

BECOME AS I AM!
PART 4

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:12-20

April 10, 2011

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:

Out of fear for the Galatians' standing before God (v. 11), Paul pleads (δέομαι) with the Galatians to become as he is: free from the Mosaic Law (v. 12a; cf. 5:1, a "Do this and live" covenant). To motivate them to do so, he presents two sets of contrasting attitudes.

First, he contrasts the Galatians' previous attitude toward him with their present attitude (vv. 12b-16). Second, he contrasts the Judaizers' self-centered attitude toward the Galatians with his Christ-centered attitude (vv. 17-20).

I. THE GALATIANS' PREVIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARD PAUL SIGNIFIED THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL. VV. 12B-14

When Paul first visited Galatia, the Galatians gave him a warm reception (vv. 12b-14). We saw that despite the temptation Paul's illness posed for the Galatians, they initially received him with joy. But, vv. 15-16, reveal that a radical change had taken place in the Galatians' attitude toward Paul.

LESSON:

II. THE GALATIANS' PRESENT ATTITUDE TOWARD PAUL SIGNIFIED THEIR POSSIBLE REJECTION OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL. VV. 15-16

In vv. 15-16, we see the Galatians' troubling rejection of Paul. Notice what Paul does. He asks the Galatians two penetrating, gospel-directed questions, "¹⁵ What then has become of the blessing you felt?...¹⁶ Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?" These two rhetorical questions highlight the major change in the Galatians' prior and present attitudes toward Paul.

Though they had initially done no wrong to Paul (v. 12b), they were now! Their enthusiastic reception had turned into a troubling rejection. Paul contrasts how their present desire to live under the Mosaic Law was contrary to their initial reception of the gospel. The troubling issue for Paul was that the Galatians' present attitude toward him signified their possible rejection of Christ and the gospel. For, as we learned, to reject Paul in his apostolic office and his gospel was in reality to reject Christ.

Once again, we see the complete antithesis between the law and gospel. There is no middle way when it comes to living in a proper relationship with God. To live under the requirement of Law is to live a cursed life (because no one can ever fulfill its

requirements perfectly; Gal. 3:10). To live by faith in Christ as He is freely offered in the gospel is to live a blessed life (i.e., a life that is acceptable to God because of the righteousness of faith imputed to us; Gal. 2:16).

Paul shows that by turning away from the gospel, the Galatians threw away the blessedness they had obtained and took upon themselves the destruction, in which their cursed state must surely end. So, in v. 15a, he first asks, “What then has become of the blessing you felt?”

When the Galatians first heard the good news about Jesus Christ, they considered themselves “blessed” (i.e., in a state of well-being that results from being rightly related to God, see George, *Galatians*, p. 325).

Luke records that during their first visit to Antioch in Pisidia (cf. Acts 13:42-52; located in the Galatian province and not to be confused with Paul’s home church in Antioch in Syria), even though many Jews sought to harm Paul and Barnabas, many Gentiles (and Jews) joyfully accepted Paul and Barnabas and their message (13:48-49). Luke writes, “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” (13:48). And so many of the citizens of Antioch in Pisidia were in a state of joy and happiness for the good news Paul had brought them.

Notice also in Galatians 4:15 that the gospel not only produced joy in the Galatians but this joy overflowed in deep affection and loving, sacrificial service toward Paul. Paul writes, “if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me” (v. 15b). The Galatians were so overjoyed Paul says they would have sacrificed everything for him (v. 15b).

Some Bible teachers have suggested this expression indicates that Paul suffered from some kind of eye disease. But, Paul’s statement is clearly hyperbole (exaggeration used to drive home a point). Biblical scholars note that ancient belief held that the eyes were considered the most delicate and costly organ (see Betz, *Galatians*, p. 227). To have one’s eyes torn out and given to another represents the giving up of one’s most precious possessions (see Fung, *Galatians*, p. 199).

Because of the overwhelming joy the Galatians initially experienced when they first heard the good news about Christ, Paul says they would have willingly sacrificed everything for him. One bible teacher notes, that the Galatians were so overjoyed by the gospel and their receiving of the Holy Spirit (which marks them as the true children of Abraham, cf. Gal. 3:7, 14), they were willing to suffer themselves if only they could assist Paul in some way (see Schreiner, *Galatians*, pp. 287-288).

Certainly, this was true. Paul was a lightning rod for opposition and persecution. The Galatians had to have been well founded in the gospel because they received and supported Paul, who was a man totally despised and rejected by all worldly standards. We saw from vv. 13-14 that Gentile pagans and Jews alike considered Paul as a demon-

possessed or divinely curse man. Why would anyone risk their own lives to associate with such a dangerous and accursed man as Paul?

This was an exceedingly extraordinary love, which moved them to be willing to risk their very own lives for Paul. Such love and deep affection for Paul was evidence the Galatians had received the Holy Spirit. Paul's description of the Galatians' initial reception of him is quite remarkable. That the Galatians were willing to give what was most valued to them for Paul's benefit is the kind of deep affection and loving sacrifice that the gospel produces.

The preaching of the gospel creates a kind of community in which people say, "I am not my own, I belong to Jesus. So, if I have something that I can give you or do for you, then let me help you. Let me serve you." When the gospel is warmly received and becomes central in a church, it creates a Christmas atmosphere of sacrificial acts of love (Acts 2:42-47; 2 Cor. 8:1-5).

When God gives the greatest gift of all and it is received through faith, everybody then wants to become a gift giver. When grace abounds, sacrificial, loving service flows! This kind of community cannot be manufactured or created by following a list of principles on how to create a sacrificially serving church. When this kind of liberality and generosity isn't present in a church, the first thing to ask is not, "How do we program it?" Rather, like Paul we direct people back to the gospel and ask, "What has happened to the blessing you felt?" We must direct people back to the gospel, which alone produces this kind of loving, sacrificial giving of oneself on behalf of others.

Moreover, we see that one of the characteristics of a gospel-centered pastor is that he not only elicits respect from his people but also a love and deep affection from them. Calvin writes, "It is not enough that pastors be respected, if they are not also loved; for both are necessary to make the doctrine they preach be fully relished; and both, the apostle declares, had existed among the Galatians" (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 129).

And so we see the initial state/attitude of the Galatians. Yet, after a brief period of time, the situation radically changed. Therefore, Paul, asks the Galatians a second question in utter perplexity, "Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth" (v. 16)?

In effect, Paul was saying to the Galatians,

Initially, you counted yourselves blessed to hear the gospel that delivered you from slavery to sonship. You received me as an authentic messenger from God, even as Christ Himself! What then has happened? Why have you turned against me and traded the freedom of the gospel for the bondage of the law? What has happened to your sense of blessing? You once regarded me as your dearest friend and now you regard me as your greatest enemy, simply because I tell you the truth.

The big question is this: Why the sudden and drastic change? How could the Galatians change so quickly from a warm reception to a troubling rejection?

The answer is false teaching (Gal. 1:7). The Galatians had begun listening to new teachers and had become infected with the intoxicating poison of their legal doctrine. Martin Luther commenting about people in his own day writes, “As soon as brethren or pupils are deceived by fanatical spirits and fall away from the doctrine of justification, they immediately begin to persecute the pious with bitter hatred, even though previously they loved them dearly,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, 413).

A false gospel always brings trouble and division into the life of a church. Legalism is a soul-enslaver, joy-taker, friendship-killer and church-divider. The Judaizers had infiltrated the Galatian churches soon after Paul’s departure. Their strategy was to malign Paul as a false apostle and thereby turn the Galatians against him. In doing so, they labored to get the Galatians to deny His gospel.

This is why Paul spends 1/5 of his letter in an autobiographical defense of his apostleship (1:11-2:21). By the time of his second trip to Galatia, some of the members had come under the influence of the Judaizers and begun to doubt the truth of the gospel (i.e., justification by grace through faith in Christ alone).

The false gospel of legalism had become more attractive than the true gospel of grace. A “Do this and live” teaching always appeals to the self-righteous flesh of man. And so, the result was that Paul, who was their dear friend, had become their bitter enemy.

Such a drastic change of affairs left Paul utterly perplexed (ἀποροῦμαι, i.e., to be at a loss, be in doubt; be uncertain as to their relationship with God, v. 20). When the Galatians turned against him and his message, Paul was left wondering whether they were really sons of God after all. If their opposition to Paul continued, it could very well signify their rejection of Christ and the gospel. Therefore, Paul, as a concerned pastor who sees that their current path could lead to a disastrous shipwreck, appeals to them with these two gospel-directed questions.

Imbedded in Paul’s words to the Galatians, are some important lessons for us to consider and reflect upon.

REFLECTION:

1. IN GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY, THERE IS A PRICE TO BE PAID.

Paul’s question, “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?” is quite sobering in one respect. The truth of the gospel always produces opposition and hatred. It is not that truth is hateful or divisive. John Calvin observes, “Though it is a common remark, that truth begets hatred, yet, except through the malice and wickedness of those who cannot endure to hear it, truth is never hateful” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, 129).

Truth produces hatred and opposition when it collides with the fallen condition of the human heart. A legal heart recoils at grace. Such was the case with the older son in Luke 15. When the Father threw a great big party for the prodigal son, Luke 15:28 says of the older brother, “he was angry and refused to go in.” The older brother represents the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes who said of Jesus, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (15:2). Grace is offensive to a self-righteous heart, which values its own works over the works of Jesus for him.

Those whose principal aim is to illumine the truth and blessing of the gospel and the glory of Christ will be opposed and hated. Martin Luther writes, “...it appears to me that this is the fate of the apostles and of all faithful teachers, as the apostles testify in all their epistles...” (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 414).

Many people welcome a preacher or teacher as long as they say things they want to hear. But, as soon as the preacher says something they don't like, he becomes their enemy. The reality is that those who are faithful to exposit all that the Scriptures teach will inevitably tell people things they don't want to hear.

Paul warned Timothy of this in 2 Timothy 4:3-5,

“³ For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

Whenever certain Biblical teachings become unpopular, pastors are tempted to mute those aspects, which give rise to most opposition and hatred. This is why Paul exhorts Timothy to remain “steadfast” (sober minded) and to persist in sound teaching and to be prepared to “endure suffering” (to be maligned or worse). Why? Timothy is to remain steadfast and endure suffering because people are woefully ignorant of the gospel. Therefore, Paul instructs Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (i.e., to make the preaching of the gospel his life's work). The gospel is not only to be defended against distortion but is to be faithfully proclaimed toward conversion.

Paul not only exhorted Timothy to be faithful in preaching the gospel but modeled it as well. In 2 Timothy 4:16a we see Paul at the end of his gospel ministry totally deserted by his friends, opposed by his enemies and unsupported in his trial before Caesar. Paul writes, “At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me.”

Yet, even in the face of overwhelming pressure (“out of season” 4:2) to change his message and plead his own cause, Paul remains focused on the cause of Christ. Even at this point, he is not being driven by his own personal cause but rather the gospel.

Paul writes in vv. 16b-17, “¹⁶ ...May it not be charged against them! ¹⁷ But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully

proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” Though there was a price to be paid, by virtue of the Lord’s faithfulness and strength, the message of the gospel would be fully proclaimed through Paul, so that all the Gentiles might hear it.

2. IN GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY, THERE IS A PARTY TO BE ENJOYED.

We must not lose sight of the fact that the truth of the gospel not only begets opposition and hatred but also acceptance and joy. In 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, Paul writes, “¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.” When God’s people hear the truth of the gospel, it is a fragrance of life! Philip Ryken writes, “...if it really is God’s message, God’s true children rejoice to hear it. They know that if their loving Father is telling them something they would prefer not to hear, it must be for their own good” (*Galatians*, p. 176).

This fragrant aroma of the gospel creates a state of joy and blessedness in believer’s hearts. When Paul first came to the Galatians, it was Christmas time! The gospel creates a Christmas atmosphere, a celebration of joy. Receiving the truth of the gospel is like standing under the piñata as the Holy Spirit bursts the gospel wide-open in our hearts and Jesus and all of His saving benefits come pouring out for us!

This is what the gospel does! The gospel, by its very nature, is joyful and joy producing (Matt. 13:44; 28:8; Lk. 2:10; 15:10). The gospel creates a state of well-being that results from being rightly related to God.

The announcement of good news always produces joy. We see this all the time in our society. For example, in response to Verizon’s announcement that it would begin carrying the iPhone, one editorial headline read: “Verizon announcement is good news for users” According to the editorial, the “good news” is that “free enterprise works in the U.S...so that even more consumers will have access to the iPhone.” For some people, this is really good news!

On August 14, 1945, President Harry Truman announced on a nation-wide broadcast the surrender of Japan, thus effectively ending World War II (Note: The official signing of the surrender took place on board the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945). This day has come to be known as Victory over Japan Day. Shortly after President Truman’s announcement, people began to gather in celebration.



The first picture is a picture of allied military personnel in Paris celebrating the Japanese surrender.

This second picture is a picture of citizens and workers of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, celebrating the end of World War II. They



worked in the Manhattan Project, which resulted in the atomic bomb.



This final picture is one of the most famous photographs ever published by Life Magazine.

It was shot in Times Square on August 14, 1945, shortly after the announcement by President Truman (known as V-J day in Times Square).

Alfred Eisenstaedt, the photographer who took this photo said,

There were thousands of people milling around, in side streets and everywhere. Everybody was kissing each other . . . And there was also a Navy man running, grabbing anybody, you know, kissing, I ran ahead of him because I had Leica cameras around my neck, focused from 10 feet to infinity. You only had to shoot . . . I didn't even know what was going on, until he grabbed something in white. And I stood there, and they kissed. And I snapped five times.

All of this hysterical joy and celebration was the result of the announcement of good news. How much more then will a sinner be filled with joy when he hears the headlines of God's front page news story:

It is Finished! The war is over! Peace! Even though you are dead to God and condemned under the law for every act of lawbreaking you have ever committed Christ has delivered you from slavery to sonship (Gal. 4:1-7)!

How blessed is it to have a pronouncement of "Justified!" by the Judge of the universe (Gal. 2:16). If you are a condemned criminal you will find this news almost too-good-to-be-true!

How blessed is it to have someone come and announce to you the good news that the curse of the law under which you are condemned has been removed because Christ redeemed you from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for you (Gal. 3:13)! How blessed is it to go from living in ignorance of God (Gal. 4:8) to being known by God (i.e., made recipients of His eternal divine favor).

How blessed is it to be a recipient of the fruit of the gospel, which is the work of the Holy Spirit in you (Gal. 3:1-5, 14). Even though there is a price to be paid, it pales into insignificance to the party that is to be enjoyed!

Iain Duguid, in his sermon entitled, "No Condemnation," based on Zechariah 3, writes,

The gospel urges you to come into God's presence with joy. Feel the welcome that is yours for Christ's sake. Enjoy the freedom that comes with worshipping God with a clear conscience, which is exactly what you were made to do in the

first instance! Praise God for clothing you in the beauty of his holiness, and look forward to the day when you and all of his people will sit down at his table for that great and final feast in the company of Jesus. On that day, we will be made clean once and for all, gloriously arrayed in garments of his holiness, crowned with the beauty of his splendor, and overflowing with thankfulness to him for our great salvation” (*Heralds of the King*, p. 145).

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