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Series: Special Messages
Text: Galatians 4: 8 – 20
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PAUL'S PLEA

Galatians is, without a doubt, the Apostle Paul's most impassioned epistle. His emotional language runs from beginning to end. In 1: 9 he exclaims: "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!" In 2:11 - 16 he airs his emotions when he publicly rebuked the Apostle Peter. Chapter 3 begins with the thundering words, "You foolish Galatians!" But Paul's language also reveals that he is intensely concerned with the spiritual welfare of the Galatians, and 4:8 - 20 shows us that the Apostle Paul was not impersonal and detached in his approach to sound doctrine. Yes, he has, and he will continue to argue his case in a meticulous fashion, but he is not the least bit interested in simply scoring debating points and winning an argument. This section of Galatians is distinguished by Paul's urgent pastoral concern for the Galatians. John R.W. Stott captures the flow of the epistle when he writes: "In Galatians 1 - 3 we have been listening to Paul the Apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the defender of the faith; but now we are hearing Paul the man, Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate lover of souls.¹ Paul's pastoral plea stems from his strong desire to see the saints established in grace. It grows out of a love that longs for the well-being of fellow Christians, not merely for their happiness, but for their holiness and wholeness in the truths of the gospel of grace.

I. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PLEA (verses 8 - 11)

In this section Paul halts his argumentation momentarily and calls the Galatians to stop and consider their past history.

A. Their Past Bondage

They were steeped in paganism and religious ignorance. They were *enslaved* by a slavish fear and worship of what Paul calls "godless gods"² (cf. I Corinthians 8:5; 10:22).

B. Their Present Attitude

In light of their past bondage, the Apostle now asks them why in the world would they want to *revert* back? Why turn from the riches of the gospel of grace to a religious system that in essence is no different from paganism?³ The Galatians, under the influence of the Judaizers, were now observing⁴ the Jewish religious calendar. Why adopt these weak and miserable principles? They are *weak* because they have no power to save or justify and they are *miserable* because they bring only enslavement. Guthrie has aptly stated, "There can be no denying that [Paul] classes all other religious systems outside Christianity as 'weak and beggarly.' To him Christ is the only means of coming to a true knowledge of God."⁵

C. The Apostle's Concern

The Galatians are on the verge of adopting a legalistic system and if that occurs then Paul's preaching among them would amount to nothing, such is the fatal character of legalism.

II. THE CONTENT OF THE PLEA (verses 12 - 15)

The Apostle lays open his heart. For the time being he drops his doctrinal argumentation and makes a personal appeal to his Galatian converts.

A. Follow Paul's Pattern

The Apostle calls upon the Galatians to mimic him in that he *left* his former legalistic position and embraced the Gospel of Christ.

B. Remember Paul's Preaching

He reminds them of the circumstances surrounding his first preaching the gospel among them and how they initially received him.

NOTE: We do not know the nature of the illness that Paul refers to in this passage. Whatever it was, it could have been seen as a burden or a trial to the Galatians. The language Paul uses here may indicate that his particular affliction rendered him repulsive—yet the Galatians did not *loathe*⁶ him but joyfully received him.

C. Remember Your Joy

The question of verse 15 is captured well by the NIV. "What has happened to all your joy?" There is an implied contrast in Paul's words. The Galatians had responded to his preaching with great joy. "They congratulated themselves that this messenger of God had come with such good news."⁷ But now things have changed. The Judaizers made them have second thoughts about Paul.

NOTE: As long as the Galatians were feeding upon the doctrines of God's grace, rejoicing in their justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, they were full of joy. But now that they have embraced the legalism of the Judaizers their joy has turned and arrogance—which is always the case when people trust in human merit.

D. Remember Your Love

The Galatians not only responded to the Gospel with joy, they manifested a sacrificial spirit towards Paul. Many commentators feel that the allusion to the Galatians plucking out their eyes, if that were possible, and giving them to Paul indicates that the Apostle had some sort of eye problem. H.D. Betz, on the other hand, has convincingly shown that Paul is using a well-known figure of speech that is a literary trope which underscores the nature of true friendship.⁸

III. **THE CAUSE OF THE PLEA** (verses 16 - 20)

The Judaizers had portrayed Paul as having a secret agenda and that his gospel was shortchanging the Galatians.

A. Paul's Truthfulness

An Apostle's authority does not cease when he has to rebuke or correct false teaching! The Galatians were inclined to believe that since Paul is being critical, he is therefore hostile towards them! Telling the truth is sometimes painful. This is especially the case when error is exposed.

B. The Judaizers' Insincerity

They are the ones with the hidden agenda. They are *courting* the Galatians in order to *seduce* them.⁹ They desire to have the Galatians completely under their authority and cut off from association with Paul. In other words, they are not the least bit interested in the Galatians' spiritual well-being. They are concerned only with themselves.

C. Paul's Pastoral Concern

Unlike the Judaizers, Paul agonizes over the Galatians the way a parent would over an erring child. He longs for their maturity in Christ. Note how this is directly linked with holding fast to the doctrines of God's grace. The Apostle expresses deep perplexity over their doctrinal wavering.

CONCLUSION: How important is the *truth* of the Gospel? In Paul's mind it was of supreme importance. "In the Church today," laments J.R.W. Stott, "there is far too little deference to the apostolic word."¹⁰ Many pastors are too preoccupied with trying to be relevant and popular. They avoid like the plague anything that might in the least be controversial or they simply play to the gallery by pulpit pounding on themes they know their audience is already inclined to accept. The Church needs, first and foremost, loyalty to the Apostolic message coupled with an Apostolic compassion for the welfare of Christ's flock.

ENDNOTES

¹ J.R.W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (IVP, 1968), p. 111.

² The expression PHYSEI THEOI refers to beings who actually are divine by nature as opposed to THESEI THEOI which refers to those that become divine by human positioning. Paul categorically denies that pagan gods have any divine status.

³ Note the twice repeated "again" (KJV and NASB). This is the Greek adverb PALIN and it plainly indicates that as far as the Apostle was concerned, the perverted message of the Judaizers was identical to paganism.

⁴ The word translated "observe" in the NIV is PARATÈREISTHE and is very intensive. It indicates a close, scrupulous meticulous observance that was typical of the Pharisees. cf. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, IV (Broadman, 1935), p. 303.

⁵ D. Guthrie, *Galatians: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 117.

⁶ The term translated "contempt or scorn" in the NIV is EKPTUŌ, literally meaning to spit out—and came to mean to spurn or hold in contempt. cf. J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 198.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Testament Commentary on Galatians* (Eerdmans, 1985), p. 208.

⁸ H.D. Betz, *A Critical and Historical Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Fortress, 1972), pp. 225 - 226.

⁹ The word Paul uses indicates dishonorable intentions and is used in other Greek sources to refer to sexual seduction, cf.

¹⁰ Stott, p. 118.