

Lawbreakers at Heart

Breaking the Curse of the Law

June 6, 2021

Today we're gonna find out why we're all such rule-haters at heart!

How do you feel when a police car follows you? Do you think: "Ahh. This is *nice*. I am as *protected* and *safe* as can be?" Or, do you think: "Turn! Go away! Why are you following me?" Have you ever turned, just to shake one off your tail? It's not that you're doing something *illegal*, it's just that you *might*, and you *know* you eventually *will* and maybe *won't* even *know*.



We've been talking about identity markers. These are the **superficial, highly visible identity markers** that allow *anyone* in any *group* to have a sense of security, belonging, and acceptance. And the granddaddy of all identity marks, circumcision, was commanded of Abraham and his offspring for two reasons: 1) as **a sign to remind of God's pledge to save mankind from sin**, through Abraham's seed – a Son to come from *those* very *loins*, to redeem, restore, and atone for the sin of anyone and everyone who would choose to trust this Son to come from God.

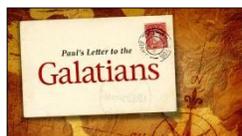
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever *believes* in Him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 ESV

And 2) circumcision was given as **a seal of Abraham's faith and trust in God's promise**. And as such, it was fulfilled in the New Covenant of Christ. And He sent the Apostle Paul to all the Gentiles, the non-Jews, with the Good News of God's grace through faith in His Son; but Paul soon found himself battling fellow believers who were fellow Pharisees whom Paul calls "the circumcision group".

[Some men] were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you *cannot* be saved." – Acts 15:1 NIV

[Which is why Paul warns Titus] There are many *rebellious* people, mere *talkers* and *deceivers*, especially those of the *circumcision group*. [Also known as Judaizers] They must be *silenced*, because they are ruining *whole households* – Titus 1:9-11 NIV

And Paul's righteous anger comes to a boil in his letter to the mostly non-Jewish Galatian believers, who were accepting these destructive teachings coming from Paul's adversaries.



^{1:6} I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the *grace* of Christ and are turning to a *different* gospel ... ^{1:7} people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of *Christ*. ... ^{2:11} When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face ...

^{2:12} because *he* was afraid of those who belonged to the *circumcision group*. ^{2:13} The other Jews *joined* him in his *hypocrisy*, so ... ^{2:14} I said to Peter in front of them *all*, ^{2:16} “... a man is not *justified* by *observing* the *law*, but by *faith* in *Jesus Christ*. ... ^{2:21} I do not *set aside* the *grace* of God, for if righteousness could be *gained* through the *law*, *Christ died for nothing!*” – Galatians 1-2 NIV condensed



Ever been pulled over to be rewarded for *following* the speed limit? No. **The law doesn't reward its followers, it only punishes its violators.** That's what Paul calls that the *curse* of the law. And both those who *know* the law and those who *don't* are equally anxious when *followed* by the law. Know why? Because **we're all lawbreakers and rule-haters at heart.** Put a hole in a fence on a sidewalk, and only a few will take the time to take a peek. But hang some police tape and a sign that says, “Do not look in hole,” and there'll be a line! Because **the law's demands trigger its own defeat.** Because for us lawbreakers, rules and restrictions provoke and challenge our search for sovereignty and sense of self-rule.

We want control! **We're law haters because we're self-rule lovers.** That's why we have such an instant, knee-jerk reflex to view *every* restriction as a *deprivation* rather than a *protection*.

O stupid Galatians! Who has bewitched you ... did you receive the *Spirit* from *works* of the law, or from *faith* in what you *heard*? [from the Spirit] Are you so stupid? After beginning with the *Spirit*, are you now ending with the *flesh*? ... all who depend on *works* of the law are under a *curse*; for it is written, “Cursed be *everyone* who does not persevere in doing *all* the things written in the book of the law.” – Galatians 3:1-10 NAB



The law is like tempered glass; **you can't break it just a little.** That's what car door windows and back-glass are made of; and when I was young I loved shootin' 'em with my BB gun! In the *wrecking yard* of course; that was my *playground*. Even if you're the *best* speed-limit obeyer *ever*, the law not only *won't* reward you *for* it, violate it just *once* and you'll get a ticket in *spite* of it.

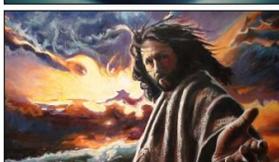
For whoever keeps the *whole law* and yet stumbles at just *one point* is guilty of *breaking all* of it. For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” [And remember how Jesus pointed out that lust *is* adultery, and hate *is* murder?] If you do *not* commit *adultery* [which includes *lust*] but *do* commit *murder*, [which includes *hate*] you have become a *lawbreaker*. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the *law* that gives *freedom*, – James 2:10-13 NIV

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.” – Galatians 3:13 NIV

Know how to be followed by the law without getting nervous at all? Let someone *else* drive! **When Jesus takes the wheel, He takes the curse** of that scrutinizing, punishment-only law along with it. And we're freed from the threat of the shadow of the law hanging over our shoulder.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility ... disqualify you for the prize. ... 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. – Colossians 2:17-23 NIV

Sins of immorality are like dying of cancer. You can see it coming and prepare for it, and take steps to correct it. But as detrimental as indulgent sins are, at least they compel their sufferers to examine themselves at the bottom of that barrel. Whereas **legalism insidiously creeps into our faith like plaque in an artery**. It's like dying of a heart attack you never see coming. So stand strong in this freedom, because **no rules or rituals can replace a relationship with our Creator**.



It takes some doing to stand *strong* and resist that *fierce* temptation to substitute an obvious religious form for an *invisible* relational reality, because just like the *circumcision group*, we crave a tangible identity marker to reassure ourselves we're in good standing with God. But **that's an insult to His identity**. That's treating Him like *He's* the one that's tailing you. Or like there's something you can *do* to change His *love* for you. How *offensive*. "Oh stupid Galatians!" Stand strong in our freedom.

We have *freedom* now, because Christ *made* us free. So stand *strong*. Do *not* change and go back into the slavery of the *law*. Listen, I Paul tell you that if you go *back* to the *law* by being *circumcised*, Christ does you *no good*. [Don't put your faith in a shadow of death rather than the Light of life] Again, I *warn* every man: If you allow *yourselves* to be *circumcised*, you must follow *all* the law. If you *try* to be made *right* with God *through* the *law*, your *life* with *Christ* is *over*—you have *left* God's *grace*. But we *have* the *true* hope that comes from *being made right* with God, and by the Spirit we wait eagerly for this hope. [of being transformed; bump, bump, bump] – Galatians 5:1-5 NCV

We're set free to focus, not on sinning less, but loving more. And the more we allow the gentle bumping of God's Spirit to turn us around, the more we're empowered to resist the allure of sensual indulgence, legalism, and all sin, by coming to see how it blocks what we desire the most: to learn to love like our Father-God, "for love *comes* from God." (1 Jn 4:7) Which is why the *truest* mark and measure of our fullness of His Spirit, as Paul explains to the Galatians, is the God-reflecting *fruit* of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. – Galatians 5:22-23 NIV

We think of fruit as *health* food, but in Paul's day it was thought of as *dessert* food. If he hadn't called them fruit, this list could be seen as just another form of willpower-driven legalism. But **no amount of human effort can make fruit grow**. Our only part is to faithfully, patiently, tend to the tree, and to protect it, and to remove any barrier to its health or growth. That's *our* role.

Although God does the work within, we're not passive in the process. But that's a job we'll carry out with *joy ... if we like* the fruit, and actually *want* the fruit. Otherwise it's just a chore. And so, sadly, many believers grasp for quicker, easier, more tangible ways to "certify" the Spirit's presence: **a legalist turns to rules.** And **a hyper-spiritualist turns to experiences.** And **an activist turns to politics.** And **an intellectualist turns to doctrines.** But Paul turns us to the fruit.

[Writing to the Galatians] ^{4:9} How is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ... ^{4:17} Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. ... ^{6:12} The only reason they do this is to *avoid* being *persecuted* for the *cross of Christ*. ... ^{6:13} They want you to be *circumcised* that they may *boast* about your *flesh*. ... ^{6:14} May I *never* boast *except* in the *cross* of our Lord Jesus Christ – Galatians 4-6 NIV *condensed*

[Having previously said that] Before this *faith* [in the promise of God] came, [in the person of Christ] we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith [in the promise] should be revealed. [In the Person who came to set the prisoners free (Lk 4:18)] So the law [of Moses] was put in charge to lead us to Christ – Galatians 3:23-24 NIV

How does the law lead us to grace? By forcing us to see how hopelessly rebellious we are. You see I'm quite satisfied going 65 ... as long as the limit is 55! And *if* your faith is based on *rules* rather than a *growing relationship* with *God*, you'll be relentlessly tempted to press the limits; because **the law was given to reveal sin, not remove it.** I love how the NLT renders Romans 3:19-20.

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses and to bring the *entire world* into *judgment* before God. For no one can *ever* be made *right* in *God's* sight by *doing* what His law *commands*. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it. [And that we therefore need a Redeemer to save us from it] – Romans 3:19-20 NLT

And lawbreakers will either *reject* the rule of God, or *change* the rules into something much more manageable. Either way the Law condemns us. But hey, that's just the curse of the law.

So if we don't face the obvious and allow ourselves to be authentically transformed deep inside by the renewing of our mind by His Spirit in His Word, our spiritual life will become a search for superficial, highly visible props to prop up our sense of inclusion. But just know that **incredible power, resilience, and assurance comes from gratitude-based obedience.** And there is just the *one* way to walk in a *faith* that's motivated by *love* that *comes* from *gratitude*:

I will put My law in their minds [with a New Testament] and write it on their hearts. [With a new Spirit] I *will* be their God, and they *will* be My people. – Jeremiah 31:33 NIV

And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow – Ezekiel 36:27 NIV

You see, the promise is to motivate loyalty with loving devotion from an internal pressure (like say, *new wineskins*); *and* to get rid of that cursed external pressure of punishment. And we'll know we've getting there when our heart is filled with our gratitude that our Dad's doing the driving down here, and allowing us to relax and enjoy our road trip together.