



Legalism Gets in the Way of the Best Kind of Fishing

By Kurt von Schleicher

Are you totally liberated from legalistic weirdness? Do you feel that you are better than others due to your adherence to rules, or just better off in Christ? Do you try to earn points or still try to maintain righteousness in your life by strictly conforming to the letter of the law, rather than to its Spirit...or do you desire an enjoyable loving relationship with God and people more than with the cold written code? Rules mania—what a drag a life like that would be!

Now of course you won't find the word *legalism* in the Bible at all. Christian, I'm not talking about having deep personal convictions, good house rules for basic order in your home, or having high ethical standards here. God wants us to have those things. But do you have a closer relationship with rules than you have with God and His people? Are you on some kind of power..or control trip? Are you afraid of losing control of the congregation that you lead pastor and repeatedly coming down hard on your constituents when they don't deserve the lashing? With all due respect, it's not your church to control—its God's and He has put you there to help govern and help the people by His grace.

We won't find the word *legalism* in the Bible at all. It is a term that Christians use to describe a doctrinal position where saints (or sinners) overemphasize a system of rules and regulations in both achieving salvation (which is impossible to do—no one can earn it) and spiritual growth ..or what I would call, maintaining righteousness. Legalists believe that a very strict literal adherence to rules and regulations is what God demands in order for them to gain righteousness. *Legalism*, is a doctrinal position that is essentially opposed to God's grace. And those who hold to this position fail to see the very purpose for which the law, especially *God's Top Ten List* (the Old Testament's Law of Moses), was even given—it's to be our "schoolmaster" or "school tutor" if you will, to point us to Christ (the Bible Jesus) in order that we will repent and start an ongoing loving relationship with Father God by faith. It's to be a grace thing, instead of a passion for cold impractical rules and regulations. The Bible says this:

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24).

“But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:25).

Listen, it's possible to graduate from school and mature. Did you know that God devoted an entire book of the Bible to fiercely combating legalism? Did you know that Paul called legalism *"a different gospel"*?

Yes, legalism is trying to attain or maintain your own righteousness with God by human effort. Most of us would never want to tell a lost person that if they try really hard and are careful to *do* all the right things, then they can work their way into being saved by God. That's so false! Most Christians will correctly say that a sinner must *admit that they've blown it... that there is nothing that they can do works-wise to be saved...that a sinner is totally lost and without God. They need to choose to turn from a life of sin to Christ because of what He did for them on Calvary's cross and then their life will change!"*

God wants us Christians to learn how to apply Christ's love and His grace in our everyday lives, instead of being all hyper-critical of ourselves and of others. You and I are to live the Christian life by grace through faith as we walk victoriously in the Spirit, as we walk in the light and walk in His truth.

Hey gang, Galatians was not written by Paul to lost people, telling them how to be saved. It was written by him to Christian people who had already received the Holy Spirit. Paul was rightly bugged inside by how these baby Christians were wrongly going about trying to advance, because they were trying to live out the Christian life by keeping the law! Look what Paul said:

“Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law?—of works? Nay: but by the law of faith” (Rom. 3:27).

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4).

You see, it's impossible to be justified by the law. God's promises are true and you must be born again to enjoy all that He has for you. You must fully trust in Christ alone for your right standing with God ...as you go the full distance with Jesus as Lord. Christians can then walk in freedom by holding fast to Him with these Scriptures, as well as to what the Apostle John said, ***"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ"*** (Jn. 1:17).

We must remember to be gracious to others, especially to our brothers and sisters in Christ in the Church. It's so easy for authority figures to come off brash or harsh. It's too easy for any of us to lack tact in how we relate to people, or to show disrespect to others. We must stick with the facts when we confront people instead of guessing about their inner thoughts and heart condition. The Bible asks: ***"Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand"*** (Rom. 14:4). It asks, ***"You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat"*** (Rom. 14:10).

And while we need to be gracious to one another and tolerant of disagreement over disputable matters (over non-essential doctrines), we cannot accept heresy. We can not accept rebellion against authority in the venues that we are responsible for. Sure there will be power struggles at times, but Christian parents must have both tough and tender love in different situations and stand firm for what is right. They must have biblical rules and not waffle with them—they must win in the home. Some will be accused of being legalists for having legitimate rules, but it is good to have them and enforce them. Some subordinates don't like "the enforcing part," no matter how it is done. But that's how God wants it to be and that is what is best for the family. Be kind, direct and blunt if you will, even if they say that's wrong. It only matters what God thinks about how you did things, for He is the One we will give account to.

Christian teachers and principals must win in the classroom to the glory of God. The must win right and be supported. Subordinates are not there to take over. We are to be concerned with the children's overall welfare, not primarily for ourselves. We are also exhorted by the Lord to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 1:3). Are you willing to lay down your life to stand up for what is right? God can help you in this area.

These are merely guidelines to remember and then properly apply in love. If we do so, we will be safe from both legalism and heresy. Remember, our unity is to be formed around the Person of Jesus Christ and Essential Christian doctrine. John said, ***"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world"*** (1 Jn. 4:1-3).

We are living in a day where gays get married and flaunt their extremely whacked lifestyle...where our nation has really gone astray on many levels, where Moslem terrorists destroy and wreck havoc; where gang bangers push the envelope every chance they get, wanting to rule the entire school and also take over on the streets... where our lawmakers and political leaders celebrate their own immorality and this is not only accepted, its lauded. We are living in a day when Christians are afraid to witness to their friends of Jesus' saving love on their break time, because they don't want to land a law suit for their company or themselves... where the legalists and liberals are stirring up trouble for those trying to involved themselves in Christ's Great Commission worldwide.

You know it's one thing for Christians to be persecuted for their faith by lost people who don't understand, but it's quite another thing when so called Christians are purposely getting in the way of other Christians seeking to tend, water, cultivate and reap a harvest for God in His vineyard.

The heresy of legalism is an ugly thing! It involves telling people that there are certain things that they must do and not do to "maintain" their right standing with God ..or to achieve victory in the Christian life! We see it in mean-spirited hyper Calvinists who picket evangelistic campaigns, telling Christians never to share their faith with unbelievers. We need to quit following religious fools and all get back to the Bible to see what it really says.

Paul says it this way: **“After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?”** (Gal. 3:3). The victorious Christian life is a gift attainable by allowing the Holy Spirit to live big on the inside ...and through us! Jesus is the only One who lived the Christian life flawlessly. Please let Him live it through you by His Spirit.

Peter tells us that, **“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness”** (2 Pet. 1:3). Isn't it just like the Lord to give us the victory continuously? Is that not what He did over and over in Old Testament times? The Bible says, **“It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was your right hand, your arm, and the light of your face, for you loved them”** (Ps. 44:3).

Religious person, listen up! Having a great work ethic is a good thing to have in the market place, but it will get you no where in the economy of God's plan of salvation. God will not share his glory with you or with me. I don't want to say: Hey look here at what I have done. That kind of statement is all about pride. God's deal is one of humility and He has paid too high a price to purchase our salvation and then let us go add to what He has done to get some credit. Let all the glory go to Him. Trust and obey, for there is no other way. You didn't die on the cross for you and me.

Have you ever wondered about that—why the Bible talks about obeying or disobeying the Gospel? Man, how exactly does a person obey the Gospel and keep obeying it? The answer is by trusting Christ to live the Christian life through them, by the power of the Holy Spirit controlling them. Christian, the Spirit was given to you at the time of your salvation. He indwells you. Have you been baptized in the Spirit? Maybe it's time to be refilled with the Spirit. I don't care what you want to call it ..or not call it, but we believers seem to be vessels that leak and really need to be refilled. We need His empowering!

God is the One to do this for liberty's sake—for witnessing's sake, for He is **“the Author and finisher of our faith”** (Heb. 12:2, kjv). Paul said:

“To this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:15-17).

Is your heart is full of bitterness towards others along with disrespect or maybe self-condemnation? Could it be that you have been going about living the Christian life all wrong? Check yourself to see if you really are in Christ. If anything that I have said has resonated inside or struck a chord within you, could it be that the Lord desperately wants to see you set free from legalism? Admit it and quit it—tell on yourself to Him. God loves legalists, but He hates legalism. [Please come to Him](#) and be set free so that He can make you into the witnessing person—the gracious fisher of men and women that He has always intended for you to become. Let Him do the work in and through you!