

# RELIGIOUS LEGALISM

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Religious legalism essentially replaces the grace of God with the pride of man. Legalists, whether or not they realize or admit it, seek God's favor and reward for adherence to some self-created, arbitrary system of rules and/or rituals. Beyond this, they concern themselves with their presentation of "godliness" to others. This causes them to focus on outward appearance and acts rather than inward heart condition. Without realizing it - and while adamantly denying it - the legalist considers himself higher than he ought, and employs the measure of himself to judge others. Further, he so busies himself with monitoring rules adherence among those around him that he is blinded to his own sinfulness and shortcomings. Then, when others choose to pursue righteousness in the freedom Christ provides, he accuses them of going the "way of the world," living without rules to indulge themselves. He fails to understand that, in Christ, men are freed from man-made rules to follow God's rules. Jesus reserved His harshest criticisms for the purveyors of legalistic "religion" (Mt 23; Lk 11).

The measure of someone's standing before God has everything to do with his heart and nothing to do with legalistic adherence. Legalists may *seem* to be seeking after the righteous requirements of God, but they are actually pursuing the satisfaction of meeting their own requirements of themselves. In failing to see their sinfulness from God's view, they are unaware of their need of a Savior. Instead, their mitigated view of their shortcomings allows them to seek exoneration in the keeping of their own rules and rituals, all the while denying they are doing so. They judge themselves as good by their own standard of obedience. But actually, they do not and cannot obey even their own impositions perfectly. They cover this failure with their own self-created allowances, exemptions and justifications. Sadly, this serves to drive others away from God and Christianity as they witness hypocrisy among the rules-makers. The unsaved more easily allow that self-professing Christians may not meet *God's* standards, but are moved to mocking and derision when they witness them violating their own.

Legalism axiomatically leads adherents away from proper focus on God's Word and *His* standards. It corrupts others and spreads that corruption, greatly displeasing God. Thus, Jesus' scathing rebuke of the legalists of His day, pointing out their nullification of God's Word in the promotion of their traditions (Mt 15; Mk 7). Legalism instills a false sense of security, either replacing God's completed provision with an invention deemed reasonable and logical (failing to assess its want of efficacy), or driven by a wrongly-perceived need or virtue in adding to it. In addition, legalism invariably engenders an emptiness in those who pursue it - it lacks the vibrant excitement and exhilarating joy God intends for Holy Spirit-led, intimate relationship with His true children. Finally, legalists strip themselves of the power to evangelize because they possess ineffective tools. Therefore, legalistic "religions" excuse their lack of evangelism by claiming to witness by their lifestyle. While they may nevertheless involve themselves in various

outreach efforts of a practical nature - even beyond mere feel-goodism - those efforts do not and cannot include any effective presentation of the gospel (if any at all).

Another facet of some legalistic thinking is that self-denial is virtuous, accruing righteous reward. Some view convenience and comfort as de facto sin, eschewing even the simplest, most widely-accepted modern inventions, methods and utilitarian means. They deliberately choose inconvenient or difficult ways, considering them righteously superior to ease and convenience. They criticize, and some even condemn those who avail themselves of modern advancements. In the extreme, some engage in self-flagellation (self-inflicted injury, pain and suffering - even being literally nailed to a cross) believing that God is pleased with such “sacrifice.” Many scripture passages address this error (Ps 51:16; Pr 15:8; Isa 1:11; Jer 6:20; Hos 8:13; 9:4; Rom 12:1, etc.).

Among legalists of the “plain communities,” there is an overt emphasis on “separation from the world.” This is indeed a biblical concept (Jam 1:27; 2Co 6:14, etc.) but it is misunderstood and misapplied. Rom 2:28 teaches that a man is not a [Christian] if he is only one outwardly. God's call to Christian separation from the world has to do with character - obedience to/relationship with Him. The plain communities find fulfillment of this exhortation to separateness in outward appearance and cultural lifestyle. They so overwhelmingly focus upon - and harshly enforce among themselves - this separation rooted in outward doings, appearance and self-denial rooted in fear that they preclude the Holy Spirit's working. Often, there is unspoken and repressed misery, suffering, and a desperate desire to break free of the replacement yoke which Gal 5:1 expressly forbids. For many, it ultimately devolves to a mere cult-like drudgery.

In legalistic circles, there is an absence of proper emphasis on sound biblical doctrine. Such an emphasis risks exposing the error of their legalism. Thus, many legalistic enterprises discourage or outright forbid personal home bible study (some allow individual study but ban groups; some discourage or ban both). Many also forbid congregants to attend other fellowships where they may discover the error of the legalism they've been yoked to. A signature component of some legalistic fellowships is that congregants do not bring a bible to their fellowship meetings. And while the bible may be employed and taught, proper exposition of sound, complete doctrine is lacking. Among adherents, Acts 17:11 is either unknown or simply ignored. Ironically, many legalists do, in fact, “know” the scriptures very well, but yet engage in their “religion” and lifestyle rooted in their replacement source of righteousness instead.

Legalists justify their extra-biblical standards of righteousness in various ways: appealing to “traditions” (as mentioned), or to well-intended and unabashed reliance on a charismatic or professional leader, or the consensus of the fellowship board. Yet, despite the flaws in their view of God and His Word, adherents from among the most widely-practiced legalistic religions generally make good neighbors and lead exemplary lives from a practical view. They simply need to be born again and rid themselves of the shackles with which they have bound themselves - or allowed others to bind them.

Finally, in abject irrationality and downright silliness, many of the actual rules and rituals of legalistic enterprises are utterly laughable. A cursory examination of the Pharisees' Sabbath rules alone - and then their self-invented exceptions and exemptions - leaves our heads spinning. (Challenge yourself to research why it was legal to retrieve water from a well on the Sabbath using a woman's girdle but not a rope!) Modern legalists cannot avoid the same nonsense - some of their rules are likewise fit for a publication's comic section.

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### **Gal 5:1-18**

<sup>1</sup>It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

*IF one is saved, he has been set free by Christ and is commanded to stand firm in the freedom Christ died to provide. Man is NOT to invent or arrange for a replacement yoke out of fear or feelings of guilt in properly exercising this freedom paid for with the precious shed blood of the perfect Son of God. Doing so enslaves such folks to their invention and prevents them from accomplishing the plan God has for them. Enslavement to their own invented edicts prevents them from experiencing the Holy Spirit and turns them away from focusing on God. Evangelism is precluded because the lost cannot be introduced to Christ while calling them to obey a man-made set of rules. Finally, improper judgmentalism is impossible to avoid when obedience to man-made rules is the measure of righteousness. And while legalists will claim and perhaps honestly intend that the rules are not heavenly-admittance requirements, it is impossible to separate them from such. When membership in a local church fellowship hinges upon obedience to the invention of some man or group of men, the unity which Christians are called to is impossible, and improper judging becomes mandatory. It is impossible to take hold of Christ while maintaining a death-grip hold on a replacement measure of righteousness - all the while adamantly denying that one is doing so.*

<sup>2</sup>Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. <sup>3</sup>Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. <sup>4</sup>You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

*This explains it clearly for anyone who has ears to hear. It is an either/or proposition: either your hope is in Christ or it is in one's choice of legalistic enslavement. One will either be obligated and obedient to Christ or obligated and obedient to some rules set. It is impossible to do both simultaneously. When one chooses to seek justification through obedience to legalism, he scorns the all-availing, once-for-all justification Christ freely offers and has provided as a finished event. Alienation and falling away from Christ is inevitable. Anyone who pursues obedience to any "religion" of man has no proper understanding of and appreciation for the righteousness of Christ, the magnitude of His sacrifice, or his own wretched and desperate condition!*

<sup>5</sup>But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.

<sup>6</sup>For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

One is either operating by faith in a sureness of hope in the righteousness of Christ imputed to himself without merit, or he places himself on a non-stop treadmill working himself to doom as he pursues a futile attempt to achieve righteousness on his own.

<sup>7</sup>You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? <sup>8</sup>That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. <sup>9</sup>"A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough." <sup>10</sup>I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. <sup>11</sup>Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. <sup>12</sup>As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

Paul expresses frustration that folks who once received the truth with excited enthusiasm to follow it, would then be persuaded to either abandon their commitment or, at the very least, spoil it by mixing it with man-made edicts. He points out that such error cannot come from the Lord who called them. And he solemnly indicates that once such error takes hold in a few, it will surely infect the many. There is no cause or explanation for such confusion except that there are those who agitate for it.

<sup>13</sup>You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. <sup>14</sup>The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." <sup>15</sup>If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. <sup>16</sup>So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. <sup>17</sup>For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

Paul puts to rest the notion that the freedom Christ provides is to be feared and given a bad reputation, so that its proponents and practitioners should fall under criticism and even condemnation of men. Clearly, freedom in Christ comes with responsibility and duty. It is not a license to indulge the flesh. It is a call to service for Christ. And yet, be forewarned: in this life, the saved possess two competing natures constantly in conflict. Feeding the Spirit nature and starving the sinful nature is the formula for success. Note, especially, the point regarding the biting and devouring of one another. This is what leads to church split after church split. Some group places themselves in charge of righteousness and demands that all others obey them. It is beyond understanding that this phenomenon continues unabated while those involved blind themselves to it!

## **Rom 14**

<sup>1</sup>Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. <sup>2</sup>One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup>The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup>He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup>For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. <sup>8</sup>If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" <sup>12</sup>So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

First, it is of paramount importance to note that this is speaking of 2 brothers; 2 saved believers. Furthermore, it explicitly points out that the one requiring rules to comport himself in righteousness is the weaker brother. That is, when 2 brothers are each pleasing God, the one who can do so without an extra-biblical rulebook is the stronger Christian. This does not mean rules are wrong (Paul tells Timothy in 1Ti 1:8 that we know the law is good if one uses it properly), but just as a child requires supervision but eventually matures and is able to manage his freedom without rulebook guidance, the young Christian must mature, able to set aside child-like rules. Nevertheless, the critical point here is that each brother is a servant of the Lord and stands at *HIS* judgment, not the whims of some rule-making group of men. Each stands or falls before the Lord alone. It is impossible to attain to and maintain the unity God calls us to if fellowship hinges upon obedience to the arbitrary impositions of men. And it is impossible to avoid the improper judgment forbidden here if man-made rules replace or are added to God's established standards. As indicated, one's conscience is to be his guide. If something hinders one's relationship with God or presents a problematic temptation, then he is right to either abstain from or participate in whatever conviction he settles upon - assuming neither violates the Master Rulebook. Yes, brother is to approach brother with correction when necessary, but that correction must come from scripture. No one, no group, no fellowship, no religion has the right or authority to establish dogmatic rules for others over disputable matters. Disputable matters are simply those things which allow multiple options which do not violate scripture. Each one is free to choose his desired option. When man's rules are imposed as mandatory, cults are born. And when a particular fellowship group adopts and enforces its chosen rule set, it necessarily precludes any hope for the unity in the corporate Church which

God demands. How can there be any unity among various Christian fellowships when some of them place their own rules on the throne instead of, or in addition to God?

<sup>13</sup>Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way. <sup>14</sup>As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. <sup>15</sup>If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died. <sup>16</sup>Do not allow what you consider good to be spoken of as evil. <sup>17</sup>For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, <sup>18</sup>because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men.

And so, Paul emphasizes that we should not be judging one another in matters of freedom. He then introduces the notion of avoiding actions which may cause a brother to stumble. That is, while we are free to exercise our freedoms and choices, we must consider their effect on the weaker brother. Unspoken, however, is that this necessarily entails practical limits. There are times when the weaker brother needs to be exhorted, in gentleness and love, to "grow up." For that reason, Paul instructs us not to allow what we consider good to be spoken of as evil. But this also applies when we do acquiesce to the desire of the weaker brother. Though we accommodate his weakness, we must remain firm in maintaining that our preferred choice is not evil. The weaker brother must learn that his adherence to a stricter self-imposed code does not signify some extra or better measure of righteousness or godly obedience.

<sup>19</sup>Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. <sup>20</sup>Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All food is clean, but it is wrong for a man to eat anything that causes someone else to stumble. <sup>21</sup>It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. <sup>22</sup>So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. <sup>23</sup>But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Paul closes this section by explaining the overarching point of it all; that we ought to be pursuing all means to establish and maintain peace among the brethren, and to be diligent in seeking the proper edification of all. Arguing about issues of freedom distracts or disables us from doing what God has carved out for us to do. In the end, each of us must be faithful to our conscience when it is aligned with God. And we must be allowed to do this while fellowshiping together in the one Lord of all!

The following insight from Wycliffe's commentary on verses 22-23 above deals specifically with the issues of liberty (particularly eating) discussed earlier in the chapter, but is properly applied in the more general and broader view. (Emphasis mine)

***Conviction is the assurance that one's standard is right.*** Without a right basis for judgment the believer may be convicted of sin by his conscience ***where no sin is really involved.*** It is highly important that a believer provide ***the correct standard*** for his conscience, and that he ***help his fellow believers to have this standard, too.*** He must shun anything that ***prevents a fellow believer from getting a correct standard*** and anything ***that separates a fellow believer from fellowship with Christ.***

(Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press)

Obviously, the begging question is: "What exactly *IS* the 'correct standard?'" That ought to be a rhetorical question. The answer is clearly, "the scriptures - and those alone!" And yet, so many religions and religious folks simply aren't satisfied with that.

Illogically, they find a need to seek righteousness by adding to God's Word their own invented requirements of obedience. In misguided wisdom, they create and compel adherence to rules and/or rituals which are not biblically mandated - and which are actually biblically forbidden. In some cases, this is driven by guilt; that it just can't be right that we are saved without a rule set to follow (apparently in ignorance that God has provided one, or out of concern that His is not stringent enough). In many cases, folks who find it necessary to yoke themselves to a custom rule set simply do not understand how salvation is provided, and require "holy living" to prevent its loss.

Another driving force is a fear that without extra man-made rules, men will too-easily fall to temptation or succumb to a perceived freedom to live in sin; that somehow, rules must be legislated and enforced to ensure men will hold themselves accountable to God and His Word. Of course, it must then be asked if an additional rule set should be adopted in order that the previous rule set will be obeyed. Where does this all end?

Previously mentioned, a final motivation for establishing legalistic rules is to deliberately shun ease and convenience, fearful that modern advancements pose a danger; that they hold potential for leading men into laziness or greed. This type of thinking sadly fails to recognize the blessing in the provision of time and resources to be utilized for godly purposes, particularly the works God has prepared for us before the foundation of the world. Rather than earning extra righteousness (so they think) by working harder and longer to meet minimum needs, modern methods can conserve time and increase income - both of which can be put to godly use. However, many folks of this affliction do not understand and are not prepared for such endeavors.

In any case, God does not grant "extra credit" or impute righteousness for legalistic achievement or self-imposed hardship and suffering. God is looking for fruit-bearing!

As Wycliffe points out, legalistic rules cause the conscience to trigger conviction of "sin" when no sin is actually committed. Thus, it is imperative that the conscience be trained to follow the one true standard. Any other will produce "false positives" or fail to trigger true positives, rendering the conscience unreliable. Unfortunately, many legalistic enterprises fail to properly exposit biblical doctrine (if at all) or, in the worst case, impart replacement doctrine. In this way, the conscience is denied its proper training.

The commentary also points out our further duty to assist fellow believers in adopting and applying the correct standard. We must avoid anything which may lead them to a wrong standard, or which causes them to misunderstand/misapply the correct one. When extra-biblical rules and demands are imposed, this duty is violated.

Finally, the overarching concern of this passage is indicated in the last point of the commentary; that we must be vigilant, in the intended context, to prevent anything from hindering a fellow believer from proper relationship and fellowship with Christ. That relationship hinges upon the application of the truths of scripture, not some man-made additions or replacements. Again, Jesus harshly scolded the teachers of the Law in Lk 11:52 for violating precisely that, accusing them of hindering their followers from entering God's Kingdom by replacing the truths of God with their own.

This is precisely what modern legalists do. And yet, even though they're involved in some of the most overt and obvious legalism, they don't necessarily realize it. They can be so brainwashed and raised up in it that they actually see their legalism as good and beneficial, while in reality it is a large stumbling block to their proper relationship with God - and it prevents them from introducing others to Him. They claim that their rules enhance their ability to obey and please God, but they produce exactly the opposite result. If they would see themselves and their "religion" from God's view, they would flee from their self-imprisonment to rule-keeping in a fearful dash!

We must be ever-forming true convictions and testing the ones we have already adopted. The only way to do this with confidence that we are not deceiving ourselves or allowing others to do so is to be forming them from the one and only true, never-changing, absolutely trustworthy standard! Formulating convictions on the basis of any standard other than God's Word at the Holy Spirit's leading is foolhardy and dangerous. That's precisely the basis for the warning of Acts 17:11. If those who follow the purveyors of legalism would examine what they are fed by leadership, culture and tradition against the clear teaching of scripture, they would find the joyful freedom Christ died for and intends for them. Religious stress and worry are not of God; they are the result of man-made religion. Faithful adherence to man-made rules in place of or in ignorance of God's standard is useless and worthless. This ought to be plain to anyone who claims to be a Christian. Sadly, it is not.

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This link is to [Christian Unity - One Bread, One Body](#), a portion of a study entitled [God's Plan of Salvation](#). It deals with the issue of unity; God's exhortation and admonition to believers to seek and covet unity - not only for their own benefit, but in order to glorify and magnify God to others. As already repeated, godly unity is impossible if rule-making and rule-adherence is substituted for or added to God's Word. Even with the best of intentions to resist and prevent the rules from becoming a destructive distraction, all such efforts will and must inevitably undo the pursuit or maintenance of unity in the Body of Christ.

It would be best to examine the writing at the link provided (verse texts are included). However, here are the verse references covered in that review of Christian unity:

(The presented order is from the link above, where they are strategically categorized.)

1Co 10:17; Jn 6:33-35a; Jn 6:48-51; 1Co 12:12-20; Rom 12:4-5; Eph 4:3-6, 16, 25; Col 3:15; 1Co 1:10; 12:25-27; Mk 9:50; Phl 2:1-2; Eph 4:13; 2Co 13:11; Col 2:2a; Act 4:32; Rom 15:5-7; Rom 14:13; 1Co 3:8a; 1Th 5:13b; 1Pe 3:8; Ps 133:1; Jn 17:20-23

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Another extremely salient component of the issue of this writing is profoundly delivered in the book of Hebrews. The specific purpose and overt theme of that writing is the preeminence of Jesus over all religious rules, rituals, sacrifices, practices, traditions, oaths, angels, prophets, priests, the Sabbath rest, the Old Covenant ... everything previously seen as authoritatively necessary to or instruments of righteousness or a path to God. While the folks specifically addressed there are the Jews of the New Testament Church, its message pertains to and is extremely effective with *any* legalistic religious group. The principles of the Letter to the Hebrews are universal.

Setting aside the Pharisaical twistings and additions to the Law, we can have great sympathy for the originally-intended audience since they were following what had been handed down through Moses and the Prophets, commanded by God Himself. In God's sovereign wisdom, He had incrementally introduced shadows of what was to come and had commanded obedience to them until such time as the Messiah would fulfill and replace these symbols and types with the realities which find completion in Himself and His finished work (Gal 4:4-7). These Jewish believers needed to be gently and lovingly brought to the understanding that their expectations and hopes had been fulfilled in Jesus and it was now time to set aside the former mere representations. They could be excused for their reluctance and confusion from a practical view. As in all spiritual enlightenment for all of us, the Holy Spirit was the required clarifying agent.

And the Holy Spirit is the only source of the required power which alone is able to reach those who are the modern targets of the Hebrews writing. Modern folks fall under much greater guilt and criticism for their resistance since the legalism they practice is not at all excusable. It is not of God; it is entirely man-made. The truth is available to them - historically evidenced, along with overwhelming, irrefutable testimony and the specific teachings of scripture. Yet, when presented with these, they argue for their chosen invented replacements. When once the Holy Spirit turns on the spiritual light in their minds and hearts, they will see the clear, inarguable preeminence of Christ over their unavailing, utterly useless rules and practices to which they shackle themselves and in which they place their hope - while passionately denying they do so.

Click this link to access a beneficial survey of the book of [Hebrews](#).

Chapters 1 and 2 present Jesus as superior to the prophets and angels. Chapter 3 shows His superiority over Moses; chapter 4 over Joshua and the land of rest into which he led the people of God. None of these were small or easy obstacles for the writer to persuade these Jews to overcome. All were tightly held in great reverence

and respect. But the writer is attempting to introduce them to Christ and to convince them of His monumental superiority to all these things they understandably held dear.

Next comes the really tough task - the challenge which faces those who evangelize modern legalists, or for that matter, the modern merely religious. From the end of chapter 4 through the beginning of chapter 8, the writer dares to present Jesus as superior to and a replacement for their entire religious and sacrificial systems, along with doing away with the religious priesthood of men, including their high priest. This is a very delicate and dangerous undertaking in light of the fact that this encompassed the entire culture and daily doings of these Jews. Similarly, legalists fearfully cling to their familiar and comfortable replacements of truth when they have grown up with them or have otherwise convinced themselves (or been convinced by others) to accept them. For such folks, letting go of the only "religion" they know is a debilitating trauma.

In chapters 8 and 9, a logical, persuasive case is presented explaining the need for and superiority of the New Covenant over the Old, the ministry of Jesus over that of the Levitical priesthood, the heavenly tabernacle over the earthly one, the shed blood of Christ as far superior to the blood of animals, the perfect efficacy of Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice over the unavailing, repeated, merely ritualistic sacrifices, and Christ Himself as our perfect Mediator over the ineffective mediation of human priests. Also explained is the reason for the failure of the Old Covenant; the same reason which logically leads to the similar failure of legalistic religion: the fault lies with the people - says God.

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Following are verses which expose various particular facets of the errors of legalism:

Col 2:20-23

<sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? <sup>22</sup>These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

**Lots of great points. But note the final clincher: After all is said and done, rules lack any value to restrain sin, much less any power to overcome it or pay its debt!**

2Co 3:17

<sup>17</sup>Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

**Among plain communities, freedom is feared. Overwhelming guilt precludes them from exercising it. In false modesty, they claim they cannot trust themselves. They point to those in sin as proof that freedom is a catalyst to wanton debauchery - ignoring those who live righteously in the freedom Christ has provided. When a member breaks loose from their ranks, they are often judged as going the way of the world - without rules.**

Col 2:8

<sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

This is precisely what happens to those stuck in legalism.

Gal 4:4-7

<sup>4</sup>But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. <sup>6</sup>Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

We have been redeemed from the impossible task of perfectly keeping the Law. In the freedom granted us in our new birth, we become the very sons and heirs of God Himself, granted the right - through the Holy Spirit - to call out to Him as "Daddy!" We are no longer hopelessly enslaved to the Law or any human legalism to earn our way to Heaven or to maintain our fellowship membership. We freely receive God's grace and mercy, approaching Him for forgiveness when we fall short. The legalist shouts, "They've gone the way of the world! They have no rules!" Sure we do! We have the Master Rulebook. Still, we know (as does God) the futility of our attempt to satisfy the Law. So we have the Master Forgiver. Unlike the legalist, we aren't burdened with inventing and obeying rules to propitiate God's wrath. We have no need to worry about whether we've been good enough. Jesus took care of it, once for all!

Eph 2:8-9

<sup>8</sup>For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- <sup>9</sup>not by works, so that no one can boast.

Legalists deflect criticism that they rely on rule observance for acceptance by God. They claim that they agree that salvation is by faith. Nevertheless, we must judge their actions, not their words. In addition to their obvious reliance on rule-adherence to attain salvation, they require human effort to prevent its loss.

Rom 3:27-28

<sup>27</sup>Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.

The only boasting we can make is in Jesus; in the work of salvation He consummated on the Cross - and in God's provision of the free gift of faith. All else is excluded. However, adding a man-made rule set to God's Word and requiring obedience to it negates this - it indeed establishes an otherwise legitimate basis for boasting.

Gal 2:15-16

<sup>15</sup>"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' <sup>16</sup>know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

Attempting to find justification in keeping the whole of God's law is futile; whenever we would decide to do so, we will have already failed. Substituting man's law is foolish and likewise impossible - not to mention a blasphemy of the perfect work of the Cross.

Gal 2:21

<sup>21</sup>I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

A compelling truth. Why would Christ have borne the cross if we could keep the law?

Gal 3:10-14

<sup>10</sup>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." <sup>11</sup>Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup>The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." <sup>13</sup>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 tree." <sup>14</sup>He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.

This ought to be self-evident. Why cast our eternal lot with a demonstrably futile hope to keep the Law when we have been freely gifted a guaranteed hope in Christ?

Rom 11:5-6

<sup>5</sup>So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. <sup>6</sup>And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

Legalism indicts itself by extinguishing the grace of God, substituting the works of man.

Rom 10:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. <sup>2</sup>For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. <sup>3</sup>Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. <sup>4</sup>Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

Indeed, many legalists (not all) possess a zealous desire for God but are, in one way or another, misguided in pursuit of righteousness. Failing to recognize or understand God's provision, they compel themselves to provide their own. Isa 64:6 addresses this.