

These 2 Types of Spiritual Bondage Still Plague the Church

Observant Christians who have walked with the Lord for over 30 years, as I have, and students of recent Christian history, see an interesting pattern among evangelicals.

Early Pentecostals tended toward extreme legalism.

In fact, I remember as a teenager when my dad took over a church, we were cleaning out the secretary's office and found an old welcome pack for visitors. In it was information about the church and denomination, which included a comprehensive list of things they didn't do: such as wear pants, wear jewelry, cut their hair, go to movies and billiard rooms.

In the mid-80s, the pendulum began to swing in the other direction. As the Charismatic Renewal was exploding, there was a cry for freedom.

This cry for freedom was legitimate.

There were those, however, who misunderstood the biblical message of freedom and this freedom led to excess and excuses for worldly behavior, and we are reaping the consequences of that imbalance today.

The children of the Charismatic freedom fighters, and even some of those freedom fighters themselves, who became bloated with too much worldly freedom have now swung into even further imbalance in the other direction and are finding the discipline of orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism more to their taste.

The problem is that they have gone into even greater legalism and a works-based faith than even early Pentecostalism

preached!

Paul addresses these two types of bondage in Galatians 5.

2 Types of Bondage and True Freedom

1. The Bondage of Legalism

In Galatians 1-4 Paul has already laid a foundation for the bondage of legalism, explaining thoroughly how preaching that the law justifies us and makes us acceptable to God leads us to destruction.

He goes on in chapter 5 to actually say that this doctrine has “estranged them from Christ”, that they have “fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4), and uses Jesus’ words “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”

In Matthew 16 and Mark 8, after Jesus and the disciples fed the 5,000 with five loaves of bread and two fish, He warns the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Paul uses this same example in 1 Corinthians 5 when talking about how to deal with immorality in the church.

This “leaven” represents both types of bondage.

You have the leaven of the Pharisees that is legalism. Even the slightest legalism in the church will infect the whole church.

In fact, we see in Galatians 5: 15 and 26 that not only does legalism put people in a position where they must keep 100 percent of the law 100 percent of the time (Galatians 5:3 – “I testify again to every man who is circumcised that he is obligated keep the whole law.”), but the critical and judgmental spirit that arises from legalism causes a church to “bite and devour one another (v. 15), “consume one another (v. 15) and it causes it to become “conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (v. 26).

You could say that the leaven of legalism actually leads to the second form of bondage we see in Galatians 5.

2. The Bondage of the Flesh

Because the Galatian church had fallen under the spell of false teachers that enslaved them to the Law as a means of justification, they fell into the trap that all Christians fall into when they become legalistic.

Legalistic Christians have a judgmental spirit.

By means of their doctrine they must be so! Because their acceptance by Jesus Christ is based on how well they perform, they critique the performance of their fellow brothers and sisters.

They devour one another with condemnation and gossip, which arises from a spirit of conceit. They resort to provoking one another with pessimistic sermons and judgmental words, and grow envious of those who perform better than they do.

Such a toxic environment, a perfect lab for the works of the flesh to overtake their hearts and lead them into even further estrangement from Christ!

With this, Paul segues into a list of the works of the flesh, ranging from sexual sins and pagan sins to sins of temper and drunkenness.

I find it interesting that he titles these “Works of the Flesh.”

Works: things we do of our own volition, and he uses the plural form of the word.

Contrast this with the spirit-filled Christian.

The leaven of the works of the flesh is powerful. When one begins to “fall from grace” and entertains sin in their heart,

they relinquish the control to say how far into sin they will go.

They are already in delusion concerning their justification. This only leads them into even greater delusion as they fall even farther and farther from grace and into even greater works of the flesh.

True Freedom

Paul's second list in Galatians 5:22-23 is titled "Fruit of the Spirit."

In contrast with the "works of the flesh", fruit is something that cannot be brought about by our own volition. Fruit in the life of a believer is something only the Holy Spirit can bring about.

Furthermore, it is singular.

Love is the fruit.

From love flow the remaining eight elements of the work of the Holy Spirit: joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

The freedom to walk in the spirit first begins with salvation.

If you are not saved, you cannot walk in the spirit. You may learn certain behaviors that mimic the fruit of the spirit. One may be loving, happy, appear peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful and gentle, but the fountain from which those behaviors flow is not from the Holy Spirit. The fruit is not genuine and it is not lasting.

Once we are saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, we must learn to reject the temptation to try to earn God's favor by our good behavior and rest in His perfect *agape* love.

When we are filled with *agape* love—God's kind of love—these

eight elements of that fruit will begin to grow and spill out of our lives, touching and impacting those around us.

When we begin walking in love, we will naturally obey the Law—not out of performance but out of love and honor for Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “If you love me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

Only when we walk in true freedom from the pressure to perform as a Christian, will *agape* love grow in our lives. And when *agape* love is present we will begin grow in joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Rosilind Jukic, a Pacific Northwest native, is a missionary living in Croatia and married to her hero. Together they live in the country with their two active boys, where she enjoys fruity candles and a hot cup of herbal tea on a blustery fall evening. She holds an Associates of Practical Theology and is passionate about discipling and encouraging women. Her passion for writing led her to author a number of books. She is the author of *A Little R & R* where she encourages women to find contentment in what God created them to be. She can also be found at these other places on a regular basis. You can follow her on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Google +.