

# 11. I fear for you

February 14, 2013

As Christian parents we would like our children and grandchildren – whether they are grown-ups or not – to walk with our Lord, glorify His name, be obedient to Him, and be blessed by Him.

Unfortunately, many of our children and/or grandchildren chose to do what they want over what the Lord wants them to do. It's not that they are criminals or bad people. They simply don't care to be obedient to Him with all of their hearts.

Do they not know what they are supposed to do? Some of them had received Christ as their Savior and Lord when they were younger. We all believe that we taught them the way of the Lord, but they intentionally reject God's way and chose to live in their own carnal ways.

As we watch their lives unfold each day, we have this uncomfortable and nagging thought in the back of our minds that makes us murmur, "I fear for you." I heard that someone says, "When they're little, they're a handful; but when they're grown, they're a handful!"

That is how our apostle Paul felt about the believers of the Galatian churches. They were his spiritual children and they were very dear to him. Because the churches of Galatia were visited by Paul during his first missionary journey and he shared his life with them.

## A. TURNING BACK TO THE BONDAGE

*Galatians 4:8-11 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.*

I've come across many drug addicts and alcoholics from the prison ministry that I was involved in previously as well as this pastoral ministry and a couple of in-laws. I can tell you this much, I have no idea why so many of them go right back to their miserable addictive life of bondage after they were doing well without drugs and alcohol for sometime. Those people would tell me that I can never understand the addictions they have because I've never used or have been addicted to drugs. They are right about that.

These Galatian believers previously were in bondage and slavery to the religion of idols that demanded their work for their false gods to gain favor from them. When they were set free by the grace of God, they enjoyed God's grace and freedom for awhile until the Judaizers' arrival to the region of Galatia that triggered them about the rituals that made their hearts proud.

They chose spiritual bondage and slavery over freedom and grace; they were giving up the power of the Gospel for the weakness of Law. The Law never made anybody rich or powerful; on the contrary, the Law could only reveal man's weakness and spiritual bankruptcy. No wonder Paul weeps over these believers, as he sees them abandon liberty for bondage, power for weakness, and God's riches for poverty.

Let's not allow the Galatians' stupidity to become ours. Let's stop trying to earn the approval of our Father, who has already accepted us and adopted us in Christ Jesus. We must beware of the legalistic spirit that caters to the flesh, leads to pride, and makes the outward event a substitute for the inward experience with the Lord.

## **B. PAUL'S PERSONAL PLEA**

*Galatians 4:12-18 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? 17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. 18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.*

Until now some Christians might say, "Paul was going after the Galatian Christians from the viewpoint of a theologian. There is no personal involvement in his part. He is cold and callous to them." But that kind of observation must be changed with what we are studying here.

This emotional appeal not only tells us Paul's desire for the Galatians, but it also reveals something about his past and present commitment to them.

V12 gives us a rather vague description of what Paul did to be like the Galatians. But we can guess what he did from the way he described in 1 Corinthians 9:

*1 Corinthians 9:19-22 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.*

Paul entered into Galatians' culture, adapted to their ways and became one with them without compromising the truth of Christianity. Even though he was a Jew, trained as a Pharisee to be totally separate from Gentiles, he lived like a Gentile in order to reach the Gentiles for Christ. This is the pattern many Christian missionaries adopt when they locate into their mission fields.

Many Bible students wish that Paul had been more clear here, because we are not sure just what events he is talking about. When Paul had originally visited them, he was suffering from some physical affliction. If, as noted in Galatians 1, Paul wrote this letter to the churches of Southern Galatia region, then he is referring to his first missionary journey, recorded in Acts 13-14. Apparently Paul had not intended to visit these cities, but was forced to do so because of some bodily infirmity. We can only speculate as to what this was.

Some have suggested malaria; others, an affliction of the eyes which I believe that it was due to v15. Whatever it was, it must have made Paul somewhat repulsive in appearance, because he commends the Galatians for the way they received him in spite of the way he looked. To them, he was an angel of God. It is a wonderful

thing when people accept God's servants, not because of their outward appearance or oratory skills, but because they represent the Lord and bring His message.

Now Paul asks them: "What has happened to that love? What has happened to the blessing and excitement you experienced when you heard the Gospel and trusted Christ?" Of course, Paul knew what had happened: the Judaizers had come in and stolen their hearts. This is what I call "From Penthouse to outhouse". It happens to pastors frequently.

Paul's situation is so relevant to our day. Teaching the Scriptures often means communicating God's truth to people who don't want to hear it. Pastors should not be so naive as to think they will always receive a warm welcome if they consistently teach the truth. In fact, teaching the truth will always run the risk of alienating some people.

And people in the church need to be aware that their initial positive response to pastors who teach the truth will be severely tested when the truth cuts like a two-edged sword. During such a time of conviction, people need to maintain their loyalty to the Word of God and their pastors who teach the truth as is precisely because they have the courage to preach the truth even when it hurts.

Paul had the Galatians' best interests at heart. The Judaizers, however, did not. He told them the truth, but Judaizers gave them lies. Paul sought to glorify Christ, but the Judaizers glorified themselves.

I've seen the people like the Judaizers who earn trust from church leadership and congregation with their silver tongues. These people know how to talk with the right lingo and portray themselves as holy men. Then, they start to cause a dissension within the body by telling things that are against their pastor that are not true or saying, "I'd better not say anymore about it." By doing so, they make others think that there are a lot of hidden problems with their pastors which is more damaging because it gives wild imagination in the minds of people.

These people are like Absalom who took people's hearts away from his own father king David. In a short time later, this false leader will take those people and start their own church down the street. What I don't understand is why they don't start their own church from the beginning if they wanted to be a pastor? The reason is because they are wolves in sheep clothing. Like the devil, they come to steal, to kill, and to destroy what God does in the body of Christ.

Don't get me wrong, because pursuing others and seeking to win them over to your way of thinking isn't bad – as long as it's done "in a commendable and godly manner," that is, with pure motives. After all, that's how Paul pursued the Galatians when he was present with them and got them off the idol worship. But that's not what the Judaizers were doing. They wanted to shut out the Galatians from their relationship with Paul and their freedom in Christ. The false teachers wanted the Galatians to seek them, to be under their control and totally dependent on them.

Our passion and our goal should be to bring others closer to Christ, not bring ourselves popularity.

### **C. REALLY?!?!**

*Galatians 4:19-20 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, 20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.*

Apostle John called the recipients of his letters "my little children" or "little children" often. I guess he could do that since he was around 90 years old when he wrote those letters. But for apostle Paul, this is the only time he used this particular endearment term. There is no ulterior motives, but filled with commitment and love for them.

Like a mother struggling through labor, Paul wanted to endure this hardship with the Galatians until Christ was formed in them. He wanted to see them shaped into the image of Christ. He had been "in labor" once before, when he preached the Gospel to them. Now he endured labor again as he struggled to see them grow in Christ and be delivered from the false teachers.

Like any loving parent, Paul would rather be present with the Galatians than far away. He would prefer to change his tone from one of rebuke to one of loving instruction. Yet Paul's hard words have been necessary, because he has doubts about their desires to turn their backs on Christ and live again under the Law.

### **D. APPLICATIONS**

**1) We must beware of the legalistic spirit that caters to the flesh, leads to pride, and makes the outward event a substitute for the inward experience with the Lord.**

We need to stop trying to earn the approval of our Father, who has already accepted us and adopted us in Christ Jesus.

**2) It is a wonderful thing when people accept God's servants, not because of their outward appearance or oratory skills, but because they represent the Lord and bring His message.**

**3) Our passion and our goal should be to bring others closer to Christ, not bring ourselves popularity.**