

Jesus' Heart for You #10
Our Lawish Heart-His Lavish Heart
~ Galatians 2:15-21

Pastor Tom
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Philip Yancy is a Christian author who has written about 25 books over the past 35 years. These included "What's so amazing about grace?" and "Disappointment with God." I read the Disappointment book when I was going through a hard time in my life. I struggled in my relationship with God because I didn't understand His presence and purpose in that hard time. I think Yancey's book helped me a bit. But that was nearly 30 years ago. I have not read or interacted with anything from Yancy since that time. But I recently listened to an interview of him. He's now 74 and has written a memoir called "Where the Light Fell." It reflects on his life and His journey with God.

He grew up in a poor family in Atlanta Georgia. They first lived in a trailer, not a mobile home. This trailer was 8 feet wide and 28 feet long. His father died when he was one. So it was just his Mom, his older brother and himself. He tells the story of the church he grew up in. He now calls it a white, racist and paranoid church. The Gospel preached was all about following God's commands or else you'd go to Hell. This church averaged one thousand in attendance every week. But for a significant time, they would not allow people of color to worship there.

Eventually that changed. But then a young black student who really like the Bible centered preaching wanted to join the church as a member. So they had a congregational meeting to consider this request. The church voted to reject it. Only whites could become members there.

This was the environment in which Yancy grew up. Eventually he found out a detail about his fathers' death that really shook him. He began to seriously question his faith. He couldn't understand how the people of God could justify excluding fellow human beings from their community. He didn't want to relate to a God who would send you to Hell for disobeying His commands. He stumbled around in darkness for a few years.

The interviewer then asked him what led him back to God. Yancy answered "three things": The beauty of nature; the brilliance of classical music and the deep love he found in his wife. God used each one to reveal Himself and show Yancy who He really was.

The interviewer concluded by asking Yancy how he persevered through the loss of his dad at age 1, a poverty stricken upbringing in a legalistic home and a racist church. Yancy credited the Lord. He said this which really stuck with me. "I got 20 years of life under law; but I now have over 50 years of life under grace. That's a pretty good deal."

Isn't it sad that Yancy had to leave the church to actually find God? Yet his story is not unique. So called Bible-believing churches can twist the Bible to justify Gospel crushing regulations. We call this legalism – the belief that if you keep certain rules or laws you will be right with God. This can slip into our lives in different ways and forms. It can lead to completely missing the heart of God for us.

So today we're going to look at this issue of living by law or grace. Dane Ortlund, in relationship to Jesus' heart in his book *Gentle and Lowly*, addresses this in the chapter entitled is "Our Lawish hearts; His lavish heart." We will look at a passage where legalism infected the heart of one Jesus' disciples for a while. Another Christian confronted him about this. Then he tells the story in the passage we'll look at. My prayer for this message is that we will see that we can live under Jesus' grace rather than law because of what He's done and of His heart. Our text is Galatians 2. Page 825 in the Bibles you have in front of you. This is the apostle Paul writing.

Galatians 2:11-21 ESV

(The name Cephas is another name for Peter)

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet 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.

But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not

nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

To understand this situation, we need to step back for a moment to see the broader context. Remember Jesus was Jewish? He came from a Jewish family with a bloodline from King David. The 12 disciples were all Jewish. Jesus' message and ministry happened mostly among the Jewish population. At that time, very distinct cultural, ethnic and religious differences separated Jews and non-Jews or Gentiles.

Jews generally despised Gentiles as unclean and pagan. They called them names like "dogs" and "the uncircumcised." Sinners. There was mutual animosity between the two races and groups. Orthodox or strict Jews would not travel through a region called Samaria because the Samaritans descended from Jews who intermarried with other races. That's why the parable of the Good Samaritan was so scandalous. Jews did not eat with Gentiles. Why they might get ritually defiled by the food a Gentile served that went outside Jewish food laws. Jews would not enter a Gentile home for fear of defilement. The morning of Jesus' crucifixion, religious leaders would not go into the Roman Governor's palace lest they be defiled for the Passover. This separation and animosity had gone on for centuries. They lived in a prejudicial system with much tension.

Along comes Jesus who ministers to mostly Jewish communities. But He also ministers in non-Jewish regions. He ministers to Romans, Greeks the Syro-Phonecian woman and the demon possessed man who lived among the graves. They were all Gentiles. This pointed to the universal invitation of the Gospel for Jew and Gentile. The church was supposed to be a community that tore down the societal walls of separation. Both Gentiles and Jews could come together under one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Yet God's intentions for this multi-ethnic, multi-cultural church did not just happen in a day. When the de-segregation laws got passed in the southern United States in the 1960's. Society did not completely desegregate the next day. It would take years and decades for this change to fully take effect. The same was true for the integration of Jews and Gentiles in the early church.

Yet God helped the early leaders move in this direction. He gave Peter a vision in Acts 10 to make this point clear. Peter gets the message. In Acts 10:28 he says “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.”

Yet some Jews concluded any Gentile Christian still had to follow Jewish law to become a full Christian. This included circumcision. God instituted this as a sign of the covenant with the Israelites way back in Genesis 17. So this “circumcision party” that came to Antioch that day expected Gentile converts to essentially observe Jewish law.

This brings us to the incident in Galatians 2, starting in verse 11. Peter comes to visit the new church in Antioch, Syria – not Israel. It had Gentiles in it. Peter has no problem eating with them. Everything is fine until some Jews from the “circumcision party,” verse 12, show up. They trusted Christ as Messiah but insist that Gentiles needed to follow Jewish religious laws to fully enter the Christian community. So those of the circumcision party would not eat with Gentile Christians lest they become unclean.

They show up and Peter joins them. He withdraws from the Gentiles. Maybe he knew about the tension these men from Jerusalem might cause if they saw him eat with Gentiles. So Peter maybe thought, “I’ll slide back into Jewish practice. It’s still pretty widespread in our culture after all. The Gentile brothers will understand. I’ll just do this while these men are here so as not to make waves.” But Peter was a leader. He was one of Jesus’ closest disciples. He had a lot of influence. According to verse 13 every other Jewish Christian present followed Peter in this. They all separated from the Gentiles because they thought it necessary to keep these laws to remain true Christians.

Paul sees this and immediately discerns this cannot go on. This does not line up with the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic new people of God that Jesus came to save. So he publicly confronts Peter! Verse 11. “I opposed him to his face.” Paul didn’t just say, “Peter, can I talk to you privately.” In verse 14, we read, “I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force Gentiles to live like Jews?’” So imagine that. Everyone’s having their lunch and talking. There’s groups of Jews over with Peter. The Gentiles are over here. Paul calls out Peter. The room

goes silent as Paul poses this penetrating question to Peter. He's saying, "Peter, you came here and ate with Gentiles. You didn't insist on them following Jewish food laws. Yet some from the circumcision party show up and you suddenly separate from the Gentiles, acting like they do need to follow Jewish laws to be complete Christians?"

Then, we don't know what happened. Paul doesn't tell us how Peter responded. We're not even sure if verse 15 continues to focus on the Antioch episode. It seems like Paul changes his focus from storytelling in verse 11-14 to teaching from verses 15-21. But the main point of 11-14 is that Peter acted as if Gentiles needed to follow Jewish law in addition to faith to be full Christians. Paul confronts Peter about this. The true Gospel says, anyone can come to Christ simply by faith.

That's what he goes on to explain in the next verses. Verse 15. "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." Justified means to "be right" with God or "gain right standing with God." It means that the conditions have been met to enter into relationship with God. Those conditions required atonement for our sin. Since God is holy, He cannot by His nature fellowship or be in close relationship with someone who is covered in sin. But God provided the way to resolve that. We can have our sins covered by faith in Christ and what he did on the cross. Then God considers us covered by Christ and His blood sacrifice for us. We are justified. We don't have to do some work or keep obeying some of God's laws to stay in right relationship with God or for Him to keep loving us. That's what he says at the end of verse 16. "So we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Verses 17-19 are hard to understand. I think Paul addresses a potential objection. If we say that we don't get justified by keeping the law, then that means we can get justified by faith. Yet after we're justified, we still sin. We find that we are still sinners. This new pathway actually leading us to sin? No. Because in fact, we still sinned if we tried to get justified by law keeping. We discovered we couldn't perfectly keep the law. So we actually have to die or let go of attempting to get right with God by law keeping. Instead, we need to live to God.

Then in verse 20, Paul describes the dramatic change in his life. Here we also find Jesus' heart for us. So he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." So this life in Christ resulted in massive change in Paul's life. His old self and ways got crucified with Christ. He no longer lives for himself and his selfish desires. Christ lives in him and empowers him to live in a God honoring way. He describes this in the last half of verse 20. "And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith." Do you see that? He lives his daily Christian life by faith. So we need an initial faith in Jesus Christ to receive this justification. We need continual faith to live in a God-honoring way each day.

At the end of verse 20, we find Jesus' heart for us. **What is Jesus' heart for us? Jesus loved us and gave Himself for us.** "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Out of His great love for us, Jesus gave up His life for us. Because of His great love and sacrifice we can receive reconciliation with God by trusting in Christ and what He has done.

But many of us already know that. I think people in Philip Yancy's church learned this. I think Peter knew this. So what happened? Peter, Philip Yancy's former church and you and I might slip into a performance based relationship with God. If I keep these laws. If I obey these commands God will keep loving me or at least he won't send me to Hell. Even though we started our relationship with God by faith in Jesus Christ, we can slide into a performance based relationship. That's what Paul confront the Galatians with. In Galatians 3:3 he writes, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?"

We can slip into a performance-based relationship with God. That means we by faith received Christ as our Savior and Lord. But then we conclude that to keep this relationship and keep God's love, we have to perform. We have to do good works or he might cut us out of his family. He might send us to Hell. So we better keep on doing good works. Now when I put it like that, it may seem ridiculous. So why would we even go down that path?

Why would we live like this? Why might we think that we have to keep obeying and doing to keep or increase God's love? **We may have experienced a performance-based love in human**

relationships. That was part of Philip Yancy's issue. His mother raised the two boys from a performance based love standard. If they obeyed her and did exactly what she said, things were good. But if they disobeyed her, she blew up with anger again and again and threatened them with abandonment, hell or disowning.

There are many stories of adult children living to prove themselves to a parent who seldom if ever said "I love you" or "showed love." The children didn't know if their parent loved them. So they lived a life of performance in an attempt to gain or earn their parent's approval and love.

It can be a discouraging way to live. You never know if what you've done is enough to satisfy and bring forth love from that one person. The prodigal son concluded that his father no longer loved him because of what he had done. So he returned with the intention of becoming a hired laborer. The elder son also lived with a performance based approach to love. He concluded that since he had performed perfectly, his father would love him more. But when his father showed compassionate, gracious love, it dismantled this performance-based system we have but told of the prodigal son's response. But the Elder brother remained outside bitter and angry. We can project this performance-based expectation onto God. We conclude, if we want to keep or increase God's love for us, we need to do good works and perform well. Our hearts harden.

Yet this thinking reveals an inaccurate view of God and His love for us. So we need the Bible to correct us. Does Galatians 2:20 say, "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by performance before the Son of God who will keep loving me if I do enough good works." No. "The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me." He did that before we were born. So we can live by faith every day in one who already loves us and gave Himself for us. We need to examine if we have adopted this performance based approach to receive God's love.

Why else might we slide into a performance based relationship with God to earn, keep or increase His love? **We may have concluded that love only happens during times of relational harmony.** It is way easier to feel loved when we're getting along well with someone or when they approve of us. When a parent and child get along well, it's a blessing. Who wouldn't want to stay in that sphere of

relational harmony? Yet, if we think love is only found in the warm, fuzzy and harmonious moments, how do we interpret harder moments? Or when hard things happen? We can conclude God is mad at us. God doesn't love us. So we've got to do something to earn it back to return to a state of harmony. Is love only found when things are harmonious? Say we blow it? We need to have a hard conversation or our parent has to discipline us. Does that mean they've stopped loving us? Not necessarily. In fact, their willingness to have a hard conversation or discipline us is a form of love. Remember we talked a couple of weeks ago about the reality that God sometimes afflicts His people? This is severe form of love often used to call them back or rescue them from destruction. God will discipline those He loves. Proverbs 3:12. It's not harmonious in that moment but it is an act of love for our good. Hebrews 12:11 says "For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

So we need to examine our hearts to see if we are allowing law keeping or performance expectations to cloud our relationship with God. How might we know this is happening? Well, if our Christian life feels like drudgery and obligation or lived in fear of God, we may have slipped into this. We think we have to earn, keep or increase Christ's love by doing things that please Him. We can never be sure if He's actually satisfied. So we get tired and maybe give up.

Instead we need hear that the Son of God loved us and gave Himself for us before we ever thought of Him. Ortlund gives us a picture to grasp how we need to change. "Think of a vent that connects to your bedroom from the furnace room. If you keep it closed on a cold winter day, the heat will circulate through your home. But you will not experience much warmth because you're closing it off. Opening the vent floods your room with warmth. The heat was already there, waiting to be accessed. But you were not benefiting from it." When we take a performance based approach to our walk with Jesus, it's like we've closed ourselves off from his love. Our relationship becomes cold, rigid, guarded and transactional. We can look at the Lord like an angry landlord who is only appeased when we pay our rent. But otherwise, he wants nothing to do with us. Galatians helps us open the vent to the one who loved us and gave Himself for us.

So today, as we come to the Lord's Table, I want to invite you to open up the vent of your life to warmth Son of God's love. Maybe you've been living as if He's disappointed with you most of the time. So you've pulled back just to ensure you don't bug Him or upset Him. That's not how Jesus sees us. That's not His heart for us – for you. He loved us and gave Himself for us before we were born. When we recognize this reality our Christian walk changes from one of drudgery to delight; from obligation to joy; from insecurity to the security of His steadfast love. Then we don't abuse this love by not caring about sin. Living from Christ's love is motivated by a desire to joyfully honor Christ because of the firm foundation His steadfast love gives us.

If you have never received Christ by faith, you can now. Do so by putting your faith in Him. Through your faith, God adopts you into His family as His child. You begin the journey of living from Christ's love. If you have received Christ by faith initially, return or keep living from Christ's love.

Open the vent to allow the warmth of Christ's love flow into your soul.