

26. The Book of Galatians 4:12-20 (Topical)

Liberty From Law-Part 25

a message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(8-4-24)

Find this weeks' sermon audio and video message [HERE](#).

This morning in our study in Galatians, as Paul has spent the better part of the first 4 chapters defending the truth of the gospel of grace against the false gospel of the Judaizers who had polluted it with the works of the Law.

After fighting for the people in Galatia who Paul loved and who were being lied to by false teachers that didn't care about them but only wanted to use for their own selfish purposes. Paul comes to a point where his heart is overwhelmed with concern for them—but also somewhat by a sense of rejection and hurt.

The only thing that Paul had ever wanted for them was that they would know the truth and come to love Jesus as much as he did. And yet the Galatians seemed to love these lying hucksters more than they did Paul whom the Judaizers had convinced was a phony who had lied to them about the truth of the gospel—prompting Paul to ask with a broken heart:

Galatians 4:16–17 (NKJV)

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...*

Paul dealt with this kind of thing many times throughout the course of his ministry where, after pouring himself into people whom he loved, they turned on him—this was a constant source of pain for him.

We see this reflected in his epistle to the Corinthians—

2 Corinthians 12:14–15 (NLT)

¹⁴ Now I am coming to you for the third time, and I will not be a burden to you. I don't want what you have—I want you. After all, children don't provide for their parents. Rather, parents provide for their children. ¹⁵ I will gladly spend myself and all I have for you, even though it seems that the more I love you, the less you love me.

Serving in ministry, like raising a family—can often be a thankless labor of love.

So often in life our deepest hurts come from those we love and sacrifice the most for but seem to appreciate us the least—even to the point of turning against us.

Let's read what Paul has to say about the hurt he was feeling at the hands of the Galatians—

Galatians 4:12 (NKJV)

¹² Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all.

Paul was a Jew who had grown up under the Law—but now, in Christ, he had been delivered from the Law and set free to live for and relate to God through His grace.

That's what he has in mind when he says to the Galatians—**"I urge you brethren to become like me"** in the sense of relating to God by grace and not by the works of the Law.

Paul is somewhat *mystified* and maybe even a little *traumatized* that, after teaching them the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace—that they had so quickly turned from it to embrace the false teaching of the Judaizers.

The Judaizers had told them that they could only approach God and be all that He desired them to be (mature and fruitful) by keeping the works of the Law. (Galatians 1:6-10)

Galatians 4:12 (NKJV)

¹² Brethren, I urge you to become like me [free from the burden of the Law], for I *became* like you...

The Gentile Galatians had never been under the Law—and, as of this point, had not yet placed themselves under it—but they were thinking about it! So, when Paul says, **"I became like you"** he is saying to them—

"I left the Law and came to know the freedom that you Gentiles had always known not having to live under the burden of the Law! Don't put yourselves under the very system I was delivered from! Don't be what I was, be who I am now in Christ—free!!"

"You have not injured me at all." (verse 12c)

Paul has used some pretty strong words with the Galatians, and he didn't want them to think that what he was saying to them was out of anger or motivated by a sense of personal hurt.

That is not to say that Paul didn't feel any hurt over the situation (he wasn't a robot, he had feelings)—it's just that he didn't want them to think that he was making this all about himself—when in reality, his main concern was for them.

To drive that point home, he recounts with fondness how they received him when he first came to them preaching the gospel, and he is basically saying to them—

"Please don't think that I'm mad at you or that I regret my time with you—on the contrary, I have nothing but fond memories of our time together."

Galatians 4:13–14 (NKJV)

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.

On his first missionary journey Paul apparently became seriously ill.

Some suggest that he contracted malaria while traveling through the low, swampy regions of Pamphylia (southern coast of Asia Minor) and decided to go up into the higher and healthier elevation of Galatia and minister there for a while until he was better (see Acts 13:13–14).

That was why he said:

"You all remember when I came to you the first time to preach the gospel—I came to you because of my physical infirmity. But even though I came to you weak and sick—you didn't look down on me, but rather you were very kind and received me like an angel (messenger) of God— even as if Jesus Himself had come to you!"

So again, Paul preached in Galatia “because of physical infirmity”.

Galatians 4:15 (NKJV)

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.**

There are many who connect verses (13-14) and in particular this statement in verse 15 with an eye problem that Paul seems to have had. That possibly it was connected with the “*thorn for his flesh*” that Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:7—

2 Corinthians 12:7 (NKJV)

⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh [Greek is ‘for’ the flesh] was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

That Paul had an eye problem seems fairly certain from the statement in verse 15 of Galatians 4 where he said—**“For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me”**.

By how Paul ends this epistle—**“See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!” (6:11)**

Galatians 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?**

This verse is the heart of this passage—and in the larger context, one of the sad realities of ministry.

When we go into a world of darkness to give people the light of God’s truth—don’t expect them to praise and thank you—Jesus warned that just the opposite will be true:

Matthew 5:10–12 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Blessed *are* those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great *is* your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

But it is especially hurtful when you labor to bring God’s people His truth only to have them turn against you, call you a liar, and to consider you an enemy!

The way many Christians and pastors have circumvented this—is by becoming a ‘*man-pleaser*.’ Yet as Paul warned at the beginning of this epistle—**“If I seek to please men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.” (1:10)**

Galatians 4:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ **Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?**

In other words, Paul is asking them—**“What happened to all the love you had for me? Have you turned on me because I tell you the truth?”**—

Proverbs 27:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

One commentator—

“In L.A. there is a church called the ‘Church of the Open Door.’ On the back wall where only the pastor/preacher/speaker standing at the pulpit could see it was a sign that read, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” (John 12:21—KJV)

J. Vernon McGee who pastored there at one time said he would have liked to put a sign on the pulpit that only the congregation could see that read, ‘Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?’ As you know, many folks today really don’t want the preacher to tell the truth from the pulpit. They would much rather he would say something complimentary that would smooth their feathers and make them feel good. We all like to have our backs rubbed, and there is a lot of back-rubbing from the contemporary pulpit rather than the declaration of the truth”.

I do think that much of what we see today with regard to this kind of thing is the fulfillment of the prophecy that Paul gave us in 2 Timothy 4—

2 Timothy 4:3–4 (NLT)

³ For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will reject the truth and chase after myths.

Paul was no man-pleaser, he was a true servant of Jesus Christ, who always gave the truth of God to those he ministered to—unlike the hucksters who took advantage of people to get their money or add them to their group.

Galatians 4:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ **They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.**

Paul is warning them, ***“Beware of the affection these legalists show you. They zealously court you, but for no good.”***

The way these legalists were winning over the Galatians to their message was by **‘zealously courting’** them.

In other words, they wrapped their message in a cloak of love, but the end result was not good.

One author noted,

“Many cults use a technique informally known as “love bombing.” They overwhelm a prospective member with attention, support, and affection. But it isn’t really a sincere love for the prospect; it is really just a technique to gain another member.”

“They want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.”—or in other words, they wanted to **exclude** the Galatians from the fellowship of other Christians so as to bring them into their *“super-spiritual”* group of legalists.

When it comes to false teachers the red flag is always, *“Our way is the only true way”* or *“Our way is the more spiritual way.”*

This is especially true with the cults who always try to separate you from everyone who is not a member of their group (even from family)—which is always a ‘red flag.’ (Explain)

“Exclude” is literally *“lock you up, to bring you into prison”* (spiritually speaking)—because religion/law doesn’t save, it enslaves—

Galatians 5:1 (NKJV)

¹ Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Galatians 4:17–18 (NKJV)

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.**

Paul wasn't against *zeal*—he wants Christians to be zealous in good things always (Titus 2:14).

But it's important to make sure that our zeal is 'in a good thing'—because zeal in a *bad thing* is dangerous (Islam)—

Romans 10:2–4 (NKJV)

² For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. ⁴ For Christ *is* the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Paul knew this well, because before he became a Christian, he had plenty of zeal—even persecuting the church (Acts 7:58; 8:4).

Later, Paul looked back at that time of great zeal in the service of a lie and deeply regretted it. (1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:15)

The Galatian Christians were no doubt impressed by the *zeal* of the Judaizers (legalists)—they always come off super sincere and more committed than other believers.

Galatians 4:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, **and not only when I am present with you.**

Paul wanted the Galatians to be zealous for what is good—all the time, not just when he was there with them.

You know you're growing as a Christian when you have the same convictions and zeal for God during the week at your job or in school surrounded by unbelievers that you have when you're at church with other Christians.

Galatians 4:19–20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ **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.**

By calling the Galatians his **little children**, Paul is reminding them that—it was he who had given birth to them through the gospel.

Now He is undergoing birth-pangs again for them again—not for their salvation (they were already saved)—but this time for their sanctification that **Christ** might be **formed in** them.

Christlikeness is God's full objective for His people—

Ephesians 4:13 (NKJV)

¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

Colossians 1:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Up until this point it’s like Paul was writing them an email using all caps—but he says he would rather be speaking with them in person. Then he could better express himself by changing the tone of his voice.

If they were receptive to his correction, he would be tender—if, however, they were haughty and rebellious, he would be stern.

Paul now returns to his doctrinal argument against those who want to be Christians and still live by the law (next time). One of the lessons we can glean from this passage (besides having a zeal for the truth and a love for those whom we share it with)—is how to deal with conflict in our relationships.

First of all, let me just say that conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships—and anyone that tries to tell you otherwise is either ignorant or is being dishonest. The only relationship in the universe where there is never any conflict is the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit—period!

Conflict in interpersonal relationships is inevitable—but resolution is not.

I am finding more and more in our society and even in the church that conflict is *escalating*—but conflict resolution is *declining*. We see this in race relations and in the hyper-partisan political climate in Washington. We see it manifesting itself in the escalating divorce rate in our nation—and we see it in the church with one church split after another.

What is the problem?

Conflict has been around since the beginning of time—so what has changed that it is escalating and not being resolved as it once was? Well, I’d like to look at this subject next week in our study of Galatians.

In life and especially when you serve the Lord you are going to be hurt by the people you are closest to—family (physical and spiritual) and friends.

In our interpersonal relationships—conflict is inevitable.

Whereas conflict resolution is a learned skill that takes humility and wisdom from God’s Word to accomplish.

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).