

Legalism in Galatians

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Illustrations of Legalism in Galatians

It is important that you read the entire epistle to the Galatians prior to reading this outline review of legalism in the Galatian church.

The sequence of events was:

1. The Galatian believers came under the influence of Judaistic legalism from the circumcision crowd, that is, Christian Jews who still followed Jewish practices.
2. They took themselves out from under the grace principle and put themselves under the Law.
3. They soon adopted a practice of observing the days, months, times and years.
4. This influenced their appreciation of their teacher and turned the Apostle Paul into an enemy.
5. Their growth process was stopped and Christ was not formed in them, so they were not growing into maturity.
6. As a result of slowed growth and the absence of maturity, bona fide production by means of the filling of the Holy Spirit was curtailed and their only production was a false production expressed as lusts of the flesh.
7. Along with this pseudo production went many other factors:

The glory-seeking concept of Galatians 5:26

The practice of straightening everyone else out, Galatians 6:1

The concept of weariness with actual doctrinal spiritual production, Galatians 6:2-6

The program of impressing others, peers, subordinates or superiors, Galatians 6:11-13

The idea that man gets the glory, God is left out, the antithesis of grace, Galatians 6:14,15

Principles to be derived from the example of the Galatian church are listed below: Legalism is a result of a process of turning away from the truth. It is therefore a deliberate (volitional) choice.

The type of legalism which a person follows is often be related to some kind of background exposure, practice or principle. A person's culture and upbringing will determine what type of religion he follows. Galatians deals with religious legalism which came out of Jewish law and practice.

Legalism always has a pseudo content or, another gospel of a different kind. Galatians 1:6.

Once legalism begins to operate in a believer's life, he becomes suspicious of another person's motives, methods and message. Galatians 1:10-12.

A mature Christian who has been in a legalistic religion can spot legalism a mile away. Paul was at the top of Judaism before his conversion. Galatians 1:13,14.

Legalism sometimes uses techniques of infiltration or spying to gather information, while operating under a cloak of respectability. The legalist will bide his time until it suits his purpose to act. Galatians 2:1-4.

When legalists are met with truth, in terms of content and procedure, it crumbles and is unable to fulfill its objectives. Strong teaching keeps legalists from getting their campaigns launched. Galatians 2:5-9.

When legalists lose a battle on one front, they will regroup and form another base of operations on another front. When legalists cannot get a grasp on a person when he is in the company of strong believers, they will concentrate on him when he is standing alone.

Legalism is often seen in leadership before it is seen in the congregation. And when a leader gets involved in legalism, he influences others to go with him. This happens often when a project is going sour and the leader is desperate for support.

Example: When there is financial trouble, there is a great temptation to get away from principles of grace giving.

The content of legalism is often something that has a bona fide function in some other context. In the Galatian churches, legalism was a distortion of the Law. The Law has a real and bona fide function, to bring us to Christ, and legalism distorted it. Other examples: Legalism takes the doctrine of separation and makes it the doctrine of spirituality; it takes the doctrine of baptism and makes it the doctrine of church membership.

The term bondage in Galatians 5:1 means the slavery to the principles and ways of regular human living. This is not the idea of degraded lasciviousness or debauchery. The Law was bona fide and circumcision was bona fide. But these were distorted by legalists to that they became the master of the person instead of his tools.

The legalistic person has been bewitched. This

terms means to have evil brought upon you by vain praise. Legalism appeals to a person's lust for approbation and tries to drag him into legalism to satisfy it. Galatians 3:1-3.

The person in legalism is described as foolish, meaning not understanding. Legalism is one of the greatest robbers of Christian benefits; it robs people of their understanding of the word of God and all of the benefits of the grace life.

The legalist does not learn from experience. He has great tenacity; and despite many failures and vain strivings, he still can not see his error. He sees his program not working, so he has to go from one thing to the next, always looking for something better, never satisfied and never satisfying others. Galatians 3:4.

The very thing that the legalist puts himself under is that which rises up to smite him. When a Christian puts himself under the taboos of others, he can't measure up. So he puts himself under a church organization and he still can not measure up. The very system that he embraces proves him to be deficient by always presenting a moving target. Grace is the only system which does not magnify the believer's deficiencies.