

# OpenTheo

## Toward a Radically Christian Counter - Culture (Part 4)



### Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture - Steve Gregg

In "Toward a Radically Christian Counter-Culture," Steve Gregg discusses the consensus among a community of radically converted and committed Christians resulting in the cultivation of a counter-culture. This consensus is based on certain appropriate behaviors for genders and ages, a transformation of the mind, and evaluations and approvals of behavior that come from the teachings of Jesus. Gregg stresses that a Christian counter-culture should permeate every area of life and should be a society where people see alternatives to the secular world. He also warns against legalism and judgmentalism, advocating instead for mercy and grace.

### Transcript

When we talk about a radically Christian counter-culture, we're talking about a consensus among people who are radically converted and committed to Jesus Christ. A consensus about the way we live. A culture is really the secondary artificial environment that's placed over the natural environment.

By the artifice of man, one person said he defined the culture very easily as what people do with the world. And there's a sense in which that's true. If you dig rocks out of the earth and make statues, if you write stories about the world, if you take resources in your environment and create institutions, whatever.

These things are what people have done with the world. The animals don't do anything to the world. They don't have a culture.

Unless it's kind of a built in culture like the ants in the ant farm. Or the bees in the bee colony. They definitely have a culture, but they don't know it.

Because God is the one who shaped their culture and built it into them instinctively. But humans actually change the world. They change their environment.

They come to an area and they start farming it or building or whatever. And soon they're building institutions like schools, churches, writing written works and developing values and community structures and so forth. And whatever people do with the world and

whatever changes they make in the environment is their culture.

And the word culture, of course, is from the same root as the word cultivate. The word used to mean in older English simply planting and cultivating crops. Culture, obviously, is in the word agriculture or horticulture.

It had to do with developing and cultivating crops. But we also cultivate a society and that cultivation results in a consensus among people who live in an area about certain things. Not about everything, perhaps.

I mean, the American culture is very diverse. In fact, we would say we're a multicultural country. Because there's people who have come from many countries and have retained much of their own culture.

But even that multiculturalism is part of the culture of being a melting pot nation. Whereas if you go to Saudi Arabia or maybe Japan or some other countries, their cultures are considerably more homogenous. But basically, whatever a society's culture is, is what the people have come to agree about.

Maybe even they didn't sit down to agree about it. They just did it together and their mutual lives, their societal life has taken on a form. Men, women, and children have certain things they do that are appropriate for their gender or their age.

There are certain religious ideas, a certain worldview. And Christians also live in these cultures. But in some respects should be different.

Should have different values. In some cases should have different standards. And, you know, the way their families operate, the way they educate their children, perhaps.

Maybe the way they entertain themselves, the way they conduct themselves on the job. There's a lot of things in the dominant culture are to change in the lives of the believers when they become Christians. Because the dominant culture is essentially what the Bible is talking about when it talks about the world.

And Jesus said, if you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because I've chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Now, John said in 1 John chapter 2, verses 15 through 17, he said, Beloved, do not love the world.

Neither the things that are in the world, because he says, he that loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father, but of the world. And the world passes away and the lusts thereof.

But he that does the will of God abides forever. So Christians are not supposed to be conformed to the world. It says that in Romans chapter 12 and verse two, do not be

conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

That is your thinking, your thinking, the way you evaluate things, the things you approve and disapprove. Your mind has to undergo transformation, but renewal. This happens, of course, as we read the scriptures and embrace what God has said and seek to apply that.

And we then begin to be among ourselves people who stand out a little bit in some ways from the dominant culture. Because, for example, in our society, the dominant culture does not think divorce is that great a tragedy. But if we follow the teachings of Christ, we know that divorce should be unthinkable.

Not that there's never any grounds for divorce, not that there's never a divorce that can be justified. There are some, but it should be essentially unthinkable to a couple who are having troubles in their marriage to think, well, maybe we should get a divorce. No, maybe we should work things out and keep our vows.

After all, we did promise God and people that we'd stay together, right? OK, maybe we shouldn't think about lying to the world and to God. Maybe we should show the world that there are some people who have integrity and keep their promises. You see that in that we would be a very different kind of people than the world at large.

Now, you probably know many Christians who've been divorced, some of them hopefully legitimately, but some of them certainly not. I'm sure you all have known Christians, maybe many Christians, who've gotten divorced when they had no really great reason for doing so. They just got tired of their spouse or they could be happy somewhere else.

In other words, they did exactly what the world would approve, but not what Jesus would approve. And this is how the early Christians were different than us. The early Christians sat daily under the apostles' teaching and observed that teaching.

And Jesus actually said to the apostles, go out and teach the nations to obey everything I've commanded you. And so as the early Christians did that, their church community provided an alternative to the dominant society. They were a countercultural phenomenon.

And so when people would become Christians and come into the church, they were coming into a different culture, not necessarily a wildly different culture. You know, everyone didn't wear, you know, tin hats and things like that, you know, to look weird. But they all had a certain different way of evaluating what they're going to approve and disapprove, namely Jesus.

Jesus and his teachings became that which governs the lifestyle of the people who became Christians, where that wasn't true of the people outside the church. So that in many cases, stepping out of the world into the church would feel like you've kind of

crossed an ocean into another world, another society, because the values of the Christians were so different than those of those who had no Christian convictions at all. And that's what I'm talking about by a radically Christian counterculture, that people who are radically converted.

And of course, this is not the case with everybody in our churches today. The early church allowed people in when they got converted. We bring them in prior to conversion and try to convert them, sometimes unsuccessfully.

And therefore, we have churches that are at least partially filled with persons who are not converted and who have no commitment to following Jesus at all. But they look like part of the church community. They look like everyone else.

They go to church all the time. They're in the activities. They might even pay tithes, but they're not living like Christians, nor do they have any intention to.

And so people look on at the church and they don't see an alternative society. They see a mixed multitude. There are some people in every church who are serious about Jesus, I'm sure.

I doubt if there's a single church anywhere that has no one in it who's a true Christian serious about Jesus. But there's also not very many churches around where everybody in there are Christians, and some churches don't even require it. They're not even aiming to fill the church with Christians.

They want to fill the church with the non-Christians so they can evangelize them. And thus, we don't have a distinctive society of Christians that the world can look on and say, well, there's a different group. They are doing things differently and better than the rest of us.

You see, people should be able to look at the Christian church and see a group of people who don't get divorced, who their kids are not on drugs, their kids are not committing suicide. They're not all going to psychiatrists to solve the problems. They're not entertaining themselves with pornography.

I mean, they're basically people who are living by different standards than the world outside. And people should say, now, people might be put off by that. They might say, well, I don't want to be like that because they don't have any fun at all, you know, which is not true.

I remember in the Jesus movement in the 70s, many thousands of people, hippies, got saved in a very short time. And we spent all our time either at church or out on the beach witnessing or singing and worshiping or going to Bible studies. I mean, that's all we wanted to do.

That's all that we had an interest in. And it was definitely a countercultural thing, at least where there were lots of us. And in Orange County, there were lots of us in the early 70s.

And I had never really been a hippie, but almost all my friends had been. And they often said that their old friends would come in and say, well, what do you do for fun now? You don't get high, you don't drink, you don't sleep with your girlfriend, you know, you don't listen to the most popular rock and roll. I mean, what in the world do you do? You don't go to parties.

How do you have fun? And their answer always was, well, we go to Bible studies. Now, that doesn't sound like fun to most people. That's why the room has this many people in it.

There are other things in Las Vegas that seem like they're more fun than this. And not only Las Vegas, anywhere you go, there are people who are sold out for Jesus. And, of course, people who are not.

And more and more, those who are sold out for Jesus look different in their choices and their values and so forth. And they should. It's a shame that the whole church doesn't look different enough that people, when they see the church and think of the church, think, well, those are those people over there who, well, I don't think I want to be like them because, you know, then I couldn't keep fornicating or couldn't keep getting drunk on weekends.

But on the other hand, they say, you know, if I want to get my life better, those people look like they've got a better way. Those people say they know God, and you know what? I can almost believe it because they act like it. And that's what people can't see often enough when they look at the church today.

It may be that the church doesn't offend them as something they don't want to go to because they've got entertainment in the church. The church is all about entertainment in many cases. So the world looks on and they say, well, I don't see any reason not to go there.

I'll go sit in there and listen to the concert too. But they also don't see the church as distinctly different from the world in any way that they would think if they want to change their life. You know, these are the people that I need to go to because they're really doing it right.

I mean, they know as many Christians who are divorced as non-Christians who are divorced. They know as many, the news is that pastors view pornography in a very high percentage. I've read somewhere in Christianity Today that something like, in a survey, something like a third of the pastors in America view pornography.

And those are the ones who are willing to say so in the survey. You know? I mean,

where's this distinction between Christians and non-Christians that Jesus said would exist and that did exist in the early church? It's not there. And as long as it's not there, I don't think the gospel will have a tremendous impact on our culture again.

When the gospel really does have an impact in times of revival, it's because suddenly a lot of Christians are starting to take Jesus seriously. They're taking God seriously. They're taking their faith seriously and they're starting to let it change the way they live.

They're willing to die to themselves and take up their cross and follow Jesus. And when enough people do that, then there's sort of a critical mass of, it looks like an alternative society is there. Most people, if they know any sold out Christians, they know one or two, maybe.

Depends on where they live, what neighborhood they're in. But the point is, they know a lot of people who go to church who aren't sold out Christians. So when they hear the word Christian, it's not so likely they're going to think, oh, Christian, that's this one person over here that I know.

They're going to think of all the Christians they know who probably, many of whom may not really be what the Bible calls Christians. So what I'm thinking is that the Christians who really do know their God should be seeking the most godly life patterns together. So as a consensus and an alternative society people can look on, and when they see a group of Christians, I don't mean people living over in an Amish community.

I'm not talking about going off and buying a big hotel and everyone moving into it and having a community or moving out to a farm and having a commune. I'm talking about that in one area, preferably in every area where there are Christians, when people run into Christians, more often than not, they're running into a real thing. And they're seeing a consistency here that Christians are, when I run into a Christian, they don't cuss.

Now, to me, that's not radically Christian, but it's basic. I mean, I know Christians who cuss and I won't say they're not Christians, but I can't imagine why they would not be concerned about the way their speech affects their testimony. Paul said, let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but only what is good to the use of edifying that it might minister grace to the hearers.

I don't know how people who use swear words can feel like that's ministering grace to the hearers. And yet, I'm not saying it's some kind of an unpardonable sin. I'm saying that when people hear Christians cussing just as much as anyone else, they don't get the impression there's any difference between them.

I may have mentioned before, I don't know, but one of the first jobs I had when I was a teenager, I got a job making phone calls in an office with a bunch of people. Yes, I was a telephone solicitor. Those people you hate who always call you at dinner time.

Well, we did it during the daytime and didn't catch many people at home. But the thing is, I didn't hold the job very long either because it was annoying to call people and bother. But I needed a job and I had long hair and not everyone would hire someone who had long hair, so they didn't care what you looked like when you had this phone.

So, I got this job at this office with a bunch of people my age approximately who were telephone solicitors. And at the first coffee break in the day, someone came up to me and said, you're a Christian, aren't you? I said, well, actually I am. I said, how did you know? I didn't say anything about it.

I said, well, you're the only one here who doesn't cuss and isn't smoking at the coffee break. Now, I know lots of Christians who smoke and I'm not saying it's wrong to smoke. Some people think it's wrong, some don't.

I've never smoked. I feel sorry for people who smoke. I don't think it makes them look intelligent and I think most of them are in trouble.

I think most of them have a bondage to it that it's hard to break. So, I pity them more than I would judge them. But, the point is, when someone doesn't smoke and doesn't cuss, suddenly they stand out like a sore thumb in normal society.

Wow, you know, I was amazed that that would make me stand out. I would have thought that would keep me kind of below the radar. But, anyway, in a sense, it would be great if all the Christians didn't have any of the bondages in their life.

If they weren't in bondage to tobacco. Now, Paul said all things are lawful for me, but I don't want to be in bondage to anything. And, I think that, well, I would never say it's a sin to smoke a cigarette.

I think being in bondage to cigarettes or any other thing that you're in bondage to. Coffee, chocolate, you know, innocent things like that. If you're in bondage, I don't think it glorifies God.

Now, I drink coffee and eat chocolate and quite a bit, actually. But, every once in a while in my life, I've had to go off coffee just to make sure I could do it. And, I've done it for a few weeks at a time.

I'm not here to make comments about coffee and chocolate. I'm here to say that I believe that Christians should be people whose self-control, whose liberty is on display. Frankly, since there's no one very fat here, thankfully, I think that when Christians are exceedingly obese, it's not a good testimony.

And, I feel sorry for them, too. Because, I mean, if a person's got a problem with pornography, it doesn't show when he walks outdoors. If he's got a problem with gluttony, it shows.

And, everyone can see it. And, frankly, all of us Americans tend to get a little bit overweight. But, I mean, I've seen some Christians who, it seems like there's just no excuse for it.

I mean, their health is poor. They obviously, a young man who comes to my meetings in Santa Cruz, he's enormous. And, you know, there's usually food and snacks there.

And, I see why he's enormous. He comes back to the couch and sits down with two plates full of food, you know, from the snack table. And, he's eating.

And, he can't get up off the couch. He has to get down on one knee on the floor and face the couch and help push himself up. He's too heavy.

And, the sad thing is, he's got Christian bumper stickers all over his car. And, you know, God bless him. You know, if you're a Christian and you've got problem eating, then you've come to the right place.

Jesus is there for people who have those problems. But, you're supposed to get over them. You're supposed to be set free.

If a person is clearly, if everyone looking at a person is going to say, That person has got a habit that he's got no control over. A habit that no one would want to have. And, he's a Christian.

It's not a good testimony. It'd be great. Again, I'm not trying to make anyone feel condemned to it who has any.

I'm saying that it'd be normative, biblically speaking. If, when people met Christians, they met people who aren't cussing. They're not in bondage to habits.

They don't, you know, they don't use pornography. They're not smoking preferably. Just only because smoking is a bondage for people.

And, you know, the people were actually, seemed to be a more, they have a life that really shows there's power in the gospel. And, their community life, there's a consistent. Whenever they met a Christian, they were similar in the best ways.

Their marriages are stable. Their kids are not rebellious. I mean, all kinds of ways that the Christian life, following the teachings of Jesus was done consistently, would look radically different.

And, the Christians as a group would have a counter-cultural testimony. And, that's a good thing. Because, although not everyone's going to be attracted to a holy culture or a righteous culture, because not everyone wants to be righteous.

Those who do, often don't know where to look. Because, the Christians around them



don't look like they're providing any alternative to the world. They just, many of the churches are just doing their best to copy the world.

And, to declare how much they're not unlike the world. You know, how much like the world they are. So, that they won't be persecuted or they won't be thought to be weird.

And, so when someone actually gets sick of the world, as sometimes people do when God's working on them. It'd be nice if they, as in the first century, the people in Jerusalem, if they got sick of their sin and their worldliness. They'd say, well, there's a group of people over there who seem to have the answers.

Because, they don't have these things going on in their society over here. They'd know where to go. I don't think most people think immediately of the church in America.

When they're thinking of the places to go. I think especially, and we've talked about this before, the homosexuals. Suppose a homosexual in America wants to quit.

I mean, wishes he could. You know, it's a terrible bondage in his life. And, he really wants to get over it.

Most will not think, I think I'll go to the church. Now, they would have, maybe two generations ago. I don't know.

Certainly, in Jerusalem when the early church was there. They'd certainly look at the church at least as one of the options. Because, they'd realize these people have something different about them.

But, what they had different about them was love. And, somebody who's, let's say a homosexual trying to get out of that lifestyle. Does not usually think of an evangelical Christian as the most loving option to go to for help.

Because, they think of the evangelical Christians as the ones who are trying to make laws to outlaw them. And, carrying signs, protesting about their lifestyle. I mean, they don't see us the way the sinners in Jesus, they saw Jesus.

When Jesus was here, the sinners invited him over for dinner to meet all their friends. And, they feasted with him. And, you know, he was a friend of sinners.

But, I don't think the church has that reputation here. There's not enough Christ-likeness in the church for the world to find him attractive in us. I think.

Now, having said all that, one reaction that Christians could easily resort to would be to say, Well, we need to make some rules. If this church is going to be, we're going to start reflecting the life of Christ better. We need to make some rules for everybody.

No more television. No more makeup. And, there are groups that do that.

You know, they say, we're going to be holy here. We're going to be unlike the world. Women have to wear dresses.

Women can't wear makeup. No one can have a television. No one can go to movies.

No one can go to dances. No one can listen to secular music. Now, see, none of those things we just mentioned are sinful in themselves.

And, therefore, none of those things would necessarily be part of a radically Christian counterculture. Now, if a person's participation in those things has been a problem in their life, it might very well be that Christ would lead them out of some of those things, if those things are stumbling blocks to them. But, those are not the things Jesus forbade.

Those are not the things that being radically Christian would make you look like. But, unfortunately, whenever people want to suddenly be Christian countercultural, they become legalistic. They begin to make rules.

Okay, our women are not going to wear jewelry. Why not? Well, because that's worldly. You mean, because the dominant culture likes jewelry, we can't like jewelry.

Okay, well, that's not really what Jesus said, necessarily. I mean, there is something to be said, as Paul said and Peter said, for a woman's adorning not to be concentrated on the outward adorning, but to concentrate on the inward adorning of the heart. But, there's no command of Scripture.

And, certainly, nothing's indicated one of Jesus' priorities at all, to get the women to stop wearing jewelry or makeup or whatever. That's not what Christianity is. And, unfortunately, as soon as Christians want to look different from the world, they choose all these countercultural things that are really a legalistic set of rules.

And, you know, once you're in a group like that, you can get kicked out for not keeping the rules, even though the rules are not biblical rules, necessarily. And, so, I'm mindful of the fact that the very advocacy of a Christian counterculture inclines toward legalism if people respond and say, yeah, let's start doing this right. We need to make some rules for ourselves.

There may be times to make some rules for yourselves, but there's very few times you need to make rules for other people. Jesus has already given, you know, all the commands that pertain to following him. And, if you're going to start putting yourself under other rules, then keep it to yourself, unless someone asks your opinion, then you can share.

But, the point is, A.W. Tozer said that as you begin to get closer to God, he might, in fact, begin to convict you about some things that are not good in your life for you. You know, maybe he'll tell you not to listen to secular music because it's not doing the right thing in

your spirit when you hear it. Or, maybe he'll tell you to get rid of your television.

It's possible. There are Christians who felt convicted. When I left my parents' home, I never owned a TV because I knew I couldn't handle it.

I knew if there was a TV in my house, I'm going to watch it. And, if there was no TV, I knew I wouldn't. So, that made it an easy choice.

And, not because watching it's wrong, but because when I sit down and watch TV, it just mesmerizes me. And, if I sit down and no one stops me, I'll be watching it for hours, just because, you know, I get mad. That's not good for me.

And, I felt, I'm not going to have a TV. But, I've never felt that it mattered whether anyone else had a TV or not. That's not part of being a radically Christian counterculture.

We don't have TVs. And so, whatever personal convictions you have about things that are not mentioned in Scripture are not things to make rules about for people. And, Tozer said, you might have to adopt the attitude that others may, but I cannot, about many things.

Some people are about alcohol or other things. Others may, but I may not. I'm not because I feel personally convicted that this is not good for me.

But, I can't say what anyone else should do. That's legalism, to start putting rules on other people. We can require people to be obedient to Jesus Christ, because that's what being a Christian is.

But, to be making rules, additional rules, for the group and saying, everyone has to do this or else they're in trouble with the group, can be kicked out or challenged or frowned upon or judged, that's just legalism. And, that's what, unfortunately, it's very common for human nature to become religious. And, religious means legalistic.

Now, you might say, well, what do you mean legalistic? When people have heard me teach about certain subjects, they often feel like I have a very high standard that I teach about certain kinds of areas of behavior. And, I hope that I do. At least in so far as the Bible does, I hope that I do as well.

But, some people say, well, that sounds legalistic. I think, well, wait a minute, what are you calling legalism? I mean, there is such a thing as legalism, but most people who use the word legalism, they usually are applying it to somebody else who's perhaps advocating or living by some kind of a more strict standard or whatever than they themselves want to live by. So, they say, I think he's a legalist, or that's legalistic.

Well, if we're going to use the word legalistic, that's what poisons everything. The title of this lecture is Religion, that is Legalism, Poisons Everything. And, that's actually from a

phrase that Christopher Hitchens, the late atheist who just died last year, he's famous for saying religion poisons everything.

And, it kind of does. Though, I'm not on his side about atheism. I do feel like, as I have observed it, when people get religious, usually that kind of poisons everything.

First, you start out, if you get really saved, you're spiritually minded. You love Jesus, you love people, you're spiritual inclination. But, then you get into the church and they teach you all the rules.

And, then you become religious. And, you can tell someone's religious if they say, well, what church do you go to? And, you say, well, I go to church maybe once or twice a month, maybe not quite so often. Oh, well, you need to be in church more than that.

And, if you say, well, the church I go to, you know, it's just a home kind of fellowship. Oh, do you have a pastor? No. Do you tithe? No.

You know, then that's not a church. You have to go to another kind of church than that. And, they're making up rules that the Bible doesn't make up.

It's like our religious tradition says you have to do such and such things, otherwise we're going to have to say you're not a good Christian. But, most of the such and such things on their list are not things the Bible says. They're things that have traditionally been brought into the church.

And, they have become rules by which we judge other people. But, we're not judging righteous judgment. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees in John 7, 24.

And, he said, don't judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment. And, too many times we don't judge righteous judgment. And, so we need to make correct judgments about such things.

Because, we ought to be able to be on our guard against legalism. But, to do so, we have to know what we're talking about. Because, as I say, legalism is kind of just a catchphrase that almost all Christians know the expression and apply to some people that they know.

It's legalistic. They may be surprised to learn the word legalism or legalist is not found in the Bible anywhere. The Bible never mentions legalism by that name.

Which means, of course, if we want to define what we mean by it, we can't just go to the Bible and say, well, here it is in this verse here. I do believe in such a thing as legalism. I believe there is such a thing.

And, I think that the Bible talks about it by other terms. And, I think where we would look in the Bible for what legalism is would be like looking at the Pharisees and distinctly what

Jesus said against them. And, also in Galatians, especially the Judaizers and what Paul says about them.

And, those would be both cases of what I think most of us would agree would be legalism. We would say Paul wrote Galatians against legalism of a certain sort. And, Jesus often preached against legalism of another sort.

Pharisaic on the one hand and Judaistic in the other sense. The Pharisaic legalism had certain characteristics. The Judaizers had another characteristic.

And, I want to look at those things. But, first I want to say what isn't legalism. And, what we have no right to call legalism.

First of all, obedience to God is not legalism. It is, in fact, Christianity. And, I have some scriptures here for you.

In Titus 2.14, Paul wrote that Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Now, notice what we are saved from. We are redeemed from lawlessness.

Now, law and legal sound like the same thing. If a person is following laws, isn't that legalism? Well, depends. It could be.

Many people who follow laws are indeed legalistic. And, we need to be aware of it. And, I am going to talk about what it is.

But, lawlessness is not okay. We shouldn't be legalistic, but we can't be lawless. He gave himself to redeem us from all lawlessness.

We were lawless before. And, that is what he saved us from. Now, what is lawless? That means that you are not submitting to God's law.

When God has given commands and you are not obeying them. That is being lawless. It is that disobedience to God that we are to be saved from.

It says in Matthew 1.21 that Jesus' name was to be called Jesus because it says he will save his people from their sins. Not from the consequences of their sins merely, but from their sinning. Sinning is what is wrong with us.

Sinning is the bondage that we need to be set free from. And, so Paul said in Romans 6.17 and 18. Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And, have been set free from sin. You have become slaves of righteousness. Now, you were in bondage to sin.

That is what you had to be saved from. Your captivity to the power of sin. We often think of salvation as mainly from hell so that we can go to heaven.

And, when we think like that, we are thinking that Jesus came to save me from the consequences of my sin. And, he did indeed. But, that is not the primary thing.

He did not intend that you would simply be forgiven for your sins and keep living in sin. He came to save you from your sins. You were slaves of sin, Paul says.

But, now you have become obedient. That is the description of salvation. You see, you were a slave of the devil and of sin in the world.

And, that was reflected in the fact that you lived in sin. That is how your bondage was expressed in behavior. And, being set free from that is expressed by not doing that anymore.

Not being in bondage to sin anymore. And, being obedient to God. And, that is what Paul says.

Obedience is the very description of the Christian walk. In Ephesians 2.10, Paul said that we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. Which God prepared before and that we should walk in them.

The Christian walk that God prepared for us to walk in is a walk of good works. Which is simply obedience to God. So, in Luke 6.46, Jesus said, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you don't do what I say? In other words, you don't obey me.

Why would you call me Lord? Isn't being a Christian meaning that Jesus is your Lord? Well, then why do you call me that and you don't do what I say? Obviously, the Christian walk is defined by obedience to God. That is not legalism. Obedience is the mark of being saved.

In Hebrews 5.9, it is actually the mark of salvation. Peter said that Christ, I mean, excuse me, the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 5.9, Being made perfect, Christ became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Christ is the source of salvation to whom? All who obey him.

Now, does this mean that we are saved by obedience? You could certainly get that impression if we didn't have any other verses of the Bible. But we do. We have other verses of the Bible.

We know we're saved by grace, through faith, not of works. But that's the same passage in Ephesians 2 that went on to say in verse 10, We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. We are not saved by our works, but we are saved for good works.

That's the mark of being a Christian. In the days when the writer of Hebrews wrote, he could describe the Christian community as those who obey God. Jesus is the savior of this group over here.

Who? Those ones who are obeying God. That's what Christians look like. They're the ones who are obeying God.

He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. That is, those who obey him is the same as those who believe in him and who are saved. Likewise, in Acts 5.32, Peter is talking to the Sanhedrin.

And he says that obedience is the mark of having the Holy Spirit, which all Christians do. He says, And we are his witnesses to these things. And so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.

Once again, it sounds like it's saying that God will give you his Holy Spirit if you obey him. But that's not what I think Peter's saying any more than the writer of Hebrews is saying that you get saved by obeying him. I believe he's saying that the Holy Spirit is given to that group over there.

Who are they? The ones who are obeying God. Those people who are obedient to God. That's a community of people over there.

They're called Christians. They have the Holy Spirit. God's given them the Holy Spirit.

It'd be wonderful if in our day, as in the first century, Christians could be described that way. Those who obey him. Who are the Christians? The ones who obey Jesus.

That's who the Christians are. Obedience is not an option. Obedience is the very essence of what it means to be a Christian.

You've been saved from a life of disobedience so that you don't have a life of obedience. That's the difference in getting saved. The word converted means change.

That's what changes. Now, I want to just make it very clear that I believe every Christian still sometimes sins. That's not permission I'm giving.

It's just an observation. Christians do not have permission to sin. Any preacher who gives permission to sin is not true to the gospel.

Christ never gave anyone permission to sin. He did say to a woman who sinned, I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more.

He didn't give her permission. Somebody gave her grace. And this is something that people don't get their minds wrapped around.

Well, there's a difference between lenience and grace. A lenient father is a father who doesn't really care much what his kids do. Never bothers him much if they obey or disobey.

He's lenient. He never disciplines. He doesn't expect much in terms of obedience.

He'd like to be left alone and have his kids stay out of trouble. He doesn't want to get any calls from the police department or from the principal at the school. As long as the kids are behaving, he doesn't mind what they do.

He's lenient. He's not a disciplinarian. He doesn't care much about how they act.

That's not what grace is. Grace is not lenience. Grace is costly.

It cost Jesus his life and his blood. Jesus had to die so that grace could be made available to us. And that's because God takes sin very seriously.

He's not lenient, but he is gracious. He's not lenient, and therefore he expects obedience. He commands obedience.

He does not give permission to sin. But he's gracious because he knows that even those who wish to live holy lives struggle. And sometimes are often known to succumb to temptation, which is not okay.

And they know it's not okay because they don't want to do that. Paul said, I do the things I hate. The very fact that I hate them means it's not me doing it.

It's something else in me making this happen, and I don't agree with it. I'm against it. God knows that.

The true Christian knows that God does not give permission to sin, and the Christian does not give himself permission to sin. But may sin through weakness, through foolishness, through carelessness. Christians do sometimes sin, but because they do not give themselves permission to, they repent.

As soon as you know you've sinned, if you're really a Christian, you know that God's waiting for you to repent, and he's waiting to forgive you for that. And he will, because he's gracious. Not because the sin didn't matter.

It mattered a great deal. It cost Jesus his life. But because it did cost Jesus his life, God is willing to forgive when we repent.

So 1 John 1.9 says, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's grace. But it's not leniency, and this is where Christians often misunderstand.



They say, I'm not saved by works, I'm saved by grace. That means it doesn't matter how I live, because God doesn't care. Or even if God does care, that's okay, because he can't hurt me, because Jesus is going to stand up for me on the judgment.

That's not what grace means. Grace means that God has paid the necessary price for our lawless deeds. And even the lawless deeds that continue after we're saved, he's covered.

But being saved means something specific. It doesn't mean that I've just decided to say I believe something, and now I can keep living the same as before. No.

Being saved means I have repented of my life of rebellion and disobedience. So that now the only thing I think is okay is obedience to God. If I sin, I'm not going to say that's okay.

That's why I repent. If I think it's okay, I won't repent. But obedience is the assignment that comes with being a Christian.

So what is legalism then? Obedience is not legalism. But what is? Well, if we look at the things Jesus said about the Pharisees, we can make a pretty good list of what legalism looks like. First of all, adding traditional rules to the Word of God.

I mentioned some of those earlier. When people say, well, we're going to be good Christians, we're going to be holy. The women are not going to wear pants.

Men are not going to smoke cigarettes. No one's going to be allowed to do these things because that's not holy. Well, not going to have TVs, not going to listen to secular music, not going to go to movies.

Well, the Bible doesn't say any of those things. That's not the commandments of God. That's traditions of men.

And legalists tend to judge by traditions that they have come up with that they feel are good ideas. Now, some of those things are good ideas. I'll tell you.

Like I said, I have not owned a TV in the years that I left my parents' home when I was 17 on. I raised all my kids without a TV in our home because, not because I was a legalist, but because I didn't think it was a good idea to have it there. Not good for me.

And I didn't think it would be very good for my kids either. It's a matter of wisdom, not legalism. It's not like I thought other people who can handle it shouldn't have TVs.

There are people who can handle it. A guy called me on the air, I think it was yesterday, he said, Steve, when you go to Las Vegas, do you ever get tempted to go into casinos? No. I've been in casinos to have something to eat.

And the part I didn't enjoy was walking through the casino part. Not because it was

tempting, but because it's depressing. I don't find anything attractive about it, but some people do.

There are people who are obviously not only attractive, but strongly tempted by that. So I can understand. Some people have got a problem with it.

Some don't. Some people have a problem with TVs. Some don't.

Some people have a problem listening to sexual music. Some don't. There's all kinds of people who have problems with certain things, which other people don't.

And the things in themselves are never said to be sins. These are areas where there should be liberty. But somebody's got an idea, says, I've got a problem with this.

Everybody's got a problem with this. Because I don't think it's good to have that in my home. No one should have that in their home.

And then you make a rule that the Bible doesn't make, and you've got a traditional man-made rule, and you're judging people. That's legalism. And Jesus talked about that, of course, and it's in your notes there.

Matthew 15, 3, it should be 3 and 9, but we can read all of it. Jesus answered them, And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God commanded, Honor your father and your mother, and whoever reviles father or mother shall surely die. That's the word of God.

But you say, if anyone tells his father or mother, What you would have gained from me is given to God. He need not honor his father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you have made void the word of God, you hypocrites.

Well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Now, this is Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees' behavior, and they were legalists, and this is certainly part of it.

They taught for doctrines, traditions of men. Now, what we have to understand is this. Every Christian ought to have the liberty to read the word of God, pray about something, and have the liberty to do what they truly believe the Holy Spirit is leading them to do.

And no other Christian should judge them for that. Unless what they end up doing is something that the Bible defines as a sin, in which case it should be addressed. Graciously, but seriously.

And, I mean, Paul said in Galatians 6, 1, you know, it's not in your notes, but in Galatians 6, 1 he said, If any of you are overtaken at fault, you who are spiritual, go and restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself, lest you also be tempted. So,

if you see a brother who really is sinning, you're supposed to go fix it, go confront it, but do it in the spirit of meekness. You know, there should be a gracious confrontation when people sin.

But when people, what people are doing is not sin, there still may be occasion to speak to them about it, but not in the same sense. You can't judge them for it. For example, if you think somebody is not handling alcohol as well as you can handle it, but they're drinking it anyway, there's such a thing as going and saying, You know, the Bible does not forbid the drinking of alcohol, but obviously the Bible says some use of alcohol becomes sin.

And, you know, you might want to consider whether what you're doing with your alcohol is getting you too far along that road, because I've seen you a few times drinking and you look like you're a little, a little, you know, not in your normal condition. You know, I mean, now you can't say you can't drink alcohol, but you can easily counsel somebody and say, You know, it might be good for you. It may be helpful to you if you've got a problem, is that you get the alcohol out of your house.

Now, if they don't do that, you still don't judge them unless they're getting drunk. If they're getting drunk, that's something that has to be addressed. If they're not getting drunk, you can't say anything more.

There is such a thing as giving people counsel, where you can see that something in their life that is not in itself a sin is perhaps leading them into sin, in which case, godly counsel and godly concern should be expressed, you know, in a way that is not condemning and is gracious and is more an appeal to godly wisdom rather than laws that God never made. You can't make laws for people. That's God's job, and he has made some, but he hasn't made as many as people make most of the time.

In Galatians 4, 9 through 11, Paul said, But now that you've come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world? Now, what's he talking about? Prostitution? Idolatry? No. He's talking about rules and regulations, man-made rules and regulations. He says, Whose slaves do you want to be once more? He says, You observe days and months and seasons and years.

I'm afraid I may have labored over you in vain. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Those are, of course, different verses in Galatians 5, 6 and Galatians 6, 15. But notice, there are some things God has commanded. He's commanded you to have faith that works through love.

He's commanded you to live out a new creation, a reborn new creation in your life. But He has not commanded you to get circumcised or not to get circumcised. If someone's telling you that, they're adding to the Word of God.

He has not told you to keep certain days and months and feasts and years. If someone tells you you have to do that, they're a legalist. They're adding to the Word of God.

Now, I know a lot of Christians who have felt like they should start keeping special holy days, especially the ones that are in the Jewish calendar. Well, more power to them. Let them do it.

But don't let them say that you have to do it because the Bible doesn't say you have to do it. Paul said, one man esteems one day above another. Another man esteems every day alike.

Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. There's liberty. When the liberty is taken away, there's legalism.

When people start adding rules that God didn't add to Christians and then start judging people by those rules, that is legalism. Human traditions being added to the Word of God. Another aspect of legalism seen in the Pharisees is majoring on minors.

When Jesus' disciples were picking the wheat on the Sabbath and they were criticized by the Pharisees, Jesus said, If you had known what this means, I desire mercy and not sacrifice, you would not have condemned the guiltless. Legalists always condemn people even when they're often guiltless. Why? Because they don't go and learn what this means.

Jesus quotes Hosea 6.6. Hosea 6.6 says, I will have mercy and not sacrifice. Jesus said, you Pharisees ought to learn that so you won't be condemning the guiltless. And by the way, later on, or earlier actually, they had done the same thing.

I think it was in chapter 9. They were condemning Jesus for him. He says, you should go learn what this means. I will have mercy and not sacrifice.

Twice Jesus quoted Hosea 6.6 and said, This will cure you of your legalistic tendency to condemn people who aren't guilty in the sight of God. You need to learn this. What is this? God says, I prefer mercy more than sacrifice.

Now, sacrifice is good. In the Jewish religion, sacrifice was, you know, obligatory. But mercy was more so.

It was more commanded to show mercy, Jesus said. More important because that's a more important issue. He brings this out with the Pharisees again in Matthew 23, verses 23 and 24.

He says, woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. He says, for you pay your tithe of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law. So some matters of the law are weightier than others with God.

There are majors and there are minors. He says, you've paid your tithe. That was a minor command of the law.

But there are weightier matters that you're not keeping. What are they? He says, when he lists what he calls the weightier matters of the law, he calls them justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

You blind guys, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel. Now, straining a gnat and swallowing a camel is simply saying you're majors and you're minors. The Jews would strain a gnat out of their drink because it was an unclean animal.

But a camel was an unclean animal, too. And, of course, he's speaking figuratively. They didn't really go out and eat camel meat.

But he's saying what you are doing is something the law says you should do. You're tithing. The law said you should do that.

Good. That's like straining a gnat out of your drink. But you're neglecting far more important things.

A violation which is comparable to swallowing a much larger unclean animal. You're not assessing the true value of God's concerns, respectively. God is not so concerned about religious rituals as he is about mercy and justice and faithfulness.

What are those? Those are relational principles. You show justice or not to other people. You show mercy or not to other people.

You are faithful or not to other people. Justice and mercy and faithfulness have to do with your priorities in relationships. It has to do with your commitment to do right by other people.

And these are weightier matters in God's sight than whether you're paying your tithe. He said, I'll have mercy rather than sacrifice. Even offering animal sacrifices.

David committed murder and adultery, and he didn't offer a sacrifice because he said in Psalm 51, I know that you don't desire sacrifices. What you desire is a broken spirit and a contrite heart. I mean, David knew that humility in his case was more pleasing to God than offering a sacrifice.

Now, the law said to offer sacrifice, but he could have done that with a proud heart like the Pharisees often did. Instead, he said, I know what you want is a broken and contrite heart. So in Micah 6, 8, the prophet says, he showed you, O man, what is good and what

the Lord does require of you, that you do justly and that you love mercy and that you walk humbly with your God.

Humility, mercy, justice, faithfulness. These are the things that are the weightier matters. That was Micah 6, 8, because it's not in your notes.

So, majoring on things that God doesn't major on and neglecting the things that God does major on. That's an aspect of legalism. Another thing about legalists, according to Jesus, is that they're critical and resentful, especially toward anyone who has any more liberty than they have.

In the parable of the prodigal son, there's several verses here. I won't take time to read them all, but you know that when the son came home, the father showed great mercy and grace to him. He received him back.

He elevated him to son's status again, threw a party for him. There was music, there was dancing. Things that would never go on in a holiness church, but God did that.

The father did that. And the older brother was a holiness guy. He said, what's all this music and dancing going on here? And the father came out to meet him, because the son wouldn't go in.

So, the father went out to him, gracious as he was. Displeased, but gracious. And he said to his son, come on in.

And his son said, no. He says, I've never disobeyed you at all. This is how the Pharisees looked at things.

We've been obedient. We've kept the laws of God down to the smallest letter. We're like that.

And God hasn't rejoiced over us like over this younger brother who wasted your living with prostitutes and so forth. And this is a guy who wasn't rejoicing that his brother had come home and that his father was happy and that things were now turned around and good. All he could see was he never got away with that stuff himself.

What good did it do him to be good? He never, you know, this guy, his brother got away with sinning, which obviously the older brother resented. Like, gee, I wish I could have done that, you know. How come he gets away with it and I don't? I really think that's why legalists are critical and judgmental.

They're resentful. They don't like people having more liberty than they can allow themselves. If they do those things, they feel guilty.

They feel condemned, so they won't do them. How come that guy gets to do that? How come that guy can, you know, go to movies and I can't, you know? Being a Christian is

being obedient to God because you love Him and therefore you love obeying Him. If you love someone, it's part of that that you love to please them.

And this son had been doing what he thought would please his father, but he didn't love it. He was angry. He said, I never got rewarded for doing this good stuff.

How come he gets to get away with what he got? And he's judgmental and critical and resentful toward his brother. And that older son represents the Pharisees in the parable. The younger brother who got away with it, so to speak, didn't get away with anything.

He wasted his fortune. He wasted his life. He besmirched his reputation and his father's.

That's not getting away with anything. He was forgiven. That's always good, but he didn't get away with it.

If someone thinks, well, how come? See, when I was a teenager, the people who gave their testimonies and people wrote books about them were the guys who were gang members and drug addicts and, you know, pimps and stuff. And then they got saved. And someone wanted to write a book about them.

And I was raised in the church. I never smoked a cigarette. I never got drunk.

I never slept with a woman. And I, you know, and I'd look at this and think, nobody's writing books about me. You know, how come these guys got to go out and have all this fun? And now there's a big party being thrown because they've come to Jesus.

Well, I've been with Jesus all this time. No one threw a party for me. And that's that same legalistic attitude.

You know, what it was saying is, I really wish I could have done those things, too. You know, the way I was raised, I couldn't let myself do that. But, boy, I sure envied those who did.

I sure did love the world. I just didn't follow it. I wasn't at liberty to.

But I wished I could. That's what a person who's judgmental about other people, when somebody's resentful of the grace shown to somebody, that resentment shows that they wish they could have gotten away with that, too. How come I had to be good and they didn't have to be good? You know, they're saying, I didn't love being good, which is another saying, I didn't love God.

If I loved God, I'd love to do what pleases Him. If I loved, you know, someone who does come out of the gutter and out of the trash can and they come and serve God, they wish they hadn't been there. They wish they hadn't wasted those years.

They are mindful of, if they're truly repentant, that repentance is seen in the fact that

they'd give anything if they could go rewrite that story and not do those things again, because of what it did to God. And the righteous person who didn't go and do those things, if he's truly righteous in heart, he's glad that he didn't do those things because he didn't want to do those things to hurt God. So, the person who's resentful about it, he's saying, I like sin, but I just can't let myself do it.

And it makes me mad that some people got to do those things and I didn't. That's part of legalism, too. Now, it's also, another part of legalism is being hypocritical.

That is, following a double standard. You judge people for something, but you let yourself do the same thing. And, you know, Jesus talks about that a lot of times.

He said in Matthew 23, 3 through 4, he says, when he's talking about the scribes and Pharisees, he says, Do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but they do not practice. They tie up heavy burdens hard to bear.

It means rules and regulations. And they lay them on people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger. They won't keep the rules.

They just like to make the rules for other people and judge other people who don't do that. And there's so many other times Jesus talks about it. In the Sermon on the Mount, he said, Don't be like the hypocrites when you fast, when you do alms, when you pray.

Don't be like the hypocrites. And remember when Jesus said, Do not judge. In Matthew 7, 1, This is not a condemning of all judgment.

He goes on to say what he means. He says, The measure you use to judge others, God will use to judge you. Therefore, if your brother has a speck in his eye and you've got a beam in your eye, don't say, Let me help you with that speck.

He says, First, get the beam out of your eye. Then you can help with the speck. That is, you really can be helpful in assessing another person's problem if you're not doing the same thing more, if you don't have the problem in a bigger way than they do.

He's saying it's hypocritically. He says, You hypocrites, first get the beam out of your own eye. Then you can see clearly.

You get the speck out of your brother's eye. Hypocritical judgment, making rules for others that you don't keep. Oh, it's not okay if you have a speck in your eye, but it's okay for me to have a beam in my eye.

That's double standard. That's judging by a double standard. Another thing about legalists is they are externalistic.

That is, righteous behavior trumps righteousness of the heart with them. A lot of times they have their heart completely unchanged, but they have changed their outward



behavior. And that's all that matters to them.

In Matthew 15, 7 through 8, Jesus said, You hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you when he said, This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. In vain they do worship me, teaching doctrines for doctrines and commandments of men. And in Matthew 23, 5, Jesus said, They do all their deeds to be seen by others.

For they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long. What that means is that the particular religious garments that the Jews wore, they extended them, they got larger phylacteries and longer fringed garments, which had to do with special religious piety. I won't go into right now because there's not time.

But the point is they did the outward things to make themselves look religious, but everything they did was to be seen by people. And so Jesus taught the disciples not to do it that way themselves. And then, of course, legalists are usually proud.

Sometimes they don't seem like it because they often afflict themselves with guilt an awful lot, too. And they seem to be quite humble. But they are proud in that they believe that they are capable if they just tried harder.

And everybody is capable if they could be holy, they could be pure, they could be perfect. If they condemn themselves, it's because they really think they could have been perfect and they can't figure out why they're not. But they'll judge other people for not being perfect much more quickly than they'll judge themselves.

Pride is something that is part of being a Pharisaical person. Jesus said about the Pharisees in Matthew 23, 6 and 7, they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues, which are the most prestigious seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the marketplace being called rabbi by others. They love to be called rabbi.

What's rabbi mean? Teacher is the translation that's given in our Bibles. And it says rabbi, which being interpreted as teacher. The literal Hebrew meaning of the word rabbi is my great one.

Yeah, my great one. That's what the word rabbi means. It was a term they used for their teachers, which is, of course, what you should be calling me, therefore.

But Jesus said, no, don't let anyone call you rabbi. Don't you be called rabbi. And don't you call anyone rabbi.

Jesus is your teacher. Jesus is your great one. But these people love to be called by that name.

And in our society, there's other names. We don't call our Christian leaders rabbi, but we might call them reverend or doctor or something else. And a lot of these are earned

titles.

But the man who revels in having such an earned title is religiously proud. There is a man who used to have a show, actually a show like mine back when I was a teenager. I'm not talking about Walter Martin.

Everyone knows that he had a show back when I was a teenager like mine, the Bible Answer Man. But there was another show with another scholar, Christian scholar, that was very similar to the Bible Answer Man. And it's not on, hasn't been on for years, but the scholar had five earned degrees.

And I'm going to call him Joe Smith just for the sake of the illustration. I'm not going to give you his real name. He's written many books.

He's a scholar and apologist and has many degrees. But he was never known for being a humble man. And I remember listening to his program a few times, and I just couldn't stomach it because of his attitude in many cases.

And I remember I was listening one time and the caller said, Oh, hi, Brother Joe. And he said, That's Dr. Smith. I earned those degrees and I deserve to be called Dr. Smith.

He said, That's not his real name, but that substitutes the real name. And that was the last time I listened to him. Shall I call you Rabbi, Rabbi? My great one.

You know, Dr. Smith. There's nothing wrong with being a doctor. But if you're insisting that you deserve to be called doctor by underlings who haven't earned what you've earned because that gives you prestige.

That's that's pharisaical. That's what the Pharisees did. And I've never known how a pastor could allow something called reverend.

If you think about what it means, a revered one. That's sort of like my great one, my revered one. So, but the thing is, a lot of people accept these titles without thinking about it.

I mean, they're not proud about it. It's just it's just what it's done in their denomination or whatever. But but when people really insist on having recognition for being religious leaders, that's a scary thing.

That's a very scary thing to me. In Luke 14, 7, Jesus told a parable to those who were invited when he saw, noticed how they chose the places of honor. That was he's a homo, a Pharisee.

And the Pharisees that came in, they were choosing the seats of honor for themselves. In Luke 18, 9 through 12, Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. That's pride.

And treated others with contempt. That's pride, too. Two men went up to the temple to pray.

One a Pharisee, the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like other men. Extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

I fast twice a week. I tithe of all that I get. This man was not exactly humble.

And this is how Jesus describes a Pharisee. Because that's how they were proud. So, legalism is, you know, it's going to add rules that God didn't add.

It's going to be majoring on minors. It's going to be critical and resentful of other people who aren't as holy or well behaved as they think they are. Hypocritical, usually making a double standard, judging other people by a standard, but they let themselves find ways to get away with not keeping the standard themselves.

They're externalistic, so that they outwardly do religious things, but in their hearts, they're like whitewashed tombs. Outwardly all white, but inwardly full of dead men's bones and all iniquity and all uncleanness. And, of course, there's pride there.

This is what Phariseeism is. This is what legalism is. Now, I mentioned Judaizers, too.

We're not going to look at all the scriptures there in Galatians, but just know that in Galatians, the Judaizers were just adding rules from the Old Testament to the duties of Christians in the New Testament. These are rules that Jesus did not command, but Moses did. But Moses commanded them to Israel under the Old Covenant.

Jesus came and made a new covenant and did not command these things, but Judaizers were trying to put the Christians under those rules, too. And those are the kind of legalists that Paul was so adamant against. He said they were preaching another gospel and should be accursed because of it.

Now, what is Christianity then? How is it not legalistic, but it is obedient? Christianity is basically coming into the family of God. So it really amounts to having a father to please. He's your dad.

You become a child of God. Now, what does it mean to be a dad? Unfortunately, we don't know that as much as people used to because there aren't as many fatherly traditions or as many people living up to them in our modern society. Many people that we call fathers are really nothing more than sperm donors.

I had a friend whose father I knew and I knew the son, and the son and the father were not on good terms. And I asked him once about his dad. He says, he's not my dad.

He's my male genetic contributor. And in some cases that's true. This father had left him

and his mother when the child was a baby.

He never fathered him. He fathered him in the sense that he contributed the genetic information for him to come into conception, but he never reared him. He never became a father to him.

But a father, as the Bible assumes it, is somebody who, first of all, cherishes his children. And he cares enough about them to train them. He doesn't want them to turn out bad.

He doesn't want them to turn out losers. And so he trains them. He devotes himself to training them to do what's right.

This includes disciplining them. And a child is born into the home of a father and a mother, and the child's assignment is to obey your parents. Now that's not legalism.

That's relational. That has to do with, you know, your father is the authority in your home, and you're born into the home. Now you weren't born there by obeying your parents.

You're not born again by being obedient to God. You're born again by the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart because of faith. And you don't really stay in the family by obeying your parents because in all likelihood, if a child is disobedient to his father, he'll get disciplined, but he won't be thrown out of the house.

Not while he's a child, anyway. Obedience is not how you come into a family or how you stay in a family. Obedience is what you do because you're in a family.

When a child is born, it is not because he has been obedient, but it does mean he's now expected to be obedient. That's what children are to be. And to please your father is going to require that you obey him.

So being a Christian means that you have a father to obey. And it's a relational thing. It's not a lawmaker who's there to judge you, though he will judge.

But the relationship is different than that. You trust and obey him. That's what's expected.

Galatians 5, 6 says, For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love. Faith is what matters, but it's a faith that works through love. What's that mean? It means it does loving works.

That's what God has commanded us to do, to love one another. And so if I have faith in him, then I will believe that my assignment is to do works that are loving. That's what he wants.

That's what pleases him. James said, Faith without works is dead. And obviously works

here refers to obedience to God.

If you say you have faith in God, but you don't obey him, then you don't understand what it means to have a father. In 1 Peter 1, 17, Peter said, And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each man's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile here. Now, if God is your father, you should be fearful of what? Of disobeying him.

That's the thing that many kids aren't afraid of their father anymore because the fathers don't discipline. There was a time a few generations ago that if a kid misbehaved at school or misbehaved in front of his mom, his mom says, Wait till your father gets home. And the kid was in fear because he knew he'd disobeyed his father and there'd be a price to be paid in discipline.

Not because the father was going to condemn him or judge him or disown him, but because the father is committed to correcting him. And that's not always unpainful. Correction can sometimes be painful.

Whom the father loves, he chastens and scourges, I mean, whips every son that he receives. So that's a mark of God's love. And you trust him.

You believe that you'll obey him because you'll fear to be disobedient. Not fear that you're going to go to hell, but fear that God who loves you is not going to just let you get away with that. He's going to fix it.

He's committed you. He's going to fix you. And no chastening seems joyful, but grievous at the time.

But afterward, it works. The peaceable fruit of righteousness and those who are exercised by it. So you have a father.

The assignment is children, obey your parents, including your heavenly father. And if you don't, there's discipline to be had. There's something to be feared.

But it's not. It's not condemnation or rejection. He scourges every son that he receives.

It says in Hebrews 12. Not the sons he rejects. He scourges the sons he receives.

So, although we're glad that he receives us, we should have the fear of God in us about what he will do because he receives us if we go wrong. But having a father means we also have to love who he loves. It says in 1 John 5, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.

And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. If you love someone, you love their kids. You might not like their kids much, but your commitment to them because of your relationship with the Father, you're going to be committed to

those kids.

Why? Because you know they matter to him. Now, if you don't love him much, you might not put up with his kids. But if you really do love somebody, you love their kids for their sake.

When I married my wife, she had two kids. I had five. She had no particular reason to love my kids until she married me.

Because she loves me, she loves my kids. She probably, if she and I were not married, she probably wouldn't have any particular attachment to my kids. And she had two kids, although I like her kids very much.

If I didn't marry her and didn't love her, I wouldn't be particularly committed to her kids in a special sense like I am. I mean, I would lay down my life for her kids or for mine. Because when you love somebody, you love who they love.

You know, love me, love my dog. And if you love God, you love His kids. And since Jesus said, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I love you.

Well, you love me, you love these guys, then I'm supposed to love them too because I love you. That's what having a father means. If he's your dad, then his kids are as valuable to him as you are.

And you should love them. But it's also having a Lord to obey. That Jesus is the Lord.

And Jesus said in some of these verses, I won't read them all now because of the time being short. These verses, He said, you know, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments, and so forth. Obeying Jesus is very clearly the command.

God has appointed Jesus to be the Lord and therefore, obeying Him. But it also means having a role model to copy. In Ephesians 5, it says, therefore be imitators of God as beloved children.

That is, as children obey their father and imitate Him. He's their role model. So you imitate God.

And other verses in your notes are other verses that say the same thing. Basically, when Jesus said, love your enemies, He said, so you'll be like your father. Your father loves his enemies.

So, the radical Christian mentality is a commitment to be obedient to God. To be obedient to Jesus Christ. But not to be legalistic.

And as soon as people become legalistic, they become the opposite of radically Christian. They become radically Pharisaical. The opposite.

Jesus wasn't at war with the sinners in Jerusalem. He was at war with the Pharisees. It wasn't the tax collectors and the pimps that came and crucified Him.

It was the religious leaders. And sometimes we are more like Pharisees than like Jesus. Because we're religious.

And that poisons everything. It's legalism that poisons everything. If you realize that Christianity means I'm supposed to be like my father.

I'm supposed to love everyone my father loves. I'm supposed to obey my father and my Lord. And be like Him.

Well then, we look at Jesus and say, well this is different than religious. God's not particularly religious. Jesus is not particularly religious.

Certainly not legalistic. But He nonetheless did the will of His Father. And that's what I'm here to do.

The will of my Father. So, being obedient to God without being legalistic is what the issue is. And the difference is, Jesus said to the Pharisees, I know you that you have no love of God in you.

John chapter 5, He said that. If you love God, you'll keep His commandments. Because you love Him.

Not because you're afraid that He'll throw you out of the family. But because you love your dad and that's what you do to your dad. You obey Him.

I had occasion to observe a contrast between these two in a situation very close to my own home life where there were two parties. One of them, well they both lived the same way. They both lived up to a pretty high standard of obedience to God and so forth.

But it turned out, it wasn't obvious at first, that one person was doing it out of legalism and the other person was doing it out of love for God. Because the one who was doing it out of legalism eventually gave up on it and left the Lord. And told some people afterwards that while serving God, she felt like she was in a dark cave.

And now that she rejected Christ, she felt like she'd come out in the light. And, you know, when I heard that, I thought, how could that be? If I was anything other than serving God, I'd feel like I was in a dark cave. You know? Serving God is being in the light.

It's like different people can live the exact same religious way. One of them does it because they love God. The other does it because, who knows why.

They're afraid not to or something like that. But the second is legalism. Legalism poisons everything.

It poisons your spirit. It poisons your relationships. And yet grace is the radically Christian attitude.

The Bible says in John chapter 1 that the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. The thing that is radically different about Jesus and Christianity than any religion is every religion is law. Christ's life is grace and truth.

And so being gracious without lowering your standards, you say, well, how can you do that? It's like this. If you're coaching a pole vaulter and his aim is to get over a pole that's, let's say, 18 feet high. Well, you put the bar at 18 feet.

And if he knocks it down several times, you don't put the bar lower. You say, if you've got to get over an 18 foot bar, let's keep trying. You don't condemn him.

You realize that he's trying to get over the bar, but he just can't do it yet. But instead of lowering the bar, you just show compassion and grace until he gets good enough to get over it. You don't change the standard.

You just recognize that men are flesh. God does. In Psalm 103, it says he knows our frame.

He remembers that we're dust. And we have to recognize in other people, we can't judge them harshly because they fail to meet the standard. But we can think badly of their Christian faith if they have no intention of meeting the standard.

If they don't want to be obedient to God, and therefore they're not, that's one thing. If they're wanting to be obedient to God but fail because of weakness, then who can condemn that? We all fail. In all things we stumble, James said.

Or in many things we all stumble, he said. So, this is the mentality when we talk about we need to have a holier, a more Christ-like society among ourselves, a radically Christian counterculture. And I say the next thing is for people to run to legalism to make that happen.

That is the thing that will make it not happen. Because the more legalistic you become, the less radically Christian you are. Radically religious, maybe.

Radically moral, maybe. But not radically Christian, per se. Because Christian is Christ-like, and that's grace.

Grace and truth came through Jesus. Though we have grace, and we rejoice in it, we don't use that as an excuse to be disobedient. Because obedience to Christ is, of course, our assignment.

That's what having a Lord, having a Father, means.