

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

FEBRUARY 19 - 23, 2024

THE GREATNESS OF THE

CROSS

2/18 - 3/17

LENTEN SERMON SERIES

MONDAY

Read **Galatians 2:19-21; Colossians 2:20-23; Luke 11:37-44**

“For through the law I died to the law ... [and] if righteousness [was attainable] through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” (Galatians 2: 19-21) The penman, the Apostle Paul, knew much about the legalism—“emphasizing ... rules and regulations for achieving ... salvation and spiritual growth” (GotQuestions.org)—addressed here. Elsewhere Paul wrote autobiographically, *“I myself have [had] reason for confidence [as] ... a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee ... as to righteousness under the law, blameless”* (Philippians 3:4-6).

Prior to his conversion heading toward Damascus, Paul (born Saul of Tarsus) had been Judaism’s rising star, the Church’s leading persecutor; but Jesus showed him the errors of his self-righteous, legalistic zeal (Acts 9:1-19). God—looking upon the heart (1 Samuel 16:7)—knew Saul’s intentions were good, but his course and methods were misguided. Jesus redirected him, spawning Paul’s new career as the Bible’s most prolific church-planter and penman.

As one who tends toward competitiveness, I can wrestle with its cousin, legalism. Both are merit-based—“I’m better,” “I deserve the prize (instead of you),” etc. They are fueled by selfishness and a scarcity-based entitlement emphasis—“there is only one winner,” “your gain is my loss,” etc. However, ours is a God of abundance (Philippians 4:19), One delighting in giving good things (Matthew 7:11), unimpressed by mere human achievement (Romans 2:11).

The legalist succumbs not only to a privileged stance and delusional self-sufficiency, but likewise to a religious legal/merit basis for salvation. However, Jesus already handled the legalities at Calvary, exchanging His life and righteous standing with the Father for humankind's sins. Anyone choosing a legal relationship with God can have it, but it won't end well. Standing before Jesus at the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-14)—when it's too late—they will grasp the wisdom of the saying, "A person who is their own lawyer has a fool for a client."

The Law and legalism cannot justify you—only saving faith in Jesus can. Reject the enemy's lies of scarcity and our culture's one-upmanship and entitlement focus. Surrender to the Redeemer and share in His glorious victory.

QUESTIONS

What is legalism and how was the Apostle Paul well-equipped to be an expert here? What are some of the problems with legalism? What does "Jesus already handled the legalities at Calvary" mean?

PRAYER

For Shepherd's Pantry

Shepherd's Pantry continues to see a growing demand for services and it is now serving an average of 2,500 households a month across its three sites of distribution. Our prayer is that we continue to receive donations of food, monetary donations, and grants in order to continue blessing our neighbors in need.



TUESDAY

Read **Galatians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:24; Exodus 29:10-25**

Before returning to Egypt to lead Israel's Exodus, Moses proved sinfully lax in circumcising his son. Fortunately, his wife intervened, handling the procedure. Concurrently, "Zipporah regarded the bloody rites of [Moses'] religion as cruel and barbarous, [disdainfully casting] the foreskin of her son at his feet" (Charles Ellicot), protesting "You are a bridegroom of blood to me!" (Exodus 4:25). Consider the methods God commanded in Judaism's animal sacrifices and Zipporah's complaints resonate. Blood abounded! God even had the priests apply the animal's blood to their own ears, thumbs and toes, then "*throw the rest of the blood against the sides of the altar*" and ensure that their own garments were blood-stained (Exodus 29:20-21).

In earlier years I sometimes pondered, "Why did Jesus have to die and why in such a gory, painful, humiliating fashion? Couldn't God simply forgive sins upon our sincere repentance, not subjecting the Savior to this?" Isaiah prophesied that He would be flogged such that "His appearance was ... marred beyond human [likeness]" (52:14). Even following Jesus' death, His piercing produced an outflow of yet more blood (John 20:34).

Why such bloodiness in all of the above? Because "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). This verse does not read, "If you sin, God will kill you"—death is a natural, direct consequence of sin. Sadly, our

acclimation to the world's fallenness inclines us to grossly underestimate sin's devastation and its repulsiveness to God.

“By our sin we greatly offend God, deserve the sentence of death ... [and] grieve the Holy Spirit. ... God ... isn't a stoic. He doesn't oversee the world ... [with bored detachment]. As a Father to His children, He is invested in us; He cares deeply about how we live.” (William Boekestein) God's hatred for sin—that which destroys His beloved—complements His love for us.

I believe God incorporated bloodiness into ancient Jewish rituals and sacrifices to vividly portray sin's harmfulness. The goriness of Jesus' execution illustrates the loving extreme God went to in bringing many to Himself. *“He Himself bore our sins ... [and] by His wounds you have been healed!”* (1 Peter 2:24).

QUESTIONS

Why do you believe God incorporated so much “bloodiness” into the Old Testament sacrificial rites? What does *“the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23) mean? What does *“God's hatred for sin complements His love for us”* mean?

PRAYER

For Shepherd's Pantry

As the need for Shepherd's Pantry's services continues to increase, we have begun to outgrow our space. Shepherd's Pantry currently rents both of its facilities. Our prayer is for guidance, opportunities, and support to work towards one day owning our own facility.

WEDNESDAY

Read **1 Peter 2:24; Galatians 2:19-20; Romans 6**

A contemporary legalist—one amplifying rules-following while discounting God’s love and grace—might embrace 1 Peter 2:24 as a credo: “die to sin and live to righteousness.” Among the greatest problems of legalism is its emphasis upon rules and a rules-giver, but no felt need for a Savior. Non-Christian religions fall in line here, but even many professing Christians succumb to this trap and its byproducts: self-righteousness; entitlement; judgmentalism; neglecting grace and, thereby, love, charity, etc.

Christian legalists disregard that “*by His wounds (not our works) [we] have been healed*” (2:24b, parenthetical text added). Moreover, they fail to grasp that “*it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live ... [is] by faith in the Son of God*” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus might say to such professing believers, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ while dismissing Me as your Savior?”

Jesus lived a perfect life, which is part of His qualifications to be our suitable Substitute in receiving God’s holy judgment. And we should strive for such holy living, even knowing it is unattainable before Christ’s return. However, such striving is not a call to legalism.

Other professing believers—knowing that holy perfection is impossible until we’re glorified, that salvation is by grace vs. works—are also misdirected, but 180° from legalism. “Carnal Christians” misapply

Paul's statement, "*through the law I died to the law*" (Galatians 2:19), and other Scripture—"all things are lawful" (1 Corinthians 10:23), "*you are not under law but under grace*" (Romans 6:14), etc.—to justify a life often indistinguishable from unbelievers' lives.

Carnal Christians conveniently ignore other Scripture: "*Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!*" (Romans 6:15); "*Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness*" (1 John 3:4); etc. They would reduce the church to a social club and pastors to pop psychologists dispensing self-help programs vs. biblical truth. These types want a Savior—aware of their sinfulness—but not a Lord. Following Jesus is not an either/or proposition, for He is the "*Savior, who is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11).

QUESTIONS

How do legalists apparently want a Lord but not a Savior? What is a "carnal Christian"? How do carnal Christians want a Savior but not a Lord?

PRAYER

For Shepherd's Pantry

The demand for our Shepherd's Pantry Help Fund has grown and it is outpacing our resources. We pray we will receive more funds specifically for our Shepherd's Pantry Help Fund.



THURSDAY

Read **Isaiah 53:4-5, 11-12; Matthew 26:39, 42-44; 27:39-43**

“By His wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24)—this simple while theologically deep statement captures the essence of Jesus’ first coming mission and Scripture’s central theme of redemption. Yet, this verse can feel paradoxical, particularly to unbelievers. Non-Christian systems—being works and merit-based—reject the notion of unearned salvation. Grace—unmerited favor—is a completely foreign concept to the religious. Moreover, how can One stand in for others, His wounds “healing” them?

The prophet Isaiah, Holy Spirit inspired, had a grasp of the Messiah’s mission 700+ years before Jesus of Nazareth was born. Today’s featured Isaiah passages capture the dark, desolate part of the Gospel along with its glorious promises.

The Jewish priests and others among Jesus’ onlookers at Calvary did not grasp what was happening, the redemptive transaction occurring on the cross. Enemies displayed unwitting insight in declaring, *“He saved others; He cannot save Himself”* (Matthew 27:42). Ironically, Jesus—as God in human flesh—could have saved Himself. In rebuking Peter for attacking one of His arrestors in Gethsemane, Jesus proclaimed, *“Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and He will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?”* (Matthew 26:53). He could have done so amidst His Roman

flogging or crucifixion, sparing Himself further physical pain and humiliation.

Had Jesus called for heavenly intervention at Calvary—to “save” Himself—He could not then save all who would turn to Him. The price would have been unpaid, no bail posted. A more precise version of what His adversaries stated: “He could save others only by not saving—by sacrificing—Himself.” If there was another way to humankind’s salvation other than through the cross, Jesus’ earlier, three-time appeal in Gethsemane—“*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me*” (Matthew 26:39)—would have been answered affirmatively. The Father’s thrice, silent “No” answer indicated “There is no other way.” If there was, God would be both cruel and unreliable.

Often, sadly, our “healing” is not physical—loved ones battle disease and injury; people die. However, in Christ they are reconciled with God, spiritually healed forever.

QUESTIONS

How is grace—unmerited favor—a foreign concept to religious systems apart from true Christianity? Why could Jesus not “save Himself”? How have you “been healed” by Jesus’ saving sacrifice?

PRAYER

For Shepherd’s Pantry

Shepherd’s Pantry has more than doubled the number of households it serves. However, the number of staff members has remained the same. Our prayer is for our staff, interns, and volunteers to be granted good health and patience, and that they always feel and know how appreciated they are.



FRIDAY

Read **Romans 3:10, 3:23, 6:23; 5:8; 10:9-10, 10:13; 5:1-2, 8:1** (the “Romans Road”)

Peter makes an evocative statement in his first epistle: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”* (1 Peter 2:24). Let’s unpack this, using other Scripture and themes we’ve explored this week.

Legalists and those maintaining that there is a post-death place where one can “work off sins” (via second chances at “following the rules” completely) essentially leave Christ on the cross, contradicting His final *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30) declaration. Theirs is a merit-based “salvation”—the stuff of religion—rendering Jesus’ suffering and sacrifice unnecessary, His atoning, sacrificial death being *“for no purpose.”* Essentially, such attitudes *“nullify the grace of God.”* To at least some degree, the “God” religious legalists perceive must be somewhat brutal and uncaring, for He answered “No” to Jesus’ appeals in Gethsemane for another means to securing humankind’s salvation.

The cults and other false religions view Jesus as a created being. For these, “God” must be somewhat cowardly, having created someone else to take the punishment that Jesus did. However, the God we worship—Yahweh, the true and living Creator, the Alpha and Omega—came to earth in human flesh on a mission

of reconciliation and salvation, enduring the horrors and pain of the cross Himself.

Remarkably, though many cling to false theology—discounting the magnitude and cost of what the Lord did at Calvary—God loves them still. *“While we were yet sinners (God’s antagonistic enemies), Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8, parenthetical emphasis added). As well, likewise gloriously, *“The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9, KJV). God is on our side. He lovingly and mercifully pursues even hardened sinners—right to the limit of honoring their free will—so that they might know salvation in Christ.

At the February 4 men’s event, speaker Dave Anderson offered, “It’s either grace (a free gift, God’s unmerited favor) or it’s wages (attempted, earned justification).” In this latter case, the inevitable wages are death (Romans 6:23). Which do you choose? How about others whom you care for?

QUESTIONS

How do legalists and all “works-based salvation” proponents essentially “leave Christ on the cross”? If Jesus was merely a created being, what does this say about God? What does Dave Anderson’s statement, “It’s either grace or it’s wages,” mean?

PRAYER

For Shepherd’s Pantry

Shepherd’s Pantry could not fulfill its mission of helping our neighbors in need without the help of our volunteers. We pray for each one of our existing volunteers that they continue to help us fulfill our mission and that new people will be moved to join our mission.



Sources

- GotQuestions.org's quote is from <https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html>.
- Charles Ellicot's quote can be found at <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/exodus/4-25.htm>.
- William Boekestein's quote is from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-costs-sin/>.
- Dave Anderson's quote is from his message at the Men's Worship Night multi-congregational event, Glenkirk Church, February 4, 2024.

These devotionals are written by a team of Glenkirk volunteers who represent a range of beliefs within the evangelical spectrum. As such, some of the expressed views may not necessarily represent those of pastoral leadership. If you find yourself challenged by a devo, explore why that might be and, should you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Pastor Kate Wallace Nunneley at KNunneley@GlenkirkChurch.org. If you are interested in joining those who pen Glenkirk devotionals, please contact Pastor Kate.

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