

# **SET FREE? STAY FREE!**

**THE FALLACY AND  
FAILURE OF LEGALISM**

**LARRY DEASON**

***SET FREE?***

***STAY FREE!***

*The Fallacy and Failure  
of  
Legalism*

***Larry Deason***

Life Communications  
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*This Book*  
*Is Dedicated*  
*To*  
*All*  
*Who*  
*Truly Desire*  
*To Be*  
*Free... Free Indeed!*

***“No one***

***is***

***fully human***

***or***

***fully alive***

***until***

***he or she***

***is***

***fully free.”***

Imprisonment...

Enslavement...

Restraint...

Confinement...

Bondage...

Shackles and chains...

These are the enemies of human worth and dignity. Here are the liberty-opposing forces against which men and women have fought and died; they laid down their lives to be free. I am speaking of various injustices that have robbed people of their God-given freedom, not about just causes for criminal incarceration.

The enslavement of which I speak may include or even transcend political, economic, religious, and ideological captivity; I speak of the bondage of the mind, soul, and spirit of a person. One can be restrained in a jail without bars or a prison without walls. Throughout the centuries of human history

people have believed themselves to be free, when in fact they may have been doubly bound. A person who is enslaved, but does not know or believe that he or she is chained, is bound indeed! <sup>1</sup> Even if one is free, but doesn't believe it, that person is not truly free; one's unbelief keeps him or her in chains.

2 Houdini, the great escape artist, once claimed that he could free himself from any jail cell in the country in only a few minutes. His challenge was answered by a small-town jailor. The famous Houdini came and was placed behind the iron bars. The steel door was slammed shut. Immediately, Houdini tried to free himself. He quickly went to the task of picking the large lock that secured the bars that imprisoned him. Nothing happened. Seconds ticked away. The master magician frantically tried to trip the lock but the bolt did not budge. Minutes quickly passed; time was running out. Per-

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<sup>1</sup> See John 8:31-33; 9:1ff (especially vv. 40-41).

spiration covered his face as the mighty Houdini made one last attempt to free himself. His final, desperate efforts proved fruitless. He had failed. Emotionally and mentally drained, he crumpled to the floor. His tired body came to rest against the cell door. To his astonishment and utter disbelief, the door opened; it was never locked! It was bolted only in his mind. He had been able to walk out of the jail cell from the minute that he had walked into it. He was never imprisoned. He neither knew nor believed that he was free. So, in his mind, he remained a 3 captive.

The restraining walls of a nation or super-power may have crumbled, but its citizens can still be in bondage. A nation may be a model of a free democracy, but lives in fear behind locked doors due to violence in that society. Then, there are literally millions of us who live in fear—dread of the unknown. We worry about the future and we mourn over the past. We are even apprehensive about the present. The chains of anxiety

deprive us of the peace of mind and joy that freedom, real freedom, brings.

There is a saying, "The best things in life are free." The whole of creation illustrates this truth. The beauty of a scenic view that causes us to stand in awe; the hues of a radiant sunset that splashes its colors across an evening sky; a new and refreshing early morning sunrise—and for whose benefit? The very air that we breathe testifies to this fact. These things are free gifts for which we pay nothing. The gracious and loving Creator freely lavishes these things, and so much more, upon us.

4 To be free, truly free in every true sense of the word, is the dream of every human being who has ever been born. To be free indeed is the desire of every individual upon the face of the earth. We are purposed by God's design to be free. We are born to be free. No one is fully human or fully alive until he or she is fully free. We are God-designed to live free. We are set free to stay free!

## ***Free Indeed!***

There was a man who had purchased a sheep ranch and needed a good sheep dog. He advertised in a local paper for such an animal. Shortly thereafter he received a phone call from a woman in the nearby town. She had a dog; it was a Border collie. Border collies are among the best bred dogs for working with sheep. Excitedly, the man drove to town to see this dog. He introduced himself to the woman; she answered somewhat impatiently, "The dog is around back." Coming to the back of the house the man looked in disbelief and dismay at what he had hoped would be the answer to his shepherding needs. There, in the dust, was this underfed, dirty dog. Chained by its neck and hobbled with another chain to its feet, the growling Border collie lay cowed down in the dirt. Here was an animal whose beauty and potential had been terribly suppressed. The purpose for which this magnificent creature had been deliberately bred was

all but extinguished! She had been robbed of the freedom that was linked to her intended destiny: running free in the openness of the countryside. Due to neglect, her potential had been literally chained! She was, for all practical purposes, worthless. But was she? A new master made the difference. She became what she was meant to be: a great sheepdog, unchained and free!<sup>2</sup>

### *Great Thoughts About Freedom*

## 6

Throughout human history, men have talked about freedom. Theologians, philosophers, educators, and scientists have all had thoughts and dreams about freedom. Kings and peasants alike have discussed liberty. Throughout the ages men have not only talked about freedom but have spilled their

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<sup>2</sup>Phillip Keller, *Lessons From a Sheep Dog* (Waco TX: Word Books, 1983), pp. 13-28.

blood to set men free. Joseph Addison, an English poet, said:

*A day, an hour, of virtuous liberty is  
worth a whole eternity in bondage.*<sup>3</sup>

Men and women who have spent only a few years in bondage would agree with Addison. Those who have been inhumanely tortured during wartime tell of the horror of being confined in total darkness where not even a thin thread of light shone. Upon being released, even for a few moments, they tell of their feelings; they call it freedom! 7

Freedom is not free; it always costs something or someone. Over two thousand years ago, Seneca, the Roman statesman and philosopher, said, "*Freedom cannot be bought for nothing. If you hold her precious,*

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted by George Seldes, *The Great Thoughts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985).

*you must hold all else of little value.*"<sup>4</sup> History has proven that if a man desires to be free, he will seek freedom at all costs. He will forfeit wealth, possessions, and even his life, if necessary, to attain it. So believed and said Patrick Henry at the Virginia Convention on March 23, 1775:

*Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as  
to be purchased at the price of  
chains and slavery? Forbid it, Al-  
mighty God! I know not what course  
others may take; but as for me, give  
me liberty or give me death!*<sup>5</sup>

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Men have died to gain freedom. History records that the finest and bravest have volunteered to preserve their cherished liberty in nations that allow their citizens to be free. Liberty of the mind, heart, and soul is something to be desired and treasured. The

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

great American statesman Thomas Jefferson wrote:

*We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness....*<sup>6</sup>

This concept is based upon biblical truths. Throughout the teaching of Christ, individual worth and freedom is affirmed. Jesus, the Son of God, speaking of the Father's providential care of the birds of the air, concluded:

9

*"Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or stow away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Matt. 6:26.

*“...you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”*<sup>8</sup>

*“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”*<sup>9</sup>

The Good News of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Savior and Lord of the world, brings to mankind a greater and higher standard of freedom. In addition to the aforementioned liberties, the freedom that Christ offers frees us “indeed.” It liberates us from our own egotistical immoralities. Selfishness is the breeding ground of all subhuman behavior and inhumane atrocities. Out of the self-enslaved mind and heart issue lust, greed, malice, prejudice, hatred, and murder. The heart of the “not-yet-free-indeed” person is an incubator for all kinds of selfish desires which are waiting to be hatched! The end

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<sup>8</sup>John 8:32.

<sup>9</sup>John 8:36.

result is ruinous and destructive, both socially and personally.

The present human condition affirms that the world at large is not “free indeed.” Human history records an unbroken trail of bondage. Secular wisdom cannot unshackle the heart of a human being merely through education, improved living conditions, or equal rights. These things are good, but they cannot (in and of themselves) set a person free in the lasting sense of the word; only the Creator of humanity can do that. And He has provided that emancipation in Jesus Christ His Son, our great Savior and Liberator. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!

11

### *The Freedom That the Son of God Gives*

Jesus Christ of Nazareth, born of a virgin by means of a miraculous conception through the power of God, lived among earthly

mortals; He became like one of us.<sup>10</sup> In the Book of John, Jesus makes many claims regarding himself and his relationship to all of mankind. Those claims are extraordinary; absolutely amazing! As the only begotten Son of the true and living God, He claimed to be the Way, the Life, and the Truth.<sup>11</sup> He soberly affirmed that He was mankind's great liberator, that He could and would set man free...free indeed!

## 12    *Jesus and “The Truth of the Gospel”*

The gospel is the Good News about Jesus Christ and the freedom that He gives. The “truth of the gospel” is the biblically inspired presentation of that Good News. The “truth of the gospel” stands in stark contrast

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<sup>10</sup> See Matt. 1:22-23; Phil. 2:1-10.

<sup>11</sup> See John 14:6.

to “another gospel” or “another Jesus.”<sup>12</sup> The truth of the gospel can be distorted or perverted.<sup>13</sup> Jesus and his apostles preached a lifesaving, mind- and heart-freeing message from God. This is Good News! What specifically is the “truth of the gospel”?

### ***The Cross of Christ: The Truth of the Gospel***

At the center of the Good News stands what the New Testament writers and spokesmen call “the cross,” that is, the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ focuses on God’s answer to man’s need: life and freedom. The death and dying of Jesus, the Son of God, is revealed in that historical event at Calvary. He died, according to God’s Word, as a sin offering. This offering for man’s sinful self- 13

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<sup>12</sup>Read carefully 2 Cor. 11:4.

<sup>13</sup>Read also Gal. 1:9-10.

ishness is God's own purpose and plan to save man and set him free.<sup>14</sup>

**The Cross, “Christ crucified,” is God’s plan to save and deliver all who are enslaved by sin.**<sup>15</sup>

**The Cross determines the conditions of salvation.**<sup>16</sup>

**The Cross** is significant only because it is the cross on which the Son of God, the Savior, gave himself according to Father’s will.

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<sup>14</sup> Larry Deason with Bill Bean, *The Eternal Purpose and Plan of God: The Meaning and Purpose of Life* (Clifton Park, NY: Life Communications, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Carefully consider 1 John 2:2; 1 Cor. 1:30; 1 Peter 1:18-21.

<sup>16</sup> One’s trust, repentance, baptism, and righteous living are inseparably connected to the teaching of “Christ crucified,” that is, “the cross” (Acts 2:29-39; Rom. 6:1-7, 17).

**The Cross** and the principle of grace call for the principle of trust or faith as an individual's response.<sup>17</sup>

**The Cross** is the basis for both grace and faith.

**The Cross** must be relied upon for salvation and freedom.

**The Cross**, with its applications and results, is the most important consideration in one's redemption and liberation.

**The Cross** and grace and faith stand or fall together.

The emancipating gospel, then, is the Good News about what Jesus Christ, the Lord and

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<sup>17</sup>Open your Bible to the Book of Acts. As you read, take note of what those who became obedient from their hearts did in response to the Good News (see also Rom. 10:14-15).

Savior of the world, has accomplished for us at the Cross. He was crucified, buried and raised for us; this is Good News.<sup>18</sup> These historical facts are explained and interpreted in God's Word, the Bible. This is the "truth of the gospel."<sup>19</sup>

16 Anyone who teaches a cross-less message is not teaching the truth of the gospel. Anyone who stands before the people and communicates a grace-less, blood-less sermon is not preaching the truth of the gospel; that person is proclaiming "another gospel" which, according to the Word of God, is a "no gospel"!<sup>20</sup> A proclaiming of "Good News" that omits ***Jesus as the focal point*** of the mes-

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<sup>18</sup> See 1 Cor. 15:1-4.

<sup>19</sup> The Books of Galatians and Romans fully express the doctrinal emphasis and impact of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ the Son of God. I recommend that you read these two great books from God's Word at one sitting.

<sup>20</sup> Thoughtfully read Gal. 1:9-10 now.

sage is not the gospel of God. The Cross of Christ, that is, the teaching of Christ crucified and raised for our justification, is **God's** power to save.<sup>21</sup>

*The Cross of Christ is God's chosen demonstration of His own flawless righteousness.*

*The Cross of Christ is God's decision and determination of the best and worst thing that has ever happened in human history.*

17

*The Cross of Christ is God's deliverance for human captives from sin and death.*

*The Cross of Christ is God's declaration of how we should live in purity, peace, and freedom.*

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<sup>21</sup>Carefully consider Rom. 1:4, 15-16.

*The Cross of Christ* is God's delight for a permanent motivation for all who come to place their faith and lives in His will.

*The Cross of Christ* is God's decisive Good News that liberates one and, in reality, sets that person free.

It is the “truth of the gospel” that is Good News. It is the truth that releases one from guilt, shame, and fear. It is the truth that sets one free.<sup>22</sup> When the Son releases, you are actually free...free indeed!

The truth of the gospel can be perverted and distorted. One must be careful, for even Satan, the Evil One, “masquerades as an angel of light”.<sup>23</sup> The religions of men are a poor substitute for the perfect righteousness

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<sup>22</sup>See John 8:32.

<sup>23</sup>See 2 Cor. 11:14.

of God.<sup>24</sup> Freedom is truly found and realized in God's biblically revealed truth. Jesus and His apostles, from the very beginning, had to deal with the greatest peril to the truth of the gospel: *legalism*. That same threat prevails today.

### *Gospel's Freedom or Legalism's Bondage?*

“Let my people go!” was the cry of God through His servant Moses.<sup>25</sup> Isaiah the prophet exclaimed, “Set the captives free!”<sup>26</sup> Jesus Christ, during His earthly ministry, claimed that these words were fulfilled in

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<sup>24</sup>See Matt. 15:9.

<sup>25</sup>See Exod. 8:1.

<sup>26</sup>See Isa. 61:1.

Him.<sup>27</sup> And the apostle Paul affirms that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic words.<sup>28</sup> But there were those who would have the captives remain in spiritual bondage and would enslave again those who had been set free. Legalism is an enemy of the cross of Christ; it is opposed to the eternal purpose and plan of the loving Father. Legalism blinds! Legalism binds! Legalism enslaves! Legalism prohibits freedom; it is a denial and refusal of God's gift of liberty!

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### *Legalism Defined and Explained*

Legalism is the "strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or

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<sup>27</sup> Compare Luke 4:16-21.

<sup>28</sup> See also Eph. 4:8-9.

moral code.”<sup>29</sup> Within the biblical framework, legalism is seen as an attempt to earn one’s salvation by doing rather than relying upon God’s grace through Christ to save. Legalism attempts to develop spiritual maturity by actions performed instead of a living faith and faithful walk in the Spirit of God. Legalism is a man-made doctrine which teaches that self-improvement is achieved by the rules. Legalism is not of God; it is humanistic in its origin. Legalism is humanism, for it makes man and man’s ability the standard or measure of all things. Not all the rules, regulations, and laws espoused by legalism are written down; the ones that are not written are often more set in stone than the ones that are! Legalism is an attitude or mind-set; it is the staunch belief that one is accepted by God on the basis of one’s efforts or works. This is in total opposition to

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<sup>29</sup> Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1981), p. 650.

God's all-encompassing grace.<sup>30</sup> Plainly stated, legalism is heresy!

22

A legalist is one who believes and lives in accordance with the rules of legalism. The legalist believes that he or she is accepted by the Lord on the basis of his or her conformity to a certain set of religious rules. The legalist is one who, in attitude, words, and behavior, believes that approval by God is based upon exact legal performance. The legalist is one who in speech, belief, doctrine, and expression, *emphasizes* the rules, the externals, and the religious traditions of men. These things can never lead one to the righteousness of God which is in Jesus Christ. The legalist is one who *minimizes* (or eliminates altogether) God's grace as revealed in the "truth of the gospel." Little, if anything, is ever said about the Holy Spirit and the spiritual fruit that is borne out of the

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<sup>30</sup>Carefully contemplate Eph. 2:1-10.

genuine heart.<sup>31</sup> Externals are addressed, but seldom is the need for inner purity of the heart taught. Not too long ago, I delivered a lesson entitled *The God of All Grace Gives More Grace*. Afterwards a man came up to me and said, "In twenty-five years this is the second sermon that I have ever heard on the grace of God." Here was a man who had been faithful in his attendance to the meetings of the church. Here was a man who had heard hundreds and hundreds of sermons. Yet, here was a man who had heard only one presentation concerning God's grace during a quarter of a century! My first thought was one of sadness. However, the more that I thought about it, my emotions turned to indignation. I said to this brother, "I'm sorry that you have not heard more about God's saving grace. What a shame." Now that I've given more thought to this incident, I am convinced that it is more than shameful. That the Good News of God's grace declared and demonstrated in Jesus,

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<sup>31</sup>See Gal. 5:13-26.

the Son of God, was not heard more than once during all this time by this individual was not only shameful; it was criminal! I am not saying that those who preach in the name of Christ are intentionally depriving hearers of the Good News of God. However, I do believe that many who preach and teach are preoccupied with religious rules and regulations—preaching law rather than the perfect law of liberty which is **love**. Many have become issues-oriented rather than focusing on **the issue**, who is Jesus... *Jesus...*

## 24 *Jesus!*

The legalists in Jesus' day had many demanding petty rules and regulations that they tried to bind upon others.<sup>32</sup> But the Lord would not play their game of religiosity; He was concerned with the truth. The Lord was concerned about the righteousness of God,

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<sup>32</sup>Read Matt. 23:1-39 to see the Lord's attitude and response towards the legalists of His day.

not the traditions of men.<sup>33</sup> Jesus, the Son of God, would not allow anyone to put a strait-jacket on Him or His followers!

To seek God and His favor through legalistic means is futile. In fact, an attempt to do so negates God's grace. The apostle states it even more plainly:

*...you have fallen away from grace.*<sup>34</sup>

Further, legalism, with its regulated demands for constant conformity to the decrees and rules of men, is a breeding ground for hypocrisy. No Christian, not even the strongest or the oldest in the faith, is perfectly flawless. Only Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord is sinlessly perfect. This is why we need Him; He, by the Father's gracious giving, is the means of our acceptance before an alto-

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<sup>33</sup>Carefully consider Matt. 15:9.

<sup>34</sup>Gal. 5:4. Carefully read Gal. 5:1-11.

gether holy God. We know that God's righteous and holy law requires perfection:

*For whoever keeps the whole law  
and yet stumbles at just one point is  
guilty of breaking all of it.*<sup>35</sup>

Realizing that God demands absolute flawless perfection, the legalist presumes that he is perfect.<sup>36</sup> But the Lord's teaching exposed the arrogant hypocrisy of this legalistic thinking when He said:

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*"For everyone who exalts himself  
will be humbled, and he who hum-  
bles himself will be exalted."*<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>James 2:10.

<sup>36</sup>Read carefully Luke 18:9-12.

<sup>37</sup>Luke 18:14. The reader is encouraged to read this statement in the context of Luke 18:9-14.

It is easy to see how the legalist can, subsequently, slide into an exclusivist, “I-have-arrived-by-my-might” mentality. Apathy and indifference become the norm. Carnality, not genuine spirituality, is the continual emphasis. Bondage, not freedom, is the end result. *Legalism robs one of a true, intimate, and personal relationship with Christ.* It promotes pride and fear. It disallows spiritual growth. It stunts and stifles full-grown maturity in Jesus Christ. It divides the body of Christ, His church. I truly believe that legalism is the greatest threat to truth.<sup>38</sup> Legalism is the greatest obstacle to grace.<sup>39</sup> Legalism is the greatest enemy of the Cross of Christ.<sup>40</sup> Legalism is all of the above and more because it is built upon Self. Selfism is the root of legalism. As mentioned earlier, the legalist is committed to a “saved by-, im-

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<sup>38</sup>Carefully consider Gal.1:6-10.

<sup>39</sup>See Gal. 5:1-6.

<sup>40</sup>See Phil. 3:17-4:1.

proving by-, growing by-, accepted by humanistic self-effort" mentality. Where this legalistic attitude prevails,

*...faith has no value and the promise  
is worthless....*<sup>41</sup>

A most important question that the church should ask, that every congregation should ask, that each individual should ask, that you and I should ask is:

## 28      *Is the religion of legalism the portrait of the church today? ...of this congregation?...of me?*

The image of legalism portrays itself as follows:

**Self-sufficient:** shallow and unbending

**Self-promoting:** critical and stiff

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<sup>41</sup>Rom. 4:14. The reader is encouraged to read Rom. 14 in its entirety.

**Self-seeking:** judgemental and brutal

**Self-qualifying:** selfish and heartless

**Self-serving:** defensive and obstinate

**Self-achieving:** arrogant and hyper-critical

**Self-asserting:** non-accepting and non-approving

*The personality and portrait of the legalist* 29  
*is totally opposite from that of the person*  
*and character of Jesus Christ.* The legalist and his theology are binding and blinding. But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.<sup>42</sup> And remember, when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>See 2 Cor. 3:17.

<sup>43</sup>Recall John 8:36.

## ***Legalism's Bondage Vs. Grace's Freedom***

*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*<sup>44</sup>

Purity of heart prevents the perversion of grace. Grace can always be perverted into license for sinning (thereby making grace "no grace") by carnal-minded religionists, but not by the genuinely poor in spirit who walk in humility and love before God.

**30**

*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?  
By no means!*<sup>45</sup>

To the sincere of heart it is unthinkable to go on living in sin because one is not under a system of law. Perish the thought!

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<sup>44</sup>Rom. 6:1.

<sup>45</sup>Rom. 6:15.

Love from a pure heart desires the righteousness of God, and this love fulfills the law.<sup>46</sup> Love out of a pure heart desires the holiness of God. However, while all along having his religious rules externally achieved, the heart of the legalist may be full of lust.<sup>47</sup> It is only the gospel of grace that sets us free to become who we really are and who God made us to be. It is only through the truth of the Good News, the gospel of grace, wherein Jesus Christ the Son of God died for our sins and was raised for our justification, that we have the freedom to grow into His likeness. Legalistic religion enslaves, but the truth of God's Good News sets us free. To be free and to remain free we must come to know the truth about grace. We must accept God's Word and what it means regarding the "truth of the gospel." To humbly listen so as to come to know and to believe for oneself

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<sup>46</sup>Read carefully Rom. 13:8-10.

<sup>47</sup>See Matt. 5:27-30.

God's Good News is the beginning of freedom.

### ***A “Truth of the Gospel” Mentality and Understanding***

It is imperative that one accept the proper understanding of God's grace. One must develop a truth-of-the-gospel-of-grace mentality and understanding. The proverb is true:

**32**

*...for as one thinks within himself, so he is.<sup>48</sup>*

The attitude and action of one set free in Christ is based upon a certain, absolute reality.

**The attitude** of the individual obedient to the truth of the gospel is one of freedom and responsibility. Or to say it another way, a genuine disciple of Christ is responsibly free.

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<sup>48</sup> See Prov. 23:7, NIV (margin).

Each individual is a special and significant part of the whole church, the family of Christ. We are in Christ together; we are responsible for each other, and we are accountable to each other.<sup>49</sup> Each one has the God-given, heavenly Father-encouraged right and responsibility to know His Word and to grow into the image of His Son, making responsible personal choices and decisions. Each one is free to be transformed into the likeness of Christ but is not at liberty to be conformed to the world.<sup>50</sup> Each one must live with the outcome of his actions as one who is accountable to God in Christ Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

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**The *action* of the individual obedient to the truth of the gospel champions genuineness**

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<sup>49</sup> Read 1 Cor. 12:27. Now read vv. 12-26, noting that, as brothers and sisters in Christ, we need each other and are responsible before God for one another.

<sup>50</sup> See Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 5:13; 1 Peter 2:16.

<sup>51</sup> See Rom. 14:7-13; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; Gal. 6:7-10.

**34**

and maturity. Each must accept the fact that God's redemption in Christ sets us free... free indeed. Each must then preserve, promote, and permit this great central truth of salvation's liberty in one another's lives. Each one must be unfettered from the legalistic desire to control or dominate the Lord's people; we must let God control! It is His kingdom. His Son is the Head of his body, the church. Any action by anyone that seeks to coerce, dominate, or manipulate a brother or sister is out of line! It is absolutely and diametrically opposed to God's plan and purpose for the life and living of His people. The Lord knows how to lead His people. Let us who shepherd the flock have the attitude and action of the Chief Shepherd of our souls.<sup>52</sup>

**The reality** that motivates the individual obedient to the truth of the gospel of God's grace is the Lord Jesus Christ. The event of

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<sup>52</sup> See 1 Peter 5:1-4. The reader is also encouraged to reverently reflect upon Phil. 2:1-11.

the arrival of the only begotten Son of God into the world is an historical fact. He was born among men. He grew up and lived among society. He declared and demonstrated Himself to be the Son of God. The documentation of His crucifixion and resurrection, in Scripture, is of such authenticity and accuracy that it will cause the honest and open heart of even a skeptic to say, "My Lord and my God!" <sup>53</sup> The actuality of the true and living God in Christ Jesus is the most liberating force in the world. His eternal, spiritual presence is an encouragement to His people. His life-giving power is the confidence of those who trust in Him as Savior and Lord. Growth, maturity, and freedom are realized only in the grace of God that is received in Christ Jesus. I reaffirm that nothing else or none other will allow transformation into His likeness. If the Son

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<sup>53</sup> John 20:28; For an in-depth study of the Gospel of John see "*That You May Have Life*" by Larry Deason (Clifton Park, NY: Life Communications, 1989).

sets you free, you are effectually released, truly liberated!

### ***Faithfully Free or Fearfully Futile?***

Viewing life from a humanistic, self-centered perspective results in futility and meaninglessness. As one man who sought fullness of life without God realized and, in wisdom, wrote:

**36**

*So I hated life because the work that  
is done under the sun was grievous  
to me. All of it is meaningless, a  
chasing after the wind.*<sup>54</sup>

The renowned and oft-quoted existentialist-philosopher, with lucid and astounding honesty, penned the following:

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<sup>54</sup>Eccl. 2:17.

*I find that I am alive and it sickens me.*<sup>55</sup>

Seeing life as it is defined and described in God's Word, the Bible, leads one to life that is in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who said:

*"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*<sup>56</sup>

One can only have lasting life in fullness and freedom in Jesus Christ. To realize and receive life in Jesus is to share in God's own eternal life, love, joy, peace, and freedom. Selfism, whether disguised in philosophical license or theological legalism, can never be fully alive or thoroughly free. Those who are captives of Selfism's religious legalism or slaves of humanistic license may be set free by mankind's great Liberator, Christ Jesus.

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<sup>55</sup>Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*.

<sup>56</sup>John 14:6.

## *Obstacles to Freedom*

There are numerous barriers to freedom. These hindrances can rob us of God's gracious and abundant provision of life that we have in Christ. Three major thieves that plunder our freedom in Christ are *ignorance, conceit, and fear.*

38

*Ignorance* of Jesus as the Light of the world,<sup>57</sup> and as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, can keep us in darkness. And the gloomy darkness keeps us from the radiance of God's freedom and love. *Jesus is* the wisdom from God that dispels ignorance.<sup>58</sup> He is the truth that sets men free.

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light to*

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<sup>57</sup> Read carefully John 1:1-9; 9:5; 12:35-36.

<sup>58</sup> Consider 1 Cor. 1:30-31.

*shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*<sup>59</sup>

**Conceit** can keep us enslaved to our selfish egos. Arrogant pride can cause people to presume that they have need of nothing outside themselves. This is the deception of humanism and the disguise of legalism. Narcissism's preoccupation with one's own self is the ultimate of arrogance. I'm reminded of the young man's reply to the question, "Are you consumed with pride?" He replied, "I used to be conceited, but there is nothing wrong with me now." How blind one can be! We would like to think that selfish pride is restricted to those who are of the world; those that are arrogantly wicked and evil. But consider this religious man. He is so legalistically consumed with egotistical pride and conceit that while praying to God, (obliviously deluded by his own selfish arrogance), he said:

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<sup>59</sup> 2 Cor. 4:6.

*“...God, I thank you that I am not like all other men....”*<sup>60</sup>

This man was so full of himself that he looked down on everybody else. He was so blinded by his conceit that he could not see himself as God saw him; Jesus said that this man was not justified in God's sight. The cocky arrogance of this self-righteous man is in sharp contrast to the other man in Jesus' parable; the other man was humble and broken before God. The humble man was exalted before God. Selfism's haughtiness and snobbish conceit rob one of his freedom in Christ. Ignorance and conceit are two deadly foes of the freedom that God's grace brings to those who would follow Jesus Christ. The final foe of freedom that I want to mention is fear.

**Fear.** Anxiety. Worry. Consternation. These are thieves that cheat us out of the joy of God's freedom. Fear can keep us in bond-

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<sup>60</sup> Luke 18:11; read the entire story in Luke 18: 9-14.

age; trepidation is a type of enslavement in itself! But fearful anxiety can keep one in confinement: confined and captive to sin—that is, selfishness, and death itself. This is why Jesus came and identified with dying humanity:

*...so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*<sup>61</sup>

41

A person who seeks to live life apart from God, the Creator and Controller of all things,<sup>62</sup> can never be free from fear. The real self-righteous legalist cannot live free from fear because he is never sure if he really “measures up” to the rules and regulations. Even the most devoted can fall prey to the deception of legalism’s fear. The most sincere can,

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<sup>61</sup>Heb. 2:14-15.

<sup>62</sup>See Col. 1:16-17.

innocently, become slaves of religious legalism and its subsequent phobias.

42

Ten years ago I met such a sweet and lovely lady. She sat in a class that I was privileged to teach. We were studying from the Book of Galatians and were discussing the great themes of grace and freedom. After the first lesson she asked if she could talk to me; she had a few questions that she wanted clarified. The following week, after the second class, she invited me home to her daughter's house where she was visiting. We had a wonderful dinner that evening. While the daughter was finishing up in the kitchen she told me that her mother wanted to speak to me. I went into the living room where this stately lady sat. I settled down in a chair adjacent to her's, waiting for what I presumed to be some casual after-dinner conversation. Sitting tall and elegantly, she spoke to me with a strong voice and said, "Do you know what you have done for me?" Having no idea what she was alluding to, I

replied, "No, I don't. What have I done for you?" Looking me straight in the eyes she confidently answered, "**You've set me free!**" I immediately knew that she was referring to the knowledge that she had learned in the classes concerning God's amazing grace and everlasting love. The following letter from her daughter will relate to you the rest of the story:

*For many years my Mother has been involved with the church in one way or another; as secretary, helping with the finances or administration. As far as we knew, she had a steadfast faith and was happy in the Lord, growing in knowledge and understanding. What we didn't know was that she believed you had to obey God...or else!! Her participation over the years had grown out of a sense of duty, not because of her love for God. So many times she wondered if she would ever be good enough to get to heaven. She had been living in*

*fear of losing her salvation because now that she was older and couldn't "earn her way" would she make that heavenly home after all? Oh, the blessed relief of learning what true love and God's grace were all about. It lifted a great burden from her heart to know that she really is living and walking in the Light and is covered each day by the blood of Christ. Finally, after thirty-seven years as a Christian follower, she can know that her salvation is assured! And she has found the joy of the Lord at last. There had been many times she had wondered what was the use of getting out of bed to face another day of guesswork: "Will I make it to heaven? Have I wasted all these years? What can I do for God at my age?...will He accept me now that I can no longer do any works for Him?" But now, in the absolute joy of knowing that God loves her as much, even more than*

*He did before, she has found new hope and direction in her life and happiness beyond compare. Praise God for His eternal love! May God bless you for bringing to my Mother the wonderful truth of the gospel and teaching her about the freedom that we have in Christ Jesus.*

Free at last! This precious soul had been spiritually crippled for thirty-seven years. Her freedom and its joy had been robbed from her because she had been taught legalistic religion rather than a heart-love response to the saving grace of God. This lovely sister died the following year. For the faithful Christian even death becomes a doorway to greater freedom; liberated into the glorious presence of God! According to God's own Word she is "at home with the Lord." <sup>63</sup> She went to be with her Lord in great joy and peace, resting in His marvelous grace and love that had set her free...free indeed!

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<sup>63</sup> See 2 Cor. 5:8.

## ***Freedom, Fences, and Faithfulness***

46

Freedom is a gift we possess only when we receive it and use it. One may have the right to think for himself, but if he lets someone else think for him, he is not a free man. A free person is not afraid to make up his own mind. One who desires to be free is not afraid to settle for himself the basic issue of life: ***what is the meaning and purpose of my life?***<sup>64</sup> A person who desires reality must fearlessly pursue truth and be responsible for making decisions regarding that truth. I must not allow someone else to make my decisions for me. I must be faithfully responsible before God for the beliefs that I believe and for the choices that I choose. To desire or expect that someone else make my deci -

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<sup>64</sup>For an in-depth revealing study of this question, see Larry Deason (with Bill Bean), *The Eternal Purpose and Plan of God: The Meaning and Purpose of Life* (Clifton Park, NY: Life Communications, 1990).

sions for me, especially in matters that affect my life both now and eternally, is to forfeit my individual freedom and evade my personal responsibility. Long ago, Joshua, a great man of courage and faithful responsibility said:

*“...choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve....But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”*<sup>65</sup>

When one submits to the truth of the gospel 47 and obediently trusts in God's abundant grace to save and to keep one saved, then that person will know what it means to be “free indeed”: free from ignorance; free from arrogant conceit; free from fear. The saving grace of a loving God as realized in Christ Jesus is the most liberating power known to man. However, a prisoner is not a free man if he refuses to leave his cell after the door is opened. Many, remain in their prisons

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<sup>65</sup>Josh. 24:15.

because they are captives of ignorance, conceit, and fear.

On the other hand, many build legalistic fences around themselves and others—especially others, with the result being the same: bondage! They, like the keepers of the rules in Jesus' day, build a man-made religion rather than the kingdom of God, whose foundation is Christ Jesus.<sup>66</sup> Numerous examples of legalistic fence-building were cited and refuted by Jesus as he confronted the religionists of the first century.<sup>67</sup> The failure of Pharisaism shows that legalism is always God-refusing and freedom-rejecting. Religious fence-building around oneself or around another is always wrong, for it is against God's will; He wills that all men be saved by grace in the liberty of His Son, the Savior of the world. Ritualistic, religious fence-building always rob one of grace and

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<sup>66</sup> Consider 1 Cor. 3:11.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Matt. 23:1-39.

growth in Christ. But someone may say, "Surely 'babes in Christ' need rules and regulations to keep them on the straight and narrow path until they mature in the faith." And I reply, "Do we leave new-born babies in cribs and cradles until they are fully grown-up men and women? Do we not allow a faltering, stumbling infant attempting his first steps to try and try again?" Surely no one would say, "See there! I told you that he would fall! Put him back in his crib until he becomes a man!" Of course this is a ridiculous illustration, but it reflects what many suggest when it comes to novices in Christ. If this is really the correct way to live the Christian life, consider these crucial questions:

***Who would decide the rules?***

***Who would decide which rules should be imposed on whom?***

***When would the rules be set aside?***

***How long would certain lists of rules be enforced?***

***Who would enforce the rules? By what means?***

The “truth of the gospel of grace” answers these questions and many, many more! ***Lists do not make Christians!*** Neither do regulations and rules make Jesus’ followers strong and free. But a genuine, intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus based upon the Father’s love and grace does! <sup>68</sup> Not all human beings are legalists, but we all have legalistic tendencies. As I mentioned above, I am persuaded that legalism is a humanistic problem that intrudes upon pure Christianity, thus perverting it and making it, in actuality, no Christianity. Even before one comes to hear about the truth of the gospel, with its clear message of salvation by grace and not of human works, the die has already been cast.

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<sup>68</sup> Read carefully Col. 2:8-23. Meditate upon this Scripture for a while.

In every facet of our lives we are taught and trained to believe that a *formula* results in rewards: self-effort + certain deeds = merit. But when it comes to achieving our most urgent and permanent need, we are helpless. The fact is that we *cannot achieve* it, but we can, by God's grace through faith, **receive** it. I said at the beginning of this book that I believed that legalism is the greatest threat to those that would become followers of Christ and to those who are already Christians. The Book of Galatians exposes and reproves...

51

*...the most dangerous substitute for spiritual living that we have in our churches today...Legalism.*<sup>69</sup>

Legalism is a subtle attitude; two people can do the same thing(s) for entirely different reasons. For example, two people desire to express their devotion to the one true

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<sup>69</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Free* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books), p. 6.

God—one from a legalistic mentality and the other from a genuine love-out-of-the-heart mentality. Their actions may be the same but their motives will be different. The *Legalist* is proud and unteachable; the *Lover* is humble and teachable. The *Legalist* acts from fear; the *Lover* from faith. The *Legalist* performs to try to earn approval; the *Lover* performs because he knows that he has already been approved on the basis of the work of His Savior, Jesus Christ. The *Legalist* continues to build fences; the *Lover* continues to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. *The Legalist's life* is one of frustration, fear, doubt, stagnation, and carnality. *The Lover's life* is one of freedom, joy, peace, purity, growth, and spirituality.

The religious acts and activities of *The Legalist* and *The Lover* may be the same but their purpose for doing so are as different as day and night. It is true that two people can do the same things for different reasons.

**The Legalist** holds to the belief that he or she is spiritually accepted and approved by God because of

*what I do*

*what I do not do*

*my attachment to my leader*

*my association to my group*

*my personal, long-held opinions*

53

*my devotion to our movement*

**The Lover** holds to the belief that he or she is spiritually accepted and approved by God because of

*the Lord's super-abounding saving grace*

*the Lord's redemptive purpose and promises fulfilled in Jesus*

## *the Lord's* never-ending love and faithfulness to His Word

A mentality of legalism among believers in Christ is ruinous and destructive. It is injurious and harmful to one and all. The pages of human history are so painfully obvious; **legalism destroys!** The warning from the Word of God is clear:

54

*If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*<sup>70</sup>

God realizes that there will be differences among His people—differences in knowledge and understanding; differences in certain beliefs and convictions; contrasts in strengths and weaknesses; distinctions in immaturity and maturity. And, in Christ Jesus, these differences are not to destroy the church, but they are to serve in building it

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<sup>70</sup>Gal. 5:15; See Appendix, *Not Free? Be Free!* pp. 71-84.

up; there is to be unity through diversity.<sup>71</sup> ***Love***, based upon the foundation of the grace of Christ, allows oneness. ***Legalism***, headquartered upon a foundation of Selfism, disallows unity.

*Agreement at the same time on all points of doctrine and on every issue that may arise among all believers is not scriptural, biblical, or practical: neither is it possible!*

Failure to acknowledge, appreciate, and allow such personal differences will result in legalistic rules and sectarian regulations that will nullify the Cross of Christ and negate God's saving grace. We are saved, justified, sanctified, made righteous, made to stand, and set free because of God's gospel of grace in Christ Jesus, not because of our doctrinal correctness in all things. Although

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<sup>71</sup>I have discussed this and related principles in another book entitled *The Love of Christ in the Local Congregation: Sharing Together in the Life and Labor of Jesus* (Clifton Park, NY: Life Communications, 1993).

a baptized believer is said to be saved and has a right standing before God, no immersed believer is right in *all* matters—but “God is able to make him stand.”<sup>72</sup> Christians are set free to stay free. The Lord's disciples are not called out of the world into bondage. Let Legalism not even be named among the followers of Jesus Christ. Let Legalism be seen for what it really is: a wolf in sheep's clothing.

*Legalism is religion without righteousness.*

56

*Legalism is externalism versus internalism.*

*Legalism is man-concerned pride versus God-concerned praise.*

*Legalism is self-righteousness versus God's righteousness.*

*Legalism is “How do I look?” versus “How is my heart?”*

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<sup>72</sup>See Rom. 14:4. Prayerfully read Rom. 14:1-15:7.

*Legalism is a system of religion that creates its god in its own image.*

Let Jesus Christ be seen for who He really is—"Immanuel," which means, "God with us."<sup>73</sup>

*Jesus is the only begotten Son of God.*

*Jesus is the Savior of the world.*

*Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings.*

57

*Jesus is the Head of His body, the church.*

*Jesus is the High Priest of His people.*

*Jesus is the central theme of all biblical revelation.*

*Jesus is the fulfillment of all prophecy.*

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<sup>73</sup> Consider Matt. 1:23.

***Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.***

***Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life.***

***Jesus is the Lamb slain before the world was created.***

***Jesus is the Faithful and True Witness.***

***Jesus is the Mediator between God and man.***

**58** *Jesus is the First, the Last, and the Living One.*

***Jesus is the great Liberator of all mankind.***

There is no other name among men that brings life, freedom and eternal salvation than that of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.<sup>74</sup> Christ, and Christ alone, has the authority and the power to liberate mankind. What God purposes He is able to accomplish!

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<sup>74</sup> See Acts 4:12.

## *A Personal Appeal to be Set Free and to Stay Free!*

Although much has been said about freedom throughout centuries of human history, most remain enslaved. Even though the words, "freedom, liberty, and emancipation" have been neglected and even rejected by strict religionists, these great biblical concepts have released people from darkness and bondage by revealing Him who is the Light of the world.

59

Strange as it may seem, the actuality of human experience denotes that the freedom that Jesus Christ offers is refused through abuse, neglect, and perverse substitutes. We Christians say that we want to be free and that we need to be free, yet legalistic religion prevails. We Christians say that freedom in Christ is good, right, beneficial, biblically sound, and commanded by God, yet legalism continues in the churches generation after generation. It is acknowledged

that liberty in Christ is ours to claim, to proclaim, and to enjoy—but most don’t! And there are many who say that they have received and have allowed others to receive this freedom in Christ, but contradict themselves in their speech and in their actions! Mutually appreciated Christian freedom is rare. It is seen in the enigma of how a brother or sister who takes his or her liberty seriously is viewed by other Christians. While such Christians enthusiastically and genuinely express their freedom with joy and peace of mind, they are often viewed by many as “unsound” (at best) and by others as “unscriptural.” This is in spite of the fact that Jesus said that His purpose for coming into this world was to set men free! The apostles, inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, claimed this freedom for themselves and unyieldingly proclaimed it to others. They called, taught, and begged others to leave their prison-houses of paganism and legalism and to enter into the joy of Jesus, the Liberator of their lives. God has purposed in His Son Jesus Christ that all be set free and that

those who have been set free, remain free.  
We are set free to stay free!

There are those who say and teach that it is unsafe to not have rules and regulations for religion. "Fences and restraints are necessary to keep us in line," they say. When the Berlin Wall was knocked down and the people who had been held politically captive for decades streamed out, there wasn't a person in the free world who didn't identify with the joy of their new-found freedom. It is fences and walls that, through their restriction, restrain and enslave. Barriers and walls prevent people from being free. The restraints of legalism prohibit God's people from being free and growing up in the likeness of Jesus Christ. The walls of humanistic religiosity deny human beings the God-given right to be free in accord with God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Shall we be afraid to proclaim the truth of the gospel which sets us free just because grace can be distorted and perverted? Shall

materialistic religionists prevent us from teaching and living in the purity of God's grace and love? We must not allow ourselves to believe that God's grace and freedom are too much of a risk or too unsafe to preach, believe, and express in our lives. We must, according to God's own Word, know and believe that...

62

*[it] is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.*<sup>75</sup>

When we stand firm in our freedom in Christ we are free to become who and what we are truly purposed to be: **significantly and uniquely ourselves in His likeness!** We must not imprison ourselves within walls of personal tastes and customs, nor allow others to do so. We must be careful that we are free from religious bigotry that builds barriers between those who would be disciples of

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<sup>75</sup>Gal. 5:1. Emphasis mine, L.D.

Jesus Christ. We must not build or maintain the walls of man-made traditions, preferences, personal convictions, and opinions; these are obstacles to the freedom that God desires for His people! ***Only*** the grace of God as realized in Christ Jesus (without legalistic fences and walls) gives one the freedom to grow into the image of Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Carefully and prayerfully consider these crucial questions:

*Have I, from the heart, truly obeyed  
the "truth of the gospel"?*

63

*Have I genuinely submitted my life  
to Jesus as Lord of all?*

*Have I experienced the holiness and  
freedom that God gives?*

*Am I, sincerely, standing firm and  
fast in that freedom?*

*Do I, by my speech and actions,  
allow others to be free?*

*Do I, without intimidation, permit others to freely grow in Christ?*

*Do I, without hypocrisy, enjoy and encourage freedom in the Lord?*

In Christ Jesus we are set free to live free and to stay free—free from whatever shame and guilt may burden us; liberated from the tyranny of our selfish, egotistical arrogancy; delivered from the ruin and destruction of a meaningless existence; set free to receive the

**64** fullest potential of our intended purpose which God designed. Free to be fully alive! Free to know assuredly of the importance of our individual significance in the sight of our beneficent Creator and loving heavenly Father. The Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth,<sup>76</sup> said:

*“...if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will*

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<sup>76</sup>Consider John 1:14.

*know the truth and the truth will set you free.”*<sup>77</sup>

A man walked into the woods. It was late evening. The sun's last rays of the day cast long shadows across the terrain. In another part of the forest was a huge fir tree. In its top boughs, a trap had been set. The indiscriminate hunter had snared his prize. Furi-ously beating its mighty wings, a splendid bald eagle sought to be loosed from the steel jaws that held him captive. With each at-tempt to soar to the skies, the magnificent creature of the air would be restrained by the fierce iron jaws that refused to let him go. Repeatedly, the noble eagle would attempt to take flight and each time the trap's steel teeth would sink deeper into its feathers and flesh. This grand bird could not free itself from the iron monster that had snapped its jagged mouth around its thigh. Blood began to trickle from the eagle's torn flesh. Ex-hausted, its enormous wings drooping

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<sup>77</sup>John 8:31-32.

against the branches, the majestic animal lay still.

Suddenly the man appeared in a clearing near the tree. He approached the gigantic fir and began to climb up towards the bewildered, beaten eagle. Reaching the trap, the man tried to grab the stately creature. With a loud screech the eagle, expending all its strength, flapped its enormous wings. The cold, uncaring steel of the trap dug deeper into the leg of the great bird. Blood spurted out of its wounded thigh, covering the green boughs with a crimson red. Once again the man eagerly reached for the eagle. With one final burst of energy the noble bird lifted up. Something snapped. The leg was severed. He flew away, leaving the lower part of his thigh and the man behind. The august bird, terribly wounded, left a trail of blood from its amputated limb. The man watched until the maimed eagle was out of sight.

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Days later the man was walking along the seashore. As he strolled along, in the dis-

tance he saw an unidentifiable object crumpled in the sand. As he drew nearer, the man recognized the battered, decaying carcass of the eagle that had been trapped; the frayed feathers and the missing leg told the story.

For a long time, the man stood staring at the dead eagle. Silently shaking his head, he slowly stooped down. Quietly, he spoke in a voice that was barely above a whisper. His tone was soft and sensitive. With tender eyes fixed upon the eagle's lifeless form at his feet, the man said, "If only you had known... if only you had known; I just wanted to set you free."

67

The Creator of the world, the Father of us all, has made it possible that all may be set free from the traps that hold us captive. All the snares that hold us are removed through God's redemptive work in Jesus Christ, the Savior and Lord, who says:

*"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*<sup>78</sup>

*"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."*<sup>79</sup>

More than anything else, God the Creator and Redeemer of us all, wants to set us free. This freedom comes through His Beloved, Jesus Christ, whose mission from His birth to His glorious resurrection was to set us free and to keep us free. *He just wants to set us free....to set us free....to set us free.*

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<sup>78</sup>Matt. 11:28-30.

<sup>79</sup>John 8:34-36.

*“I  
just  
want  
to  
set  
you  
free....”*



# APPENDIX

## NOT FREE? BE FREE! *The Fallacy and Failure of Legalism*

by

Larry Deason

*“You have a fine way of setting aside  
the commands of God in order to observe  
your own traditions!”*<sup>1</sup>

71

*“Thus you nullify the word of God  
by your tradition that you have  
handed down. And you do many things  
like that.”*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark 7:9.

<sup>2</sup>Mark 7:13.

1. The ***not-yet-free*** are afraid to allow themselves and others to live with God.
2. The ***not-yet-free*** build fences to “protect God’s Law,” then build other fences to protect the previous fence that has now become “law”!
3. The ***not-yet-free*** expect and demand that others will respect and obey the fences they have made.

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4. The ***not-yet-free*** receive the most serious and scathing rebukes that the Lord ever gave to men: “blind guides”; “hypocrites”; “snakes”; “brood of vipers.”<sup>3</sup>
5. The ***not-yet-free*** eliminate trust in God, since self-effort is the power of one’s own performance.

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<sup>3</sup>See Matt. 15:14; 23:1-36.

6. The ***not-yet-free*** theology is a religion of fear: fear of responsibility, of insecurity, of personal responsibility, and of freedom.
7. The ***not-yet-free*** make man-made rules into absolutes, then proceed to twist the Scripture to make it appear as though it is “God’s will.”
8. The ***not-yet-free*** make God in their own image; the rules and regulations are what God wants and desires; the traditions are what God thinks and requires.
9. The ***not-yet-free*** determine all that they and others are allowed to see, hear, feel, touch, speak, or believe.
10. The ***not-yet-free*** develop a false sense of security, for God has been reduced to a manageable size and the man-made laws are “blamelessly” kept.

11. The ***not-yet-free*** are committed to a second-rate religion with a second-hand faith, thereby making true religion appear as cold and dead!
12. The ***not-yet-free*** “know” more than they “do” and demand more of others than they do themselves!
13. The ***not-yet-free*** promote stiff formalism which stifles the human spirit which God designed to be free...free indeed!
14. The ***not-yet-free's*** formalism tends to be monotonous, meaningless, and oftentimes mindless.
15. The ***not-yet-free***, with their legalistic rules, frequently degenerate into hate machines.

16. The ***not-yet-free***, with their environment of Legalism, breed ignorance, prejudice, and intolerance.
17. The ***not-yet-free*** are devoted to a legalistic religion that is strangling and stifling.
18. The ***not-yet-free*** are primarily disapproving; they have a negative outlook on morals, religion, and life.
19. The ***not-yet-free*** consider anything that they do not understand as threatening or dangerous. 75
20. The ***not-yet-free***, as would be expected, use an unwise(not to mention illegal!) measuring rod: they make their own and they measure themselves, and everybody else, by themselves! <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See 2 Cor. 10:12.

21. The ***not-yet-free*** renounce and refuse God's rule: ***grace***.<sup>5</sup>
22. The ***not-yet-free*** play games rather than keep promises.<sup>6</sup>
23. The ***not-yet-free*** are blinded by Legalism in building a hard enclosure around themselves in an attempt to avoid the penetration of the heart and conscience by God's gospel of grace.

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24. The ***not-yet-free***, being legalistically and externally oriented, seek to side-step ***personal*** responsibility.
25. The ***not-yet-free*** are not overly or fully concerned with grace and mercy;<sup>7</sup> if

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<sup>5</sup>See Gal. 6:15-16; Rom. 10:4.

<sup>6</sup>See Matt. 23:16-22; Mark 7:10-12.

<sup>7</sup>See James 2:12-13.

“grace and mercy” are on the list at all, they are toward the bottom!

26. The ***not-yet-free*** attempt to justify their lack of love (i.e., hate) by denying that they do “hate” because “the Bible says we should not hate”!
27. The ***not-yet-free*** strive to legislate “right” rather than allow the grace of God to mold one’s inner character into Christ’s image.

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28. The ***not-yet-free*** use God’s laws to restrict and restrain, to refuse and reject people rather than to help them; God’s law was written to help (not hurt) people; it was given to restore the human spirit.
29. The ***not-yet-free*** make traditions as important as Scripture, then insist that everyone else do the same. (It is easy for strong “opinions” to become “laws”

- and for these opinionative laws to become “commands to be obeyed”!)
30. The ***not-yet-free*** see man-made traditions as “great truths” to be bound upon themselves and others, rather than viewing God’s Word as the guide to one’s life and life-style.<sup>8</sup>
  31. The ***not-yet-free*** insists upon extra-biblical requirements for *acceptable* church membership, *acceptable* worship, and *acceptable* service.
  32. The ***not-yet-free*** are bound to a system of religion that is rigorous, burdensome, and unbearable!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>See Col. 2:8.

<sup>9</sup>See Matt. 23:4; Acts 15:10-11.

33. The ***not-yet-free*** deceptively believe that their “strength” is in their intolerance, prejudice, and pride! <sup>10</sup>
34. The ***not-yet-free*** are blind to spiritual truth because they narrowly focus on “the letter” of the law instead of “the spirit” of the law, which is love. <sup>11</sup>
35. The ***not-yet-free*** are enslaved to a legalistic religion that is not unique: it is as old as man and his attempt to be “right in his own eyes.”

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36. The ***not-yet-free*** legalistically look upon the principle of grace as “too revolutionary and risky” a standard by which to live one’s life; so religious rules are implemented.

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<sup>10</sup>See Luke 18:9-14.

<sup>11</sup>See 2 Cor. 3:13-18; Rom. 7:4-6; 13:8.

37. The *not-yet-free* legalistically set up hurdles that they don't intend to jump; stairs that they don't endeavor to climb; walls that they do not expect to scale; yokes and burdens that they do not aim to wear nor bear—but which they contentiously demand that others jump, climb, scale, bear, and wear! <sup>12</sup>
38. The *not-yet-free* are devoted to Legalism, which is a breeding ground for all manner of hypocrisies: no one, in actuality, can flawlessly “live up to the rules,” so pretense is the next step! <sup>13</sup>
39. The *not-yet-free* can easily become shackled to a routine of legalistic conformity that is machine-like: heartless, mindless, and mechanical.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Matt. 23:4; Mark 7:7.

<sup>13</sup> See Matt. 23:25-27.

<sup>14</sup> See Matt. 15:8-9.

40. The ***not-yet-free*** remain in a legalistic stranglehold that prohibits one from the freedom to think for himself and subsequently to grow in knowledge, faith, and grace.
41. The ***not-yet-free*** are bound to Legalism, a highly organized system of religion that ostracizes and rejects those who do not “knuckle under” to its demands.<sup>15</sup>
42. The ***not-yet-free*** are entangled in a religious web that is empty and vain: it is unacceptable to God!<sup>16</sup> 81
43. The ***not-yet-free*** are enslaved to Legalism, which is incompatible with God’s gospel of grace in Christ Jesus: The “grace of God” and the “works of

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<sup>15</sup> See Matt. 23:13-14.

<sup>16</sup> See Matt. 15:9.

- man” are opposing principles and cannot be mixed together.<sup>17</sup>
44. The ***not-yet-free*** are erroneously led to believe that their group has “all the answers”; a closed mind can no longer learn and grow in grace and faith.<sup>18</sup>
45. The ***not-yet-free*** are robbed of the power to properly understand God’s Word; a humble attitude is the first prerequisite for understanding and receiving God’s Word into the heart.<sup>19</sup>
46. The ***not-yet-free*** legalistically manipulate—by deceit and trickery, plotting against others who are in disagreement with their “sound dogmas,” in order to entrap them.

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<sup>17</sup>See Rom. 11:6; Gal. 5:4.

<sup>18</sup>See Rom. 2:17-28.

<sup>19</sup>See Isa. 61:2; Matt. 5:2; James 4:6.

47. The ***not-yet-free*** are blinded by a legalistic fanaticism which impairs the good judgement of a sound mind and hardens the compassion and sensitivity of the heart, insomuch that one would “murder in the name of God”! (E.g., the rule: “We love God so much that we will kill you because you do not love the God that we love in the exact same way that we do.”) <sup>20</sup>
48. The ***not-yet-free*** are increasingly hardened in their hearts because of legalistic thinking which, due to its carnal nature, prohibits the mind and heart from becoming open, tender, and sensitive to God’s will. <sup>21</sup>
49. The ***not-yet-free*** legalistically disallow loving acceptance, even between people of the same basic religious persua-

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<sup>20</sup> See Matt. 5:12; John 7:21; 16:2.

<sup>21</sup> See Luke 8:1ff.

sion, as well as full acceptance of some who are members of the same congregation: I call this "***The Bigotry and Party-spirit Syndrome***"! <sup>22</sup>

50. The ***not-yet-free*** and their religion of Legalism test God, pervert the Good News of Jesus Christ, deny the Holy Spirit, and subsequently reject God's only means of one's acceptance into His presence: **GRACE!** <sup>23</sup>

- 84** It is not too difficult to become ensnared in the lie of Legalism; basically all that one has to do is to take his or her eyes off the Lord.

Legalistic religion is a poor substitute for genuine Christianity—the Jesus style and type of Christianity which is a reflection of Jesus Himself.

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<sup>22</sup> See 1 Cor. 1:1-10; 1 John 4:19-21; 3 John 9-10.

<sup>23</sup> See Gal. 1:1-10; 3:1-4; 5:1-6.

*“For it is by grace  
you have been saved,  
through faith—and  
this not from  
yourselves,  
it is the gift  
of God—not by  
works,  
so no one  
can boast.”*

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<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Eph. 2:8.

*“It is for freedom  
that Christ has set  
us free.*

86      *Stand firm, then,  
and do not let  
yourselves be  
burdened again by a  
yoke of slavery.”* <sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Gal. 5:1.

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