

GALATIANS

Lesson 13

Paul's Conflict with the Galatians Galatians 4:8-20

INTRODUCTION

We so often make judgments about people without really knowing these people personally. It would be easy to make a snap judgment on the Apostle Paul from the first three chapters of the book of Galatians and say he was a stern, cold, calculating scholar who was all head and no heart. There is no question about it that Paul had a massive intellect and, as a theologian, he was unrivaled. However, this section of scripture allows us to see another side of Paul which is a very rewarding study.

We are privileged to see Paul the pastor, Paul the man and Paul the lover of souls. Paul had been God's instrument in leading these Galatians to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. He had taught them faithfully that salvation was totally by God's grace and appropriated only through faith in Christ. These were Paul's spiritual children. However, in Paul's absence from them, they had fallen under the false teaching of the Judaizers who claimed that to be saved and really show that one is a Christian a person had to keep the Mosaic Law, especially the ceremonial law like circumcision and feasts days. The Galatians were falling prey to a works system in salvation and repudiating all that Paul had taught them about grace. Here is a clear incident in which the sheep "bucked" the shepherd or the congregation opposed the pastor. It is in this setting that we get a glimpse of Paul's deep concern and compassion for his converts who were going astray from the truth. We see his tenderness and genuine concern towards people in need.

Paul shows us a pastor must have a heart for God and people as well as a head full of knowledge. Although today we don't have to worry about pastors having too much knowledge. It must always be remembered that the ministry is people not books or sermons.

THE DOCTRINAL ERROR OF THE GALATIANS 4:8-11

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. Before conversion to Christ these Galatians were rank pagans and idol worshippers. They were in bondage to heathenism. Sin had so blinded their minds that they were enslaved to a false religion. They were religious people but in bondage to false gods and idol worshipping practices. Their pagan religion was one of works and they were working their way to heaven by self-effort, which brought them frustration and misery because of all the gross sins tied up with paganism. Their heathenism had shackled them to sin, for there was no power in false religion to set a person free.

“But now that you know God--or rather are known by God--how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years.”

Paul felt that most of these Galatians were true believers in Christ, for they knew the true God of heaven and earth through Christ. Notice how careful Paul is in his theology, for he refers to salvation as the time the Galatians first came to know Christ: “You know God.” But then he qualifies this statement by the words, “rather are known by God.” Paul knew clearly that salvation was all of God through Christ. Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8). The cause of salvation is grace; the means of salvation is faith. The Bible teaches that we come to know God through faith but that God really knew us first (Rom. 8:28-29 **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose. For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son.”**). We were seeking Christ; yet He was seeking us (Luke. 19:10 **“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”**). We were lost and needed to be found by God. God was not lost and needed to be found by us. Yet from our human perspective, it does seem as though we

found God when we were converted to Christ. This is the mystery of divine sovereignty and human responsibility that no man can completely understand, but somehow God is behind all of our salvation. We can say as the prophet Jonah, “Salvation comes from the Lord” (Jonah 2:10)

It is just as correct to say “Christ found me for salvation” as to say “I found Christ for salvation.” Both statements are scriptural and true, and it depends on whether you are looking at your salvation from the divine or human perspective. But ultimately it was God who caused our salvation and not us.

These Galatians, after having been gloriously saved by Christ from the bondage of pagan religion, were now turning to another form of bondage in religion. They were going after the false teaching of the Judaizers that taught men had to keep the Mosaic Law to be saved. “Days, months, seasons and years” have reference to the Jewish system of feasts and to the Hebrew sacred calendar. This is a reference to ceremonial law of special Sabbath feasts, new moons and sabbatical years. They were deceived into thinking they could not be saved unless they did these things. Ceremonial law would be easy to keep tabs on—”I attend these festivals and these feasts. I keep this Sabbath and that holy day.” These Galatians were being brought under the bondage of works again for salvation.

This verse tells us that Christians can fall into error after they are saved, especially in the area of grace. There are many people who have been converted out of the bondage of good works only to return to legalism in Christianity, which is another form of bondage. Their Christianity is reduced to a list of “do’s” and “don’ts” with no real relationship with the resurrected Christ. Christians can subtly fall into the mind set of “I prayed so many times a week; I go to church three times a week; I have daily devotionals; I witness to so many people,” and so forth with the idea that if they don’t do these things they will not be saved. Now it is important that we do pray, witness, have devotions and go to church, but not to get saved or to keep ourselves saved but because we are saved and we want to do God’s will. There is no one more miserable than a true Christian under the bondage of legalism, being driven by the fear if they don’t do something or perform right they will lose their salvation. Legalism kills the spirit of Christ.

“I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Paul felt all the trouble he spent over them to bring them to maturity in Christ had been wasted. Instead of growing in liberty with which Christ had set them free, they slipped back into the bondage of legalism.

As Christians we must keep on telling ourselves, “Once I did not know God, but now I know Him and have come to be known by Him. How can I turn back to old slavery, bondage and ignorance by trying to be saved by good works and law keeping! I must push on into progressive liberty and faith-obedience in Christ.”

PAUL’S APPEAL TO THE GALATIANS - 4:12

“I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you.”

Paul’s great desire was that these Galatians would be free in Christ like he was free in Christ. Legalism was no part of Paul’s faith for legalism always kills the spirit of Christ. Paul, who was a Jew and under the Mosaic Law before conversion to Christ, became as a Gentile, for threw over his Jewish background and customs when he became a Christian.

Trusting in Christ means leaving our old lives of bondage and going after a new life of spiritual freedom in Christ.

“You have done me no wrong.”

These Christians had not done Paul personal wrong, but they did go against his apostolic authority by going after the heresy of works for salvation. In abandoning grace, these Galatians had abandoned divine authority.

When a congregation rejects a pastor, they are not wronging the pastor per se but are going against divine authority who placed him in this position. This, of course, assumed the pastor is teaching what is biblically true and there is no moral or doctrinal error. If there is then the person is to be removed. However, God's general rule for men placed into authority by God is **"Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm."** (Psa. 105:15).

THE GALATIANS ATTITUDE TOWARDS PAUL - 4:13-16

"As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself."

When Paul first came to Galatia to preach the gospel, he was afflicted with a serious physical disease. While we cannot be dogmatic, it appears that he was suffering from the eye disease ophthalmia. This disease makes the eyes red, swollen and pussy and is very unpleasant to look at. However Paul's repulsive appearance did not cause the Galatians to reject or despise him. In fact, they received him as a messenger of God, and a representative of Jesus Christ. In the beginning, they recognized Paul's apostolic authority.

A congregation's attitude towards the pastor should not be determined on the basis of personal appearance. So many choices of a pastor today are based on looks rather than ability and spirituality. The pastor must be handsome and the wife good looking. We have today many "Hollywood" pastors and the Apostle Paul would not be considered a good candidate for most pastorates today. So much emphasis is placed on externals for a pastor because pastors have become public relations men, to run an organization rather than men of prayer and of the Word.

"What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me."

In those first days of Paul's ministry with them, they were so satisfied, pleased and proud of Paul and his work among them because he brought them grace from God. They would have done anything for Paul, even pluck out their own eyes and give them to him if it were possible.

They were excited about their new pastor and nothing was too good for him. Paul was the "apple of their eye." A sort of hero.

"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

Paul, being faithful to teach the whole counsel of God, had to lovingly rebuke the Galatians when they started to drift into legalism and salvation by works. They were deserting the gospel of grace and falling back again into bondage. When Paul faced them with the truth, they turned on him and he became their enemy instead of their beloved pastor and friend. These Galatians were very fickle and did not want the Apostle's authority or teaching because they were convicted in their own consciences. They were uncomfortable with truth. Grace became unpopular to the legalistic Galatians.

The doctrines of grace are always unpopular with the masses, but just because something is unpopular does not change its truth. Grace must be taught and legalism rebuked whether Christians like it or not. The very gospel is at stake!

A pastor should never give in to the theological whims of his congregation. He should stand firm on the truth, even if it means being rejected by the congregation. The doctrines of grace are more important than any pulpit in the whole world. (Isa. 30:9-11 **"These are rebellious people, deceitful children, children unwilling to listen to the Lord's instruction. They say to the seers, 'See no more visions!' and to the prophets, 'Give us no more visions of what is right! Tell us pleasant things, prophesy illusions. Leave this way, get off this path and stop confronting us with the Holy One of Israel!'"**).

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE GALATIANS - 4:17-20

“Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.”

Paul points out that the Galatians were being taken in by flattery and praise by the Judaizers in order to win them to a perverted gospel. The false teachers were not sincere in their devotion to the Galatians or they would tell them the truth or at least expose them to the truth. These false teachers were shutting out the Christians from Paul and the true message of grace. They kept the truth from the Galatians by one means or another. False teachers never give all sides of an issue. They are narrow and bigoted to their viewpoint.

So often people who oppose the doctrines of grace seek to isolate people from any exposure to these truths. Often grace literature is censored and grace teachers are purged because that is the only way false teachers can keep people from the truth of grace. The devil himself opposes the teachings of grace with a passion because these teachings alone can dent, invade and conquer his kingdom of salvation by good works.

A pastor has the responsibility to warn his congregation when they are departing from grace in salvation and sanctification.

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.”

These Galatians are Paul's converts to Christ and he loves them dearly. They are his spiritual children in Christ. When he first came to them, he worked as hard as a woman sweating it out in labor pains to bring them to Christ. And now he is having labor pains again to see them grow up spiritually and mature in Christ. He desires that they should have the attitude of Christ which is for grace and against legalism. He desires to have them live by the grace of Christ and not legalism and externalism. Obviously it takes time for Christ to be formed in the Christian. In fact, this process goes on all through our lives in various areas.

A pastor must have patience with his congregation, for it takes time for the people to grow in grace and have Christ formed in them.

“How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”

Paul in the Book of Galatians is very stern towards the Galatians because of the doctrinal error which they had fallen into in his absence. He wants them to know he loves them and he longs to see Christ formed in them. However, he is perplexed about them. He is at his “wits ends” with their failure to come out of this false teaching of salvation by works.

Even pastors can get perplexed and frustrated with their congregations but only prayer, the teaching of the Word and the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit are going to move people into the truths of grace in salvation and sanctification. The pastor's one goal should be to see Christ formed in His flock.

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, I ask you two simple questions: “Do you know God in a personal way or have you been sovereignly known by God?” You can have a real relationship with God through Jesus Christ (John 14:6 **“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”**). You can know you're a child of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

How can you know? Receive Jesus Christ into your life as your personal sinbearer and Lord, asking Him to make you the person He wants you to be. When you do, you shall come to realize you have been known by God.