



Legalism in Salvation and Spirituality

Legalism is any merit system that operates based on works by which man tries to please God. It is the antithesis of grace. It is the attempt of man to assist God and an attempt to glorify God apart from divine power. There are different systems of legalism, but all adding something to faith belief. Legalism is anti-grace.

Mixture System for Salvation

The mixture system is believe plus something to be saved. Believe and confess, believe and fully surrender, believe and walk an aisle, believe and shed great tears of repentance at the altar, believe and join our church, believe and give up your bad habits, believe and be circumcised, believe and keep the Mosaic Law, and believe and be sincere. None of these accomplish salvation. Salvation can only be by faith alone in Christ alone – faith plus nothing.

Works For Spirituality

Tabooism. Asceticism. Tarry and fast, wait upon the Lord, agonize in prayer by praying through, and crucifying self. Self never cancels out self.

Extrabiblical revelation. Ecstatic experiences are horrible. Often these are called spirituality, but this leads to correlating spirituality with how one feels.

Ego lust. This is operating out of fellowship. Motivation is by ego rather than the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 2:18, “inflated without cause” means you can do a right thing in a wrong way and thus you bomb out.

“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,” (Colossians 2:18, NASB)

Some form of idolatry is associated with this system. 1 Cor. 10:12-21.

“Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.” (1 Corinthians 10:14-17, NASB)

The Galatian believers had been taken in by legalism and were trying to live under the Mosaic Law as their way of life. Spirituality by works only puts a believer in a strait jacket. Legalism works its way through the whole group. It destroyed the Jerusalem church for example. Leaven is a symbol of legalistic evil and it “leavens the whole lump.” Acts 21:18-26. See category on [Leaven](#).

“After he had greeted them, he began to relate one by one the things which God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they are all zealous for the Law;” (Acts 21:19-20, NASB)

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day, purifying himself along with them, went into the temple giving notice of the completion of the days of purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them.” (Acts 21:26, NASB)



Warning against the repercussion of legalism. Legalism teaches heresy. Gal. 5:10.

“I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.” (Galatians 5:10, NASB)

Paul had confidence in the believers in Galatia through the Lord and that they would have the proper mental attitude toward legalism. They were to ignore the legalistic teachers and throw them out. The legalist “one who is disturbing you” will be judged. If believers, they will be under divine discipline and be miserable. If unbelievers, they will be judged in the Lake of Fire forever. A legalist always causes trouble in a local church and their leaven can stir up the whole church. A legalist must be dealt with very severely.

Paul did not preach circumcision. However the legalist persecuted him. If legalism is the way of salvation (circumcision) then the Cross is of no value. Calvary is the epitome of grace and those who try to work for their salvation or spirituality are offended by the Cross. Gal. 5:11.

“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.” (Galatians 5:11, NASB)

Paul had a wish or desire concerning these false teachers who always were pushing circumcision for salvation. Gal. 5:12.

“I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.” (Galatians 5:12, NASB)

Paul is saying that they are always pushing circumcision for salvation or spirituality. Why don't you cut the whole member off and really be spiritual! He alluded to the Phallic cult at the heathen temple which practiced emasculation or castration. This is a tough statement, but legalism is so horrible, there must be a straight from the shoulder condemnation of it and a doctrinal presentation of grace. It is the Word of God. Sarcasm is sanctified in this instance. Also it was in Elijah's case in 1 Kings 18:27.

“It came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.”“ (1 Kings 18:27, NASB)