



The West End Herald

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The Second Presbyterian Church
Corner of River and Rhett Streets
Greenville, South Carolina

October 1, 2012

Letter from the Senior Minister What Is Legalism?

Last Sunday I taught a lesson in the New Members' Class on Law and Gospel in the Christian life. This is an important subject for all of us, and it has been made more important in recent years because of the large amount of erroneous teaching on it within Christian and even Reformed circles. It occurred to me this week that it would be good to review these matters with the entire congregation. I therefore intend to cover several topics, starting this week with the question, "What is legalism?"

The question of legalism is important for two reasons. First, there is such a thing as legalism and we need to know how to avoid it. Second, there are many false accusations of legalism that are hurled against the Bible's actual teaching, and these too are to be avoided. So, what is legalism? I would define legalism in three categories: 1) seeking to be justified before God by our own works; 2) adding human laws to the actual laws of the Bible; and 3) an approach to sanctification that is excessively reliant on human effort and forgetful of God's grace.

The first, and classic, form of legalism is to seek justification before God by your own works. This is the universal approach to salvation apart from Jesus Christ. Most people think they just have to be "good enough" and they will be accepted by God into heaven. Their problem is an ignorance of God in his holiness and perfect justice, coupled with a denial of their true sinful condition and a false conception of sin's offense before God. The true situation is that God is perfectly holy and his standard is nothing less than perfect holiness in the creature. He says, "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). Not only are we not perfectly holy but we are thoroughly corrupted by sin. Romans 3:10 says, "None is righteous, no, not one." This is true both with respect to our guilt - we have actually violated God's holy law and are guilty of it - and of the condition in which we were born as part of a fallen race: "you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked... and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph. 2:1-3). Moreover, whereas we tend to downplay sin, God says, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). When you add this up, there is not one single person, apart from Jesus Christ, who is able to be justified before God on the basis of his works. As Paul explained in Romans 3:20, "by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

This is why the very heart of the gospel is justification not by works but through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul explained: "we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). Christians are justified not by their own works but by Christ's work, which we receive in faith. Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and Christ lived a perfect life before God that fulfilled on our behalf the demands of God's law. The Bible therefore teaches an "imputed righteousness." This means that through faith we are justified because Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed, or credited, to us before God. 2 Corinthians 5:21 states this classically: "For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

All of us must struggle against this kind of legalism. We have an inborn tendency to base our acceptance with God on our performance as Christians. In theological terms, we tend to base our justification with God on our sanctification (holiness) before God. But our acceptance with God is based not on our performance but on Jesus' perfect performance in fulfilling God's law and dying for our sins. Justification through faith alone does not merely mean that when I die I will be accepted into heaven (though praise the Lord it does mean that). Justification also means that I am accepted by God right now, despite my sin and failure. Paul said, "Having been justified through faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1). Legalism causes Christians to cringe in fear before their loving God, when in fact they are accepted as "dearly beloved children" (Eph. 5:1) through union with Christ in faith.

It is possible, however, to teach justification accurately and still have legalistic tendencies. One way of doing this is to add man's rules to God's law when it comes to practical obedience before the Lord. As I will make clear in a following letter, justified Christians are required to press on to sanctification, that is, to a life of increasing holiness. Knowing this, some zealous Christians make their own laws that are supposed to promote holiness, naming as sins things that are not considered sins in God's Word. Typical examples today would be to say that it is a sin to drink any alcohol, to enter a restaurant that sells alcohol, or to enter a movie theatre and see a film. These man-made laws have good intentions, noting in these cases the way that alcohol can lead to sin and that ungodly movies can corrupt our morals. But the problem is that God's Word does not forbid alcohol or cultural events like movies. Alcohol is an example of something made by God for good (Ps. 104:15), made use of by Jesus Christ (Jn. 2:6-10, and endorsed in its proper use by the apostles (1 Tim. 5:23). Paul wrote, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Tim. 4:4). The true problem with man-made laws is that we tend to think that by keeping them we are righteous before God. By not drinking alcohol, avoiding movies, and not wearing certain kinds of clothes, Christians are made to believe they are better than others and righteous before God, when in fact that they are sinners like everyone else in need of saving grace through faith alone.

A third kind of legalism, a sort of "soft legalism," is seen in some Christians who would never think of themselves as legalists. They know they are justified before God through faith in Christ alone and would not think of adding to God's law or inventing their own sins. Nonetheless, and usually in reaction to the sinfulness they see around them in the culture and in some churches, they approach the Christian life with such a severity and an emphasis on human effort that they forget the all-important grace of God. This often comes through in the way that harsh parents treat their Christian children. There is no doubt that the Christian life requires much effort, but we must not forget the mercy of God for those who struggle in weakness and need compassion. We must not forget that God is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34:6). Moreover, we must not forget that sanctification comes by God's grace, through God's Word and prayer. Let us make sure, therefore, that the manner in which we seek to be holy reflects the God who loved the world and sent his only Son to forgive us of our sins (Jn. 3:16).

Lastly, notice something that I did not say. I did not say that legalism is the belief that Christians must obey the Bible. That is because this is *not* legalism - it is Christianity! It is *not* legalistic to believe that we must and can obey God's Word by the grace of Christ. It is *not* legalism to strive against sin and seek to remove sinful habits from our lives. It is *not* legalism to set the Ten Commandments before ourselves and, trusting Christ for our justification, seek by Christ's grace to live in accordance with God's law, in order to love God and our neighbor as we should. The only way to live as a Christian is by God's grace in Christ, but living as Christians we must seek to honor God's law as the true and only path of love. Paul said, "For the grace of God has appeared... training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" (Tit. 2:11-12).

In Christ's Love,

Pastor Rick Phillips

Church Calendar

Sunday, October 7
8:30 AM MORNING WORSHIP
9:50 AM New Members' Class
9:50 AM Children's Chapel
10:00 AM Diaconate Training
10:00 AM SUNDAY SCHOOL
11:00 AM MORNING WORSHIP
4:45 PM Adult Choir Rehearsal
5:30 PM Season of Prayer in the Chapel
6:00 PM EVENING WORSHIP
6:30 PM Wee Worship Choir
7:15 PM Worship & Music Committee Meeting
7:15 PM CHURCHWIDE FELLOWSHIP SUPPER
A - J Main Course * K - Z Side Dishes
Everyone please bring one 2-liter drink.

Monday, October 8
6:00 PM Joint Session/Diaconate Meeting
Supper * 7:00 PM Meeting
Tuesday, October 9
10:00 AM WIC Circles 1 & 3 meet at the church
2:30 PM WIC Circle 5 meets at the church
4:30 PM Mites Basketball practice
6:00 PM Evangelism Explosion Training
6:00 PM Boy Scout Troop 828
7:00 PM WIC Circle 2 meets at the home of Tammy Looper
7:00 PM WIC Circle 4 meets at Panera Bread on Augusta Street
7:00 PM Jr. High Boys' Basketball practice

Wednesday, October 10
6:30 AM Men's Bible Study
5:30 PM Missions' Committee Meeting
5:45 PM FAMILY NIGHT FELLOWSHIP SUPPER
6:15 PM Covenant Choir
6:15 PM Youth Choir
6:45 PM CAT Kids and Covenant Kids
6:45 PM Youth Bible Study
6:45 PM WIC Circle 6
6:45 PM PRAYER MEETING AND BIBLE STUDY
7:00 PM Diaconate Training
8:00 PM Sr. High Boys' basketball practice

Thursday, October 11
9:30 AM WIC Precepts Bible Study
5:30 PM Jr. High Girls' Basketball practice
Friday, October 12
12:00 PM Men's Bible Study and Fellowship Lunch
Saturday, October 13
9:00 AM FALL CHURCH PICNIC

Remembering One Another

Remember in prayer this week the following shut-in member.
Also, send her a note of encouragement.

Bobbie Houser
2 Hoke Smith Blvd., Room 203
Greenville, SC 29615

Praying For One Another

Remember in prayer this week the following members.

Richard Chivers
Kathleen Cleveland
Jimmy and Leigh Anna Compton
John, Laura, James, William

Upcoming Events

Oct. 4 David Bragdon's Fold Dinner
Oct. 5 Men's Ministry Bowl-a-rama
Oct. 7 CHURCHWIDE FELLOWSHIP SUPPER
Oct. 7 Worship & Music Committee Meeting
Oct. 8 Joint Session/Diaconate Meeting
Oct. 9-10 WIC Circles
Oct. 10 Missions' Committee Meeting
Oct. 13 FALL CHURCH PICNIC
Oct. 15 Young At Heart
Oct. 18 Jessamines
Oct. 21 The Lord's Supper at the evening service
Oct. 24 CE Committee Meeting
Oct. 25 Calvary Presbytery at Shannon Forest PCA
Oct. 26-27 WIC Fall Retreat
Oct. 26 Jr. High Fellowship
Oct. 26 Sr. High Dinner and Bonfire at the Evans'
Oct. 28 REFORMATION SUNDAY
Oct. 28 Evangelism/Church Growth Committee Meeting
Oct. 31 REFORMATION PARTY

Evangelism Explosion Training

Have you ever wanted to tell a friend or relative about Jesus, but did not know how to start or what to say? Evangelism Explosion is an evangelistic training program designed to equip you to tell others the good news about Jesus Christ. The fall semester begins Tuesday, October 9, at 6:00 pm in the Conference Room. Please call or see Ken Safford (419-8267) to sign up, or if you have any questions.

Men's Bowl-a-rama

Friday, October 5th
7:00 pm...until
Star Lanes Bowling
740 S. Pleasantburg Dr. (next to Greenville Tech)
Call Bill Hedgpeth (414-4145) with questions.

Ladies: You Are Invited

A Diaper Shower for Maria Bassett
Saturday, October 6, 2012; 10:00 am
Home of Denise Patton
730 Boling Road, Taylors, SC 29687; 244-9634

From the Church Historian

On Sunday, March 19, 1967, Second Church celebrated its 75th anniversary. One of the visitors to the celebration was the last living charter member of the church, Miss Lucy McDonald. The historian is looking for pictures of Miss McDonald that were taken during the celebration for inclusion in her charter member display. If any of you have any recollections of her visit and anything she said about the early years of the church or her own life, they would also be appreciated. Thank you for any help you can provide.

FALL CHURCH PICNIC



Saturday, October 13
9:00 AM - 2:00 PM (rain or shine)
Herdklotz Park
126 Beverly Road, Greenville
The Deacons will provide the meat and drinks.
Everyone please bring salads, side dishes and desserts.
There will be a dessert contest!

Come join us for food, fellowship and fun at the 2012 Fall Picnic. Lunch will be served at 11:30 AM but come early. There are playgrounds and lots of room to run at the park, so bring your footballs and Frisbees. Organized games will be held under the shelter and on the grounds.



Pack a Shoe Box

Operation Christmas Child "The Power of A Simple Gift"

Share God's love and the joy of Christmas by packing a gift-filled shoe box for a hurting child overseas. Your simple gift can make an eternal difference. Pamphlets on how to pack a shoe box and all other instructions are located throughout the church, on bulletin boards or in the church office.

Calvary Pres WIC Fall Retreat

Calvary Pres WIC Fall Retreat
October 26-27, 2012
Friday, 4:00 PM until Saturday, 3:00 PM
Bonclarken Conference Center, Flat Rock, NC
Speakers: Debbie Gamble and Crystal Liu
Sign-up sheets are in the church gym or see Margaret Holman or your WIC Circle Chairman.

Young At Heart

The Young At Heart's monthly luncheon and meeting will be Monday, October 15, 11:45 am in the Fellowship Hall. The catered lunch will be \$6.00 per person, payable at the door. Pastor Phillips will be bringing us a special message this month. Don't miss this joyous time of fellowship and good food.

Jessamines Group

The next Jessamine Group (SPC young ladies 5th-8th grade and their moms) will be Thursday, October 18, 6:30-8:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall. "Using Your Gifts for the Lord" will be our theme as girls will bake cupcakes with our resident baker Mrs. Jessica LaBombard, and create their very own fondant decoration. Our dinner theme is Italian. Please bring a generous portion to share.



REFORMATION SUNDAY OCTOBER 28, 2012

REFORMATION PARTY WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2012

We need booths, prizes, and candy.
If you would like to sponsor a booth see or call Seth (ext. 25).
If you would like to donate candy and/or prizes, please mark and leave in the gym.

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The Second Presbyterian Church

105 River Street
Greenville, South Carolina 29601-2537

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WORSHIP AT SECOND
THE LORD'S DAY
OCTOBER 7, 2012

MORNING WORSHIP
8:30 & 11:00 AM

FROM DEATH TO LIFE
Revelation 1:17-19
Anthem:

We Will Walk in the Name of the Lord
Hymns: 4, 34, 369
Dr. Richard D. Phillips preaching

EVENING WORSHIP
6:00 PM

JERUSALEM REDEEMED
Isaiah 52:7-12
Hymns: 94, 175, 92
Psalter: Psalm 149

Rev. Seth T. Starkey preaching

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