

The right answer is neither legalism nor liberalism!

Christ can be taken out of the salvation equation either through blatant rebellion of the will and law of God or through the less visible confidence in your own wisdom. Paul speaks extensively about the latter and calls it “*confidence in the flesh*”. Neither legalism nor liberalism offers answers!

But what is legalism? *It is not* the presence of God’s law in our daily walk with God and our desire for sanctification. *No, it is an attempt to be acceptable before God* by my own law-keeping and my attempts to live by my own effort to stay within boundaries I perceive to be “Christian”.

The opposite of legalism is not “antinomianism”, meaning being against the law or being in denial of God’s law. God always remains God and his will for me and for all that he created always remains intact. The opposite of legalism is not lawlessness.

No, the opposite of legalism of any variety and often present in all the various Christian traditions, is the gospel.

It is the gospel that teaches imputed righteousness by grace and through faith in Christ alone. The gospel is not a message of grace that adds protection of a Christian life that bears fruit, through an obsession with any law, whether it comes from human tradition or biblical tradition. Such qualified grace puts us back under the burden of anti-evangelical self-justification.

Paul clearly says in Galatians 3: 26 - 29: *For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.*

Paul takes the Galatians to whom they were before their redemption in Christ: they were accursed because they were law-breakers as well as slaves of rules and laws at the same time. But in Christ they became sons and daughters - even heirs - and therefore own the full right of children who are in possession of their inheritance by the indwelling Spirit; even though its fullness and perfection is still to come on the Lord’s Day. But in spite of our imperfection in this dispensation, we have already received the inheritance as God’s children, because Christ was born of a woman, *born under law*, in his perfect humanity, to redeem us from the curse of law-breaking and to make us heirs united with and in Christ Jesus.

How did it come about? Paul does not talk about what we are doing or have done, but proclaims what our Lord, in whom we trust, has done.

When we did not know God, we were enslaved by what is wrong, sinful and offends the very character of God. But when we became God’s children we have come to be known by God. How can you ever turn back to the weak, impure and worthless principles, customs and traditions of the world, whose slaves you never want to be again.

Paul says in Galatians 4: 8 - 10: *Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable force? Do you wish to*

be enslaved by them all over again?..... I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

We cannot trust ourselves to move from rebellion to salvation. Therefore we should not trust in ourselves to “remain saved” by keeping rules and boundaries in our own strength!

And in the same way that legalism tries to protect my salvation, in the same way liberalism tries to create and make acceptable a life without boundaries and disrespect and apathy for God's perfect will and law. As little as we can trust ourselves to protect our salvations through our own efforts to keep the law, just as futile is the notion to create your salvation by making your own rules and law that suits your era and suits a society that exists as God's very enemy!

Paul taught that our spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being, both personally and as a community of believers are at stake. Trying to be the keeper of our own salvation, or the creators of our own salvation, always results in the absence of joy and a life burdened with futility.

And our **witness to the only true gospel of salvation** by the radical grace of the imputed righteousness of Christ in our place and for our salvation, is at stake. **Both legalism and liberalism offer no gospel that is worth proclaiming to a world unable to save itself.**

As messengers of the gospel we can proclaim nothing but Christ, grace, faith, the Word and the glory it gives to God which is the only, final, radical and complete source of our salvation

Nothing can ever be more relevant for the ministry of both individual believers and the church, than free justification by faith in Christ, the only Righteous One.

The answer to both the sins of the flesh (the result of legalism) and to the sin of confidence in the flesh (the result of liberalism) is the same:

The imputed righteousness in and through Christ Jesus, our Lord!