

Escaping the Trap of Legalism and Embracing the Gift of Grace

Legalism — relying on rules, rituals, and human effort to gain righteousness.

A. We were set free to be free.

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”
Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

B. Legalism undermines the work of the cross by relying on ourselves instead of our Savior.

“You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth? It certainly isn’t God, for he is the one who called you to freedom. This false teaching is like a little yeast that spreads through the whole batch of dough! I am trusting the Lord to keep you from believing false teachings. God will judge that person, whoever he is, who has been confusing you. Dear brothers and sisters, if I were still preaching that you must be circumcised—as some say I do—why am I still being persecuted? If I were no longer preaching salvation through the cross of Christ, no one would be offended. I just wish that those troublemakers who want to mutilate you by circumcision would mutilate themselves.”

Galatians 5:7-12 (NLT)

“Someone came to Jesus with this question: ‘Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?’... Jesus looked at them intently and said, ‘Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.’” Matthew 19:16, 26 (NLT)

Grace — God’s ability to do for you what you cannot do for yourself.

Note: Salvation is not a reward, it’s a gift.

“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!)... God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.”

Ephesians 2:4-5, 8-9 (NLT)

“...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Galatians 2:16 (ESV)

Note: Can I do whatever I want then? **NO!**

“Well then, since God’s grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not!... Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.”
Romans 6:15, 18 (NLT)

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

C. To keep ourselves from falling into the lie of legalism we must:

1. Embrace the unconditional love of Jesus.

“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT)

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”
Romans 5:8 (NLT)

“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.” 1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

“And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39 (NLT)

2. Seek to become more like Jesus.

“For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.”
2 Corinthians 3:17-18 (NLT)

“You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.” Philippians 2:5 (NLT)

“Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:6 (NLT)

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing...’”
John 5:19-20 (ESV)

3. Selflessly serve others.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. *Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.* For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 5:13-14 (ESV)

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.”
Philippians 2:3-4 (ESV)

“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.” 1 Peter 2:16 (ESV)

Note: You were not called to be a sin manager, you were called to love God and serve others.