

## **Bibles???**

### **The Word of God is the Absolute Truth and the Final Authority**

This morning we continue our study through the book of Galatians.

We are going to be in chapter 4:12-20

Question?

Who were the first legalists in the bible?

Answer Adam and Eve.

But someone may say – wait a minute pastor - but the law was not created until much later – true.

**But God had given them one command and they failed to keep it.**

So, how were they legalist -

When you study the story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, we have to look at what was the motivation for them to eat the fruit of the tree.

And we discover it wasn't about them WANTING to disobey, but rather a desire to OBEY and have "knowledge of good and evil", whereby they could choose for themselves, instead of letting God guide them.

That church, is the definition of a legalist.

Let's pray...

Paul is writing to a group of churches in the Galatia region who have strayed from the gospel of grace because these Judaizers had infiltrated the church and they started preaching a perverse gospel.

And as a result, these churches started to embrace legalism once again.

So for the past few weeks, from the beginning of chapter three to the beginning of chapter 4, Paul has presented a brilliant argument in his letter, he has been referencing scripture, he has been using illustrations that the churches would easily understand.

Theologically speaking – his defense is perfect.

The evidence has been clearly laid out for the churches in Galatia to examine for themselves.

So far, as Paul has made his defense, he was been very direct with the churches in Galatia.

He is not beating around the bush – he is clearly pointing out that what they are doing is wrong.

However, now – Paul is going to shift his approach by speaking to them in a gentler manner.

He is going to speak to them directly from the heart.

And I believe this is a very important application for each and every one of us here today.

We tend to focus on the theological portion and many times we forget to speak from the heart.

We forget that the most loving thing we can do for someone is to endeavor to help them grow – to help steer them back in the right direction.

And we must remember that -

They key is not simply to point out their faults from a sense of superiority, but to do so in genuine love for them as we encourage them to be more like Christ.

And that is what Paul begins to do here.

**[Gal 4:12-20 NKJV] 12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I [became] like you. You have not injured me at all.**

Paul is urging his fellow brothers and sisters to look at his life as an example.

Noe, Paul didn't go around saying – "I'm Mr. Perfect, everyone should just follow me"

He didn't say – "Don't worry about following Jesus – you just do what I do" No.

Paul's frame of mind is this:

I'm following Jesus, so if you become like me – if you follow my example, then you will follow Jesus as well.

You see, Paul knew that there were things in his Christian life that needed to be real in the life of the Galatians.

They were lacking in certain areas.

And one of those areas was consistency.

**Paul exhibited consistency.**

He trusted in the Lord and the Lord alone for his salvation from the day that Jesus Christ saved him, on the road to Damascus - and decades later, he is still doing the same thing.

**The Galatian Christians were not like that.**

The Galatians started out with the right understanding of the gospel, because Paul led them into the right understanding.

But some of them didn't stay there like Paul did, and in that way, they should become like Paul.

Not only does he tell the churches in Galatia to be like him, he reminds them that he was once like them.

What does it mean that he was once like them?

This could be in reference to his legalistic past – remember Paul was a Pharisee but it could also be in reference to the conduct that he demonstrated as he went proclaiming the gospel to the gentiles.

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 9,

**[1Co 9:19-23 NKJV] 19 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. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with [you].**

What Paul is saying here in Corinthians is that when he proclaimed the gospel to the gentiles – he became as a gentile and freed himself from the shackles of legalism.

He was no longer bound by the rules and traditions or the Jews and here he is urging them to do the same thing.

**“I know where you guys are coming from because I was in the same place at a time in my life.”** That is what Paul is telling the churches in Galatia.

At the end of verse 12, Paul writes that ***You have not injured me at all.***

Paul wants to make sure that the churches in Galatia know that he is not writing this letter because he has been personally hurt by their actions.

He wants to make sure that they are aware that he is writing this letter for their sake and not his.

**13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.**

Paul is speaking to the Galatians about something that **they happen to know** all the details about, but we don't.

He's taking them back in time to when they first met.

Because, it appears that the first time Paul met these people and preached to them was apparently a time when he was sick.

Some have suggested that Paul had malaria, and was sick with a fever.

Some have suggested, and it makes the most sense that it was possibly some kind of eye disease that Paul was suffering from, also thought to be his "thorn in the flesh", and the reason for this is that Paul will make reference to eyes in verse 15.

So we really don't know what Paul's infirmity is – the only thing that we do know is that God used Paul's infirmity to bring the gospel to the churches in Galatia.

**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.**

It appears that the physical condition that Paul had been suffering from during this initial encounter was so severe – it may have been deemed as repulsive.

Think of the worst case of pink eye imaginable.

The eye inflamed, oozing and runny.

And as painful as it would have been for Paul – it would have been just as painful for others to look at as well.

Yet, what Paul is saying here is that his infirmity didn't prevent the Galatians from receiving him and demonstrating love toward him.

Most people would have ignored the message that he came to preach solely based on his physical condition.

Remember that during this time, physical infirmities and illnesses were regarded by people as a symbol of divine displeasure or punishment.

We see an example of this in John 9, Jesus encounters the blind beggar and the first thing that His disciples ask is

[Jhn 9:2-3 NKJV] 2 And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him."

In the book of Job, he has three friends that make the same assumption, and a big portion of the book of Job is the three friends trying to come up with reasons that Job was going through the series of tragedies.

So, there would have been a natural temptation for the Galatians to despise Paul and reject his message.

But that is not what they did –

They received Paul and responded to the message of grace that he preached.

**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.**

The Greek word that Paul uses here for (blessing) can also be translated “happiness” or “satisfaction” and implies a feeling of joy, fulfillment, and contentedness.

So what Paul is saying here is, “From the beginning you were satisfied and happy with me and with the message of grace I preached.

**So then what made you lose that satisfaction?**

**Why have you turned against me and against the gospel of grace?”**

And of course the answer is the return to legalism.

And Paul reminds them just how much affection they demonstrated toward him during this earlier time.

They were willing to pluck their own eyes to give to Paul.

Now, this is a figure of speech – if they plucked their eyes out, it would not have helped Paul out at all.

However, the Galatians would have given up their very eyesight if doing it would have helped Paul.

The Galatians had loved him with a love that would have compelled them to make any sacrifice on his behalf.

And again – it all changed when they abandoned grace.

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

The Galatians indeed had loved him before but there were some in that region that had already started to resent Paul simply because he was telling them the truth.

The implication of what Paul is saying in Galatians 4:16, is that on a second trip to Galatia by Paul, some of the church members there had already come under the influence of the Judaizers and had begun to doubt the truth of salvation by faith alone, which they had learned and accepted from him.

The false gospel of legalism had become more attractive to them than the gospel of grace, and the man who had been their beloved friend had become to them like an enemy.

How sad!!!

Keep in mind that Paul was the kind of man that was more interested in telling the truth and delivering God's message than he was in making the Galatians feel good.

He would rather give them the truth than win their approval.

That is what the role of a pastor is.

Unfortunately what is happening here in the region of Galatia happens in churches everywhere where the word of God is taught faithfully.

People will reject the truth that they hear from the pulpit – as the word of God cuts through their heart like a two-edged sword and instead of responding to the conviction

brought upon by the Word of God, they leave to another place where they are going to get their ears tickled.

**The church today is looking for a pleasant experience – they want to feel good.**

And for the most part, we try to offer a pleasant experience –

It's not too cold in here – just a little cold.

But church, I truly believe that if the word of God is being faithfully taught, and the Holy Spirit is faithfully working among his people, there will be times when we will come to church and we will feel unpleasant – as we are convicted by the Word of God.

The church needed the truth more than they needed to feel good about where they were at.

This is what Paul experienced with the churches in Galatia and this is what he later warns Timothy about in the final letter he wrote.

Turn with me to 2 Timothy 4

When you read the letters to Timothy, Paul had to exhort Timothy to do something about the false teachers that were infiltrating the church.

**[2Ti 4:1-4 NKJV] 1 I charge [you] therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season [and] out of season. Convince, rebuke,**

exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, [because] they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn [their] ears away from **the truth**, and be turned aside to fables.

As believers, the moment we walk away from the truth, we stop maturing spiritually.

Again, maturity comes with the truth.

Where does it say that???

Ephesians 4,

[Eph 4:11-16 NKJV] 11 And He Himself gave some [to be] apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 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; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, **15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--** 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective

**working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.**

We are to speak to one another in truth and we are not to deviate from the truth.

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

They of course is in reference to the Judaizers.

The word that is used for court is the same word that carries the idea of taking serious interest in someone – it is often used when a man courts a woman.

Paul is saying, “These Judaizers, they come to you and they make it seemed like they are really interested in you.

But the truth is that they really don't have a genuine love for you, they don't care for your welfare – all they want to do is entrap you in their legalism.

The goal of the Judaizers and any legalist is to simply control you.

They want to exclude you from grace, they want to exclude you from Jesus Christ, they want to exclude you from Paul – because once they have achieved that – you will be in bondage to them.

To the Judaizers, these Galatians were simply another notch in the belt.

Paul simply wants the churches in Galatia to hear and receive the truth and reject the harmful lies of these legalists.

The Galatians were thinking that Paul was their enemy – and Paul wants them to know that these Judaizers, they were the real enemy.

Church, we too must be faithful to the Word, even when it exposes blind spots and areas in our lives that need a radical adjustment.

Even when it contains truths that you and I may not want to hear.

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

If anyone knew how to be a zealot, it was Paul.

Because before he was a Christian, before he had his encounter with Jesus Christ, Paul a zealous man?

That zeal is what drove him to persecute the early church.

That zeal is what drove him to give the ok for the mob to stone Stephen.

And that zeal, in something that was bad, was something that he always regretted it.

Paul certainly wasn't against zeal.

He wanted Christians to be zealous in good things. And one of the ways that Paul demonstrated that was with his zeal to preach the gospel.

No matter how many times he was beaten or shipwrecked, he continued to preach Jesus.

**19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,**

In verse 19, Paul addresses the churches in Galatia as my little children.

He is speaking to them as a father or a mother to them.

It is a term of endearment.

Interestingly this is the only time that Paul uses the term, my little children, to address any of the churches in his epistles.

John uses it multiple times in his epistles.

And this is true in a sense that Paul founded all these churches in Galatia, they were indeed the fruit of his labor.

They were his children in the faith.

But notice what he says next –

**for whom I labor in birth again**

So now, Paul changes his metaphor from a dad or a mom to an expectant mother.

And what he is saying is “you’re my children but it is almost like I have to give birth to you again – we have to start all over again because you deviated from the truth.”

This metaphor of childbirth is not meant to communicate that Paul is the one who has saved the Galatians.

Only faith in Christ can cause a person to be born again.

Instead, Paul is describing his own emotional experience in suffering and celebrating for the birth of the Galatians when they believed in Christ when he was with them.

And now he suffers for them again to escape the false teaching of the Judaizers and fully trust the good news about their status in Christ.

Child birth is hard – it hurts – sometimes it is a prolonged process.

And Paul is thinking about those labor pains that he will have to experience again with the Galatians until...– **until Christ is formed in you.**

Now – notice the metaphor changes

First Paul was the parent – he was the mom/dad - then Paul was the expectant mother and now we have the church as the expectant mother as Christ in formed in each and every one of us.

God wants to form Jesus Christ in all of us.

So that when people look at us – they see Jesus

Turn with me to the book of Romans 8,

**[Rom 8:29 NKJV] 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to be] conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

The picture is of Christ becoming so prominent in us that He begins to do His work in the world through us

It's not about us and our works, as the legalists say; it's about Him and His work in us. You see, even in our own hearts, Christ must increase and we must decrease.

**20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.**

As Paul is writing this letter, he wishes two things.

He wants to be there physically with the churches in Galatia.

He also wishes that he did not have to speak to them in such strong words.

However, their danger of leaving the true gospel has made it necessary to use these strong words.

In the same way a parent doesn't delight in chastening his children – Paul wasn't thrilled in calling out the Galatians – but he had to do it –

Not so he can say, I told you so – he did it out of love.

Let's pray...

To Receive Christ do the following:

Admit, "I am a sinner."

Confess and be willing to turn from your sin.

Believe, by faith that Jesus Christ died for you on the cross.

Receive, through prayer, Jesus Christ into your heart and receive eternal life.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I know that I am a sinner and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died on the cross for my sins. Please forgive me for my sins and cleanse me by Your blood. I accept You by faith as my personal Lord and Savior. Give me a thirst for Your Word and Help me to follow You all of my days. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen. pray...