

Lesson 12

Christ, the Answer to Legalism in Sanctification

Philippians 3:8-11

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Legalism destroys a person's joy in Christ. In fact, legalism has probably driven as many people from Christianity as rationalism. Furthermore, it is much easier to identify and mark out those people within the Christian church who deny fundamental doctrines or mock at the supernatural than it is to identify legalism in the life of an individual Christian or local church. Legalism often appears to be Christian when it is not but rationalism is never Christian.

- B. There is legalism in salvation in which a person says "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ PLUS something else, whether it be a work, an act or a ritual. The one condition for salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which includes the concept of repentance when a person changes his mind about God, Christ and sin. Any time anything is added to by grace through faith in Christ for salvation, it is a legalistic act. If teachers or preachers say, "Believe and be baptized" or Believe and join the church" or "Believe and surrender" or "Believe and do good works," making some additional condition for salvation, these persons are legalistic in the area of salvation.

- C. There is also legalism in sanctification or Christian living. This happens when a true Christian adds some condition for being a spiritual Christian other than that which the Bible specifically declares. In Colossians 2:6 it says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness." How did we receive Christ? By grace through faith. How then are we to walk in Christ? By grace through faith. A Christian legalist adds something to the Christian life other than that which is specifically mentioned in scripture. A Christian legalist says a person is not spiritual unless he does certain external things which are mere traditions, customs, cultural mores or personal likes and dislikes. A Christian legalist says one cannot be spiritual if he or she has hair a certain length, or skirts a certain length, or goes to movies, or watches TV, or has a glass of wine with meals, or takes a walk on the Lord's Day, or wears make-up or listens to certain types of music or a hundred other man-made taboos. These doubtful things or questionable practices may or may not be good in themselves but they are not scripturally commanded against. They are matters of scruples, conscience and opinion based on one's cultural beliefs but have nothing to do with spirituality. A person is not a legalist if he or she has personal convictions about these questionable practices and

does not do them. No person should ever participate in any questionable practice if his or her conscience does not permit it, for the Bible says, "And everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). A person becomes a Christian legalist when he or she attempts to force cultural convictions on other Christians. Why? Because the person is insisting on conformity to certain man-made rules or customs for spirituality which are not specifically spoken against in scripture.

- D. Christian legalism is very germane to the argument of Philippians 3. Paul wanted these Philippians to rejoice in the Lord. He was afraid that the Judaizers who were false teachers would rob them of their joy in Christ. These Judaizers were legalists in that they said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ PLUS be circumcised and also keep the ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic Law. If Gentile Christians believed in Christ PLUS kept Jewish ceremonial law, dietary law, customs and traditions then they would be saved. Paul called these Judaizers "dogs," "men who do evil," "mutilators of the flesh." Harsh words for these false teachers because they tried to add some work, act or ritual to belief in Christ for salvation.
- E. Then Paul used his own life as an example of one who was a supreme legalist before he was saved. Paul showed how he was a proud and self-righteous Pharisee. If salvation was ever to be accomplished by works, Paul had all the credentials. He came from good Jewish stock. He was a Hebrew who held tenaciously to Jewish custom and culture. He was a religious man and so zealous was he for the Jewish faith that he persecuted the church in the name of God. As far as the outward, external keeping of the Law of Moses was concerned, Paul was blameless. What Paul discovered was that his good works system, instead of setting him free from himself, actually put him under bondage. Paul was proud, contented and self-righteous until the day Jesus Christ invaded his life with salvation. Christ intervened and Paul became a Christian. He came to know the resurrected and living Christ. He discovered the ultimate answer to all of life. He found the missing piece to the puzzle. The key which unlocks the mysteries of life. So impressed was Paul with Christ that he said, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ." Literally in the Greek this is in the past tense and says, "I have considered loss for the cause of Christ." All the things Paul once thought were profit for him to merit favor before God were counted loss. When Christ found Paul, Paul found the answer to life.

II. EXPERIENCING FREEDOM FROM LEGALISTIC WORKS 3:8-9

- A. ***What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ, for whose sake I have lost all things.***
1. Now Paul moves from the past tense to the present tense. He says, "I am considering everything a loss..." He moves from salvation to sanctification, from the new birth to the Christian life. Paul's point is that legalism is inadequate to bring men to salvation or spirituality as Christians. Remember, Paul is addressing these Philippian believers. He did not want them to be influenced in

any way by these Judaizers. Many true Christians at Philippi might get sucked into legalist thinking by the Judaizers and think that spirituality was somehow related to ritual, custom and tradition. If they kept a list of Judaistic laws, customs, traditions and rituals, they would be spiritual. Paul's point is that legalism is inadequate for salvation or sanctification.

2. Everything for Paul was loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ. Anything and everything this world had to offer, Paul felt was inferior to a super knowledge of Jesus Christ. He is not talking about a head-knowledge of Christ but a personal relationship with Jesus Christ which is meaningful and dynamic. For Paul, salvation, sanctification and spirituality were not of his own human efforts, not some religious process of law-keeping, not a matter of ritual, tradition and custom but was knowing, loving, obeying and serving the person of Jesus Christ. Paul did not concentrate on the process but the person of Jesus Christ. NOTE. Paul could speak this way because Christ was his Lord and he had submitted himself unreservedly to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. ILLUSTRATION: Scientist I read a story about a very remarkable scientist who lived in a beautiful home. He was paid high fees by percentile companies, for his advice. In the evening when he would walk in his garden, a man who lived in a little cottage beside him, a poor man, used to talk with him and sometimes tell him about the Lord, but the scientist wouldn't listen. But when the appointed hour for the scientist to die arrived he said on his death bed, "I would give all the knowledge that I have at this moment just to know what that man knows in the little house next door."

- B. ***I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.*** – Paul suffered much for the Lord as a Christian but these things were but rubbish (dung, manure) compared to a real, vital, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ. NOTE. Paul was from a wealthy Jewish family and he lost financial ability when converted to Christ. He lost the love of family, being cut off from them and considered dead. There is no record that Paul's parents were ever saved. He lost his reputation in the Jewish community, for he was the outstanding young Jew of his day. Yet, Paul thought it all worth it for a personal relationship with the resurrected Christ.

Educated, famous and wealthy men have given up all to follow Christ and did it with joy.

1. Jonathan Edwards. Edwards was the most brilliant mind in America in the 17th century. The unbelieving educators of his day could not understand why he would commit himself to Christ and submit his mind to a little black book, the Bible. Edwards left the prestige of the educated world to follow Christ.
2. C. T. Studd. C. T. Studd of Cambridge, England a famous cricket player, gave away his considerable private fortune, and went off to labor in the mission-fields of inland China.

Why? For the Christian, his personal relationship with Christ is more valuable than his mate, fame, fortune, family and even self. For a true Christian would rather die than deny his Savior.

C. ***Not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.***

1. Paul clearly understood that salvation was not a result of human merit but because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Paul was not trusting in his own righteousness, his own legalistic convictions or his own good works. He was trusting in Jesus Christ and His righteousness to take him a sinner, to heaven.
2. Nor did Paul think keeping the moral law of God as a Christian made him righteous before God. He, as a Christian, was to keep the moral law but it was to be done by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Christ had to supply the power to keep the moral law. Even then, Paul never kept the Law perfectly, so he was cast again and again back on Christ for a positional righteousness which would make him acceptable to God. It was the life of faith in Christ that gave Paul the power to obey the moral law of God. The Bible says, “The just shall live by faith.”

III. EXPERIENCING CHRIST 3:10

- A. ***I want to know Christ.*** – Paul says, “I want to be repeatedly, constantly, knowing Christ.” Paul did not say, “I want to know about Christ (facts, dates, teachings) but I want to know Christ as a real person.” The driving passion of Paul’s life was to know more about Christ. This is not just head knowledge but experiential knowledge of the resurrected and living Christ. After Paul had initially trusted in Christ for salvation, his goal was to come into a deeper relationship with the Christ who saved him. Paul did not say, “I want to know more doctrine,” although he knew that to know Christ well, he had to have good doctrinal teaching. Paul realized that Christianity is Christ, and real meaning, purpose and sense to life was found in one’s relationship with the Savior. NOTE. It was not church that gripped Paul’s heart. It was not listening to a sermon which saved Paul. It was not a preacher who changed Paul’s life. It was Christ! NOTE. Paul wrote this statement 30 years after he had been saved by faith in Christ. It is impossible to know Christ completely in this life but it is a wonderful adventure as one progressively grows in Jesus Christ. Just think, after 30 years, Paul did not get tired of knowing Christ more intimately. NOTE. Paul was not all bogged down in legalism which robbed him of his joy. He was not constantly judging, pointing his finger, criticizing every other brother or sister in Christ who had cultural differences with him. He was occupied with knowing, loving, obeying and serving Christ and did not have time for legalistic nit-picking. Consequently, Paul had real joy. Paul could say, “For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

- B. ***And the power of his resurrection*** – Paul wanted to know the power of Christ’s resurrection in his own life. He did not want to know about the power. He wanted to know the power experientially. Paul makes it clear that a Christian can experience in degrees the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. This is supernatural power provided by God to live the Christian life. A power to give victory over sin, habits and negative attitudes. A power to be filled with the Holy Spirit so we can produce love, joy, peace, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, kindness and self-control. A power to live a practical righteous life for Christ. NOTE. The prayer of Paul for the Ephesian Christians was that they might know this supernatural power in their lives (***Eph. 3:14-21: For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.)

- C. ***And the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings***, -- Paul longed to share Christ’s sufferings. This is not suffering because of sickness, or financial crisis, or loss of loved one, for even unsaved people have this kind of suffering. This is suffering for Christ and for His cause of the gospel. He was willing to suffer social and perhaps physical persecution that Christ might be glorified and that the world might know Christ. Paul thought Christ to be the most important cause in the world and for that Paul would stand and die. NOTE. Today, we see young people need a cause. Well, here is the greatest challenge ever thrown out to mankind – to know the real Christ. But this does not come without suffering for Christ. Christ said, “Then he said to them all, ‘If any man will come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.’” The Apostle Paul said the same thing in another way: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12).
- D. ***Becoming like him in his death***, -- Paul desired genuine holiness of life. Christ died to defeat sin and to be victorious over self, fears, death, insecurities or whatever. Paul wanted to be so identified with Christ that Christ’s death would become his death. Paul wanted to die more and more to sin and self and live for Christ. He wanted the selfless life Christ displayed in His dying for sin. Paul wanted to be a blessing to others as was Christ in His death. Paul clearly understood that this meant death to self – his desires, his wants, his fantasies and his goals. Paul knew there is no gain without pain. NOTE. What about it? Do we really want to be conformed to Christ’s death? Do we want to follow the path of self-negation and radical obedience to Jesus Christ? I think we are more like the man who wrote to the Internal Revenue Service, saying, “Dear Sirs: My conscience is bothering me and I can’t sleep. I’m enclosing a check for \$50.00. If I still can’t sleep, I will send you the rest.” That is not conformity to Christ’s death. That is compromise. Christ will be satisfied with nothing less than conformity to his death.

IV. EXPERIENCING RESURRECTION (3:11): ***And so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.*** – This is a very difficult verse to interpret. I think it means that Paul, by living daily for Christ, is giving evidence that he is a true Christian, experiencing resurrected life and power, and ultimately he will be resurrected from the dead after he dies. His perseverance in Christ will give him a place in the final resurrection. The resurrection is the complete and final stage of salvation. It is the ultimate experience of knowing Christ in perfection. Then we shall be face to face with Christ in our resurrected bodies. Folks, it won't get any better than that!

V. CONCLUSION

- A. Saved. Christian, beware of legalism. It will rob you of your joy. It will make you harsh, negative, judgmental and critical. Do not place your emphasis on what you or others may externally do which is not mentioned in scripture. Place your emphasis upon knowing Christ intimately, vitally and dynamically and you will not have time for any legalistic thinking. You will be too filled up with the joy of Christ.

- B. Unsaved. For you without Christ, for you who are searching for the real meaning of life, for you who are looking for the ultimate experience, I point you to Jesus Christ. When one meets Christ, he has found the key to life and death. After one comes to Christ, he spends the rest of his life getting to know Christ better. You can know Christ. You can know resurrected power. You can be changed. How? Believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved. When you come to know Christ, you will say, "It doesn't get any better than this!"