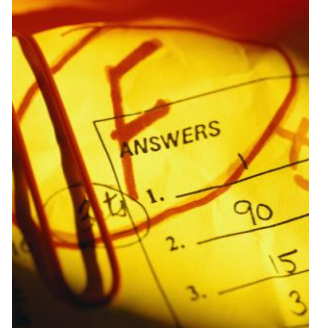


Resolving Performance-Based Acceptance

Christian legalism is seeking to attain, gain or maintain acceptance with God or someone else who represents God, or to achieve spiritual growth, through keeping a written or unwritten code or standard of performance. Legalism causes us to focus on what we can do in the flesh to please God, instead of on what Christ has already done to make us right with God. Freedom from legalism comes as we renounce our fleshly attempts to win God's approval and believe that we are accepted in the Beloved.



Steps to Breaking the Bondage of Legalism

Opening Prayer

“Dear heavenly Father, I thank You that You love me and that Your Son died and rose again so that I could have a close personal relationship with You. I have spent too much of my life trying to gain Your acceptance when I already have it. I have tended to relate to You more on the basis of head knowledge rather than heart experience and laws rather than love. Your Word says that ‘It was for freedom that Christ set us free’ (Galatians 5:1), and that is what I really want—freedom. There are many ways in which I have not stood firm in your new covenant of grace but instead have allowed a yoke of slavery to legalism to weigh me down and wear me out. Please deliver me from all bondage in my life and bring to my mind all the ways legalism has trapped me. I ask that Your truth would set me free to love, worship, know, obey, and serve You in the love and acceptance that You have graciously extended to me in Christ. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

Declaration

“In the name and authority of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who has all authority in heaven and on earth, I take my stand against all demonic opposition to my quest for freedom. I refuse all fear, anxiety, doubt, confusion, deception, distraction, or any other form of harassment that comes from the enemies of the Lord Jesus. I choose to take my place in Christ and declare that all His foes have been disarmed and that Jesus Himself came to destroy the devil’s works in my life. I declare that Christ has already broken the chains of legalism and that I am in Him. Therefore, His victory is my victory.”

Step 1: Renouncing Lies and Choosing Truth

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, Your Word is truth (John 17:17) and Jesus Himself is truth (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), and it is the truth that will set me free (John 8:32). I want to know the truth, believe the truth, and live in accordance with the truth. Please reveal to my mind all the ways that the lies of legalism have kept me in bondage. I want to renounce (verbally reject) all those lies and walk in the truth of Your grace and acceptance of me in Christ. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.*

Lie: “I can’t do anything right, and my best is not good enough.”

Cause: continual criticism and put-downs

Results: instability, indecision, vacillation, irresponsibility, critical or judgmental spirit

Lie: “I must measure up to a certain standard to be a valuable person.”

Cause: living under a system of performance-based acceptance

Results: perfectionism, drivenness, anxiety, insecurity

Lie: “I’m unlovable and have no worth. I’m unattractive and unwanted.”

Cause: receiving little or no affection or healthy physical touch

Results: withdrawing from people or using my body to get attention and affection

Lie: “I am guilty, evil, or dirty.”

Cause: physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual abuse

Result: trying desperately to alleviate guilt or living in accordance with the lie (sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, criminal or deviant behavior)

Lie: “I am not important or wanted.”

Cause: being ignored or rejected

Result: trying hard to please, dropping out, acting out to gain attention, anger, rage, bitterness, depression

Lie: “I am incompetent, inadequate, weak, or untrustworthy.”

Cause: overprotection or smothering

Result: perfectionism, fear, inadequacy

Lie: “I am (the negative names) they are calling me or I call myself.”

Cause: cursing and name-calling

Result: self-hatred, inferiority, attacking others

Lie: “I/we are better than others.”

Cause: repeatedly hearing others “different than us” being put down

Result: boasting, arrogance, putting others down, separatism, self-righteousness

Prayer to Renounce Lies

“Dear heavenly Father, I thank You for showing me the lies that I have believed about myself and my life. I can see how devastating they have been to me and the harmful behaviors that have resulted. I renounce the lie that (state the lie or lies you have believed). I confess that I have believed all these things that are contrary to Your truth, and I thank You for Your total forgiveness and cleansing according to 1 John 1:9. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

Step 2: Confessing Sins

Prayer: *“Dear Heavenly Father, You have told me to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lust. (Romans 13:14) I confess that I have often given in to fleshly lusts, which wage war against my soul. (1 Peter 2:11) I thank You that in Christ my sins are already forgiven, but I have broken Your holy law and given the devil a chance to wage war in my body. (Romans 6:12-13, James 4:1, 1 Peter 5:8) I come to You now to confess and renounce these sins of the flesh (Proverbs 28:13 NIV, 2 Corinthians 4:2) so that I might be cleansed and set free from the bondage of sin. Please reveal to my mind the sins of the flesh I have committed and the ways I have grieved the Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ holy name I pray, amen.”*

Categories of Sin

Performance

- Trying to keep God’s commands in order to earn God’s acceptance or favor
- Trying to keep God’s commands in my own strength
- Trying to measure up to the standards of others in order to be accepted
- Being driven to work harder and harder in order to succeed
- Feeling like achievement is the means of gaining personal happiness and a sense of worth
- Centering my life around keeping laws rather than knowing the Lord

Perfectionism

- Living with fear of failure
- Being afraid of going to hell because I have not kept God’s law perfectly
- Being unable to accept God’s grace because I think I need to be punished (even though Jesus said my sins were “paid in full” on the cross!)
- Being obsessed with doing everything perfectly and keeping things in exact order
- Sweating the small stuff
- Having unreasonable expectations of perfection in others
- Being angry at others when they disrupt my neatly controlled world
- Punishing others when they are not perfect
- Not able to experience joy and satisfaction in life unless something I do is absolutely perfect

Pride & Prejudice

- Thinking that you are more spiritual, devoted, humble, or devout than others
- Thinking that my church/denomination/etc. is better than others
- Not being willing to associate with others who are different (independent, separatist, or isolationist spirit)
- Elevating religious opinions (like which translation of the Bible to use) to the level of inflexible convictions
- Not being willing to soften religious opinions in order to promote love, peace, and unity among true brothers and sisters in Christ
- Finding it hard to admit I am wrong; feeling like I always have to be right and prove to others I am right
- Bigotry against those of other races, economic and social groups

Picking Apart (judgmentalism)

- Having a critical spirit toward worship styles, music, sermons, other people's clothes, etc.; always being quick to criticize and critique
- Judging others (impugning their motives and character)
- Faultfinding with ministers (either your own or those of other churches)
- Intolerance of anyone who differs (unwillingness to listen to them on the radio or TV, unwillingness to read their books, etc.)
- Guilt-by-association thinking
- Labeling of others, placing them into religious categories and writing them off

Persistence (unhealthy)

- Being rigid in beliefs on which sincere Christians disagree
- Clinging to traditions in church that are not Biblically based and which are not conducive toward reaching the current generation with the gospel
- Stubbornness and resistance to innovation by church leaders
- Closed-mindedness; being unwilling to even listen to new ideas

Power & Dominance

- Using guilt and shame tactics to get others to do what I want
- Expecting or demanding others to attend every church service, be at every church function, etc.
- Controlling others by means of strong personality, persuasion, fear, or intimidation
- Experiencing strong anxiety when I am not able to be in control
- Finding security in rules, regulations, and standards rather than in the Lord
- Being more concerned about controlling others than in developing self-control
- Being driven to rise into powerful positions in order to gain control and accomplish my agenda
- Feeling overly responsible for the lives and well-being of others

Pleasureless Living

- Living a joyless life of duty and obligation
- Feeling guilty for experiencing or being secretive in pursuing pleasure
- Inability to rest and relax
- Workaholism
- Being strongly attracted to (or giving in to) illegal substances, illicit sex, pornography, etc. in order to escape or find some gratification
- Feeling and living as if pain and suffering were more spiritual than enjoying the good things God has given us

As the Spirit of God reveals these (and/or other) areas of the flesh, confess and renounce them by praying the following prayer out loud from your heart:

“Dear Heavenly Father, I confess that I have sinned by (name the sins of the flesh). I agree that these attitudes and actions are not proper for a child of Yours, therefore I renounce them all. I thank You for Your forgiveness and now yield myself to the Holy Spirit’s filling so that I might become more like Christ. I choose to allow You to develop the fruit of the Spirit in my life, which is ‘love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.’ (Galatians 5:22-23) In Jesus’ holy name I pray, amen.”

Step 3: Forgiveness

Prayer: *“Dear heavenly Father, I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance, and patience toward me, knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance (Romans 2:4). I confess that I have not shown that same kindness and patience toward those who have hurt me. Instead I have held on to my anger, bitterness, and resentment toward them. I realize, too, that at times I have been hard on myself, being unwilling to forgive myself, living with a lot of regret. Please bring to my mind all the people I need to forgive in order that I may do so now. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”*

We encourage you to make a complete list (by name wherever possible) of all the people the Lord brings to your mind that you need to forgive. To help you, here are some suggestions:

- Parents and other family members who abused me in any way or who caused me to believe I was worthless, unlovable or valuable only when I “performed well”
- Ministers and other church leaders who hurt me by fostering a law-based rather than grace-based church environment
- School teachers or officials who were harsh, critical, or legalistic
- People who stifled any free expression in grace or spiritual liberty in my life and who forced me to conform to legalistic standards
- Others that the Lord is bringing to mind who were used by the enemy to rob me of joy and freedom including any perpetrators of abuse or neglect

- ❑ Myself for leading my family into legalism; for leading or influencing my church into legalism; for attacking those teaching freedom and grace; for being hurtful, hateful, critical, or judgmental toward family, friends, others; for robbing others of freedom and joy by my attitudes, words and actions

Prayer to forgive:

“Dear heavenly Father, I choose to forgive _____ (say the person’s name) for _____ (be specific in what the person did) which made me feel _____ (be honest in expressing how you felt or still feel).”

Prayer for blessing:

“Dear heavenly Father, I choose not to hold any of these things against _____ (name) any longer. I thank You for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness toward _____ (name). I now ask You to bless _____ (name). In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

A final word about forgiveness:

Perhaps the Lord has reminded you of some people that *you* have hurt. These people have held a grudge against you because of the suffering you have caused in their lives. According to Matthew 5:23-24, you need to approach those people humbly and gently and ask them to forgive you for what you have done to them. As you go, be specific in spelling out your wrongs and say something like, *“Will you please forgive me for _____ (be specific). That was wrong and I am so sorry.”* Then wait for them to respond. If they have hurt you as well, make sure you have forgiven them before you go to them, but do not go expecting an apology on their part. If they refuse to forgive you, you are free because Scripture says, *“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” (Romans 12:18)* Sometimes it doesn’t depend on you. If, however, reconciliation takes place, God be praised!

Step 4: Fearing People vs. Fearing God

To allow the Lord to examine your heart in this area, begin by praying:

“Dear heavenly Father, I know that I have not always walked by faith, but have allowed the fear of people to control me. I have been overly concerned about gaining approval from others and have been led astray from a simple, pure devotion to Christ. I want to walk in a healthy fear and awe of You, Lord, and not of people. Thank You for Your forgiveness. I now ask You to bring to my mind the specific ways that I have allowed the fear of others to control me. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

The Fear of People

- I have been afraid to say what I really think or feel for fear of being reprimanded, ridiculed, or rejected.
- I have changed the clothes I wear, the makeup I put on, or the way I wear my hair to prevent people at church from scolding me.
- I am afraid to say “no” when asked to do something for fear of experiencing disapproval or anger.
- I am often tired and on the verge of burnout due to my inability to say “no.”
- I resent feeling “used” but I can’t seem to bring myself to set healthy boundaries in my life.
- I find myself easily intimidated by strong personalities who tell me I must do certain things in order to be pleasing to God.
- I constantly need the affirmation of people in order to feel happy or significant.
- If I don’t get the affirmation that I feel I need from people, I can easily become discouraged or depressed.
- I do not handle criticism well; it makes me feel like a failure.
- I will do almost anything to gain the approval of important people in my life.
- I make sure others know about the good things I have accomplished.
- I have found myself lying in order to cover up things in my life that might result in disapproval from others.
- I have been more concerned about following man-made traditions in our church than in obeying Scripture.
- Other ways I have allowed the fear of others to control me: _____

Prayer of Confession

“Dear heavenly Father, I realize now that much of my life has been lived in the fear of people, seeking to please them rather than discerning and doing Your will. I realize that is sin. I specifically confess now the sins of _____ (list the sins the Lord has revealed to you). Thank You for Your gracious forgiveness. I ask You to strengthen me so that I will fear no one but You. Empower me by Your Spirit to learn what pleases You and do it, regardless of what others might think. I thank You that You already love, accept, and approve of me so that I don’t have to go looking for those things from people. It is nice when I get them, but let them be byproducts of having pleased You first. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

Step 5: Surrendering Rights

I surrender my “rights” to:

- Live life in my own strength
- Rely on my own resources
- Say what I want to say when I want to say it
- Go where I want to go whenever I please
- Live wherever I want to live
- Have the kind of job I want to have
- Have the kind of financial security I desire
- Be single or to be married
- Have the number [and gender] of children I want to have
- Have all of my children grow up and love the Lord
- Be right all the time
- Be always loved, accepted, and understood by people
- Have the friends that I want
- Be used by God
- Be in control or in charge
- Have a good reputation
- Know the will of God all the time
- Be able to fix people and circumstances around me
- Have good health
- Be free from pain and suffering
- Have the respect and support of people around me
- Be always shielded from the abuse and neglect of others
- Receive forgiveness from those whom I have hurt
- Be spared heartache, crisis, and tragedy
- Engage in sinful practices in anger toward or in rebellion against those who have hurt me
- Other things the Lord is laying on my heart to surrender to Him: _____

Prayer of Surrender

“Dear heavenly Father, in the past I have claimed all these ‘rights’ as mine, but now I present myself to You as having been purchased by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I am no longer my own. I appreciate Your giving me a choice to surrender these things to You. I choose to surrender all my selfish rights to You, the One who has loved me and given up Your Son for me. While I accept my responsibility to follow Your good, acceptable and perfect will for me by the power of the Holy Spirit, I give You permission to do in me and through me whatever You desire and whatever will glorify You. In Jesus’ name I pray, amen.”

Name _____

Date _____

—————Final Affirmation—————

- I affirm that it was for freedom that Christ set me free. I therefore choose to keep standing firm and to no longer be subject to the yoke of slavery to legalism. (*Galatians 5:1*)
- I affirm that having begun by the Spirit I am not being perfected by the flesh but through the transforming power of the Spirit of liberty. (*Galatians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18*)
- I affirm that the Law served as my tutor to bring me to Christ, but now that faith has come I am no longer under that tutor. (*Galatians 3:24-25*)
- I affirm that I am now an unconditionally loved, accepted, and secure child of God in Christ. (*Galatians 3:26, Ephesians 1:6*)
- I affirm that I am now dead to the Law through the body of Christ and that I have been joined to the risen Christ in order to bear fruit for God. (*Romans 7:4*)
- I affirm that I am a bondservant of Jesus Christ and my life's purpose is to please Him, not others. (*Galatians 1:10*)
- I affirm that the Lord's word to me is now, "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (*Galatians 1:3*)
- I affirm that God's strength is made perfect in my weakness and that His grace is sufficient for me. (*2 Corinthians 12:9*)
- Therefore I affirm that by the grace of God I am what I am and that by His grace I stand. (*1 Corinthians 15:10; Romans 5:2*)

~To the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on me in Christ~
(*Ephesians 1:6*)

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