

GALATIANS: IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING LEGALISM

Part XI: Discerning Legalists From Grace-based Believers By Their Respective Lifestyles (Galatians 6:11-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Legalism, that vice where false spirituality is promoted by the wrong method of obeying God or by keeping the wrong rules, can be a very difficult error to discern. The Galatians had problems discerning the legalists who plagued them as such errorists would quote **Scripture** to validate their urgings for believers to be **circumcised!** (Gal. 5:2 with 1:8-9 and 3:1-5)
- B. However, Jesus said that ". . . by their **fruits** ye shall know them," cf. Matthew 7:15-20. False teachers give off tell-tale signals of their theological error by **how they LIVE!**
- C. Galatians 6:12-18 conveniently summarizes these **fruits** of legalists in contrast with the godly as follows:

II. Discerning Legalists From Grace-based Believers By Their Respective Lifestyles, Galatians 6:11-18.

- A. Discerning "Fruit" One - The Showman Kiwi Fruit, Gal. 6:12a, 14.
 1. On the one hand, the legalists were very concerned about how other legalists admired them, and wanted to perform circumcisions to validate their ministries to their legalistic colleagues, Ga. 6:12a.
 2. Conversely, Paul cared nothing about saving face, and willingly considered his pride crucified to the world for the sake of living for the true gospel, Gal. 6:14.
- B. Discerning "Fruit" Two - The "Grapes of Wrath," Gal. 6:12b, 15-16.
 1. The legalists "constrained" (KJV), or, in the NIV, "compelled" the believers to be circumcised, a **pressure** move to make men face an unwanted, embarrassing surgical procedure, Gal. 6:12b.
 2. Paul rather pointed to the inconsequential spiritual results of circumcision for the believer in order to set the people of God **at peace** regardless of their circumcision status, Gal. 6:15-16.
- C. Discerning "Fruit" Three - The "Yellow" Lemon, Gal. 6:12c, 17 with 2 Cor. 11:24.
 1. Legalists pushing circumcision did so out of fear of persecution reprisals from other legalists, 6:12c.
 2. Paul fearlessly stood for the truth of grace even to being scarred on his body from four beatings by legalistic countrymen, Gal. 6:17 with 2 Cor. 11:24.
- D. Discerning "Fruit" Four - The Wormy Apple, Gal. 6:13a with 6:11, 14.
 1. The legalists pushed the rite of circumcision on others but themselves didn't keep the Law, Gal. 6:13a.
 2. Paul did all he could to counter any hint of personal hypocrisy: he took the pen from his secretary to whom Paul dictated the letter in verse 11 to show by the larger letter he wrote that he was writing the rest of the letter himself. This way, no one would misunderstand his intentions to be clear that he was fearlessly careless about what he suffered for his grace doctrine in verses 14 and 17!
- E. Discerning "Fruit" Five - The Selfish Prickly Pear, Gal. 6:13b versus 6:15-16.
 1. The legalists were only concerned to use the surgical discomforts of circumcision on others to selfish ends in order to look and feel good about "ministry achievements," Gal. 6:13b.
 2. Paul conversely suffered scars to his body so that others could live in peace without pain, Ga. 6:15-16.
- F. Discerning "Fruit" Six - The Human Power Orange, Gal. 6:12b versus 6:15.
 1. The legalists made their ministries depend on humanly performed surgical circumcision, Gal. 6:12b.
 2. Paul pushed the spiritual "new creation" of the Spirit's new birth, Gal. 6:15 with 3:3.
- G. Discerning "Fruit" Seven - The Overripe Banana, Gal. 6:15 implied with Col. 2:11-17.
 1. The legalists promoted circumcision from an outdated dispensation cf. Gal. 5:2 with Col. 2:11-17.
 2. Paul promoted the new creation of the heart done without circumcision since the cross, Gal. 6:15.

Lesson: We can discern the legalist from the grace-based believer by the 'produce' of their lives as follows: (1) legalists are showmen, pressuring their disciples, fearing their own persecutions if they don't visibly "produce results," who hypocritically fail to live what they teach, who use others for personal gain, who depend on human power for results instead of trusting God, and who cling to outdated dispensational beliefs. (2) Grace-based believers are unassuming, gentle, fearless of trouble, living what they teach, self-sacrificing for others, who trust God above using human effort and who rely on current dispensational truth to guide interpretations of Scripture.