

Title: "Oh Great, now I've got guilt!"

Text: Romans 5.1-11; Galatians 3.1-5

Theme: Fighting Legalism and Condemnation with the gospel

Series: Living the Cross-Centered Life, pt.10

Prop Stmt. Only the gospel of Christ can truly set me free from self-worship and self-loathing.

Read Text:

Part 1 – Dealing with Legalism

It really is amazing how much we tend to swing back and forth between extremes. We live in a context, hardly realizing that our context is itself a reaction. This is very evident in churches. Christianity is a history in reactions. One of the reasons the Scriptures are full of history is to help us learn from this. One of the reasons I like to read history is to study these sorts of things. When we make observations, we do not always understand how heavily influenced our lenses are through which we view our world and make assessments.

Discuss the swings between "made in the image of God" (already) and "sinner" (not yet) balance.

For example: Take the statement, "that church is legalistic." What on earth is that supposed to mean?

Let's say that you go to a downtown church in a large city, that is pastored by a friend of mine, and you discover that they basically only sing hymns and when they do, they sing all of the verses. That is what the elders of the church prefer. Does the absence of drums and a guitar make it legalistic? Let me give you another scenario. A friend of mine was invited to preach at a very large church which makes a big deal about the fact that at their church you can come dressed as you are. He showed up to preach in a suit and tie, which was his custom, which for him was coming dressed as he was. He was not only the only one in a suit and tie, but was actually ridiculed for it. He anticipated this happening, which was his point, and opened the sermon by pointing at his outfit and saying, "I thought this was supposed to be the place where you could come dressed as you are."

Myth #1 – The presence of rules means that you are legalistic.

Any organization, family, church, club, school, has to have policies. Having the rules is not necessarily legalistic. The weight and value you place in them is. We have a policy in this building not to bring in food that is made with peanuts because we have children who are allergic to it. Does the presence of that rule make us legalistic?

What if there is a church that does not have that rule? Are they better or worse than us?

Myth #2 – The absence of rules means that you are not legalistic.

Why not? If you insist on not having rules, then you end up with a rule not to have a rule.

The issue is not rules per se, the issue is, what weight or value do you place in the rules?

Myth #3 – A legalistic is the person who has higher standards than me.

Myth #4 – A libertarian is a person whose standards are not as high as mine.

In some ways it is sort of like the old joke that says, minor surgery is what they do to you, major surgery is what they do to me.

Legalism is not that simple. It is not a matter of external rules, it is a matter of internal trust.

CJ defines it as “seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and justification before God through obedience to God.”

“A legalist is anyone who behaves as if they can earn God’s forgiveness through personal performance.”

Legalism is the air of self-sufficiency. It is what drives the idea that my performance enhances my standing before God and gives me greater worth than others who are not as advanced on the spiritual food chain as me.

Thomas Schreiner writes: “Legalism has its origin in self-worship. If people are justified through their obedience to the law, then they merit praise, honor, and glory. Legalism, other words, means glory goes to people rather than God.” If you can contribute to your justification, then you ought to be worshipped.

Justification – Sanctification or Sanctification – Justification

Justification is based on grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. By the way, we are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. True faith is married to repentance. That is why justification will produce sanctification. It is also why sanctification comes by grace alone evidenced in a faith-driven obedience and surrender to Christ. If there is no sanctification, then James says, there was no justification.

A grace alone Justification will produce Sanctification. If it is a dog, it will bark.

A clear theology of justification is so very important, not only for the integrity of the gospel’s sake, but because your theology of justification will affect your theology of sanctification. If you think that your effort got you saved, then you will think that it is your effort that will keep you saved, or get you more saved.

A clear theology of sanctification is so very important, not only for the integrity of the gospel's sake (sanctification is part of the book of Romans called the gospel of God) but because your theology of sanctification will leak and affect your theology of justification. If you think that it is your performance that makes God love you more and keep you saved, you create a theological atmosphere where it becomes easy to believe that it is your effort that gets you saved. Justification always precedes sanctification, but your view of each one affects the other. That is why Paul is so adamant about this in the book of Galatians.

A legalistic, rules-driven, performance-based justification reflects a fundamental distrust of the sufficiency of Christ and the gospel to save me.

A legalistic, rules-driven, performance-based sanctification reflects a fundamental distrust of the sufficiency of Christ, His gospel and Spirit to keep me. Since, according to the thinking of legalism my salvation is ultimately up to me, you can see why this fatal theological flaw breeds the fear of man. When a church is full of the fear of man, you have to perform according to the "rules" because the "rules" define Christianity. A performance-based sanctification makes it very easy to have a rigid-spirit, approval-junkie atmosphere for church. The making and keeping of the rules becomes the standard by which our Christianity is measured.

E.g. Daily Bible reading – good idea! Is God angry with you when you miss a morning? Does God love you more when you do it three days straight? (story)

Again, it is not the rule, it is what weight or value you assign to it. We start our AM service at 10.45. Can we change that? Yes! Can other churches start at other times? Yes.

After a person comes to faith in Christ, they become part of family. In the family are people from different backgrounds, who, like you, did not instantaneously get over all of their background the moment they became a believer, but brought all of that (good or otherwise) with them into the family. That is what we are. And we are working all of this out even as we are with each other. We do not fully understand the implications and affects of everything that has happened to us, much less understand the implications and affects of everything that has happened to others. That is why we have books like 1 Corinthians and chapters like Romans 14 and 15, so we can learn how to work through these things at the foot of the cross.

When we embrace the first point of the gospel (I am a sinner), then I am humbled and must remain humble. If I am maintaining the rules to prove myself in your eyes, then I am no longer trusting in Christ, but instead, I am trusting in myself and hence, no longer humble. If I take what God has provided as a means of experiencing grace (worship, communion, Bible Study, prayer) and turn it into a means of earning favor, respect and grace, then I am trusting in myself instead of in Christ.

What is so dangerous is that we think that a little legalism is actually pretty good to help control the masses. A little fear of man can keep people in line. Is your goal keeping people in line, or helping people grow? If your goal is keeping people in line, you are helping them fear man instead of God. If your goal is helping them grow, then there is going to be some room for give and take, problem and solution.

Luke 7.36-50

The dragon of Legalism has to be slain by the sword of the Gospel (the preaching and embracing of the cross). Legalism has a kin that is just as dangerous – condemnation!

Part 2 – Dealing with Condemnation

Do live constantly under the threat of God's wrath?
Do you fear that God is looking to get even with you?

“Oh great, now I've got guilt!”

Back to the 5 unanswerable questions: Romans 8

1. If God is for us, who can be against us? The ultimate answer is - no one who will prosper. (31)
2. If God already gave us His best, is He going to withhold anything else from us that we need? - No. (32)
3. Who can lay a charge against that will stick? No one. (33)

A. God does the choosing.

God chooses us, not on the basis of what we have done or what we are, but because of his mercy, God knows what He is going to make us to be. That is so thrilling. He who began a good work in us will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. Therefore, if God has chosen you to be his own, no one can level a charge against you that will stick.

When God chose you to be His own, he did so because of his mercy. Now, God was aware then of everything that you have done and will do. My sin does not surprise God. My sin does not please God. My sin grieves the heart of God and the Spirit of God. But in spite of all that I have done and will do, God has chosen to place His love upon me and you.

That is one of the reasons why some people resent God. He knows too much. He knows everything. But in reality, that ought to be the basis of why we are driven to Him. Here is a God who knows me, who created me, who is not surprised by what I do and who yet in spite of that has said, “You're mine!” When my conscience accuses me, when Satan accuses me of the contradictions between my claims and my life, then God says, “I already knew that!”

B. God does the justifying.

This verse also says that it is God who justifies. As we have seen over and over in the book of Romans, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, paid the penalty for your sin in full. When you personally accept that truth for yourself, God takes your sin and puts it on Christ's account, which is paid in full, and He then takes Christ's righteousness and places that on your account. Then God says, "I declare you on the basis of my son, to be righteous!"

Romans 8:34 - Christ has taken our condemnation

Romans connects the theological dots and draws a picture of complete believer. A growing believer is growing in joy in happiness and is decreasing in worry. How can you do that? Because your understanding of what is important grows and your understanding of what Christ has done for you regarding the most important issue in your life also continues to grow as well.

The essence of a life that is lived to please God is choosing to accept what God has said. This means that you have to know what God has said, and then you need to apply it. We are going to work on that this morning. I want to spend the first part of this message talking about what God has said, and then in the second part showing you how to work that out.

4. Who can condemn us? God is the only one who can condemn, so the answer is - no one, not even myself. (34)

A. Only God has the right to condemn.

When katakrino is used of person to person (horizontal) it means to sentence to death. When katakrino is used by God to a person (vertical) it means to sentence to hell. It is true that Satan wants to damn your soul to hell, but he cannot do that. Only God has the ultimate right to condemn. Satan likes to try to imitate God and so he accuses us and condemns us, but his condemnations while formidable do not carry the day. Only God has the right to condemn, and our sin is the reason for our condemnation. But . . .

B. Only God can save you from being condemned. "Who is he that condemns?"

This next question provides its own answer. Paul asks if there is anyone in the universe who can condemn the genuine follower of Christ? Before he even allows space for a yes or no answer, Paul launches (like the previous question) into the theology that proves that no such person can ultimately exist.

Revisit the prepositions: kata - against; huper - for

Exhibit A - Jesus Christ. What is so special about Jesus Christ, the text makes it very

clear, lit. “Christ the One who died.” or “Christ, the dead one.” But hold on, because there is more to it than that. That is great, in the sense that the death of Christ already took our condemnation, but the story is not done. Christ is the One who died, but he also was raised from the dead. In fact, he was raised so much, he IS at the right hand of God, interceding FOR us.

1. He did this through Christ who died.
2. He did this through Christ who was raised back to life.

The death of Christ is certainly a critical and central event in the history of history. But what makes his death so important in addition to his perfect life is His resurrection. Notice the words, “more than that.” The resurrection of Christ was the divine stamp of approval on his perfect life and substitutionary death. It is amazing to me how that otherwise seemingly intelligent people follow the teachings of dead people like Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young et.al. I serve a risen Savior, because His Word says so.

3. He did this through Christ who is at the right hand of God.

The right hand position is the place of highest honor in heaven. In Philippians 2 we read that God exalted Christ to the highest place. That highest place is at the Father’s right hand. Please don’t miss this important point. Hebrews 1:3 says that “after he had provided purification for sin, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” Ephesians 1:20 says that Christ is seated at “his right hand in the heavenly realms.” Now, in Ephesians 2:6 we read, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” Colossians 3:1 says, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

Do you know what this means? God has put you into Christ. He views you within the realm, the dominion, the family of His Son. Your position, your value to Him based on Christ, is an honorable position. That position in Christ is the essence of who you are. Because your position in Christ has been established by God, accomplished by Christ, and sealed by the Spirit, there is no threat of condemnation that can change your status in Christ.

By the way, if you ever do a study on the furniture that is in the OT tabernacle and Temple there is one usual piece of furniture that is not there. Chairs! That is because there was no sitting in the temple. The priests were constantly working, constantly in the process of offering sacrifices or preparing to offer sacrifices or cleaning up from offering sacrifices. But after Christ offered himself - He sat down!

4. He did this through Christ who is interceding for us.

Are you willing to trust His judgment? - The application

A. Trust His Judgment when your heart condemns you. - 1 John 2:20-21

Here is an issue that we struggle with on a regular basis. Every person here has some things in your life of which you are not pleased that are there. Some people have believed and taught that when we get to heaven, God is going to play on a large screen the entirety of our lives in order to show to everyone all the things that we did. The reality is that many of the accusations that we make against ourselves, or that Satan makes against us, or that others make against us are true. We all still sin, every single day. There are no super saints here. We all have a ways to go. We are all on the journey. That is not an excuse to coast. If you coast, you're toast. But, even when a charge is leveled against us that is true, that charge will not result in our damnation.

B. Trust His Judgment when your world condemns you.

(When I Don't Desire God – pg. 87ff.)

5. Who can separate us from the love of God?

This question in many ways summarizes all of these questions and summarizes all that Romans has been teaching up to this point. Brothers and sisters, if you are settled on this issue, you can face anything. If you are not settled on this issue, you are vulnerable to everything.

A. God's Love to the believer is guaranteed not to fail. - 35a

This fifth and final question is the exclamation point to the rest. What do we say in response to the fact that God is working in all things to carry out His divine purpose in my life and this world? What do I say? The only real appropriate response is to say, "Praise God!" But what Paul does is he applies some of these things to some specific problems that we encounter. There are times when we think that we are going to fail. We think that we are going to be defeated - but if God is for us, no one can be against us. There are times when we are tempted to believe that God is holding out on us. God is depriving us of something. But we saw that is not true either. We are vulnerable to the accusations of our world, but those can't stick. We are vulnerable to the threats of condemnation of our world also, but those won't stick. We are also threatened to doubt the love of God. We are especially tempted to doubt the love of God when we are facing difficult trials. That is why, when Paul asks back in v.31 - What do we say in response to this? What do we say in response to the fact that God is working in all things to carry out His divine purpose in my life and in this world, that we were especially vulnerable to doubting that truth in the midst of difficulties. As we are going to see, Paul is not only forcing us to think through the implications of this truth, he goes on to work out the implications of the implications. God really wants us to understand this.

B. God's Love to the believer does not guarantee an easy life. - v.35b

Becoming a follower of Christ does not mean that I am immune to difficulties or discouragements. I resent that unbiblical teaching that every difficulty is an attack from a demon that I have to resist through some secret weaponry or that a real spiritual person is not going to be sick. But, the reverse is actually true. Difficult times are not the exception for the believer they are the norm. We act surprised by suffering. We (myself included) wonder, where did this come from? Wait a minute, God's Love to me does not guarantee an easy life for me now. Folks, when is character seen? Character is forged and seen under pressure. Anyone can be happy on a holiday. But who of us can be blessed when our enemies are persecuting us and saying all sorts of evil things about us? Who can rejoice and be exceedingly glad in the midst of that. You can, I can when I remember who loves me. But when tough times are part of my life, that is when I am tempted to doubt.

Brothers and sisters, that does happen. That happened to John the Baptist. Even Paul was discouraged. These words, breathed out, by the Holy Spirit through Paul were not written in a mechanical manner. Some of these words are the exact same words that Paul used to describe some of his own experiences and sufferings for the testimony of Christ. Don't doubt God's love even in the midst of tough times because His love does not guarantee an easy life. Notice the things that cannot separate us or divide us from Christ. He has already asked, can anyone put a distance between Christ's love and us? Can anyone or anything make Christ stop loving us? Now, he makes it personal.

1) **Trouble** -

General word meaning pressure from without, distress, anxiety, persecution - Acts 11:19; Suffering - Romans 5:3 It is the same word that Christ used in John 16:33 when he said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world." Trouble is part of the deal.

The follower of Christ experiences trouble now, yet has joy. The person without God, may not have, and may have trouble, but does not have joy. In addition to that, our trouble has an end.

2) **Hardship** - anguish, a narrow place where we are being squeezed (within and without)

3) **Persecution** - first three words overlap, being called bad for doing good is one of the most difficult times in a person's life. John the Baptist - was what I did and believed really true?

4) **Famine** - No food, starving.

5) **Nakedness** - word means extreme poverty, not having even the bare essentials for life.

6) **Danger** - Natural danger (storms etc.) and personal danger (robbers)

7) **Sword** - means dying in a violent manner, often at the hands of a tormentor.

Is it possible to experience these things and still be deeply loved by God? Yes. These things are bad. They are some of the results of living in a sin-cursed world. As bad as they are, they do not separate us from Christ's love.

C. God's Love to the believer does guarantee some tough times. v.36

Verse 36 is a quote from Psalm 44:22, in which it makes it clear that loyalty to God carries a price tag, because we are loyal to God in a world that is at war with him. Sheep are not prized animals. Sheep are actually rather stupid animals who are easily lead and easily intimidated and have a very difficult time solving their own problems. They are good for their wool and they are good to eat. Sheep are dispensable. We are labeled by an unbelieving world as being dispensable. However, a person who truly believes what the Bible says is considered to be a really dangerous person.

Please do not forget this. The crucifixion of Christ was not a mistake in the sense that it was a misguided emotional response by some irrational leaders. The crucifixion of Christ was the planned, deliberate and calculated response by this world to the person and message of Christ. If Christ had waited 2,000 years and came today, the response would be the same. As followers of a hated and crucified leader, what are we to expect from our world?

Colossians 1:24 - "Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church."

Now, here is the point that I really want you to grasp. You are never closer to the heart of God than when you suffer for the cause of Christ. You see, you are in Christ. When you suffer, Christ is there with you. Not only are not separated from Him in tough times, but if you are understanding what is truly going on, then you are made more aware of how close you really are to Him. When someone attacks you, he is attacking Christ. Before they attacked you, they spit on Jesus. Before they threatened you, they nailed Christ to the cross. That is why God said in Isaiah 43:2 "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, the flames will not set you ablaze." All of this speaks of the protection that God provides for his own, because he is with them.

The time of suffering is not over. The church has always been her finest when she has been the purest. Persecution purifies the church. God has never needed a large church, but God has always used a pure church. When God's people are persecuted and yet holy and committed, then there is much more accomplished than when we are comfortable, yet dull and lazy.

D. God's Love to the believer does guarantee victory (37-39)

No, these things do not separate us from the love of God because IN all these things we are more than conquerors, we are super-conquerors. Please take notice of the word IN. It is only IN these things do we realize how much we truly have in Christ. How many of you who have gone through the valley of the shadow of death have emerged to tell of

God's grace? The victory that is promised to us means, that it is not even close! We win by such a large margin of victory the outcome is never in doubt.

1) We overcome because of what the troubles do for us.

Remember v.28, these troubles are part of what God uses to make us stronger and deeper.

2) We overcome because of what our reward will be.

We know that these afflictions as real as they are, are still light and momentary in contrast to the glory which will be revealed in us.

When Chrysostom was brought before the Roman Emperor, Emperor threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied, "You cannot banish me for this world is my father's house." "But I will kill you," said the Emperor. "No, you can't," said Chrysostom, "for my life is hid with Christ in God." "I will take away your treasures." "No you can't because my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there." "But I will drive you away from man and you will have no friend left." "No, you can't because I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you: for there is nothing that you can do to hurt me."