

GALATIANS AND Y0U

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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Chapter Seven

DOCTRINAL EXPOSITION

Galatians 3:1-4:31

Apostasy from Faith Deplored (Galatians 4:8-20)

Subjection to the form (verses 8-11)

In verses 8-11 of this fourth chapter of Galatians Paul deplores the fact that the readers, after professing to have entered into the new life of fellowship with GOD are, at the solicitations of the Judaizers, referring to an observance of empty forms.

"Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. But now . . . " What a somber contrast the sin described in verse 8 and 9 presents to the glowing privileges suggested in the verse immediately preceding! Paul is at a loss to account for his readers' turning their backs upon the treasures of grace for an eager pursuit of the husks of legalism. Prior to their conversion they had, in common with pagans everywhere, devoted themselves to idolatry and the worship of false gods - in which category are to be included demons and deified men as well as idols. In man there is an instinct for worship which in the absence of a knowledge of the true GOD, will, like vines cumbering the ground, fasten upon false and unworthy objects of adoration. This principle is applicable, not only to heathen sunk in the grossest superstition but to many highly respectable and intelligent people who would be insulted if anyone were to classify them as pagans. Men who reject the Son of GOD are worshipping gods of human fabrication and not the GOD of divine revelation (John 5:23; 14:6). They make idols of wealth, fame, science, reason, pleasure and many other things. We are enslaved by what we adore. Scorn of the best makes us slaves of the worst. It would be well for society at large if some of our worldly-wise writers of best sellers would turn from their futile "debunking" of God-made men to a desperately needed "debunking" of man-made gods. What treasures of time and talent are wasted upon counterfeit gods in our day!

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" Paul injects the words "**or rather are known of God**" to forestall any pride his readers may be tempted to take in their having come into a knowledge of the true GOD. They would never have found

GOD if GOD had not first found them. And must we not all say that, apart from the grace of GOD in CHRIST who sought and brought us, not one of us would or could have entered into a saving knowledge of the LORD? He who seeks business leadership or social preferment is most diligent in cultivating the acquaintance of "the right people," for to know and be known of them is an advantage not lightly to be esteemed. How vastly more needful in the light of eternity to know GOD and be known of Him as His blood-bought children! Many a worldly reputation will go up in smoke before the flashing eyes of the LORD at the Great White Throne. It matters not how many celebrities we know or how many of the great of earth smile favorably upon us if we know not CHRIST.

"How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements . . ." Paul alludes here to the many rites and forms of works-righteousness whereby Jew and Gentile alike sought to hide from GOD. Poles apart in many respects, Judaism and heathenism stood in one common plane of impotence to provide materials for building a bridge of reconciliation across the gulf of separation that sin had dug between GOD and man. All of man's efforts to save himself are truly but "**weak and beggarly elements**" that leave him weaker and poorer in the sight of the LORD. And yet how many men and women seem never to have grasped the elementary truth that man can never save himself by his own good works! And as for dependence upon ceremonial rites, formalism makes religion a farce instead of a force.

"Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." The Galatians had evidently so yielded to the false teachings of Judaizers as to celebrate various Jewish holy days and special seasons; and Paul was deeply grieved over this lapse into a legalism on their part. They were doing all this, no doubt, in the expectation of obtaining extra merit and special favor for themselves. (The middle voice of the Greek verb for "observe" brings out this meaning). Does this mean that Christians are not to celebrate special days in the church year such as Christmas and Easter? Can it be quoted in support of the position maintained in some circles that Christians are under no obligation to keep the first day of the week sacred since every day should be regarded as holy unto the LORD? We must answer both of these questions with an emphatic negative. Our observance of holy days, however, must not be with a view to winning merit before GOD. The Lord's Day is His gracious provision for us, an oasis in the desert for the refreshment of our spiritual lives. Do we keep the first day of the week holy in order to gain merit for ourselves or to pay tribute to our LORD? Motive governs income in the things of the spirit.

"I am afraid of you, let I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Well can we appreciate the fogs of disappointment that swept over the soul of the great apostle as he learned of this growing departure from the Gospel of grace on the part of these Galatians of whom he had expected so much. His past labor among them was a fact; the fruitage therefrom was dependent upon their loyalty to the truth. He had planted the seed; it was for them to drive away the thieving crows of error, particularly the deadly legalism which the Judaizers were trying to foist upon them. Paul doubtless was fearful of the effect upon his work elsewhere of a wholesale turning from the Gospel of grace on the part of the Galatian churches.

Desertion of the truth (verses 12-16)

"Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are." Dr. Keen in his very helpful commentary on Galatians throws real light upon this exhortation of the apostle as follows: "He

appeals to them: '**Be as I am**' (free from the law) '**for I am as ye are**' (actually saved by grace),' Or we could paraphrase it thus, 'Be like me in ignoring the law; for I, though a Jew, have come like you Gentiles - without the law.'"

"**Ye have not injured me at all.**" The reference in these words is somewhat obscure. Various explanations have been offered by outstanding New Testament scholars. The following view advocated by Hogg and Vine seems plausible: the apostle is anticipating a possible objection that the vigor of his language is due to some personal grievance. Other commentators advance the theory that Paul is referring to a contention of the Galatians that they had a perfect right to supplement what he taught them with further instruction from other teachers. This right Paul grants, with the observation, however, that the toils of legalism in which they are entangling themselves will work injury to themselves rather than to Paul.

"**Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.**" These words cannot very well be understood without some knowledge of their background. Evidently the apostle had been overtaken by illness and while under a great physical handicap had proclaimed to the Galatians the Word of Life. The attack of sickness may have been the barrier interposed by the SPIRIT whereby Paul's plans for going into the province of Asia and later into Bithynia were frustrated: "**Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not**" (Acts 16:6, 7). As to the nature of the malady we are left in uncertainty. It was probably the thorn in the flesh alluded to in II Corinthians 12:7, "**And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.**" Speculations without end have been offered covering this thorn in the flesh. What was this thorn? The most likely guesses are that it was a peculiarly aggravated form of ophthalmia, an eye disease caused by Paul's temporary blindness following the appearance of CHRIST to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:8); or else that this thorn in the flesh was in the form of recurrent attacks of malaria, an ailment very prevalent in the region of Tarsus where the apostle was born and brought up. Either one of these maladies, or both of them together, would make the victim an object of aversion during the period of a severe attack. This physical repugnance was undoubtedly what Paul had in mind in the reference to the temptation which was in his flesh. But instead of turning from him in disgust, as might have been expected, the Galatians had given most earnest heed to Paul's testimony for JESUS and had accepted the SAVIOUR with an enthusiasm that knew no bounds. They received Paul, prostrated with pain and weakness as he was, as an angel of GOD, as the personal representative of the Son of GOD Himself. How ingloriously, then, did their present apostasy contradict their early zeal for CHRIST!

And this is not unrelated to current situations, with reference both to preachers and hearers of the Gospel. Paul, as we have tried to make clear, was greatly hindered in his work from time to time by an unavoidable physical affliction, whatever it may have been. And as in the case of the great apostle, the LORD again and again has richly blessed the ministry of devoted servants of His who have been beset by bodily infirmities that humanly speaking would seem to constitute insurmountable barriers to effectiveness in the work of the MASTER. Names of such saints thus

used of the LORD despite crippling physical limitations will no doubt come to the minds of the readers. We think, for example, of George Matheson, Robert Hall, Charles H. Spurgeon, Fannie Crosby, and Annie Johnson Flint. But while GOD in His sovereign mercy and wisdom may crown the ministry of such afflicted saints with multiplying fruit to the glory of CHRIST, we are not thereby warranted in the conclusion that the LORD will similarly bless the service of men and woman laboring under bodily handicaps that could have been prevented by a common-sense observance of the rules of health. The fact that GOD sometimes uses pain and weakness to augment the spiritual power of his workers by no means justifies servants of JESUS in carelessly and willfully neglecting their health.

But when Physical ailments do overtake us in the course of our service for the LORD, we must be careful not to exaggerate them to the point where they are made an easy excuse for failing to discharge our Christian duties. What trifling trials in the flesh are allowed to play havoc with our service and witness for the LORD!

The unsaved, furthermore, will do well to profit by the example of the Galatians in giving earnest heed to the message of the Gospel even though it may come to them through messengers who have little of attractiveness in person or delivery to commend the truth they advocate. Be it remembered that the wrapping does not lower the value of the contents. Diamonds done up in brown paper are no less precious than when they repose in a silver box lined with velvet. Regardless of the unattractiveness of the preacher or the personal worker, the Gospel is still the one and only key to salvation and eternal life. Shortcomings of the messenger will afford the sinner who has rejected the Word of Life no shelter when he stands before the judgment bar of GOD. But while the appearance of the preacher does not excuse the sinner for spurning the offer of salvation, the Christian worker has no right to prejudice his cause by carelessness in dress and by refusing to overcome repellent mannerisms.

"Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." Whether these words can be quoted in support of the view that Paul's thorn in the flesh was eye trouble is at least open for question. It is more likely that the latter part of the verse was a current proverb expressive of unbridled sympathy. But at any rate, the apostle refers in unmistakable terms to the eager reception given to the Gospel by the Galatians, which throws their present abandonment of the doctrine of salvation by grace alone into darker hues than ever. It was a reenactment of the parable of the seed sown in stony places where there not much depth of earth: **"Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth . . . But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended"** (Matthew 13:5, 20, 21). How often these same conditions are duplicated in our day! Emotion is not devotion. The zeal and loyalty of too many professing believers resembles the transient torrent following a cloudburst rather than the deep, broad river fed by perennial springs and tributaries. Feeling good is no substitute for being good or doing good. We must rest in CHRIST to be blessed by CHRIST.

"Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" How typical is this reaction to wholesome admonition of the attitude of men and women today! Regardless of how

much he may need it, the average person resents correction. But the religious leader must not take counsel of his fears when faced with the duty of administering a much needed reproof. Danger does not dissolve duty. The servant of CHRIST dare not change his course with every shift in the wind of popular favor. Some pulpits, it is to be feared, are too much like the drugstore that specialized in candy, soda and almost everything else, to the neglect of its medical supplies.

They who resent being rebuked for sin and error by their leaders need to learn that scorn for storm warnings is powerless to ward off the impending tempest. The story is told of a man who received from a mail order house a barometer that he had purchased from them. Opening the package he saw that the barometer read "hurricane." In anger he sent the instrument back accompanied by a scorching letter charging the firm with selling merchandise under false pretenses. Then he went downtown to his office. When he returned home at night, his house was no more - it had "gone with the wind." The application is obvious. Why gamble with eternity by scoffing at God's warnings as to the consequences of sin?

Acceptance of the False (verses 17-20)

"The zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them." These Judaizers, Paul writes, are actuated by ulterior motives; they are seeking, not your good, but their own gain. They are unscrupulous exploiters. They do not have your best interest at heart. Therefore steer clear of them. Beware of their wiles. The Pharisaic party is courting you in a selfish spirit; they want to shut you out of your rightful inheritance in CHRIST that they may reduce you to their law. Would that men and women who today are being hard pressed by false teachers would take the time and trouble to examine the motives of their spiritual seducers! Self-interest is a major factor in the majority of false cults. It is significant that they go, not after outsiders, but after church members. They do not pray for the Church; they prey on the Church. They thrive on sheep-stealing. We who are charged with the responsibility of spiritual leadership should extend a welcoming hand to teachers - Bible conference speakers, for example - who are divinely qualified to lead Christians into a fuller knowledge of the truth and a deeper fellowship with the LORD; but we should set our faces like flint against imposters with false Gospels, notwithstanding all their brilliance of intellect or winsomeness of personality.

"But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you." It is good to be zealously courted in a good cause. No, Paul says in substance, I am not jealous of other teachers who come to you with the truth. I pray God's blessing upon all who come to you with a message that will help you grow in grace and in the knowledge of our LORD and SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST (II Peter 3:18). The thing that really matters is the triumph of the truth in your lives. But these Judaizers are seeking your spiritual undoing, and that is why I oppose them. Let us be sure that opposition to rival spiritual teachers is actuated by zeal for the truth, with no admixture of personal jealousy. Wounded pride may confuse superior insight into the truth with departure from the truth.

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you . . ." This is a bold figure that Paul uses here, one that is wrung from his heart under great stress of emotion. The apostle represents himself as the mother suffering birth pangs over them. The metaphor is that of the embryo-developing into the child. The Galatian believers were Paul's spiritual children. As he had travailed to bring them from idolatry into a new life in CHRIST, so

now he is laboring to deliver them from the Judaizers so that the Christ-life may be fully formed in them. In passing it might be observed that CHRIST would be born and grow in more hearts today were there more of this Pauline passion for souls on the part of the rank and file of Christians in our modern churches. Any legalism rolling in like a fog into the soul of the believer hampers the work of the HOLY SPIRIT in manifesting CHRIST through him in His beauty and attractiveness.

"I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you." Paul yearns to be able to go and speak to them instead of writing to them. He could put his heart into his voice. The pen stands as a barrier between them. It is a nonconductor of the emotions, powerless to move their hearts. Were he in their midst he would know better what kind of words to use, whether tender or severe, to bring them back to the path of truth. The true Christian worker will neither delight in severity for its own sake, nor will he refrain from it when the situation requires. In fact, we may even go so far as to say that the effectiveness of a needed rebuke is often in direct ratio to the disrelish, not to say pain, experienced in administering it. As iron must be melted to be poured into a mold, so unwelcome truths may be put into other hearts as a corrective when molten with tenderness.

Typology of Grace Unveiled (4:21-31)

In the closing section of the doctrinal portion of the epistle, the apostle makes use of Isaac and Ishmael, one the son of a free woman and the other of a bondwoman, to set forth in type the relation of the law to grace. Paul by no means questions the historicity of this Old Testament story; nor does he mean to say that the allegory was designed by the narrative. But under the inspiration of the SPIRIT he uncovers a rich typical lesson enshrined in the simple narrative (See Genesis 16:1-16; 21:1-21).

Among the Jews the bondage of the mother determined that of her child. Hagar and Sarah are identified with the two covenants, the Sinaitic and the Christian. The characteristic features of the two are slavery and freedom. The children of the old covenant are, like Ishmael, in bondage - to the Mosaic Law; the children of the new covenant are, like Isaac, free - freed in CHRIST from the dominion and penalty of the law.

Christians, both Jew and Gentile, are children of the promise, as Isaac was. Even as Ishmael is reputed in Jewish tradition to have shot arrows at Isaac, so, the apostle implies, the Jews in bondage to the law are persecuting the true children of Abraham who have found freedom from such bondage through acceptance of salvation through JESUS CHRIST. Thus Paul sums up his teaching in the doctrinal portion of the Epistle to the Galatians.

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