

**BECOME AS I AM!**  
**PART 5**

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:12-20

April 17, 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).

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

However,

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

To further motivate the Galatians to live in the freedom of the gospel, Paul contrasts the Judaizers' self-centered attitude toward the Galatians with his Christ-centered attitude (vv. 17-20). In doing so, Paul exposes the Judaizers' true motives (4:17-20) and shows that the Judaizers are the Galatians true enemies (4:16)

**LESSON:**

- III. THE JUDAIZER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GALATIANS SIGNIFIED THEIR ZEAL TO BE PRAISED AND HONORED. V. 17

The NIV translates v. 17, "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."

Paul exposes the Judaizers on two accounts: their misdirected zeal and their dishonorable motives.

- A. THE JUDAIZERS' MISDIRECTED ZEAL, V. 17A

First, he highlights the Judaizers' misdirected zeal; "Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good" (v. 17a).

Zeal is a great quality to possess as long as it is aimed at the right object. But, here Paul says the Judaizers' zeal was misdirected. He shows that there is a kind of ministry zeal that is not pleasing to God.

These false teachers were zealous for the Galatians but for no good purpose (not commendably, NASB). What were the Judaizers zealous for? Paul writes, "What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them" (NIV).

Here Paul exposes the Judaizers' dishonorable motives.

#### B. THE JUDAIZER'S DISHONORABLE MOTIVES, v. 17B

The Judaizers' misdirected zeal was driven by a dishonorable motive in their heart. Paul says they desired (θέλωσιν) to turn the Galatians against him. They were driven by an evil desire to alienate the Galatians from Paul. Why did the Judaizers want to alienate the Galatians from Paul?

Their motive for desiring to alienate Paul from the Galatians was so that the Galatians would follow them (be zealous for them) rather than Paul. Paul writes, "What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them." (NIV) Or, as the ESV translates v. 17b, "They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them." Simply put: The Judaizers were seeking their own praise and honor.

Paul refers to the desires (θέλω) of the Judaizers four times in Galatians. In 1:7, he says the Judaizers desire (θέλοντες) to distort the gospel of Christ. In 6:12, Paul says the Judaizers desire (θέλωσιν) to make a good showing in the flesh. In 6:13, Paul says the Judaizers desire (θέλωσιν) to have the Galatians circumcised so they could boast in their flesh.

As we consider the Judaizer's misdirected zeal and dishonorable motives, there are some important insights regarding the side effects of legalism for us to reflect on.

#### **REFLECTION:**

##### 1. LEGALISM BRINGS DIVISION TO A CHURCH.

Instead of unifying the church, these legalizers were spreading dissension and division in the church. Paul says, "What they want is to alienate you [from us] (NIV) or "They want to shut you out" (ESV).

Their legal poison was destroying the rich relationship Paul and the Galatians had initially enjoyed. In 4:15, Paul says initially, the Galatians, if possible, would have gouged out their eyes and given them to him. They were so overjoyed by the good news Paul had declared to them they would have sacrificially given everything for him.

But, the Judaizers came in and began teaching the Galatians that they had to follow the Mosaic Law in order to be a true Christian. The side effect of such false teaching is that it was dividing Jews and Gentiles inside the church, of which Paul said “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28).

Later in 5:15, Paul will describe how a failure to live in the freedom of the gospel results in “unholy civil war” on one another in the church! He writes, “But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.”

The works of the flesh thrive in a culture of legalism, whereas the fruit of the Spirit flourish in a culture of gospel nourishment. Legalism feeds the fleshly desire to promote self rather than to live according to the law of selfless love. Such a self-centered culture makes it impossible for true relationships to flourish. Why? Legal doctrine always stokes the fires of self-adulation and self-promotion. Do you want intimacy in your marriage relationship? Then you must stand in the freedom of the gospel. Do you want rich horizontal friendships? Then you must stand in the freedom of the gospel. The freer your heart the richer your friendships.

But, a false gospel will always produce misdirected zeal and dishonorable, self-serving motives. James Boice observes, “Failure to maintain Christian liberty always leads to ecclesiastical as well as other forms of bondage” (*Galatians*, p. 480). Self-centeredness divides, gospel-centeredness unites.

## 2. LEGALISM FEEDS THE SELF-SERVING, SELF-EXALTING DESIRES OF OUR FLESH.

The Judaizers’ were driven by a desire for their own praise and honor. Self-glorification was their true motive. Paul writes, “What they want is to alienate you [from us], *so that you may be zealous for them*” (NIV, emphasis mine) Or, as the ESV translates v. 17b, “They want to shut you out, *that you may make much of them*” (emphasis mine).

The word translated “zeal” (ζηλόω), depending on the context, can mean:

1. To have intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success, be filled with jealousy, envy.
2. To be deeply interested in someone, court someone’s favor, make much of, with the implication of desiring the other to be on one’s own side (BDAG).

It could be that both ideas lie behind Paul’s thinking concerning the Judaizers. The Judaizers it seems were envious of Paul’s missionary success with the Galatians. Thus, they zealously courted the Galatians with the dishonorable motive of bringing them to their side. These legaliazers wanted their own “groupies.” Therefore, in the quest for influence, they sought to tear Paul down in order to build themselves up! John Calvin writes,

This stratagem is frequently resorted to by all the ministers of satan. By producing in the people a dislike of their pastor, they hope afterwards to draw them to themselves; and, having disposed of the rival, to obtain quiet possession. A careful and judicious examination of their conduct will discover that in this way they always begin (*Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 131*).

Legalism breeds insecurity and a spirit of competition, envy, jealousy and therefore the drive to be made much of over others. Whenever the idol of one's heart is challenged (in this case the desire to be made much of), a person will do whatever it takes to eliminate the "rival" so as to maintain a sense of satisfaction (justification) about one's life. So, legalism causes men to pursue self-centered interests rather than Christ-centered, others-oriented interest. The motive for the Judaizer's zeal was so that the Galatians will be devoted to them ("...so that you may be zealous for them.").

The truth is not everyone who is in ministry is in it for the right reasons. Timothy George observes, "Their way of doing ministry was as perverted as their doctrine was corrupt" (*Galatians, p. 332*). Just because someone says they want to be in ministry or serve in the church doesn't mean they have a pure motive for doing so. Some enter the ministry for self-serving, self-important, self-promoting, self-exalting interests.

For example, in 1 Timothy 3:3, Paul says that one of the qualifications for an elder is that he is not to be a lover of money. The implication is that some will be lovers of money. In 1 Timothy 3:8, deacons are also not to be greedy for dishonest gain. Deacons handle money and thus must be men of character (cf. Acts 6:3). In 1 Peter 5:2, Peter states that an elder is to do the work of the gospel eagerly and not be shamefully greedy for material gain or profit. Jude 12 characterizes false teachers as "shepherds who feed themselves." Like the Judaizers, false teachers don't exhibit a heart to shepherd and care for others in the church. They are only on the lookout for opportunities to further themselves.

This is why Paul warns in 1 Timothy 5:22, "Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others..." Paul states that those who hastily appoint unqualified men as elders are later implicated in the future sin of those elders. Time must be given to let the quality of their lives become evident. This is why Paul instructs Timothy to first test all potential elders and deacons and to let them serve only if they prove to be blameless (1 Tim. 3:10).

So, Paul exposes the sinful desires of the Judaizers, which was to be praised and honored ("that you may make much of them"). He shows that their misplaced zeal was really a desire to add the Galatians to their trophy case of self-glory (6:13).

Mark this: Promoters of self-glory are the believer's true enemy. Your true enemy is anyone who directs you to trust in the law for righteousness before God! The chief work of the enemy is to blind you to Christ by magnifying the allurements of your own self-righteousness. Oh, how the human heart craves self-exaltation and admiration (to be made much of)! But, this is the enemy of Christ and the gospel!

We must heed Paul's example and learn to war against anything that would feed the self-serving, self-exalting desires of our flesh. This can only be done by standing firm in the freedom of the gospel. Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon entitled, "Salvation by Works, A Criminal Doctrine," writes,

The idea of salvation by the merit of our own works is exceedingly insinuating. It matters not how often it is refuted, it asserts itself again and again; and when it gains the least foothold it soon makes great advances. Hence Paul, who was determined to show it no quarter, opposed everything which bore its likeness. He was determined not to permit the thin end of the wedge to be introduced into the church, for well he knew that willing hands would soon be driving it home hence when Peter sided with the Judaizing party, and seemed to favor those who demanded that the Gentiles should be circumcised, our brave apostle withstood him to the face. He fought always for salvation by grace through faith, and contended strenuously against all thought of righteousness by obedience to the precepts of the ceremonial or the moral law. No one could be more explicit than he upon the doctrine that we are not justified or saved by works in any degree, but solely by the grace of God. His trumpet gave forth no uncertain sound, but gave forth the clear note.

### 3. LEGALISM SEPARATES SINNERS FROM CHRIST.

Mark this: When self is exalted Christ is shut out!

Underlying Paul's relationship with the Galatians was an issue of eternal significance! Timothy George notes that the Judaizers were not only guilty of sheep stealing but also of soul butchering (*Galatians*, p. 332)!

The Judaizers were zealously seeking to bring the Galatians under the law so that they might separate the Galatians from Paul. But, as we saw in v. 14, to receive Paul and the gospel was in essence to receive Christ. Thus, to be alienated from Paul was to be alienated from the gospel and Christ!

The destructive side effect of being brought under the law is to be separated from Christ and thus lose all hope for salvation (Gal. 1:8-9; 5:2). To be under the law is to be under the eternal curse of the law (Gal. 3:10). To be in Christ through faith in the gospel is to be under the eternal blessing of God (Gal. 3:8-9, 14; 4:15).

Paul's words recall Jesus' strong language toward the Pharisees in Matthew 23:15, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves."

Jesus denounces the Pharisees self-centered zeal in seeking converts. He exposes their true dishonorable motives. The Pharisees only sought converts to place them under the

burdensome, legalistic, requirements of their extrabiblical traditions. In doing so, Jesus says they make their converts “twice as much a child of hell” as themselves.

A “child of hell/Gehenna,” was a reference to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, just south of Jerusalem, where refuse was burned. Jesus used this as a metaphorical picture of eternal punishment.

Like Jesus, Paul criticizes the Judaizers who required circumcision, observance of dietary restrictions and Jewish feast days for justification. The Judaizers zealously sought to get the Galatians to supplement their own works with Christ’s righteousness as the basis for their acceptance before God.

But, a supplemented Jesus is no Savior! He is either everything or nothing. Self-righteousness and Christ’s righteousness can no more be mixed together than oil and water. Thus, Paul writes in Galatians 2:21, “if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Again, Charles Spurgeon, writes,

It is the intense selfishness of this doctrine which condemns it as an evil thing. It naturally exalts self. If a man conceives that he will be saved by his own works he thinks himself somewhat, and glories in the dignity of human nature: when he has been attentive to religious exercises he rubs his hands and feels that he deserves well of his Maker; he goes home to repeat his prayers, and ere he falls asleep he wonders how he can have grown to be so good and so much superior to those around him. When he walks abroad he feels as if he dwelt apart in native excellence, a person much distinguished from “the vulgar herd,” a being whom to know is to admire.

All the while he considers himself to be very humble, and is often amazed at his own condescension. What is this but a most hateful spirit? God, who sees the heart, loathes it. He will accept the humble and the contrite, but he puts far from him those who glory in themselves. Indeed, my brethren, what have we to glory in? Is not every boast a lie? What is this self-hood but a peacock feather, fit only for the cap of a fool? May God deliver us from exalting self; and yet we cannot be delivered from so doing if we hold in any degree the doctrine of salvation by our own good works (“Salvation by Works, a Criminal Doctrine”).

The real enemy of your soul is self and anyone who comes to you and directs you deeper into yourself. The main idea in this section (4:12-20) is Paul’s exhortation, “Become as I am.” Here, Paul is exhorting the Galatians (and us!) to not become like the Judaizers, whose zeal is not for the gospel but for their own praise and honor.

Zeal for your own praise and honor will destroy your soul! In contrast, Paul longs for the Galatians (and us!) to be zealous for the gospel and thus live in freedom to the praise and glory of Christ. Life comes through self-debasing, Christ-forming, gospel-centered faith.

Therefore, like Paul, let us seek to bring unity to the church by no longer seeking to live under a “Do this and live” relationship with God (i.e., Mosaic Law). Like Paul, let us not feed the self-serving, self-exalting desires of our flesh. And, like Paul, let us seek to unite (not separate) others and ourselves to Christ.

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