

Christian Externalisms from *How People Change* by Paul Tripp

Formalism – doing all the activities, but those activities have no spiritual results. You are doing everything, but nothing is happening to you or in you. Church participation is part of a good healthy life, but there is no noticeable hunger for God's help, no reliance on grace, no delight in God's pleasures.

Legalism – we are constantly confirming the love of God by our own obedience. By knowing what to do and how to do it, we cannot only judge ourselves, but those around us. The rules may be good, and even biblical – but those living under this emotional mechanism tend to feel a crushing weight of discouragement, and they feel the mild disgust of the harsh judgment they imagine on God's face. In addition, no one likes them because of their unreasonable standards, and they are secretly coming to hate God for what they think are his unreasonable standards. While trying to grow in "godliness" there is an increase in the strength of pride, impatience and a judgmental spirit.

Mysticism – the constant pursuit of emotional experience in God. Looking for the next spiritual high, a new "dynamic encounter with God." One tends to find all other religious actions, and the ordinary nature of life, boring. When God doesn't seem to be present, or allowing himself to be felt, the mystic has a great sense of abandonment, disappointment and frustration. The mystic constantly is flying up and down emotionally – and they lack the fortitude of the mature disciples of Scripture. It reduces the gospel to dynamic emotional and spiritual experiences.

Activism – being for and against the right things is what makes us a good or bad person. Being the one who sees the right thing to advocate for and build awareness about is at the heart of spiritual growth and triumph. But whenever you believe that the evil outside of you is greater than the evil inside of you, a heartfelt pursuit of Christ will be replaced by zealous fighting of the "evil" around you. This will make you hate your fellow sinners, and turn you away from a reckoning with your own sin – both will wall you off from grace.

Biblicism – you can know every single word and phrase of the Bible, and have a developed "Christian worldview," and still have a heart untouched by its meaning, or a life filled with the transforming power of grace. Biblicism gives a rush to the mind, and the false feeling of growth while the heart is protected by more and more sophisticated reasons to protect itself from repentance and growth – and especially healing.

Psychology-ism – in seeking healing, one can fall so into the language and activism of healing, that one can speak constantly about “hurting people” and people “finding healing” without dealing with their hurts or finding healing themselves. This can come from a focus on certain psychological teachings replacing necessary spiritual teachings – and therefore short-circuiting the healing process. It can be another form of self-righteousness, believing we are the ones protecting the “hurting people,” and no one is “doing enough” to help them. It can be a form of activism. It can also be a form of idolatry, or the creating of an alternative religion for redemption.

Social-ism – so much emphasis on the fellowship, acceptance, mutual respect and other corporate ideas about the body of Christ, that it misses the gospel’s work in the priority of the heart. It so over-emphasizes the provision God has made in unity and fellowship, that it ends up minimizing and ignoring the primacy of the gospel itself accessing and effecting sin and repentance to deal with the wretchedness of human experience.