

Homeschoolers Anonymous

A Project of Homeschool Alumni Reaching Out

Stiff-Necked Legalism: By Chris Jeub

October 28, 2013 · by R.L. Stollar · in Homeschool, NCFCA, Parenting ·



(<http://homeschoolersanonymous.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/jeub.gif>)

Chris Jeub and his family. Photo credit: <http://www.chrisjeub.com> (<http://www.chrisjeub.com>).
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HA note: I am truly honored to share the following thoughts with you from Chris Jeub. I have known the Jeub family for over a decade. I remember meeting them at the first national homeschool forensics tournament that was held at Point Loma Nazarene University. When I created and sold my debate resource books, I usually had Chris in mind as my main “competitor” in the market. I also had the pleasure of teaching at one of Chris’s Training Minds debate camps in Colorado years ago. (Also, in case you didn’t catch it: when Kevin Swanson recently talked about homeschool speech and debate and “homeschool apostates,” the only person

Swanson mentioned by name (<http://www.cynthiajeub.com/2013/10/23/in-defense-of-devils-advocate/>) was Chris.) It may seem odd to some of you that we are featuring a post by Chris. He has a bunch of kids and his family has appeared on reality TV. He might seem like one of “those people.” But I have immense respect for him and I personally believe that he understands a core part of HA’s message: that ideology should never take the place of love and humanity in either family or education. This is a vitally important message, and I appreciate beyond words that Chris is willing speak up on this matter. ~Ryan Stollar

Stiff-Necked Legalism: By Chris Jeub

This Homeschool Anonymous group is fascinating. I’m very much enjoying your articles. As an educator of 20+ years, HA seems like a hot bed of pedagogical information that I would have loved to have years ago.

I must be honest, though.

My first impression was you were acting like troubled teenagers.

Hyper-dramatizations of your upbringings, lashing out at your parents, edgy poetry, obvious attempts to rattle my cage. I thought you were 20-somethings who are upset with the world and were determined to force a change.

Yeah, a lot like me in my 20s.

Most of my homeschool friends were this way. We didn’t appreciate the way we were raised, and we set out to change it. Some of us are still irked at our parents. But in our youth, we pressed on with our divine calling, separated ourselves from the public schools, and pressed through new ground called homeschooling. I considered myself a radical, still do. And that is good. (You can read of my homeschool journey here (<http://www.chrisjeub.com/my-history-with-home-education/>).)

After spending a good amount of time reading your posts, I began to see my first impression was not accurate. You’re a very interesting group of young people. I know, I know, you’ve been called “apostates” and rebels of an ill sort.

I’m sorry that some people — including me — jump to judgment.

Don’t let that get you down. I am seeing a very raw and needed message to the homeschool community brewing, and much of it is coming from you.

I’m not sure if you know me, but I’ve been a homeschool leader since 1992 when I started. A couple of the board members on HA (Ryan and Andrew) are former alumni of my speech and debate program. If you don’t mind, would you like to hear a confession of mine? I think you will be

surprised. I also think you'll find a lot of hope in how similar confessions are sweeping through families, and it may bring about the change you are looking for.

Legalism Is Poison

I have many friends in the homeschool movement, and some of them are still stuck in a legalistic, judgmental rut. Perhaps your parents are in this, too. Legalism was a poison that, early on, stole many fruitful years away from my family.

Back in the day I entertained the idea that perhaps following the Law of Moses was worth the pursuit, thinking pride was a noble quest for my family, and it produced nothing of value in our home. It is like we believed we had a secret potion that we fed our family, that if only we followed some legalistic formula, we would most certainly process perfect kids.

Parents like Wendy and me didn't realize the poison until later when the outcome shocked us awake.

I hesitate to call this "religious" legalism. I prefer "stiff-necked." I know many religious people who are gracious, loving individuals, just like I know some non-religious jerks. I can't tag religion with much blame when it comes to legalism. I view legalists much like Jesus viewed the Pharisees: sure, he talked with them and ran in similar circles, but Jesus found them arrogant and annoying. When the legalists started dictating how people should live their spiritual lives, Jesus got extremely upset.

I think legalism has much more to do with the lack of love, not the law.

Love in the House

I wish more homeschoolers would read my family's book, [Love in the House](http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204) (<http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204>). It's a confession that exposes a weak area in our parenting. For years we modeled the homeschool expectation of raising kids right, and our older children didn't appreciate it. The book has helped counsel thousands through the faulty idea that their legalism would pump out "perfect" kids. In a nutshell: Jesus had it right from the start.

The only law that you need to get right as a parent is love. Miss that mark, and you miss them all.

Since 2007 when we were featured on TLC, [my family](http://www.jeubfamily.com) (<http://www.jeubfamily.com>) has enjoyed rich exploration in the deep relearning of love that has made our lives — and our homeschooling — more valuable and wholesome. Wendy and I are more patient, kind, and caring. Our children are more joyful and carefree. As we explain in [Love in the House](http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204) (<http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204>), love came crashing in and it was like we were reborn into a relationship with God that we were blind to when we were attempting to reach a spiritual perfection.

Spiritual perfection. Some try to clear this bar. I had my share of trying, and, in a way, was encouraged by my legalistic friends.

Such legalism quickly turns sour, judgmental, and creepy, and it is wrong.

Hope for Homeschooling

Those who grew up in the homeschool movement in the past 20 years remember such things as fiery sermons at homeschool conferences, segregation from community activities, the rise (and bitter splits) of “homeschool churches,” and other sub-cultures that homeschool communities created. A symbol of the homeschool legalistic code: the denim jean jumper. There wasn’t a woman out of uniform at a homeschool conference in the mid-90s.

I’m pleased to report that this has changed considerably. I see a wide array of homeschool curriculum available to families. Parents are more trendy and diverse than ever before. They aren’t led along by the nose, they’re more selective of their choices, and I see very few denim jumpers at homeschool gatherings anymore.

This gives me hope.

Our family has changed, and I believe others will, too. There are still strongholds — I’m thinking of quite a few friends who will find me a heretic for posting on this website — but all in due time. It has been seven years since my family walked out of our legalistic stronghold, but I still have sacred cows to slaughter. That’s okay.

Love is patient and kind, and in the end, He wins out.

And this is why I find you so fascinating. Reading of your pains and trials here at Homeschool Anonymous has captured my heart and attention. I’m encouraged, largely because I see many parents “liking” your work, not to spy or prowl, but to better understand a fatal flaw in the homeschool movement, perhaps one they sympathized with too much.

Stiff-necked legalism is poison.

As mentioned, my family’s story is represented in our book [Love in the House](http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204) (<http://www.amazon.com/Love-House-Filling-Greatest-Commandment/dp/0979564204>).

Perhaps your parents are still knotted up, judgmental, and unloving. I invite you to forward this article to them — even if you’re estranged from them, perhaps for healthy reasons. The life of love is incredibly liberating, and I encourage you to keep your hope for resolution for you and your family.

About the Author



(<http://homeschoolersanonymous.files.wordpress.com/2013/10/chrisjeub.jpg>)

Chris Jeub.

Chris Jeub (<http://www.chrisjeub.com/>) lives in Monument, Colorado and is the author of *Jeub's Guide to Speech & Debate* and co-author of several books with other debate coaches and his wife, Wendy. He currently serves as president of Training Minds (<http://trainingminds.org/>) which includes setting up camps, classes and curriculum for schools and home schools across the country for academic speech and debate. He also owns a publishing company, Monument Publishing (<http://monumentpublishing.com/>), that publishes curriculum and resources for public, private and home schools.

Chris is father to 16 children, all from his dear wife, Wendy, of 20+ years of marriage. They've been on TV — featured in *Kids by the Dozen* on TLC in 2007 — and published books about love in the house (<http://jeubfamily.com/>).

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Tags: Chris Jeub, homeschool apostates, homeschool speech and debate, Homeschoolers Anonymous, Kevin Swanson, Kids by the Dozen, Love in the House, Stiff-Necked Legalism

25 responses to “Stiff-Necked Legalism: By Chris Jeub”

1. Ricker October 28, 2013 at 5:14 am · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Very astute observation about legalism, but I think it goes a little deeper than that. In my experience, and the experience I saw of others around me, the totalitarian upbringing was a result of religious love and a desire for perfection. I think this can make it very difficult to raise children.

If you're a Bible believing, born again Christian, then you believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that an unsaved person is going to hell. With that fundamental belief in mind, it only makes sense that a parent would view their most important priority of raising their child as making sure their child was saved. While I cannot fault this idea, I can fault the method. First time parents are confused; raising a child is a terrifying experience fraught with worry of failure. So these parents turn to "self-help" parenting books, and these books are steeped with legalism. The basic premise is that in order to ensure that your children grow up to be saved, you must shield them from all things of the world. You must discipline their actions in hopes that you direct their thoughts toward religion, so that they grow up steeped in religious dogma and belief, and their soul is saved.

The problem with this approach is its rigidity and reliance on authority. It works with a majority of children, I cannot question that. But the faith and beliefs it installs are not unlike planting an oak tree in the desert: there are no deep roots to provide support because the faith and beliefs are not the child's. I remember when I first headed off to college; I could not wait to sit in my biology or philosophy class and take on the atheistic evolutionary professor and win over the hearts and minds of my classmates through my testimony. But my faith, my beliefs, were not mine. I had been told what to believe, how to believe it. I was never provided with well-thought out arguments for my faith, just surface reasons and feelings.

I never had the heroic confrontation with a professor like I envisioned. In fact, I never had a confrontation at all. Very quickly after getting to college and interacting with non-Christian people, I discovered that all the legalistic ideas, the black and white morals my parents had spanked into me, were wrong. The death blow to my faith was delivered not by the faithless, but from the instructions of the faithful.

Chris makes a very important point: parents should operate with love towards their children. But they should ensure that they have long-sighted love, because short-sighted love seeks to shield the child from harm. Long-sighted love allows the child to grow, to learn, to experience sadness and pain as well as joy and pleasure. A child must be allowed to explore and to question if the roots of his faith are to grow deep. Above all else, parents, especially religious parents, need to allow the child's beliefs to be his own.

◦ [NEURONOTES October 28, 2013 at 6:34 am · Edit · Reply →](#)

"Above all else, parents, especially religious parents, need to allow the child's beliefs to be his own.

Richer, that was an eloquent comment, and I concur with everything to wrote. The very fact that religions, such as sects of Christianity, teach that a 'loving' God created a hell for his creation **who didn't follow the rules**, and that this God is a jealous god, lends to legalism, Othering, and undermines emotional intelligence. "Us and Them"

I was raised to obey authority and not question. To do so was a form of rebellion. I was taught in Christian schools and church to believe in Hell and this caused confusion, fear, and nightmares for me when I was a child. I couldn't wrap my little brain around this kind of 'love'. When I grew older and studied the Bible extensively, it became apparent to me that the very act of indoctrinating children had to do with reward from approval on high.

To parents who indoctrinate their children to believe in their religion, their God — I ask of you to search your hearts. Why are you doing it? What is your truest motive behind your actions?

Neuropharmacological studies show that anticipation of a reward (i.e., heaven, recognition, approval) causes surges of dopamine (a neurotransmitter) in the reward center (nucleus accumbens) of the brain. This can lead to addictive behavior because dopamine is the most addictive chemical on the planet.

@Chris — thank you for your assisting in helping to reverse the untold damage that has been done via sugarcoated legalism in the name of love.

2. [forgedimagination](#) [October 28, 2013 at 10:04 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Thank you very much for this piece, Chris, and for being willing to come here and share part of your story in this way.

However, I would like to echo something Ricker said— while I totally agree with you that legalism is pernicious, and a “poison,” it’s really only a surface-level symptom of a much bigger problem. You hint at it by presenting love as the opposite of legalism, but that’s only true in a very superficial sense.

Love is the opposite of the theological system that fosters legalism. A theological system that is based on a God that rules through fear, dominance, anger, and wrathful, righteous judgment can only result in legalism. However, if a theological system has as its basic premise that God loves us— a concept I was taught was “new age” and “hip” and “wishy-washy” and “makes God a wimp”— legalism likely won’t arise from that system.

It’s the whole system that we need to talk about— the system that delivers unbridled, totalitarian control into the hands of a very select few. The rules, the legalism, the restraints, they’re just superficial.

◦ [Chris Jeub](#) [October 28, 2013 at 11:00 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

I’m not sure we disagree. “However, if a theological system has as its basic premise that God loves us...legalism likely won’t arise from that system.” Right on. What in my article breaks from this?

◦ [forgedimagination](#) [October 28, 2013 at 11:24 am](#) · [Edit](#) ·

I don't think it was a "break," necessarily, just that it wasn't something you highlighted and I felt was crucial.

- *Ricker* [October 28, 2013 at 1:16 pm](#) · [Edit](#) ·

I think it was more what you didn't say. I've seen many people say that you shouldn't abuse your children or be overly legalistic but instead raise your children with love. Unfortunately, they don't detail what that love likes.

In a religious based upbringing, oftentimes the greatest duty of the parents is to make sure that children are raised to be born again. If you truly believe your unsaved child will burn for eternity, then loving them must involve trying to save their eternal soul. It's this aspect that allows legalism to seep into families, because sometimes, "god is love" isn't enough to convert some people. These parents love their children so much that they are will to try anything, do anything if it means their children will be saved.

Let me ask you, if your son/ daughter grew up to be a vocal atheist, able to logically defend this belief against any christian attack, would you feel like you had failed as a parent?

3. *Lana* [October 28, 2013 at 10:11 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Thanks for writing. Great post.

I'm a little out of the loop with young homeschool moms in the US (I do know a lot of young homeschool moms in SE Asia. But most there homeschool because circumstances make it necessary. I'm not sure how many do it from conviction).

When I went off to college less than 10 years ago, homeschool mothers were very critical. They told my mom, "I can't believe you let her go." I always said, "They don't get to stop me." 8 or 9 years later, these parents have let their own children go to college. So one could say there is some improvement. But yet....they still would look down on me as lesser for my liberal beliefs, their children still are going, or have gone through, courtship, and their kids are still filling up their own quiver.

To be clear, I *don't* think there is any thing wrong with a homeschool alumni growing up, homeschooling her own kids, and having a bunch of kids. But this reminds me of a story. After I graduated from the university, my undergrad professor wrote me a killer awesome letter of recommendation and wanted me to go to the Social though PhD program at the University of Chicago. I turned down the opportunity, and my professor was puzzled. Then she told me, when I visited her:

"I suppose you are just moving, getting married, and are going to homeschool."

I got angry because how dare her put down my desire.

Now 5 years later, I get it. Her concern wasn't that I might get married and have a bunch of kids. That wasn't her concern. Her concern was that I didn't full know my options. Her concern was that I didn't know that my mind could be used for society. Her concern was that I was making my decisions based upon my conservative culture, and not my heart.

I have no regrets the last few years. God knew what I needed, and he knew that I would have never listened to philosophy and theory to get healing – because I was blocked from receiving truth from books.

But this is still my concern among homeschool parents today. As each of my friends get married one by one and have baby after baby, I think of that conversation with my professor. Do my friends truly know all their options? I will know there is a mass exodus going on when I see kids making formed decisions.

As far as jumpers, this reminds off of one of our scavenger hunt questions at the HSA reunion a few years ago, "Find a girl who has never wore a jumper." There was maybe one or two girls out of 250-300 attendees who had not. Zoom 6 or 7 years later. I bet it would be a lot easier to find one who had not today.

ATI's attendance has dropped way down too, I think. Hardly ever year of a young 30s couple in in ATI.

- [Chris Jeub October 28, 2013 at 11:04 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

I chuckled a lot through your story. Wendy and I totally identify. I bet your kids will have a great homeschool experience! =)

4. [Heidi Underhill October 28, 2013 at 10:16 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →
Forgedimagination

I think I am not fully understanding what you are saying.

I think that only a section of Christians teach that God is love is new age. Even my most fundamentalist friends would not agree with this. I don't think most American Christians or even home schoolers agree with a complete totalitarian system as right and true. There are some but not most.

Chris you are right when you say many parents of younger children read this blog in order to try to do things better then the first generation of home schooling parents. I am one of them. I am a born again Christian, but not a fundamentalist.

- [Chris Jeub October 28, 2013 at 11:08 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Keep resisting that false teaching. It's the epitome of legalism. Thinking that the idea of "God is love" is New Age is, well, heresy. Countless verses can be listed, but I'll stick with the most "fundamental": 1 John 4:8. 'Nuff said.

5. [Linda File](#) [October 28, 2013 at 10:38 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Out of a fundamentalist upbringing (which I did not leave until age 45), I sympathize with your need to give your view of this site. I recall how troubling it was that people were faced with serious struggles and life issues related to the stridency of fundamentalism and, often, by extension homeschooling. If they only knew how wonderful and sincere and happy our lives were, they would want to live our way too. It is evident that you have become an expert, having done this right. (As the pastor said, “You can afford to be narrow-minded if you are right.”) Children must be ‘trained up’ that they ‘not depart’. So you homeschool, you advocate, you have molded your lives around it, you benefit financially. You choose to raise your family this way. However, for those of us who have walked away, there is great depth in the choice and in the long and anguished personal and philosophical journey. For me it has been just over a decade-long progression to freedom. This freedom feels so good that I would not exchange it for anything, even the friendships we lost (everyone I once knew in fundamentalism ostracizes me in whispers as a “liberal” – I am the enemy, somehow). Yet, the very thing, the essential thing I had hoped to give my children in homeschooling them – the ability to think – is the thing we have all finally achieved.

◦ [Chris Jeub](#) [October 28, 2013 at 11:13 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Your short testimony stirs up many similar convictions of mine. One in particular, the subtitle of my debate curriculum company: “think, speak and persuade.” I have to remind the fundamentalists in my circles, “IN THAT ORDER.” Thanks for sharing.

◦ [Linda File](#) [October 28, 2013 at 11:40 am](#) · [Edit](#) ·

And yet, truly thinking, is at its core, diametrically opposed to all that fundamentalism in any form represents. (Way to insert a reference to your curriculum company, by the way. Ahhh, marketing, how it compels.)

6. [Shawn Mathis](#) [October 28, 2013 at 12:14 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

“It is like we believed we had a secret potion that we fed our family, that if only we followed some legalistic formula, we would most certainly process perfect kids.”

Well said.

◦ [Chris Jeub](#) [October 28, 2013 at 1:40 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Thank you, Shawn.

7. [Impressed](#) [October 28, 2013 at 12:34 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Thanks for saying this, Mr. Jeub. This really needed to be said by a Christian homeschool leader. Glad you were up for the task.

◦ [Chris Jeub](#) [October 28, 2013 at 1:40 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Thank you, I really appreciate that.

8. [sarahejones](#) [October 28, 2013 at 5:36 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Well, I'd prepared myself to hate this, but I'm pleasantly surprised. I'm an atheist now and it's wearying to be upheld as the Worst Thing That Could Ever Possibly Happen, like the Kevin Swansons of the world so often do. I think my parents would probably agree with what you've written, too, even though both their children left the fold. And because this is their approach, we're able to have a relationship. We wouldn't, if they hadn't undergone a similar transformation.

- [Chris Jeub October 29, 2013 at 1:14 pm](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

It sounds like you're healing, and it's great to hear you and your parents are back to having a relationship. I agree, some of the vitriol from the anti-atheist crowd isn't kind or patient, and I'm glad to hear you're bigger than that. Thanks for listening, Sarah.

9. [Reid Hall October 29, 2013 at 2:33 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Amen Chris. It's taken years for us to begin to work our way out of this. Thanks. You are an inspiration to me.

-Reid Hall

10. Pingback: [Love Misapplied](#) · [Edit](#)

11. Pingback: [Stiff-Necked Legalism](#) · [Edit](#)

12. Pingback: [Love Misapplied: A Response to Chris Jeub | H. A.](#) · [Edit](#)

13. [Tim December 3, 2013 at 5:54 am](#) · [Edit](#) · [Reply](#) →

Question: how do you define legalism? The word is often misused just when a Christian disagrees with another Christian over a conviction. Too often, using the word violates rules of debate, as calling someone a legalist is argument by character assignation. Using the word can also be a diversionary tactic away from the real issues. If i have a conviction just to be self righteous,

that certainly is wrong. But if my convictions is a result of love if God and neighbors

14. Pingback: [Great Homeschool Convention: Cincinnati | Chris Jeub](#) · [Edit](#)

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