

Paul's Plea: Cling to the Gospel!

Scripture: Galatians 4:12–18

Code: 48-22

Open your Bible, if you will, to Galatians chapter 4. For those of you visiting with us, Galatians is a book in the New Testament written by the apostle Paul, one of thirteen New Testament books that he wrote. It's the first one that he wrote in terms of chronology, and it is a book designed really to do one thing, and that is to proclaim the fact that salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ; that salvation does not come to those who are good or do good works, or religious, or involved in religious ceremonies, rituals; whether they be circumcision, baptism, or any other right or ritual. Those cannot achieve salvation, nor do they partly achieve salvation, as if there's a combination between faith and works. Paul's message in Galatians is that God forgives the sins of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and no works play any role in that at all. Works are the result of salvation, not the reason for it, not the cause of it.

So Paul has been defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone into chapter 4. And now in verse 12, he sets aside his arguments, and this is a much different portion of Scripture. In fact, it's a bit of a shocking change in the character of this book. The book has been very polemic, very severe, pronouncing curses on people who tamper with the gospel, warning those who have been bewitched by false doctrine; it has called such people fools. This has been a very strong formidable proclamation of salvation by faith alone in Christ. It has been head, you might say, and not heart.

We have seen the apostle Paul as a theologian. We have seen him mastering the reasonings of theology. We've seen him as a lawyer defending his case. We've seen him as a biblical scholar tapping into Old Testament texts. And he's done all of this to make a case, a reasonable case, a rational case, and a biblical case for salvation by faith alone; and that is the great doctrine, of course, of the Reformation that defines Protestantism and true salvation. At this particular point, we find a change in his approach; and let me begin by reading verse 12 to you. We'll read down to verse 20.

"I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

"So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you – but I wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."

Up to this point, there has not been one amenity, there has not been one personal comment, not one personal note, not even in the introduction. Paul always gives personal touches in his introduction,

except in Galatians. There is a fury raging in his heart as he writes this book, and he skips all the amenities and goes right with fervor and passion to the argument that he must make against the false teachers who have come into the churches in Galatia and told the people that salvation is not by faith alone, it is by faith plus circumcision plus adherence to the ceremonies and rituals of the Mosaic law.

To this point, he has given us the strong reasoning of his fertile mind. He has been engaged in a battle, a battle for the thinking of those who are caught up in error, a battle to preserve God-authored, God-ordained gospel truth. And, honestly, he has seemed detached. It has seemed impersonal in a sense. He has preferred truth to friendship. He has preferred fact to fellowship. He has been concerned with principles over people. But all that changes now in verses 12 through 20.

There are not theological reasonings here, there is only one profound theological declaration, and it is a critical one to understand. But for the most part, this is not theology. There are no references to the Old Testament. This is where his heart takes over. His anger and his frustration, you might say, have run their course. It's not over. As he ends verse 20, he says, "I'm still perplexed about you."

To say that he has turned to the personal does not mean that he has resolved the issue. It does mean that his anger has cooled – and it has cooled in the clarity of the arguments that he has made – he has pelted out the rhetoric to make his point; and now he comes down from that lofty doctrinal pulpit to the personal connection. In fact, the words that I read you earlier are some of the strongest words of personal affection that Paul ever uses.

Here we see the gentle side of Paul, and it's a rare insight. We see it occasionally, particularly in 2 Corinthians. But here he uses a word that he never uses any other time in thirteen Epistles; it's in verse 19. It begins verse 19: "My *teknion*, my little children."

John uses that word frequently, but only here does Paul use it. It is a variation, a diminutive variation of the Greek word *teknon* which means "child." It could mean a child of any age, anyone who is a child in the sense that they are born into this world and acknowledge that they have come from their parents. We're all somebody's children. It fits with "Abba, Father," another diminutive term in the sense that it's a slang term for intimacy as one would identify his father; and we saw that in our last passage.

He calls them "my little ones, my little ones." He likens himself here to a mother. Most of the time he proclaims himself a father. In fact, he likes to proclaim himself the father in the sense that he is the authority in the lives of those who are in the church of Jesus Christ as the apostle of Christ Himself. But here, he pictures himself in verse 19 where he says, "My little children," – he pictures himself as a woman in labor – "until Christ is formed in you." This is the soft side, you might say, of the apostle Paul.

A good illustration of it is over in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 7, where he writes to the Thessalonians and says, "We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us." Beautiful, beautiful words of tender affection, care, and compassion. A kind of mother-like attitude.

In that same passage further down in verses 9 to 11, he speaks of the fatherly side. “You are witnesses” – verse 10, he says – “how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children.” We tend to think of Paul more in that fatherly tone, spelling out the theology, the injunctions, the demands, the commands, the mandates, as a strong father. But he also comes alongside believers in a motherly way with compassion and tenderness and kindness. And he learned this from Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 10:1 Paul himself refers to the gentleness and meekness of Christ, the gentleness and meekness of Christ. So here we see Paul as he unbears his loving heart to beloved Christians in Galatia who are both frustrating him and grieving him. They are frustrating him, and they are grieving him.

What has caused this? They had begun in the Spirit, he said earlier, they had begun so well. Someone had bewitched them. Who is that someone drawing them away into false doctrine? It was Jews from Jerusalem who had come to the churches of Galatia and told the Christians that faith was not enough, you had to have circumcision and adhere to all the rituals and customs of the Mosaic law. He attacks that for the sake of sound doctrine; and here, for the sake of loving friendship.

There are no scriptural arguments here in this section, no more great heights of logic; just a tender call to the people that he loves like a mother loves her own offspring. There are four features here that I want you to look at. It’s a little bit hard to outline because it’s just an emotional passage. But we’re going to look at his appeal to them, and then his remembrance of them, and then his warning to them, and then his desire for them. His appeal, his remembrance, his warning, and his desire.

Let’s look at his appeal. I find this one of the most fascinating parts of this entire epistle. Verse 12: “I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.” Now this is strong: “I beg you.” That is a very strong verb. He is begging now. It’s not so much the father commanding as it is the mother begging, pleading. But it’s a strong attitude behind the begging.

“I beg of you, brethren,” – he identifies them first as brethren, and then down in verse 19 as children – “become as I am.” Now what do you think he means by that, “become as I am”? What do you mean, Paul? “I mean, I am free from the Mosaic law.”

If you go back to chapter 2, verse 19, “Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I’ve been crucified with Christ.” He has been delivered from, severed from the Mosaic customs and rituals: circumcision, ceremonies, all the things that went with it. Not from morality, not from the divine nature and the definitions of righteousness which are forever; but from the Mosaic formulas, the externals.

“I have been delivered from them. I no longer have anything to do with them. I have been set free from them; I now live free in Christ. I now live under grace. I now live in union with Christ. And what I could not do through the law because I was weak in my flesh, I can now do through Christ who is strong in me. I have been disconnected from all that old Mosaic religion.” So he says to them, “Become as I am. Disconnect yourself from those teachings of the Judaizers. Disconnect yourself.”

And then he adds this: “For I also have become as you are.” “Look, when I came here, when I came

here to minister to you, I became as you are.” First Corinthians 9, he says, “Be all things to all men, that you might win some.”

“So when I came to you as Gentiles, I stepped into your culture and your world, and I didn’t bring Jewish traditions. I had none of those constraints on my own life. I came to you like a Gentile. As a Jew I had all that legal prescription that tied me up. As a Jew I was into it, I was deep into it; I observed all of it, I lived under it, until I came to encounter Christ. And Christ forgave my sin, granted me His righteousness, and set me free from bondage to legalism.”

The testimony of this I call to you attention is in Philippians chapter 3; you’ll want to turn to it, it’s another of his letters. He says, “Look, as a Jew I have confidence even in the flesh. In my Jewish days I had put my confidence in my flesh, in my own works, in my own righteousness. And if anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more. I went way beyond other Jews. Yes, I was circumcised the eighth day as prescribed in Mosaic law. I was of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, one of the elite tribes. I was a Hebrew of Hebrews. What that means is I was kosher, I followed all the traditions – all the traditions, all the rabbinic traditions that accumulated around the Old Testament.

“And as regards the law of Moses, I was a Pharisee. In other words, I went to the most extreme level of interpretation and adherence to the Mosaic law. I was so zealous I persecuted the church,” – verse 6 – “and as to the righteousness which is in the law, was found blameless. As far as people could see, I never violated the Mosaic law until I met Christ.”

Then verse 7: “Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things,” – all those things, all those Mosaic things, all those things that were part of Old Testament Jewish external religion – “and I count them but rubbish” – that’s the Greek word for “excrement” – “that I may gain Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. I gave all of that self-righteous behavior up for the true righteousness that is in Christ Jesus.”

In the twenty-first chapter of the book of Acts it’s very notable that Paul arrived in Jerusalem and met with the elders of the church there and James who is the head of the church, and he told them the work among the Gentiles. He reported from his missionaries journeys. In verse 19, “He told them what God was doing among the Gentiles through his ministry. And when they heard it they began glorifying God; and they said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed, and they’re all zealous for the law; and they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.’”

It is not the moral law, which is eternal, that he had set aside; it is that religious structure, those external things, that he had set aside. But the Jews had come to believe, in doing them you earned your salvation. He had abandoned the ways of his people. He had abandoned the tradition of the fathers. He had been cut adrift from that which he had literally been moored to his entire life. He was no longer living under the religion of Old Testament Judaism. He was no longer observing ceremony and ritual. And now what’s happening is the Galatians who are Gentiles, who never had anything to do with the Mosaic religion, are being told they must go back to the Mosaic religion if they expect to

be saved from their sin and judgment.

They were never under Jewish ritual law, and now they have fallen into the hands of these Judaizers who are trying to put them under that law from which Paul has been set free. So he says, “Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. I came to you as one free from the law; you need to become free from the law, as I am. Get rid of all thoughts that you are able by means of any action prescribed by Moses to make yourself right with God. That is what I was taught to do; that is what I taught others to do. That’s the realm in which I live. I was a proud legalistic, self-righteous Jew, imagining I was achieving my own standing with God by observance of the law. And then I was exposed to the gospel; and through grace and faith in Christ I was set free from all of that, by which I could never be redeemed. And now you want to go back into that which was never a part of your life in the first place? No, be like me, because I have become like you.”

Paul’s appeal is very simple: “I had all the advantages of Judaism. I had the advantages of Judaism to the max level. I had it to the highest possible conceivable level, that devotion to religion, Jewish religion. And it’s all gone; it’s all rubbish; it’s all empty. And now I have become, as it were, like a Gentile, free from all of it. Don’t you go back into what I have been delivered from.” He said back in chapter 3, verse 28, “In Christ there’s neither Jew nor Gentile.”

“It’s all new. That was all shadow and picture and illustration. And now the substance, the reality has come, and that’s Christ. You’re no longer under the law, you’re in Christ. You’re no longer under the Mosaic law, you are in Christ.”

That’s his appeal. “Don’t go back. Don’t go back to something you never had. I’ve left it all; it’s rubbish.” That’s his appeal.

Secondly, his remembrance. This is very interesting, fascinating. The end of verse 12, “You have done me no wrong.” He’s looking back. “You in the past have done me no wrong.”

All of a sudden in a very abrupt moment he shifts into the past, and he goes back to when he first came on that first missionary journey. And he came to Galatia, and he preached the gospel in these various cities, and the churches were formed – and there are at least four of those Galatian churches.

He returns to the past when he was with them. He said, “You’ve done me no wrong. You have done me no wrong. I don’t have any record that you rejected me. You didn’t harm me; you didn’t hurt me; you didn’t persecute me.” What happened? “I came.”

It’s recorded in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters of Acts. “I came into that region. I lived with you as if I were a Gentile, setting aside all of those Mosaic traditions; and you accepted me, and you saw what the Jews did.” I can’t go through all the thirteenth and fourteenth; but a comment from toward the end of the thirteenth chapter will get you the picture.

While he’s preaching the gospel in the realm of Galatia and establishing the church, it says, “The next Sabbath” – verse 44 of Acts 13 – “nearly the whole city assembled to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowd, they were filled with jealousy, began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.” So the Gentiles knew that the gospel Paul was preaching

was hated by the Jews, because the Jews were infuriated by this, and were openly contradicting what Paul was saying, and calling him a blasphemer right in the hearing of the Gentiles to whom he was preaching the gospel.

“Paul and Barnabas” – verse 46 – “however spoke out boldly and said, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you Jews first; since you repudiate it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’” “You had your opportunity, and you rejected; and now we’re turning to the Gentiles.”

And then he quotes from Isaiah, “For so the Lord has commanded us, ‘I have placed You as a light for the Gentiles, that You may bring salvation to the end of the earth.’” Now listen, verse 48: “When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.” And verse 52: “The disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.” That was the initial Gentile response to Paul’s preaching the gospel with the Jews calling him a blasphemer at the same time, at the same time. Verse 50 says, “The Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.”

“Look, you were all there in the early days on that first missionary journey when I preached the gospel. You knew the Jews hated the gospel I preached. But you heard it, you believed it; you received it with joy and blessing and salvation; and you did me no wrong, as the Jews did.”

Chapter 14, verse 19: “Jews came from Antioch and Iconium into that area, and having won over the crowd, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.” They were furious enough to try to kill him.

“If you had some issue, why didn’t you bring it up then? You have done me no wrong. You begged for more teaching; you begged for more gospel truth. When I was behaving like a Gentile and the Jews were calling me a blasphemer, you didn’t hassle me, you didn’t give me any trouble. Why now? Why now?”

This is a heartbreak for Paul. “Why are you doing this now? You didn’t do this in those days of open conflict with the Jews; why are you doing it now?” Heartbreaking.

Like Jesus in Matthew 23:37, 37 saying to the Jews, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood; but you would not.” Or God, in Hosea chapter 11, saying, “I tried to win you. I took care of you; I did everything I could. But you were unfaithful to Me.” Or Ephesians 4:30 where we’re told that not only does God express sorrow and Jesus express sorrow, but the Holy Spirit even grieves.

It’s little wonder then that a pastor could be heartbroken over people who welcomed him once and now are somehow attacking the very man they once affirmed. So he makes the general statement in reminding them that they accepted him then. In a very hostile setting with the Jews making their case, they didn’t oppose him, they didn’t do him any wrong. In fact, look at verse 13: “But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time.”

I don't think Galatia, the region of Galatia, was on the plan for the first missionary journey. I think Paul was there because he was sick; that's what it's saying. That is clearly it. "Because of a bodily illness, I preached the gospel to you the first time." "If I hadn't have been ill, you wouldn't have heard the gospel."

In God's providence somehow, Paul contracted some kind of illness. Originally he did not plan to stay in Galatia, or maybe even to go there. We don't know why he went there. It's a little bit more elevated than some of the lowlands of Pamphylia. Some suspect that maybe there was an epidemic of mosquitoes and malaria in the lowlands, and he went up into this area to get a little bit of relief from that; we don't know that. But he was sick.

Could it have been a malarial sickness? Could have been, because malarial sickness is kind of recurring, its symptoms ebb and flow, and he would have been able to still minister and still preach and still teach in times of strength, and then maybe settle down in times of weakness as he fought the disease. And we do know something about malaria. It can attack the optic nerve; and in attacking the optic nerve, it can develop basically color blindness, some atrophy, and ultimately even blindness.

So perhaps it was malaria that he had somehow contracted; we can't be dogmatic about that. But it was enough to keep him in one area so that he couldn't go anywhere else. But still he had enough power or strength to be able to do the ministry that he did while he was there. It wasn't totally debilitating, but it kept him, you could say, off the road.

"There I was. I was sick, so sick I couldn't leave; so sick, you were kind of an afterthought, that's the only reason I was there. But God had a better plan."

Now look at verse 14: "And that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition." What does he mean by that? Why was it a trial to them? Literally, he says, "My illness was a trial to you. My illness was a trial to you." Why was it? Because he was not able to do all the things they wanted him to do; because it kept him away from them a lot of the time when he had piercing, torturous headaches and pains.

But it's more than that. It's not so much physical as it is theological, because in the ancient world, if somebody claimed to be a prophet of God, and particularly if somebody claimed to be the one who represented the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he had chronic physical problems, this would be a way certainly to discredit his claims. "And yet, you did not despise" – that means to regard as nothing – "or loathe me," – that means to spit out – "you didn't think of me as nothing, you didn't spit me back out, even though I had this illness, which was a trial or a temptation to you."

Why was it a temptation? The Jews, first of all, believed that if you had an illness, this is the judgment of God. Go back to the book of Job where that theology is articulated by Job's friends – Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar – chapter 4, chapter 8, chapter 11. They come to Job and they say, "Job, you have all this trouble because there's sin in your life. You're under judgment, God is punishing you; that's our theology."

That was longtime Jewish theology, the theology of trouble. "You have it because you're sinful, and God is punishing you." You say, "Yeah, but these are Gentiles." Yes, but the fascinating thing to me

is the Gentiles had the same theology.

In the twenty-eighth chapter of the book of Acts, after Paul gets to shore, escaping the shipwreck with all the people who made it safely to shore, he's on the shore in an incredible place called Malta. If you have a chance to go there don't miss it. They're on the island of Malta.

"The natives showed us extraordinary kindness; for because of the rain that had set in and because of the cold, they kindled a fire and received us all." These are soaking wet people who have managed to make it to shore while their ship has been completely obliterated. There is over two hundred of these people, and the natives make a fire.

Look at verse 3: "When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks" – helping to make the fire – "and laid them on the fire, a viper" – a poisonous snake – "came out because of the heat of the fire," – he was in the wood – "and fastened itself on his hand." He's got a poisonous snake dangling from his hand. This is Malta; this is Gentile territory.

"When the natives" – verse 4 – "saw the creature hanging from his hand, they began saying to one another, 'Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live.'" That's the same theology of Job's friends. You can pick out someone under the judgment of God because they're having trouble, they're suffering.

It wasn't just the Jews who discredited one who said he was a representative of God because there was a physical illness or infirmity, the Gentiles had the same theology. But even at that – back to Galatians – even at that, Paul says, "Though that illness was a temptation to you to despise or loathe me, to spit me out, to think nothing of me because your theology told you this was a sign that I was under divine judgment, you didn't do that. Quite the opposite. You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself." Really an amazing, amazing statement.

And that shows the works of the Spirit of God on their hearts. "You received me; you didn't yield to some temptation to judge the messenger and judge the message by my outward appearance, by my physical illness, you received me as if I was an angel from God, or Christ Jesus Himself. Do you remember those days?"

Verse 15: "Where then is that sense of blessing you had? What happened? What happened? How did it sink to this? You were so happy with me. You were rejoicing, you were full of joy; disciples were multiplying as you proclaimed the gospel. You experienced joy, unspeakable, full of glory. You experienced" – as he says earlier in chapter 3 – "the work of the Holy Spirit. You had complete trust in me, confidence in me, that in spite of my severe human inadequacies, you received me as if I was Jesus Christ Himself. Where then is that sense of blessing you had?" Blessing could be happiness or satisfaction. "Where is that sense of satisfaction you had? How can you change?"

You know, being in ministry with people is usually heartbreaking at some points, because the people that you maybe invest the most in, and you see this exhilarating response to the truth of Christ, somewhere down the road lose that satisfaction and begin to turn on the one they once loved. It's a deep sadness, it's part of ministry, that those who loved you and lifted you up and admired you and sought your presence, for some strange reason turn on you and become an enemy.

This is so concerning to Paul, and it's why he said in verse 11, "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain. Was all this wasted? This work is not easy, it's not easy. But originally, do you remember how devoted you were to me?"

Verse 15: "I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me." Transplants weren't possible, "But if they had been, you would have given me your eyes." Wow. Deuteronomy 32:10 speaks of guarding someone, and it wants to make an illustration of how important it is to guard someone, and it says guarding someone as if he were the pupil of your eye.

Look, of all our extremities, the eye is the most precious. "You would have plucked out your eyes. You would have given me a transplant," if indeed this is a physical malady, if indeed this is because malaria had attacked his eyes. Perhaps something had attacked his eyes, some eye infection that would be everywhere in the ancient world. "You would have literally given me your eye." It's very, very reasonable to presume that he had some eye issues.

Look at chapter 6, verse 11, toward the end of the book: "See with what large letters I'm writing to you with my own hand." Why is he writing in large letters? Possibly because those are the only ones he can see. Why is he even writing? Because in his other letters he had a secretary. And then at the end of the letter, such as the end of 1 Corinthians, the end of Colossians, the end of 2 Thessalonians, he says, "I signed with my own hand." He would always write a final few words in his own hand so that everyone would know this was not a forgery.

But this particular epistle, his first, he says in chapter 6, verse 11, "I wrote it." He apparently didn't have a secretary or an amanuensis at that time, and he launched into this thing with his own hand and he wrote with large letters, letters that would allow him to see what the Holy Spirit was inspiring through him.

"You loved me so much you would have given up your own eyes to improve my sight. How" – verse 16 – "is it possible that I have become your enemy by telling you the truth? How can that possibly be?" The only thing he can conclude is, "You don't want the truth anymore."

"It was for the truth that you loved me. It wasn't because of my personality; it wasn't because of my appearance, it was despicable. You loved me for the truth that I gave you; and I was so precious to you, you would have given me your own eyes to sustain me in the proclamation of this truth. Now all of a sudden by telling you the truth, have I become your enemy? Now you believe the Judaizers and you think I'm a liar?"

And then we come to verse 17 and the third part of this, the warning, his warning to them. Paul's appeal, first; his remembrance, second; his warning to them. "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them." You ought to know that verse. That verse applies to all false religion and all false teachers. That is a defining verse.

"They eagerly seek you." This is referring to the Judaizers teaching their Mosaic lies. "They court you, they make a fuss over you to win you, favor you." "Eagerly seek" is to have a deep concern. They, these false teachers, aggressively went after the Galatians.

That's how it is with false religion, it is a seeking religion; they're aggressive. False religion is

spreading like wildfire over the world today.

Second Corinthians 11 says that Satan is disguised as an angel of light, and so are his emissaries and ambassadors. “And they’re going everywhere” – as Jesus put it in Matthew 23 – “making double sons of hell.” There are already sons of hell; and now when you get into this false religion you’re a double son of hell.

“They eagerly seek you, not commendably,” not honorably, not honestly, not with any commendable purpose like all false cults, false teachers, false religions. “All they want to do is shut you out so that you will seek them.” Why do they want you to seek them? Because they represent Satan’s kingdom, and they’re in it for the money. They do what they do for money; all false teachers do, according to Scripture.

“They want to shut you out. Literally, they want to exclude you from the benefits of true salvation, and walking with Christ, and living in the power of Christ. They want to exclude you from freedom in Christ. They want to bar the door, they want to put up a barrier, and then they want you to turn and seek them.”

Chapter 6, again, and verse 12 says, “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” We’ll say more about that. “They’re making a good showing in the flesh to compel you to be circumcised. They’re after you.” Paul’s heart is really grieved here; it’s really broken, because he’s seeing what false teachers always do.

2 Peter 2, “False prophets” – verse 1 – “arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing in swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of truth will be maligned; and in their greed they will exploit you with false words.” They’re exploiters.

It isn’t wrong though to be sought. Look at verse 18: “It’s good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable way, and not only when I am present with you.” There’s some sarcasm in that. False teachers wanted money. They wanted converts to validate themselves and their false teaching, they wanted to make double sons of hell. They wanted money.

Paul is making, I think, an offhanded reference to that when he says, “It’s always good to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner. It right for those of us who preach the truth to come after you and to seek you, and not only when I am present with you.” False teachers did their seeking when they were present because they wanted to get their hands on the treasure, on the money, on the possessions.

Paul says, “When I’m not there and I can’t get anything at all from you, when I’m not present, it’s still good to be sought by me in a commendable way.” Paul sought the Galatians, not for his own advance, but to secure them to Christ. As long as he was there, he was doing it; and when he was gone, he would do it. Even though an enemy had moved in and the alienation of affection had begun almost breaking Paul’s heart, in spite of this situation he still seeks them for Christ and not for himself.

And there's a final point. We talked about the appeal and the remembrance and the warning; it ends with his desire for them. Verse 19: "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." That's his desire for them. That in itself is so doctrinally powerful a truth that we're going to save it for next time. It is the key to understanding sanctification.

"I want your sanctification. I don't want you to believe in Christ, be saved, and then wander off into unsanctifying false doctrine even as true believers. I want Christ not just in you, but formed in you." Powerful thought.

Father, we're so grateful for again the feast of divine truth that we receive from Your precious Word. Week after week, month after month, year after year, we feast on truth. Thank You for opening the heart of Paul to us and letting us hear his agonizing heart cry for fidelity to gospel truth.

I pray for anyone here who is thinking for a moment that he can escape hell, divine wrath, divine judgment, by some work, some moral act, some religious ceremony, some ritual, some rite – circumcision, baptism – church attendance, some special ceremony, even moral goodness. None of it, none of it can save; and anyone who says it can is a liar. And those of us who are believers, who have been brought to Christ by faith alone, may we never go back to legalism, but live in the full freedom that is ours in Christ; and that for His glory. Amen.

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