

Galatians #10 - Religion and Rebellion vs Relationship

- All right, if you've got your Bibles, what book are we in?

- [All] Galatians.

- We've been in it for awhile, you're welcome. We're in Galatians chapter five. And I was thinking about on the drive in. You know, how many of you right now, your car's out of alignment? Anybody got a car out of alignment? And you know it's out of alignment when you're driving and it pulls in one direction or the other, or you pump the brakes and then it veers left or right. What's true of your car is also true of your life and your family and your relationships and entire churches, and that is that we can get out of alignment. We can either go to the left, I'll call that liberalism and rebellion. We can go to the right, I'll call that legalism and religion. These are the two defaults, these are the ways we tend to get out of alignment. And God created us for a relationship with him, and Satan wants to counterfeit that by getting you to go to the left and be rebellious, or go to the right and be religious. So let's just own it up front. Let's just be really honest. How many of you are more rebellious, you're more rebellious, okay? I'm surprised you even raised your hand. You know, that's how rebellious you are. Okay, how many of you, you're prone more toward being religious? Let's be honest, let's be, you can be more honest than that. All right, okay, some of us are religious. And how many of you, you've gone from one to the other? You were very rebellious, you grabbed the steering wheel, you got very religious? Or how many of you were raised in a home that was really religious and you overreacted, pulled the steering wheel, became very rebellious? This is what happens in our life, in our families, in our church family. And what Paul is seeking to do today is to get everybody aligned back to the relationship with Jesus which gets us away from rebellion and religion. And so he starts in chapter five verse one, and he says, "For freedom," massive word, right? That's the American word, right? We just blew stuff up, 'cause nothing says freedom like blowing stuff up, right? We have whole holidays. Like I ate a lot of food and I blew stuff up, why? Freedom! Okay, so we're into freedom. But what's interesting is that you can be set free and not live free. You can have freedom that you don't enjoy and exercise. And what he's talking about here is not just the kind of freedom that comes politically, socially, economically, it's spiritually. It's where God sets you free. And the language of slavery in the Bible is comparable to our language for addiction. When somebody's addicted to some destructive pattern or habit, to be set free according to the Bible is to be released from that slavery to enjoy freedom of life. That's what he's talking about. "For freedom Christ," he's talking about Jesus, "has set us free, stand firm therefore, "and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." And here's what he says. Jesus sets you free, and you've gotta hold the line and you've gotta stand in that freedom. When you hear the language of slavery in the Bible, almost every time it talks about slavery, it refers back to the great emancipation story in the Scriptures and that's the Book of Exodus. There God's people were made slaves in Egypt. The Pharaoh ruled over them, it was demonic, it was a counterfeit of the kingdom of God. That was the nation of Egypt. People were used and abused, they were harmed and oppressed, they were mistreated. And what God decided was, "I'm gonna set my

people free." And so God showed up through Moses, a mediator. He showed up through miracles. And God delivered his people and God's people were set free. But they didn't live free. You can be set free and not live free. So if you know the story of the exodus, they're walking around in the woods, what do they start doing? Grumbling, "God disappointed us. "I'd thought we'd have more, this is, "you know, this is not working. "Surely, surely you can do better than this." They're grumbling. And then what do they start doing? They start romanticizing their past. Right? "Oh, you remember the good ol' days when we were slaves? "Those were the good ol' days. "We didn't have to worry about making decisions, "the master would just tell us what to do. "The good ol' days." And we do the same thing when we romanticize our past. Some of you, you're like, "Well, when I was a Christian, "you know, I stopped having fun." "Before I was a Christian, let me tell you, "I had a lot of fun!" That's romanticize, it wasn't fun. You were hungover. You know, that's not fun. It's not fun. And we can do this, right? Some of you are married, let me just meddle a little bit. It's my spiritual gift. And you're like, "Oh, I remember when I was "single." "Single, oh, the good ol' days, the good ol' days." No, no, no, no, no, no, God has set you free. You're not in slavery, you're in marriage, okay. So what do they do? They grumble about their life, they romanticize their past, and then ultimately they forget their identity, they forget, "We're free to worship God." We can forget that we're free. We can forget our freedom in Christ. And then what do they do? They start worshiping a counterfeit god. And this is what we all do. They were set free, but they didn't live free, because freedom is not just out there, freedom is also in here, okay? And so Christ has set you free. But what he's saying is that there is something that's going to come against your freedom, and it's going to declare war on your freedom. And since Christ has set you free, the key is like a soldier just holding the line. What is that enemy? It's legalism, it's religion. There's a difference between God-given redemption and man-made religion. And where he's going to go, and let me just do a little bit of theological work on legalism, pulling in a lot of what we studied in Galatians to this point to set up the rest of our time together. Legalism is ultimately this misbelief that we can do something to have God love us, save us, approve us, or bless us, okay? And ultimately it is us trying to do something in addition, oftentimes, to Jesus Christ, hoping that Jesus did his part and if I do my part, then God will be good with me. And what it is, it is an offense to Jesus, 'cause he already did all the work and he set us free. Okay, he did all the work and he set us free. And so what legalism ultimately is, and legalism is also called works of the flesh, or works of the law in Galatians, it's the result of religion. And let me say this, the reason that Paul is stressing this is if all you do is preach against rebellion, what do you get? A bunch of self-righteous, judgmental, law-making and people-beating, that's the kind of people that are produced, if all you do is preach against rebellion. But what happens if you only preach against religion? You end up with a church full of rebellious people. How many of you have been in these churches? Right, how many of you, you raised these kids? How many of you, you've seen these conflicts? Is there a third way? Yeah, it's the way of relationship. When it comes to this issue of legalism, he says it's a yoke. What is that? It's heavy, it's a burden, it's exhausting. That's man-made religion. Jesus says, "Come to me all you who are weary "and heavy laden, and in me you'll find rest for your souls, "for my yoke is easy, my burden is light." What Jesus is saying is, religious people just keep dumping more obligations, duties, commands, expectations. All of a sudden you're overwhelmed by it. Some of you have lived under that. It's a parents or spiritual leader or friend.

But have a lot of opinions, and they're gonna make sure that they are applying constant pressure to you to do it their way and to follow their rules. And where Galatians is going, I think ultimately, is to family systems. We tend to get most legalistic about our kids because we love our kids so much, that we don't want them to make a bad decision, we don't want them to make a mistake, we don't want them to do something that is wrong. And so we think the only way to prevent their rebellion is to enforce our religion. A couple of things about legalism. I'll give you seven lessons about legalism. Number one, legalism is what happens when people try and do the job of the Holy Spirit. That's where he's going next week. If you come back, he's gonna talk about being filled with the Spirit. And ultimately, the Holy Spirit convicts. A religious person says, "I got it, I'll convict you. "I'll make sure to show you "all your faults, failures and flaws." The Holy Spirit will control you. And the religious person says, "No, no, no, "that's fine, I've got this, I'll control them." And ultimately, if the Holy Spirit is in you, then God is always with you, even if the person who is in authority is not present, God who's an ultimate authority is present. So here's what it is. It's about a personal relationship with God by the person, the presence, the power of the Holy Spirit. And ultimately, I would say even for parenting, the goal is to get kids to what? To understand freedom in Christ, to live in the grace of God, to grow up and make their own decisions, and to understand what it means to be led by the Holy Spirit, okay. And if you raise a kid in a religious environment, invariably, they don't learn how to think and make decisions. And so they can't mature. So give you a few more on legalism. Number two, legalism is godless. You don't need God. I mean, legalistic people, it's not like, hey, pray about it, read the Bible, seek wise counsel, get solitude with the Lord. They're like, "I'll just tell you what to do, "or actually we've got a book "and this book tells us all how to do it." And it's a different book than this book, by the way, that's always the way that it works. And somebody says, "Here's how you parent your kids, "here's how you live your life, "here's how you go varsity and be a Christian. "Just read our approved books, "abide by our policies, do what we tell you, "you don't need God, we've got this handled." God wants a relationship with you, where as you're making life decisions, it's building the relationship, okay. Number three, another lesson on legalism. Legalism puts law-based people in authority over other people. A religious spirit, a religious environment, those people who gravitate toward leadership, they peer into your life, they have a lot of opinions, and they're going to pressure you and punish you. Some of you grew up in those environments. I'm not talking about people who love you and are pointing out rebellion. Talking about people that are making rules that God doesn't have and punishing people that God doesn't have a problem with. As we've gotten into Galatians, with some of you, I love you, some of you have been Christians awhile, and you've been in these environments. And what happened in Galatia, they started really well, and then some false brothers, he says, came in, and they brought this spirit of legalism in, and he's trying to course correct it and realign the church. We're in a healthy season, our church is growing, you guys are wonderful, it's a peaceful time, praise be to God. But just know that at some point, religious people will show up. And we want them to have a relationship with Jesus. But we don't want them to have a relationship over us. Religious people are always the ones who wanna be in charge, wanna be in authority, you know, wanna be the ones who are what? Putting the yoke on people. Legalism only does addition, it never does subtraction. Part of the problem with the spirit of legalism is it's like, okay, well, I just have this one legalism, and I'm gonna say that everybody should do it this

way. Well, that spirit eventually continues to add things to the list. How many grew up in a very non-relational, very rural-based, punitive, performance, punishment environment and gosh, you're like, "They just kept making rules. "I mean it was rules about the rules and the subcommittee "to oversee the judiciary committee to oversee the rules "to enforce the policies." And this can happen in churches where all of a sudden we don't really believe that God actually cares more about people than we do, and we don't actually believe that God knows what's best for someone, and that may not be what we think is best for them. Another one, here's the real problem. Legalism seeks to prevent people from needing grace. Grace is for your mistakes and your failures and your sins and your regrets and your bad decisions and tripping over your own feet. Grace is humbling, isn't it? It's humbling. Ultimately, religious people want to control people with rules so that they don't need grace. And some of you, I'm gonna mess with your family system, some of you are parents. And you love your kids so much, right, you love your kids so much, or you should, okay, you should. You should love your kids so much that you don't want them to make bad decisions, you don't want them to ruin their life, you don't want them to mess up. So perfectionism is the result of people who think that they can live in such a way that they don't need the grace of God. Do you know what your kid needs? Grace. Do you know what you need? Grace. Grace. Now as soon as we say that, some people will be like, "Well, I don't know, I don't know, I mean you know "you gotta be serious." No, take God seriously, not yourself. Take God's grace seriously, not your religious performance, your works, your legalism. Another one, legalism makes neutral things necessary things. Oftentimes legalism isn't about something that's bad, it's just taking it from an option to a requirement. Christians can do this with almost any issue, that's my next point, that... give you some examples. Sometimes it's posited like this. You're not a real Christian, you're not okay with God, things aren't right until you do something like, have you been water baptized? Had somebody come to me a couple years ago, they had a little kid that they loved, a newborn baby, and they said, "I'd like to baptize my baby." I said, "Well, it seems like child abuse "to put them under the water. "That's mean, you know." 'Cause that's what baptism means, it means to plunge, dip, or immerse. So it's like, you know, that's abuse. They said, "No, no, just sprinkle them." I said, "Okay, well," I said, "I don't agree with that, but it's not a sin. "There are Christians who do believe that, "this is an open-ended issue." I said, "Let me ask you why do you want your kid "to be water baptized as a baby?" They said, "So that if they die, I know they go to heaven." I said, "Oh, we can't get them wet for that reason." I said, "Water doesn't get people to heaven, Jesus does. "It's not like God's in heaven going, "'I'm taking all the wet ones.' "That's not how this works." Right, you take something that's not necessarily bad, but you make it necessary. This can be things like, I'll give you some other examples. Have you spoken in tongues? Well, how do you know you have the Holy Spirit unless you've spoken in tongues? Speaking in tongues is perfectly fine, well, and good, but it's not necessary to have a relationship with God. Do you have the right Bible translation? Do you have the right kind of church? Do you hold to the right confession of faith? Do you educate your kids in the right way? There's always some goofy new parenting book telling us that this is the only way to do it. Also examples can include holidays. Do you celebrate Christmas? Christmas was Saturnalia. It was a pagan holiday. You're worshiping demons. And you're like, "Oh, I actually just wanted a present." you know, so. you know, all right. There's nothing wrong with Christmas, but being for or against it can be a legalism. And this happens, let me just push the parents,

okay? Halloween. Halloween. Pastor Mark, don't dance on that line. Are there some evil things in Halloween?

- [Congregant] Yes.

- Yes, says my wife in the front row very loudly. Yes! People dress up like witches and naughty nurses and eat candy, all of which is wrong, okay, so. But can we make a legalism about Halloween? You can. Then you start judging people. Well, if the kids come to your house and they knock, do you give them candy or not give them candy? I tell them that God loves them and I have no candy for them, that this is a pagan holiday, all right. We've all got our, let me just say this, it's not whether or not we have our legalisms, it's whether or not we're honest about having our legalisms. Some of y'all, "I don't have legalisms, "I just have principles that make a lot of sense, "and make me closer to God, "and therefore, I judge other people. "Those aren't legalisms." That's exactly what a legalism is. This can even be a social cause. Are you for or against that? We gotta be careful on all of this, 'cause Jesus plus anything ruins everything. It's just Jesus, it's only Jesus, it's always Jesus, always Jesus. And here's where he is, he is trying to bring people to this place of understanding their freedom in Christ, and then exercising it responsibly. There is a great parenting and grandparenting, and coach and teacher lesson here, and that is that the goal is to help somebody mature so that they have responsibility for their freedoms, okay. I'll give you an example, so, a couple years ago our oldest daughter, I apologize, I'm gonna tell a story about it. She said, "Dad, I wanna go to Costa Rica "to go to Bible college for months." I was like, "That's another country "with another language. "And if something happens, it's gonna be a long time "for us to get there to help you." Plus, if you send kids to a foreign country, they get to do what? Make all their own decisions, right? She's still in high school. I'm like, "What the heck, you know, like, what the heck?" When you're 40, that's a good idea, you know, so. But as I prayed about it, I thought, "You know what, "her responsibility level can handle this level of freedom." So I could send her to a foreign country and she can decide her friends, her lifestyle, we can't see it, right? We're not there, we didn't put a security camera in her room. We're not keeping an eye on her. We're talking to her and loving her. Your goal has got to be with your kids to get them to the point where the more responsibility they take is so that they can be responsible with their freedom. My goal with my kids it to get them to be free, literally, like, move out. Get off the payroll. Make your own decision. All right, mom and I are going on a date now that we have time and money. Okay, so my goal is to get my kids to be independent. Legalism causes people to always be dependent. Somebody has to tell you what to do. And the fear is you won't be responsible with your freedom. So what I would tell my kids when they were little all the time is this, "If you want more freedom," and kids want more freedom, right? How many of you got kids and they want freedom? I said, "I'd love to give you more freedom, "but you need to be more responsible. "So the more responsible you are, the more freedom you get, "so that I can trust you with those freedoms, "because you'll participate in them responsibly." The same is true of God. You are a child in the sight of God, that's what he just told us in Galatians four. And God is a Father and we're his kids, and he's trying to get us not to go toward religion and legalism, but to be filled with the Spirit, to walk in wisdom, to make our own decisions, and to walk into freedom responsibly. That's the big idea. Now we'll move a

lot quicker through the rest of the text. And he's gonna compare and contrast things, faith and faithfulness, receiving and rejecting, religion and rebellion. Here's faith and faithfulness. Paul says this, Galatians 5:2 through 6, "Look, I, Paul, say to you that if you accept" what? "circumcision," okay. How many of you, that would not be the thing you would pick? If you're gonna pick one thing, like this is my hill to die on, this is where I'm going down with the ship, circumcision, that's it. All right, how many of you would not pick that? See for us, we look at that and we say, "That's silly and crazy." You and I have our own legalisms and they're silly and crazy. You accept circumcision which was for them the evidence that you are keeping all of God's laws. "Christ will be of" what? Let me tell you this, Christ is either of all advantage or no advantage. And he's saying, if you, if you think that a relationship with Jesus can be enhanced by religious legalism, then Christ is of no advantage to you. "I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision, "that he is obligated to keep" how much of the law? All. Here's how Jesus says it: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Well, he's saying, if you wanna obey one law, you gotta obey all of the laws. The first five books of the Old Testament books of the law have 613 laws. He says, it's an all or nothing deal. All right, there's certain people be like, "Well, there are parts of the Bible I like, "and parts I don't." Most of those are parts related to pants. You're like, "I don't like any of the verses "that tell me what to do with my pants. "But I love the forgiveness verses." No, it's all or nothing, it's all or nothing. "You are," and he's talking about those who are, he calls them false brothers, people who are trusting in their works, not Jesus' works. "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified "by the law, you have fallen away from grace. "For through the Spirit," he's talking about the Holy Spirit, "by faith we are ourselves "eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness," Jesus is coming, heaven is coming. "For in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision "nor uncircumcision counts for anything, "but only faith working through love." Religion never produces love. Legalism never produces love, because only the Holy Spirit, only he can produce love. The fruit of the Spirit, you're gonna learn it next week is, is love, is love. If you are a person who's prone toward rebellion, you're not good at loving people, you're good at using them. You use them for money, you use them for sex, you use them for service. If you're religious, you don't love people, you're not good at loving people, 'cause you're too busy being fearful for them, condemning of them, judging them, and punishing them. And what tends to happen in life is, right, we all have a proclivity, we have a bent in our disposition when we get out of alignment that we go one of these two ways, neither of which is the Holy Spirit, neither of which is the love and grace of God. That's ultimately what he's saying. And he says, circumcision and uncircumcision that's not really the issue. Baptism, not baptism, how you educate your kids, your Bible, whatever your thing is, that shouldn't be your main thing. Paul was circumcised. He's telling these guys, they don't have to be. Circumcision isn't a bad thing. And what happens is that ultimately legalism, when it takes a thing that is neutral and makes it necessary, that's the problem. They did that with circumcision. Ill give you another illustration. When Grace and I were engaged many years ago to get married, I had a male relative come up to me, and he's like, "Okay, tell me about the wedding, "I'm thinking of coming." "Well, we'd love to have you, that'd be great." Said, "Where's it gonna be?" I said, "Well, it's gonna be, it's gonna be in a church." He said, "Who's gonna officiate the ceremony?" "I said, "Our pastor, did our premarital, "great guy, we love him. "And Grace's daddy is also a pastor, "so they're gonna co-officiate." He said, "Yeah, you don't wanna do it like that." I's like, "What?" He

said, "You need to do it "in a Catholic church with a priest." I said, "Why?" He said, "So that'll be a blessed sacrament "in the sight of God. "It'll be a spiritual marriage." Whoa! Being married in this church versus that church, this priest versus this pastor, it's all neutral. What he did, he made it necessary. That's the problem. I said, "Well, my parents were married in a Catholic church, "we're not gonna get married in a Catholic church." I said, "Why do you think it has to be "in a Catholic church with a priest?" And he said, "Because that is the right church." Ugh! And he said, "The priest is the one "who mediates the grace of God." I said, "We will have a priest at our wedding, "his name is Jesus." Okay, he's a great High Priest. So you can just check off the priest box. And God doesn't look down and say, "That roof and that roof, I only go under that roof, "I don't go under that roof." If his kids are there, he'll meet with them wherever they are. And I said, "You know what," I said, "it's not a sin to be married in the Catholic church "with a priest, but it is a sin to say "that that's the only way that God will approve, "because it means I'm doing something to make God approve." God already approves. That's the problem ultimately. So here's what he's saying, that ultimately your faith is only valuable if the object of your faith is faithful. How many of you bought a lemon car? Anybody bought a lemon? When you bought it, you had what? Faith in a lemon! All right. So the car wasn't faithful. You had faith in the car, but the car wasn't faithful to you. How many of you have had a relationship? You had faith in somebody. And they proved to be very untrustworthy. Maybe this was even a business relationship. You're like, "I left myself vulnerable, "I trusted you, and you really took advantage of that." What he's saying is this, that everybody needs to trust somebody. You're gonna have to learn from somebody, you're gonna have to follow somebody, and he says, it ultimately boils down to this, either you trust yourself or you trust Jesus, that's it. And he says, the problem is for those who trust in themselves, "I'm a good person, I'm a moral person," let me say this, that this is my bent and proclivity. When I was not a Christian, I thought I was a good person and a moral person and I thought God graded on a curve and surely I'd be a first-round draft pick. That's what I thought. And then I started reading the Bible, and Jesus says, "Be perfect "as your heavenly Father is perfect." Paul says stuff like, "You gotta keep the whole law." James says if you disobey one section of the law, then all of it is null and void. And what I learned was that God has a pass/fail grading system that ultimately passes perfection, fail is any imperfection. Oh gosh, once I realized that, my God, I'm not perfect. And even if I started today, it's already too late. My life is a test, and I've been taking it up until now and failing. Not only that, Jesus comes and takes the letter of the law and then adds to it the spirit of the law. So the Bible says, "Don't commit adultery." Guys are like, "I didn't." Jesus is like, "Or lust in your heart." And you're like, "Really? "Ah" . Jesus builds upon the Old Testament command, "Don't murder." Says, "And if you say something real nasty "about a fellow Christian, you're murdering in your heart." Really? Here's the problem, we think we're good. And if you don't know how bad you are, you don't appreciate how good Jesus is, okay? Once you realize, I am kindling. There's, I, God, you're perfect, heaven's perfect, I'm not perfect. If this is gonna work out, it ain't me. His name is Jesus. And what he's saying is have faith in Jesus, not yourself, trust in what Jesus did, not what you do, okay, not what you do. So let me tell you, Jesus does three things. He does a great work for you, he lived without any sin. Jesus lived the perfect life in your place. Thank you, Jesus. Not only that, Jesus Christ goes to the cross, he's gonna get to this in the next section, and he substitutes himself and he dies in your place for your sins. And he sets you free from

slavery, from the law, from the demonic, he sets you free. And then he rises from death to conquer death for all who trust in him. That's Jesus' work for you. Jesus then does a work in you. He's talking here about the Holy Spirit. He sends the same presence and power that enabled and empowered his life into your life. Now all of a sudden you're gonna see this next week, and this is where he goes next week. Your nature changes, your desires change, your motives change, your longings change. You undergo this change process from the presence of God at the deepest level of your being. So Jesus does a work for you. He does a work in you. And then he does a work through you. You can now love people and bless people and be gracious and be generous, sharing the grace of God. Because here's the key, the only way you have a relationship is by grace. Your relationship with God, true or false, I hope I'm proving my point, is by grace. Your only relationship with other people, if it's going to be healthy, has to be grace-based. All right, and sometimes this starts at home with our family. I'm married to a woman named Grace, so this is my constant reminder, like, give grace to Grace. Your relationship with Jesus is by grace, your relationship with others is by grace. And ultimately you're either gonna trust in yourself or trust in Jesus, trust in what Jesus does, or trust in what you do. And in this category is all religion, all self-help, all morality, all pull yourself up by your bootstraps, actualize your potential, all of that versus Jesus, versus Jesus. He then continues. Talking about receiving and rejecting. And the principle here is to receive some things, you need to reject others, okay. So if you wanna be faithful to your spouse, you need to reject infidelity. Your spouse would agree with me on that point, okay. To receive some things is to reject others. This is where the cultural myth and demonic lie that all should be tolerated, celebrated, should be proud of, holding parades for, and the Bible says no to receive is also to reject. And so ultimately to receive Jesus is to reject religion, and it's also to reject rebellion. He says it this way. He uses some analogies. Galatians 5:7 through 11. "You were running well." Okay, so imagine you're in a track meet. Our daughter and Grace are both sprinters, and I've been to a lot of track meets and the sprinter always gets a lane. You got your lane, and they've got their lane. They're not supposed to come into your lane. What he's saying is, you were running well, who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. He said, okay, Jesus is setting the pace, he's leading the team, all right. He's out ahead, we're running behind him, and then somebody gets in our lane. They're religious, they're pushy, they're demanding and they shove us off course. Next thing you know we're off the track, we're out of the race. Sometimes you do this to other people. Sometimes other people do this to you. You've cut in their lane, they've cut in your lane, they've shoved you off course, you've shoved them off course. What he says is that ultimately this is a problem that Jesus can solve. How many of you right now, I just feel inclined to ask this in the Holy Spirit, how many of you right now, you're off course? Jesus is here, but I'm going here or I'm going here. I mean, I'm going toward rebellion, or I'm going toward religion, like, I'm veering off course. All right, he says, "No, no, no." You see, the Bible says to fix your eyes on Jesus, right, that's who you're running behind, that's who you're running with, that's who you're running toward. It's the relationship. He uses another analogy from the kitchen. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Leaven is very small, but it overtakes the entire batch and then causes it to magnify and grow. And what he says is that legalism is like leaven. Jesus said it this way, he said, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees." What he was saying is these are the really religious guys, and they're gonna show up and when

they show up, if you let them get in, then they're going to infect everyone with their problem and their poison. How many of you, you have allowed someone to do this in your life? They've showed up with rules and control and punishment and legalism, and now all of a sudden Jesus isn't Lord of your life, they kind of are. And it's not about Lord Jesus, what do you want, it's like, well, what do you want? I live in fear of you rather than faith in him. How many of you are doing this to other people right now? How many of you are, you're trying to leaven their loaf. You're like, "You need to do it this way. "This is the right way. "This is how we do it. "Come on, you're part of our family, "this is, you know, these are our rules. "Hey, this is the way we do it." The question is is that the way God wants it done? That's the problem with the Pharisees. They're always trying to make people like them, rather than trying to become like Jesus. "I have confidence in the Lord "that you will take no other view." He says, you know what, you have the Holy Spirit, you guys are gonna get this figured out. "And the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty "whoever he is." Usually with a religious group of people, they have a leader, they have a spokesman, they have a person who represents them, and they say, "I come on behalf of all of these people "with all of these problems and all of these demands, "and this is our list of expectations." And he says, you know what, that person and those people are not honoring Jesus, so you don't need to honor them. It doesn't mean you don't, I'm not saying dishonor, but I'm saying, you don't honor those who aren't honoring Jesus, particularly those who tend to gravitate toward positions of religious leadership. He goes on to say, "But if I, brothers, "still preach," what? "Circumcision," the little legalism, "why am I still being persecuted? "In that case the offense of the cross has been removed." What Paul is saying is this, Jesus was persecuted to give you grace. And then other people who don't like Jesus and/or the grace of God, they're gonna come into your life and they're gonna persecute you, so that you will not stand firm, hold your ground, and that you will walk away from the grace of God and gravitate toward rebellion or religion. And he's talking here about the cross. He's had a lot to say. He's sort of built up to this moment. What about the cross? The cross is what's the word? An offense. Now, this doesn't mean that we should just be offensive. I've been guilty of that. Sometimes like, "Well, yeah, the reason they don't like us "is 'cause they're offended by the message." And the messenger. I mean, they actually, they don't like you either. So maybe, you know, be nice to them, give them grace. But what does it mean that the cross is offensive? In Jesus' day, the cross was the most offensive way to die. The old hymn calls it the emblem of suffering and shame. What would happen is you would be arrested, you would be condemned, this would all be public, very shameful, it would involve your family, cast a shadow of shame over your family, which is a big deal in Eastern culture. They would parade you through town carrying your cross so everybody could see, "Yep, they're guilty, "they're nasty, they're naughty, they blew it, "they're gonna pay, they're gonna be punished." Nobody had compassion for you, nobody had sympathy. They would jeer, they'd spit on you, they'd make fun of you, they'd, they'd show up to your place of crucifixion, which was usually in a public place. This would be like a grocery store or a shopping center. People are walking by and seeing all of this. And what they would put above you is a list of all the things you were guilty of. And there you would hang bleeding, incontinent, sweating, dying, while people are yelling at you. And you're looking them in the eye. You know what that was? People who saw that, it was an offense. It's like, "Oh, I don't even wanna see that. "This is horrible!" We get grace, because Jesus got offense. We get grace, because Jesus got

persecution. And let me just tell you this, that the cross is still offensive. In every generation, there is some leader who rises up that tries to get rid of what I'll call substitutionary atonement, and that is that Jesus died in our place for our sins, not just to be a good example to those who are suffering, he did much more. And here's why the cross is an offense. Okay, let me tell you the secret. The reason that the cross of Jesus Christ is an offense is because it's a condemnation on human potential. We like to think we're good. We like to think we're evolving. We like to think that we can help ourselves so we have self-help. And the cross says, "No, if you're a good person, "why did that happen to Jesus?" If the problem that God has with you is so severe that Jesus had to die, then surely you cannot believe the illusion that you're a good person and close to what God would want you to be. You and I are made in the image and likeness of God. We have tremendous potential, but until we meet Jesus, it's only the potential to do evil. And the cross shows the potential of humanity. We can murder God, and it shows the grace of Jesus that he would take our place to endure the wrath of God, to provide the grace of God, to pour out forgiveness from God. So here's the big idea. Legalism wants to say, "Here's what I'm doing." The cross says, "No, it is finished. "Jesus did all the work, Jesus did all the work." And what this is, this is humbling, amen. How many of you don't like needing grace? You don't, all right, all right, I need money, that's grace. Please forgive me, that's grace. Please take me back, I'm sorry, that's grace. Here's the good news: Jesus loves to give grace to people. He does, he does. But to receive that grace, you need to empty your hands of all of your performance and all of your rules and all of your controls and all of your legalisms, 'cause as long as you're handing, holding rather onto all of those things which are religion, your hands aren't open to receive grace from Jesus. And so it's by rejecting our performance that we receive his performance. And then his performance does something incredible in us and for us and this is where he concludes. He wraps it all up, if I can bring my themes together, by talking about rebellion and religion. What tends to happen is these are the categories, these are how we get out of alignment. This can even be in a family. How many of you were the religious kid, and your sibling was the rebellious kid? All right. How many of you have been in a church, and there's a fight between the religious and the rebellious people? And you guys have too many rules, and you're not loving. And hey, you guys are sinning and buy some pants. You know the fight ensues. Here's what Paul says about religion and rebellion. Galatians 5:12 through 15, "I wish those who unsettle you would," what's the word? Just read the Scriptures today. "Emasculate themselves." What does that mean? It means exactly what you fear it means, that's exactly what it means. True or false, that could be an offensive statement to a grown man, right? Some things have changed, this is still offensive. Paul is using strong language. You need to know that on occasion, the Bible uses strong language. Not all the time. If you use it all the time, it loses its punch. He uses it rarely. Here he uses it. I'll explain what that means. It means that God creates relationship and Satan counterfeits with demonic religion. I didn't know this, and it dawned on me, Grace and I were in Galatia some years ago. We hired a professor of archeology and history, and he took us out to the ruins of an old pagan temple. It was a feminist religion that worshiped god as mother, all right. Today it would be Wicca, witchcraft, hard feminism, it would be radical environmentalism, the earth is your mother, that kind of thinking. And for them, they worshiped mother god, not Father God, and she was to be the one who bestowed fertility. So she'd get you pregnant or make your crops or business flourish. And she

became very powerful, and the most powerful worshiped pagan deity in that entire region. There was a temple to her as well in the city of Ephesus. There was a riot there when the cross was preached. There's this conflict between these two. Here's where I'm going with the story. He said, as he was explaining the temple and the ruins, the worship of the mother goddess. What he said was, "To be a priest for this temple required "that you castrate yourself, "that you deny your God-given gender." Now, what they were saying was, if you really wanna go varsity, circumcise yourself. Paul is like, "Oh now, that's junior varsity. "Varsity is emasculation." Some of you are like, "I'm playing a different game, then, "I don't wanna play that game at all." That's the point. And what he's saying is circumcision doesn't matter. Some are, some aren't. But if you think that circumcision is something that gets you closer to God, you can't get any closer to God than the grace of Jesus, that's demonic, that's demonic. He goes on. "Only do not use your freedom "as an opportunity for the flesh, "but through love serve one another. "For the whole law's fulfilled in one word, ""You shall love your neighbor as yourself."" He's talking here to the rebellious who use freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. He's gonna talk about this next week in the rest of Galatians five, but that's this fallen predisposition toward rebellion. How many of you have received the grace of God, freedom from God, but you've used it as an opportunity for the flesh? And let me just tell you, Paul is brilliant here, because what he's saying is, some people abuse the grace of God and that causes other people to become legalistic and religious to make rules so that nobody gets grace. Some of you have been Christians for awhile, you've done this to people and they've done it to you. You have taken God's grace as an opportunity for sin. Here's the freedom. The freedom is from sin, not to sin. The freedom is from slavery to relationship with Jesus. The closer you get to Jesus, the further you get from sin. I was dealing with this some years ago. There was a guy I knew, he had a great wife, loved the Lord. He decided that he was also gonna have some girlfriends. His wife, of course, pulled the fire alarm. We don't do that. And I met with him, I said, "What are you doing?" He's like, "Well, my wife, you know, "some other girls I like, and I got girls on the side." And I was like, "What the heck, you're a Christian, right?" He's like, "Yeah." I said, "I how do you explain this?" I'll never forget this conversation. He said, "Well, Jesus died for all my sins, "and I'm forgiven, so whatever I do, "I can't lose my salvation "and God forgives me and I'm fine." I was like, "I don't know if you know Jesus, all right. "I don't know if you know Jesus, ""cause when you realize that he had to die on the cross "for what you do, you wanna become like him "and stop doing what you've been doing, okay." Because we become like the people who love us the most. Those are the most influential people in our lives. Jesus loves you, he wants to be the most influential person in your life. And he wants you to then think about loving other people, serving them, giving grace to them, being generous to them. And what he's saying is that ultimately rebellion, it doesn't understand freedom, and it doesn't understand relationship with Jesus. And then he compares and contrasts that. "But if you bite and devour one another, "watch out that you are not consumed by one another." Which group is that? Those are religious people. Legalism turns people into beasts, that's what he's saying. Satan and demons in the Bible and evildoers are referred to in beastly language. So Satan is called a serpent and a dragon, it's also called a lion. Demons are called pythons, python spirits, goat demons, wild animals, including ostriches, bulls, hyenas, birds, and scorpions. The Bible talks about evil people as vipers, serpents, goats, cows, dogs, wolves, leeches, donkeys, and evil beasts. What he's saying is this, that religious

people attack one another, they bite and devour one another, they destroy one another. And let me just say, my experience here at the Trinity Church has been that we tend to see a lot of people that have experienced this. And maybe even for awhile, they're just like, "Well, I'm rebelling," and they confused religion for relationship with Jesus. You ever seen a dog fight? You ever seen a dog fight? Who wins in a dog fight? Nobody. I lived in a neighborhood. I grew up behind a strip club next to an airport. We had wild dogs that ran all over the neighborhood. You see some of you, you're in Scottsdale. You name your dog. We didn't do that. You put a chip on them so you can find them. We didn't do that. If the dog ran away, what did we do? Get another dog, all right, we're done with that dog. So that dog's now free, jailbreak, okay. And sometimes people that were poor, they would move, and they would just leave their dog. They'd just literally let it out, 'cause they couldn't take it to the apartment or wherever they were moving next. So we had some wild dogs that ran around our neighborhood when I was a kid. And I'll never forget it, at night you could hear them barking and howling, and they get into garbage, and you could hear dog fights. I'll never forget, I was a little boy, and I was driving my bike at a school, and I come around the corner, and boom, I drove right into a dog fight. These wild dogs are attacking, biting, devouring, consuming, it was just a frenzy. I remember as a little boy just being terrified, thinking, this is scary. Satan wants people to act like beasts. He wants them in the name of God to beat the heck out of each other, to criticize one another, to judge one another, to bite, devour, attack, and consume one another. And when this demonic spirit gets into a family, the family begins to die. When this spirit gets into a church family, that church family begins to die. Because the point of a dog fight is death not life. Some of you, I love you, I'm burdened for you, I care for you, it's an honor to have you. Some of you have, have been biting and devouring your spouse, your kids, your friends, not loving; biting and devouring. Some of you have been bit and devoured. Just like, "I don't know if I can walk with Jesus, "I don't know if I wanna go to church, "I don't know if I wanna hang out with Christians. "Ah, every time I tried, it's like I go to pet "the mean dog who bites me." What do we do? Well, we're gonna need Jesus. We're all gonna need Jesus. You rebellious people need Jesus to forgive you of your rebellion, to change your heart, to give you the Holy Spirit so that you can receive his love and start to live out of the grace of God a new life. For those of you who are religious, you need Jesus to forgive you. 'Cause there's two kinds of sin: there's rebellious sin and religious sin. Jesus died for all sin, he died for both kinds of sin. You need Jesus to forgive you, you need Jesus to change your heart, you need Jesus to show you your desperate need for grace so that you can have a healthy relationship with Jesus. And then you need to take that grace and give it away, so that you can have healthy relationship with others. Let me just close with this. If you have Jesus, you have everything you need. If you don't have Jesus, it doesn't matter what you have, that's not what you need. So you know what we're gonna do. This has been a little heavy. I know it's weird, like emasculation, circumcision, water slide Sunday. I know it's a little emotionally complicated, I get that. But I want this to be a time for you to meet with God. I want you to take a little time and ask Holy Spirit, is there any rebellion or religion that I need to own and bring to you? Is there any way that I've been encouraging others toward rebellion or religion and I need to go apologize to them to bring the grace of God into the relationship? I'm gonna invite the band up at this point, and want you to stick around. But what I want you to do, I want you to meet with God. All right, I want you to have the Holy Spirit speak to you, reveal to you exactly what it is that you need to

walk away from today, so that you can grow into the next level of freedom in Christ. And to celebrate and acknowledge that, we're gonna partake of communion. Communion is where we remember Jesus. Not rebellion, not religion, relationship. Okay, there's a God who loves me and gives me grace. And when we partake of communion, we're showing that we accept the offense of the cross, and we need the cross of Christ. Our problem was so desperate, that God had to die for it, and it was sufficient for us to live to overcome it. And as you partake, you're showing that Christ is also still doing a work in you. He's changing you by the person, the presence, and the power of the Holy Spirit. And I just feel inclined to say to some of you, you need to forgive somebody. They've sinned against you, or they've been very legalistic, biting and devouring. Well, the only way to heal that kind of wound is to put grace on it, grace for you, grace for them, grace from Jesus. And I want you guys to be healed up, unburdened, free, filled with the Spirit and hopeful, amen. Father, thank you for an opportunity to teach today. And God, I just feel impressed to pray for those, God, who have been under legalistic environments, and as a result they've felt bite, devoured, and consumed, that God, they would forgive and apply grace and heal. God, I pray for those who are rebellious and they just keep doing the same old thing knowing that Jesus died for it, which he did, and he will forgive them. But he died so that they could put those things to death, too. Help them to do that, Holy Spirit. And God, for those of us who like me incline toward religion and biting and devouring and judging and rulemaking and finger pointing, let us just empty our hands of all of that and receive grace, 'cause we need it to. In Jesus' good name, amen.