

## Legalism

Ron Merryman

1. Legalism is the desire to “help” God improve upon our righteousness or to give Him more adequate reason to see us as righteous (than our simple faith in Christ’s work). *Galatians 2* illustrates the foolishness of this; Peter knew that justification, i.e., righteousness before God, was by simple faith in the work of Christ, yet he yielded to the legalists, so Paul had to reaffirm the truths of justification, *Gal. 2:11-21*.
2. Legalism is human effort to approbate God: It seeks merit from God on the basis of human good.
3. Legalism usually expresses itself in a code or system of taboos: Legalistic people try to force their system of “do’s” and “don’ts” on others.
4. Legalism is the opposite of grace:
  - a. In the case of the believer, legalist codes are efforts to improve upon the work of Christ or upon what He provides in “Phase 2” of salvation.
  - b. In the case of the unbeliever, legalistic codes seek God’s approval apart from the work of Christ.
5. Legalism often results from a confusion in the mind of the new believer over the means of spirituality; in many churches, a system of works-spirituality is taught, e.g.:
  - a. “Follow a system of ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ and you will be spiritual” (each church or geographical area will have its own list);
  - b. “Mimic the talk, mannerism, or dress of the super-spiritual ones”;
  - c. “Crucify yourself and you will be spiritual,” (self canceling out self, an impossibility!);
  - d. self-sacrifice or ascetic practices – “one is a super if he practices extreme self-denial” (the Hindus, Moslems and Roman Catholic hierarchy believe it, too.);
  - e. Witnessing is often used as a basis of works-spirituality, “If you witness to x number of people each day, you will turn out a super-spiritual.”
6. Legalism can only be properly understood by understanding the Pauline doctrines of grace, justification, spirituality by grace, and the resources of grace provision.  
**The legalist consistently confuses the means of spirituality with the results of true spirituality. A person who is spiritual will have a value system: He will not be a loose person; he will have some “do’s” and “don’ts” in his life; he will find himself volitionally and spontaneously witnessing for Christ. But, he will not be doing or practicing these things in order to approbate God (Jesus and Jesus alone completed this approbation at Calvary); nor will he be doing these things in order to be spiritual; but he does them because he IS spiritual; meaning, he is in right relationship to the Holy Spirit, who alone provides the power and vitality to live the Christian life.**

[1] Merryman, Ronald C. *Galatians, God’s Antidote to Legalism*, Merryman Ministries, 2441 E. Fiesta Drive Casa Grande, AZ 85194-9507, 1999. p. 36.

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To visit his website, Merryman Ministries [click here](#).  
The following is an excerpt from his commentary on Galatians[1]