eternal life/God's acceptance. Yet Jesus said otherwise; b/c if a person can earn grace, then it'd no longer be grace. If we could get to heaven thru some other means than the cross, then Jesus died for no reason – *for if righteousness could be gained thru the Law, then Jesus died for nothing.*

The problem w/ the legalism and the Law is they teach that we can DO something to earn/keep God's favor – and thus, be good enough for God's approval

Have you seen the movies – *Saving Private Ryan*. It was based on the true story of (4) brothers from PA who went to war – and 3 of the 4 were killed in combat. When military officials learned this news, they detached a rescue mission to save the 4th son – Private James Ryan – who'd just landed on Omaha Beach in the Invasion of Normandy on D-Day. They'd hoped that by rescuing him, they could spare a family from suffering the loss of (4) sons.

In the movie, the squad leader, played by Tom Hanks, leads a 6-man team behind enemy lines to find Ryan. Of course, not one of them is happy w/ their mission, often making comments like, "*He better be worth it. He'd better cure a disease, or invent a longer-lasting light bulb.*" Eventually, they find him, but before they can get him to safety, they're attacked by the Germans, and Hank's is mortally wounded. As he's dying, he grabs Ryan and says, "**Earn this! Earn this.**"

As the movie ends, the scene shifts to the present, w/ an elderly James Ryan visiting the grave of John Miller in Normandy. W/ tears in his eyes, he says to the grave marker, "Every day I think about what you said to me that day on the bridge; and I've tried to live my life the best I could. *I hope it was enough. In your eyes, I hope I've earned what you have done for me.*"

This movie as a parable of how some of us relate to God as we all were the objects of a heavenly rescue mission where Jesus stepped behind enemy lines to save us from the clutches of sin/Satan. Yet sadly, like Private Ryan, some of us think we have to spend the rest of their lives "earning it" and *good enough*.

What we learn in this text is that the last words Jesus said on the cross weren't – **EARN THIS**; but *It is finished!* In this statement, Jesus was saying our eternity isn't based on what we can do to earn God's favor, but only on what God has done for us.

So, when Jesus said – *it is finished*, He was saying *there's nothing more we could ever do to be saved*. **Legalism is for losers** b/c legalism misses the point of God's grace b/c it falls short of earning God's favor.

III It **LEADS** Us Away from Jesus' Mission

In **Luke 19** – in the story of a wee little man named Zacchaeus – Jesus makes a statement to Zach that speaks to the very reason for His incarnation. (v. 10)

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

This was God's purpose in the advent of Christ. This is why God became flesh and made His dwelling among us – *so He could lay down His life to give life to everyone who'd believe/receive His grace.*

So, for a person to think they can attain salvation and God's forgiving grace based on their effort/ability thru the keeping of some set of rules/regulations – it misses the purpose of Jesus entering humanity, living a sinless life, and then laying down His life on a cross. Jesus did what He did b/c there was no other way for salvation.

Which causes some people to ask – then did the death, burial, and resurrection Jesus **abolish** the law? Let me address this idea w/ a statement Jesus made concerning Himself in **Matthew 5:17**:

Do not misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose.

IOW – Jesus didn't enter time/space to get rid of the Law – remember, the Law serves a noble/important purpose of revealing our sinfulness and need for God. ***Yet the Law cannot save*** – it either condemns a person in their sin, or it points them to the solution to the problem of sin – and His name is JESUS. He didn't abolish the Law, instead, He fulfilled and completed where the Law fell short.

The problem w/ legalism is it makes us think we can do something to cause God to accept us – and that whatever we've done, we have to keep doing so that He won't reject us. It gives us a completely inaccurate view of God, His grace, salvation, and His Great Commission.

Thankfully, the cure for legalism is the same cure God has provided for ever sin/malady in humanity – it is the truth of the Gospel. It is believing/receiving that God so loved you, that He gave His one/only Son to provide a one/only way unto forgiveness and intimacy w/ Him.

TAKEAWAYS

Legalism is one of the great threats to an intimate walk with Jesus because it forces a person to trust in their ability instead of in God's grace.

The purpose of the Law was never to save us but to reveal our need for a Savior – to point us to Jesus.

Jesus didn't come to abolish the Law or O.T., but to complete it – so that we could be rescued and saved.

NEXT STEPS

Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

G – Have you ever struggled with legalism? How?

R – Read **Romans 7:7-12**. What is the real value of the Law as it pertains to God and His grace?

O – Read **Matthew 19:16-26**. What does God want us to learn from Jesus' exchange with this man?

W – Get with someone this week to talk about our tendency to trust in our abilities and goodness – and how these impact knowing and walking with God.