

The Heart of the Gospel **ROMANS** *The Unattractive Christian: Legalism*

Romans 2:24-29, July 30, 2017, Pastor Bill Russell

GADGETS NAG US TO CHANGE BEHAVIOR

No matter how hard we try we just can't seem to shed our need to live by law rather than grace. A recent (2013) article in *The Wall Street Journal* explored the new wave of gadgets that will remind, cajole, pressure, threaten, judge, and nag us about what we're supposed to do and how to punish ourselves when we fall short.

For instance, a new smart-utensil called the HAPIfork measures how fast you eat while it prods you to slow down and chew. A company called Automatic offers a device that will chirp when a driver speeds, slams on the brakes, or does other things behind the wheel that your mother wouldn't like. For \$50 you can buy a toothbrush that wirelessly tells a phone app how often and how long you brush your teeth. The phone app sends the user rewards and punishments based on brushing behavior. A webcam software program called PostureTrack will catch you slouching, and a website called Beeminder will tally fines for undesirable behaviors like not flossing or staying up too late.

One device user said that the digital nagging can "kind of run your life." Another user said, "It's now possible to have a device in the background of your life recording everything you do."

Although these devices may be helpful, they also sound a lot like trying to live by "the law." These gadgets "change" our external behavior by relying on pressure and threats. God changes our hearts not through performance but through his grace. Along the same lines, this isn't the way the Spirit convicts us. The Spirit leads us into true growth and change through love, not impersonal pressure.

Geoffrey A. Fowler and Shira Ovide, "Sit Up Straight, and Other Advice From Big Mother," The Wall Street Journal (4-22-13)

This morning I want to talk with you about the dangers of legalism and the destructive force it can be not only in our own personal lives but in the context of the overall church as well as Christianity. When we talk about what makes Christianity unattractive in the world today, probably the greatest threat out there would be legalism. Why?

☀ First legalism victimizes the Truth. It is true that the Bible would say that false doctrine and false teaching are a serious issue in the church today, and yet what is this false teaching rooted in? Lots of times it is legalism. Legalism adds to and takes away from God's truth in a dangerous way.

☀ Second legalism victimizes Grace. Legalism victimizes grace by silencing Grace. Now if the essence of God, the essence of Christ, the essence of the Holy Spirit is love and that love is silent or absent, that will not be a good thing for the church.

☀ Third legalism can ultimately victimize RELATIONSHIPS. Legalism is not a friend to the kind of relationships that God wants us to build. Because legalism is so judgmental and hypocritical it tends to isolate us and ultimately it is very anti-relational and ungracious. At the same time, because legalism victimizes the truth we can easily surround ourselves with others who will agree with our warped view of the truth and not call us out on our legalism. In the end, legalism doesn't build strong mutual relationships where we share our weaknesses and build each other up in Christ. Legalists tend to band together and simply support each other's legalistic views.

That is why we can say that legalism may be the greatest threat to the church today.

The sad reality is, it is so very easy for any and every one of us to become legalistic in some way. That is why we have to have our guard up and we have to know what it means to be truly legalistic.

We have been working our way through the Book of Romans and we are in our 3rd week in chapter 2. We have been looking at the examples of the Unattractive Christian that Paul presents to us in this chapter. Let's look at our first two examples and then see where we will be going today.

3 MARKS OF AN UNATTRACTIVE CHRISTIAN

**1. WHEN WE COME ACROSS AS BETTER-THAN
AND NOT OTHER-THAN
= JUDGMENTALISM**

**2. WHEN WE DON'T PRACTICE WHAT WE PREACH
= HYPOCRISY**

**3. WHEN WE HAVE RELIGION BUT NO RELATIONSHIP
= LEGALISM**

Now here is the thing, all three of these are related. As I shared the last two weeks. Judgmentalism and Hypocrisy are siblings. They are like brother and sister. What that does then, is that makes Legalism the mother. Legalism is the mother of all Judgmentalism and Hypocrisy.

Now I just made the point that legalism at its worst can tend to be anti-relational. Legalism will not only hurt my relationship with others but ultimately is destructive to my relationship with God. We can see this throughout the Bible. I want to give you the positively BIG idea behind this message this morning. As we work our way through this message this is what we have to know and keep in mind.

THE BIG IDEA:

**THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF GOD'S DESIRE TO HAVE A RELATIONSHIP WITH US
AS WELL AS OUR NEED AND DESIRE FOR A RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD
AND IT SHOWS US HOW WE CAN ENJOY THAT RELATIONSHIP!
THE BIBLE IS OF ALL THINGS - A RELATIONAL BOOK!
IT IS NOT A BOOK OF LEGALISTIC RULES.**

Let's look at our scripture reference for this morning then and begin to work our way through it.

Romans 2:25-29 ESV

25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. **26** So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? **27** Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. **28** For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **29** But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Now then it is really unattractive....

3. WHEN WE HAVE RELIGION BUT NO RELATIONSHIP = LEGALISM

Understand that I am not saying religion on its own is unattractive. People may be able to find great beauty and comfort in a say a cathedral or chapel or certain religious practices. What I am talking about is the life of a Christian who has lost sight of their relationship with Christ and is consumed with nothing more than an empty religion. In fact the beauty and comfort one may find in a cathedral or chapel or ceremony would be the sense of being drawn out of this world and closer to God and that is moving beyond religion to a deeper relationship with Christ.

What I want us to see this morning then, is the difference between a religion and a relationship. The dynamics of the two are greater than we may realize. Also understand that as Paul writes this, he is coming from a point of reference where he HAD the religion, He had all of the trappings of the Jewish Religion but NOW he has the relationship and he as well as anyone is qualified to speak to these differences.

Now let me give you the simple definition before we break this down and get a little more practical.

Religion is best understood as man's attempt to reach God.

Relationship is best understood as God's attempt to reach man.

So let's take each of these individually.

CHRISTIANITY: *God trying to reach man* = RELATIONSHIP

#1. First, we must understand that **God ALWAYS makes the FIRST move.**

In Romans 3 Paul says it this way...

Romans 3:10-11 ESV

"None is righteous, no, not one;
11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.

On our own we will not seek for God. In fact just go back to the Garden of Eden, after the first sin was committed. What did Adam and Eve do? They tried to cover up their shame as they HID from God. What did God do? God sought them out. He came looking for them and when He found them, HE covered up their shame adequately so that He could still be relational with them. This very order of events is true today from the moment anyone is born. We are born with a sin nature in which we will never seek God apart from Him seeking us.

You see God always makes the first move.

- *It was God who called Abraham.*
- *It was God who gave Moses the Law.*
- *It was God who invited the Jews into a covenant relationship.*

Now let me give some clarity here. It says that "**no one seeks God.**" Yet at the same time God also says in the Bible that "those who seek me with their whole heart will find me." So which is it then? Do we seek God or not?

#2. We SEEK God but only as a RESPONSE. God seeks us out and we simply respond to His seeking and His truth. Paul showed this to us earlier.

Romans 2:6-8 ESV

He will render to each one according to his works: 7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

The thing is you can't live in this world and NOT encounter God and His truth, He and His Truth is all around us. Paul is saying in these verses that when we encounter God's truth we can respond to it by seeking out the source of that truth or we can ignore or disobey that truth and simply be self-seeking, self-promoting. What the Bible teaches, as In Romans 1, is that if we sincerely seek out the source of the truth we encounter God will send us greater Truth, God will show us Gospel truth.

That's why God says in Romans 1 those Gentiles were without excuse because they saw Him and His truth in Creation and they exchanged it for a lie. They ignored His obvious truth in creation. The thing is it is impossible to look at creation and NOT see a creator, a designer, this did not all happen by accident.

A great example of this scenario is found in Acts 17. Paul is sent to preach to the people in Athens and he delivers his well-known Mars Hill sermon.

Acts 17:22-23 ESV

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

Now the way I have always understood this is that these people who worshipped all of these different gods, must have looked out at creation and knew that there must be one other supreme God they had yet to discover, the God who created it all.

Paul goes on then to preach about WHO this God is and to share the reality of the Gospel. The point here is that as the people responded to the truth in creation sincerely seeking, God sent them the greater truth of the Gospel. In the end, some of the people believed Paul's teaching and trusted Christ for their salvation while some others rejected what Paul taught them altogether.

Now back to day's text. Paul talks about two things that have specific significance. Circumcision and the Law. What was the reasoning though, behind both circumcision and the law? From God's standpoint BOTH of these were intended to be relational.

#3. Cir. and Law were a part of God's covenant relationship with Israel.

- Take Circumcision for instance. Circumcision is defined as:
"The Cutting Away of the Flesh." It represented "Living in Spirit."

Much like the two trees in the Garden of Eden.
The Tree of Relationship and the tree of Rules.
The Tree of The Spirit and the tree of the flesh.

Circumcision from God's perspective was relational, it signified the special relationship he had with the Jews and their commitment to living within that relationship. It signified that they were not living IN the flesh but IN the Spirit, IN relationship with Yahweh.

Now from man's perspective, from the Jews perspective at the time, many looked at circumcision as merely a religious exercise. That is how they could be circumcised and still live fleshly, worldly, sinful lives, that did not cut off the flesh.

- Then Paul raises The Law. **The Law was also intended to be RELATIONAL.** Circumcision was just a small part of the law. The Mosaic Law was actually much more, and was always intended on God's part to be relational. For starters just take the 10 commandments themselves. The first 4 commands are about man's relationship with God and the next 6 are about mans' relationship with each other. Very relational.

For another thing the law was MORE than just the 10 commandments. There were literally hundreds of commandments, many of which the significance seems to make little sense to us. Yet even these strange and obscure laws were designed to make the Jews a unique and peculiar people. These laws set them apart as a special people to God. They were apart of this covenant relationship.

Listen to the words that God spoke to Moses shortly before delivering them from slavery in Egypt.

Exodus 6:2-8 ESV

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. 3 I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. 4 **I also established my covenant** with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. 5 Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I **have remembered my covenant**. 6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. 7 **I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God**, and you shall know that **I am the Lord your God**, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'"

I WILL BE YOUR GOD AND YOU WILL BE MY PEOPLE.

This is what the law as well as circumcision was all about, this relationship between the Jews and God. The reason this relationship was so important was because it was through this relationship God would be able to have a relationship with the rest of the world. In fact to be honest this covenant relationship did not stop with Israel, it started there. The Bible is clear that God loved the WHOLE WORLD.

➤ This covenant relationship then extended beyond the Jews in two ways. It also was a covenant relationship with those proselyte Gentiles who were circumcised and **BECAME** Jews, as well as the people and nations who **BLESSED** Israel. Remember God's covenant with Abraham said that God would **BLESS THOSE WHO BLESSED ISRAEL**. So the covenant was actually extended to the entire world. Anyone who wanted to get in on the blessings could.

Now moving on in today's text, let's go a little deeper. When Paul speaks in Romans about the law, what exactly is he referring to? What exactly IS the law? To answer this, we have to remember how Jesus defined the law for us. Think about that itself a moment.

Jesus comes to earth and He goes to the cross and on the cross He fulfilled the law for every man, meaning we have no law to keep today it has been completed. Yet Jesus did not only fulfill the law, He also defined the law for us. He told everyone what it meant to KEEP the law.

Jesus defined the law as having 2 basic commandments.

#1. Loving God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength

#2. loving your neighbor as yourself.

Let me shorten that first commandment up a moment.

►► **Obeying The Law = Putting God FIRST and Loving God MOST!**

Now let me read today's text and paraphrase it with this understanding of the law. It will make a lot more sense.

Romans 2:25-29 ESV

25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you **put God first and love God most**, but if you **don't put God first and love God most**, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. **26** So, if a man who is uncircumcised **does put God first and love God most**, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? **27** Then he who is physically uncircumcised but **put God first and loved God most**, will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but **don't put God first and love God most**. **28** For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. **29** But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

Now that makes the passage speak more boldly and with more clarity. You see it is not only about the physical act of circumcision or the keeping of some strange and obscure laws, it is about the covenant relationship behind it. The covenant relationship where God LOVED the world and wants US to love Him in return. **He wants us to put Him first and love Him most!**

Thinking about the relational side of God today, consider the Body of Christ. Today God has set aside the Jewish Kingdom program and is working through the Body of Christ, where there is NO Jew or Gentile. Today when we are saved the relational side of God is seen in two ways.

►► First Christ becomes our very life and the Holy Spirit indwells us. Things can't get much more personal than that.

►► Second we are all baptized INTO Christ, we are placed INTO Christ and together we make up His Body. That's very relational both with God and each other.

The pinnacle of God reaching out to man of course is the cross, He offers us through the cross, the relationship with Him that we all need and desire. Now as we will see momentarily, this is where legalism and religion rear their ugly heads as they attempt to steal some of the cross's thunder and diminish some of its power!

Let's look then at the other dynamic at work in this morning's text. I am speaking about the dynamic of RELIGION.

LEGALISM: *Man trying to reach God* = RELIGION

This is exactly though, what the Jews in turn developed with God's Law. They used His law not to be His people in a special relationship, but to create a religion.

Now religion is man's attempt to reach God and what religion ultimately does, is that religion totally misses out on everything God has done to reach out to us. Religion often misses the relational side of God.

Now don't misunderstand me here. It is not that in religion someone is not necessarily seeking out a relationship with God, many are. The problem in religion though, is that WE do all the work to reach God while ignoring all the work that God did to reach out to us.

For instance in religion one can readily recognize and acknowledge the cross, just not what was accomplished there. The cross can be a beautiful thing to someone, it can even speak of God's amazing love, but it is never enough. We still have to work to earn said love.

Let's look then more specifically at what makes religion so problematic and even at times anti-relational.

#1. Religion is not shaped by GRACE but by LEGALISM. Now think about that a moment. Think with me about the relationship between legalism and religion. Legalism in many ways props up the Christian faith as a religion. In the Christian faith, where the cross reigns supreme and the Gospel is the power of God for Salvation, there is really no room for man to try and reach God on His own. That is where legalism steps in. Legalism adds to the finished work of the cross. Legalism says there is something MORE to the Gospel, something MORE than the Gospel that you need. Now, what exactly is legalism? Let's define it a little more directly as that might be helpful.

Q: Legalism Defined: Let's look a moment at where this term comes from and what it means.

The term "legalism" commonly denotes preoccupation with form at the expense of substance. While it is now used metaphorically in all areas of human life, it appears to have had a theological origin in the seventeenth century, when Edward Fisher used it to designate "one who bringeth the Law into the case of Justification" (The Marrow of Modern Divinity, 1645). No equivalent term existed in the biblical languages. However, the idea is found in both Testaments.

<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/legalism/>

"Legalism: Strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious moral code." - *The Tenth Edition of Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

"Legalists are people who add personal preference to accepted doctrinal teaching, accept these additions as having equal weight with doctrinal teaching, and apply these additions in the judging of others." - *David Miller, Breaking Free: Rescuing Families from the Clutches of Legalism*

"Legalism is the reduction of life to mere technicalities. It substitutes code for conscience, ritual for worship, rectitude for holiness, morality for purity." - *Mark Buchanan, The Rest of God*

The thing that struck me as I was studying this week is how Law is not the opposite of Grace, legalism is.

Legalism is the opposite of Grace.

It is legalism that vandalizes Grace and misrepresents the law.

Think about this, Jesus fulfilled the law, but how?

He fulfilled the law with Grace and what did the religious people around Him do? They tried to silence His grace and keep the law intact as it was. The law was fulfilled and yet the religious people did not want the Law to be fulfilled. They wanted to keep it intact and enforced.

Here's a second problem with legalism

#2. Legalism **BYPASSES** the heart. Look at verse 29. This is really a significant verse in this passage.

But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

What Paul is saying is that a Jew is not a true spiritual Jew simply because he or she was born a Jew but because of the condition of his or her heart; because of their standing with Christ before God.

At the same time physical circumcision means nothing if you have not been spiritually circumcised in your heart. If you have not cut off your fleshy ways of living as well as the fleshy desires of the heart. What you see legalism does though, is that legalism focuses on certain outward behaviors that give the appearance of holiness and spirit-filled living, all while having a heart that is corrupted by the flesh. Remember Proverbs 4:23...

Proverbs 4:23 ESV

Keep (guard) your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

Legalism tends to ignore the conditions of our heart and focus on other aspects of our behavior. What this can do is give us a false sense of security that everything is fine and okay in our relationship with Christ.

■ ■ In fact if someone tries to call us about something they see in our life, ***we can easily become defensive because as a legalist we are worried about keeping up appearances.*** In the end legalism prevents us from having to face the real spiritual issues in our life.

At the same time, legalism focuses on the supposed sins of others. We can become preoccupied with what is going on in someones life to the detriment of our own, because once again as a a legalist we are worried about keeping up appearances and looking good. The irony of that, is that other people can often see more clearly what is developing in our life then we can. Thus, all the more importance to heed the words of ***Proverbs 4:23*** and to... Guard our heart with all vigilance!

One more look at the problematic nature of legalism...

#3. Legalism takes the ABUNDANT out of our Christ-Life.

■ ■ It takes the JOY out of our GIVING!

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 ESV

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

One of the areas where I see that legalism is alive and well today in the church is when it comes to the area of giving, especially in the teaching on tithing. Tithing is giving God the first 10% of your income. I have to be honest there was a time when I used to teach the tithe much more literally, but the more and more I grow in my understanding of grace and grace-living, the more and more I see tithing exactly for what it is. It is an extension of a law that has been fulfilled in Christ and it is a practice that can and often does take the joy out of our giving. It can easily be legalism.

The irony of tithing 10 percent is that for the Jews they gave much more than 10% they gave closer to 23% of their income. I think most pastor's today have a hard enough time convincing people to give 10% I can't imagine aiming at 23%.

To be entirely clear though, we are NOT under the Law and there is no where we are explicitly told to tithe today. That's not to say that we are not instructed to GIVE today. Clearly we are. Clearly the way we handle our money reflects what we value in life and how deeply we trust and love God.

Today God wants us to Put Him first and Love him most and yes even in our finances.

Here are some of the ways the Bible defines giving for us today in an age of Grace.

- We are to give **JOYOUSLY!**
- We are to give **GENEROUSLY!**
- We are to give **OUTRAGEOUSLY!**
- We are to give **PROPORTIONALLY!**
- We are to give **CONSISTENTLY!**
- We are to give **FAITHFULLY!**
- We are to give **THOUGHTFULLY!**

All of these words can be attached to our giving.

The thing is God does not want our giving to be controlled by an artificial and impersonal law. God wants our giving to be directed by the Spirit, to be relational in nature and to flow out of a joyous and generous heart.

I have heard for years the line that if every Christian just gave their 10% churches wouldn't have any financial problems. I'm not sure that is entirely true though. Now if every Christian just gave their hearts to God, then we would have no financial problems.

I have also heard many personal stories over the years, of the person who started to tithe and their finances were blessed. Pastors use these testimonies all the time to motivate and encourage others to tithe. You might ask well doesn't that prove that tithing is honored by God? If God blesses it? No it actually doesn't. You see in all of those stories it is not the 10% law that is blessed it is the position of the persons heart who started to give. In most cases they are just following some teaching with a sincere heart and God blesses the generosity of their heart. The thing is they could have given 5% and still been blessed. The number 10 is not a magical number or percent today. In fact God may ask you to give MORE than 10%, maybe even 23%.

■ ■ Legalism also takes the LOVE out of our SERVING!

Instead of serving someone and doing for them what they maybe can't do for themselves, out of a humble spirit and heart that loves God, my serving has conditions.

I serve because I am trying to keep up appearances.

I serve because I am trying to earn God's approval or affection.

I serve because it is required of me, not because I want to share the love of Christ.

Instead of my serving coming from a heart of humility it comes with a prideful attitude because what I have done and how i look doing it.

In the story of the prodigal son, if you remember, Jesus told that story ultimately for the benefit of the older brother. The older brother represented all of the Jewish religious leaders and their legalistic attitudes. The older brother did not like it when his young prodigal brother returned home to such fanfare as well as a party.

The older brother would not go in and celebrate with the younger brother and the rest of the family and his words are very telling.

Luke 15:28-32 ESV

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Here is a son who has served for years and missed the entire point of his serving. His service was an opportunity to express His love and gratitude for His Father, not earn His approval. In fact if this older brother really understood the beauty of value of serving, he would have realized what the younger brother missed out on the times he was gone. He would have understood the years that his younger brother threw away and wasted.

The sad reality is, it appears that he wasted his time just the same as he served with a legalistic heart that was simply keeping up appearances.

One last destructive example...

■ ■ Legalism takes the FREEDOM out of our LIVING!

Galatians 5:1 ESV

For freedom Christ has set us free;
stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

The sad reality is there are many Christians today who live in FEAR and not freedom.

There is the spouse in an abusive marriage who is too scared to get a divorce because they do not realize they have the freedom to do so. Now hear me out. I am not advocating for more divorce I am advocating for less legalism. There are plenty of Christians getting divorced that have no reason getting divorced, but then there are those people in a spiritually unhealthy and abusive marriage trapped by their own legalism. Does that make sense?

There are prodigal people, prodigal sons and daughters, who fail to come back home, whose spiritual life suffers because of the legalistic walls that their families put up. They would come home if they had the freedom to be honest, real, open, transparent. Instead they stay in a distant land living in brokenness, emptiness and pain.

There are the older brothers who fail to enjoy the feast, who skip out on the Father's party because they can't forgive, they can't have fun, they can't envision such a father or believe they are that loved. Legalism totally takes the freedom out of living and en traps us.

What legalism does today when it keeps a dead law intact, what makes it so unattractive, is it makes the Christian life exhausting while at the same time stealing its joy! The Christian life is supposed to be a joyous reality not a legalistic burden.

HOW DO I LIVE IN THIS RELATIONSHIP EVERYDAY?

The Circumcision of the Heart

Colossians 2:11 ESV

In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

 *When I am TEMPTED He is the WAY-OUT!*

1 Corinthians 10:13 ESV

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

 *When I am TIRED He is my REST!*

Matthew 11:28-30 ESV

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

 *When I am TRIED/TESTED He is me REFINING!*

1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

 *When I am DISCOURAGED He is my HOPE!*

John 16:33 ESV

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

 *When I am HURTING He is my HEALING!*

2 Corinthians 1:3-4a, 5 ESV

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction... 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

 *When I am DEFEATED He is my VICTORY!*

1 Corinthians 15:56-57 ESV

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Legalism is anti-relational and fights specifically against my relationship with Christ.

 **BRINGING IT HOME** 
Application & Transformation

- What is one area where I tend to be legalistic? Identify a possible issue that is important to me but yet has no Biblical support behind it.*
- What is in my heart this morning (potentially hidden behind my legalism) that needs addressed?*
- Where has legalism stolen the JOY in my life?*
- Where I can LIVE-OUT my relationship with Christ this week?*

COWBOY JOINS CHURCH, QUILS DRINKING

A cowboy walked into a Texas bar, ordered three bottles of beer, and sat in the back room, drinking a sip out of each one in turn. When he finished them, he came back to the bar and ordered three more.

The bartender told the cowboy, "You know, a bottle goes flat after I open it. It would taste better if you bought one at a time."

The cowboy replied, "Well, you see, I have two brothers. One is in Australia, the other is in Dublin, and I'm in Texas. When we all left home, we promised we'd drink this way to remember the days we drank together, so I drink one for each of my brothers and one for myself."

The bartender admitted this was a nice custom and left it there.

The cowboy became a regular in the bar and always drank the same way. But one day, he ordered only two bottles. All the regulars took notice and fell silent. When he came back to the bar for the second round, the bartender said, "I don't want to intrude on your grief, but I wanted to offer my condolences on your loss." The cowboy looked puzzled for a moment, then a light dawned and he laughed.

"Oh, no, everybody's just fine," he explained. "It's just that my wife and I joined the Baptist Church in Longview, and I had to quit drinking. It hasn't affected my brothers though."

Ed Rowell, Monument, Colorado

HELIUM BALLOON DEMONSTRATES OUR LIFE IN CHRIST

To illustrate how the beauty and majesty of God can cause our hearts to desire him more than we desire sin, J. D. Greer writes:

Think of [our relationship with Christ] like a balloon. There are two ways to keep a balloon afloat. If you fill a balloon with your breath, the only way to keep it in the air is to continually smack it upward. That's how religion keeps you motivated: it repeatedly "hits" you. "Stop doing this!" "Get busy with that!" This is my life as a pastor. People come on Sunday so I can "smack" them about something. "Be more generous!" And they do that for a week. "Go do missions!" And they sign up for a trip. Every week I smack them back into spiritual orbit. No wonder people don't like being around me. But there's another way to keep a balloon afloat. Fill it with helium. Then it floats on its own, no smacking required. Seeing the size and beauty of God is like the helium that keeps us soaring spiritually.

J. D. Greer, Gospel: Recovering the Power That Made Christianity Revolutionary (B&H Publishing, 2011), pp. 97-98; submitted by Van Morris, Mt. Washington, Kentucky

SEEKING GRACE AT WORLD'S LARGEST GATHERING

The Kumbh Mela is the largest gathering on earth. During its last celebration in 2013, it was conservatively estimated that around ten million people gathered in Northern India. The Kumbh Mela (or the "pitcher fair") takes place every four years. In 2013, the festival was called the Maha (meaning "Super") Kumbh Mela, which happens only once every 144 years. It is estimated that this Kumbh cost around 210 million dollars while generating approximately ten times that amount in revenue.

Hindu tradition says that there was a war between the gods and the demons over divine nectar, and in the process, four drops of nectar fell from the pitcher. These fell on four different locations, which overlap the cities where the Kumbh is held. One of those drops fell at Haridwar where the river Ganges flows, while another fell at the Sangam. The Sangam is the confluence of three rivers—the Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythological river Saraswati. The other two drops fell at Kshipra in Ujjain and Godawari. A dip in these rivers on auspicious dates during the Kumbh is said to rid pilgrims of their sins.

Anyone who reads the newspaper and honestly reflects on it is hard-pressed to deny the reality and universality of sin. Through the ages, humans have tried to rid themselves of sin and its consequences. Religious rituals, idols, journeys, and sacrifices have all tried to assuage and comfort the sinner's heart, but have been found wanting ... In the Christian religion, grace that is made available through the death and resurrection of Jesus is the very fount which offers release from the burden of sin and restores our relationship with God ... Thus, we can confess Jesus as Lord anytime, anywhere, and we will be saved! It makes one gasp in wonder at the overarching simplicity and compelling elegance of this very good news.

Cyril Georgeson, "The Cross and the Pitcher," A Slice of Infinity—Ravi Zacharias Ministries (1-15-15)

STEVE JOBS'S IDOLATRY COST HIM HIS LIFE

Steve Jobs, Apple's late cofounder and CEO, displayed incredible drive and creativity. But like all of us, Jobs struggled with idolatry. Surprisingly his idol wasn't technology; it was food. Steve Jobs was obsessed with food in ways that dominated his life and relationships. As a teenager he experimented with strange diets. At one point he went for two weeks eating only apples. The various diets, often based on raw food, gave Jobs an exhilarating sense of control.

Like all idols, his obsession worked at first. It was part of Jobs's larger project of attaining to superhuman control over his surroundings and other people—intimately linked with his perfectionism. Indeed, Jobs's idolatrous relationship to food may have cost him his life. In October 2003 a scan turned up islet cell cancer, a rare version of pancreatic cancer that is slow-growing and consequently almost always curable with prompt surgery. But Jobs's idol—food as a method of control—failed him. As his biographer Isaacson writes:

Jobs decided not to have surgery to remove the tumor, which was the only accepted medical approach. "I really didn't want them to open up my body, so I tried to see if a few other things would work," he told me years later with a hint of regret. Specifically, he kept to a strict vegan diet, with large quantities of fresh carrot and fruit juices ... For nine months, as his friends and family pleaded with him to have the surgery, Jobs refused.

Not until July of the next year did he consent to remove part of his pancreas. During the surgery, doctors found that the cancer had spread. Jobs would never again be free of cancer, and just over eight years later he was dead at age fifty-six. He was in the terminal stage, not of cancer, but of idolatry, when the idol ceases to deliver but exacts its full demands for unwavering worship. When the public became aware that Jobs was increasingly gaunt, commentators suspected that Jobs's disease had come back with a vengeance. What few knew was that his wasted body was not just the result of cancer but also his own dependence on control through food.

Adapted from Playing God by Andy Crouch (Intervarsity Press, 2013), pp.

