

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON SIXTY-ONE)

“ROTTEN MOTIVES”

GALATIANS 4:16-18

(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)

16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

18 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,

In verse **15**, which we looked at last week, Paul writes the following to the Galatian believers, “*What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.*” Paul is reminding the Galatian believers of the spiritual prosperity that they enjoyed when he first arrived in Galatia—a spiritual prosperity which consisted of such a state of self-denial and self-sacrifice, that they were willing, if it had been possible, to dig out their own eyes and give them to Paul. He now asks them, “Where is that spiritually prosperous condition now? Why have you turned against me and the Gospel of grace that made you so prosperous spiritually?”

Apparently, the Galatians no longer felt the same way about Paul as they did when he first visited and evangelized them.

Paul’s question is a rhetorical one. He knew what had become of the joyful and grateful spirit that had characterized their early Christian

experience. He knew that the Judaizers had come in and stolen their hearts.

In verse **16**, he asks, *“Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?”* He asks this question as a means of trying to awaken the believers in Galatia to the seriousness of their situation. The Judaizers, who were preaching the heretical, legalistic “gospel” of law with a view to enslaving them again, had become their friends, while Paul, who had proclaimed to them the authentic Gospel, the Gospel of the grace of God, had become their enemy. How ironic! The Galatian believers had grown to love the works-based, performance-driven message of the Judaizers so much that they were upset with Paul for telling them the truth about their spiritual condition. **Warren Wiersbe** writes the following in respect of the spiritual condition of the Galatians:

“They had not lost the experience of salvation—they were still Christians; but they were losing the enjoyment of their salvation and finding satisfaction in their works instead. Sad to say, they did not realize their losses. They actually thought they were becoming better Christians by substituting Law for grace, and the religious deeds of the flesh for the fruit of the Spirit.”

Wiersbe then asks,

“Is your Christian life moving forward into liberty or backward into bondage? Think carefully before you answer.”

We noted that there is evidence in the first chapter of this letter that indicates that the reason the Galatians had lost their love for Paul and for the authentic Gospel that he proclaimed, was because they had first lost their love for Christ!

In chapter **1**, verse **6**, Paul writes, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting **him** who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.”* Paul does not here accuse the Galatian believers of primarily deserting him (Paul), or the Gospel that he

preached. He accuses them of deserting the One Who called them by His grace. It was Jesus Christ Whom they were deserting. They were turning from Paul and the authentic Gospel of grace that he preached, to a heretical “gospel” of law, preached by the Judaizers, because they had first turned away from the God of grace!

In verse **17**, Paul writes, *“They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.”*

The **Message** translates the verse as follows: *“Those heretical teachers go to great lengths to flatter you, but their motives are rotten. They want to shut you out of the free world of God’s grace so that you will always depend on them for approval and direction, making them feel important.”*

Commenting on this verse, **Wiersbe**, writes the following:

“One of the marks of a false teacher is that he tries to attract other men's converts to himself, and not simply to the truth of the Word or to the person of Jesus Christ. It was not the Judaizers who originally came to Galatia and led them to Christ; it was Paul. Like the cultists today, these false teachers were not winning lost sinners to Christ, but were stealing converts from those who were truly serving the Lord. Paul had proved to be their loving friend. He had ‘become as they were’ by identifying himself with them (**Galatians 4:12**). Now they were turning away from Paul and following false shepherds.

Paul told them the truth, but the Judaizers told them lies. Paul sought to glorify Christ, but the Judaizers glorified themselves and their converts.

A true servant of God does not ‘use people’ to build himself up or his work, he ministers in love to help people know Christ better and glorify Him. Beware of that religious worker who wants your exclusive allegiance because he is the only one who is right. He will use you as

long as he can and then drop you for somebody else-and your fall will be a painful one. The task of the spiritual leader is to get people to love and follow Christ not to promote himself and his ministry. "

Paul says, "*They make much of you, but for no good purpose.*" The context supports the interpretation that the word "*They,*" is a reference to the Judaizers who had misled the Galatian believers concerning Paul and the truth of their freedom in the Gospel. **Kenneth Wuest** remarks that,

"The fact that Paul does not mention the Judaizers by name, is in keeping with the emotional strain and the irritation he was experiencing at the time."

The Judaizers did not have a desire toward the Galatian believers that was Christ-centered. Their desire was a self-centered one. They wanted to **use** the Galatians, not **serve** them. They wanted the believers in Galatia to rethink their salvation and make them return to legalism. They wanted to isolate those who were trusting in Christ. This is the general practice of cults. They desire to make their followers exclusive, in order to keep them from talking with others. That is, they wanted to shut the Galatians out from the influence of Paul. They wanted to alienate the Galatians from Paul and his teaching so that they would be shut up instead to them and their influence. In an interesting double use of the Greek word, **zélōó: (dzay-lo'-o)**, Paul tells them that the Judaizers, "make much of you," so that you will "make much of them."

The phrase, "*make much of*" in the Greek, involves the idea of a person taking a serious interest in another. Most cults demonstrate a keen interest in and affection toward prospective members, promising them great personal fulfillment and happiness. As with the legalism of the Judaizers, the true nature of their spiritual enslavement is not revealed until they have secured the allegiance of their prospects. The Judaizers had no interest in the Galatian believers beyond enslaving them once again in legalism. They were perfect examples of the scribes and

Pharisees whom our Lord denounced in **Matthew 23:15**: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”*

As **David Guzik** observes,

“The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice the group itself is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true 'super-Christians...For now, the legalists are courting the Galatians, but once they have alienated them from Jesus and from Paul, the legalists will demand that the Galatians serve them. Legalism is almost always associated with some kind of religious bondage.”

Later, in chapter **6** and verses **12-13** of this same letter, Paul will write the following about the Judaizers,

12 Those who are trying to force you to be circumcised want to look good to others. They don't want to be persecuted for teaching that the cross of Christ alone can save.

13 And even those who advocate circumcision don't keep the whole law themselves. They only want you to be circumcised so they can boast about it and claim you as their disciples.

(New Living Translation)

In **2 Corinthians 12:14-15**, Paul outlined his ministry motive. He writes,

14 Here for the third time I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.

15 I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?

In **Colossians 1:27-29**, he writes,

27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

29 For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Paul “*made much of*” the Galatians, not so that he might secure them for himself, but that he might secure them for the Lord Jesus. He was glad that they should be “*made much of*” at all times, even by others in his absence, if it was done in a right spirit and in connection with the truth of the gospel.

Just in case the Galatians misunderstood what he was saying, Paul informs them in verse **18** that there is nothing wrong with zeal, if it is directed at the right object, with the right motive. He writes, “*It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you.*”

Paul is saying in essence that it is commendable if the Galatian believers were being zealously sought after, or “*made much of*” by any person or group who had the motive of seeking to evangelize and/or edify them with the truth contained in the Gospel. Paul was not opposed to the Galatians benefitting from the ministry of others. He was not jealous for his own reputation. If others had arrived in Galatia, preaching the Gospel, and strengthening the Galatians in the true faith, he would have rejoiced greatly. His great concern was that these persons, whoever they were, be motivated by love for the Lord Jesus and the truths about Him

contained in the authentic Gospel. Paul himself had come to them zealously with the Gospel that had liberated them, but the Judaizers had come to them zealously with a false “gospel”-a legalistic message that enslaved them.

Paul agreed that it is good to be zealous, but only in service of the truth. In **Romans 10:1-3**, he writes,

1 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [the Jews], is that they may be saved.

2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

3 For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, zeal in the service of a lie is a dangerous thing! Paul knew this very well. Before he was converted to Christianity, he demonstrated great zeal in opposing Christianity, to the point of persecuting the church! Later, he looked back at that time of great zeal in the service of a lie and deeply regretted it.

J Vernon McGee, in his comments in respect of this verse writes the following:

“Paul is saying that it is good to seek that which is the very best, but these Judaizers are after you in order to scalp you. They want to put your scalp on their belt and be able to say, ‘We were over at Galatia, and we had so many converts’-which, of course, would not be actually true.”

The meaning of the phrase, “*and not only when I am present with you,*” is uncertain. If the words refer to Paul, he may be saying in effect, “I confess that I also am jealous of you, but not in the same way that the Judaizers are. They are interested in how they can benefit from you. I am

interested in how I can be of benefit to you. And this is how I feel whether I am present or absent.”

If the words refer to the Galatians, they may have the meaning of, “The Judaizers are persuading you to withdraw your affections from me so that you may go over to them, but you, who loved me while I was present with you, should continue to cherish the same regard for me when I am absent.”

Or, perhaps Paul’s words are to be understood in this way: “I do not mind others making much of you when I am absent from you, as long as they are doing so with pure motives and for a good cause.”

Albert Barnes, the nineteenth century theologian, who is best known for his extensive Bible commentary, comments as follows:

“The apostle intends to remind them as gently as possible, that it would have been as well for them to have shown their zeal in a good cause when he was absent, as well as when he was with them. The sense may be, ‘You were exceedingly zealous in a good cause when I was with you. You loved the truth; you loved me. Since I left you, and as soon almost as I was out of your sight, your zeal died away, and your ardent love for me was transferred to others. Allow me to remind you, that it would be well to be zealous of good when I am away, as well as when I am with you. There is not much true affection in that which dies away as soon as a man’s back is turned.’ The doctrine is, that true zeal or love will live alike when the object is near and when it is removed; when our friends are present with us, and when they leave us; when their eye is upon us, and when it is turned away.”

Guzik explains that,

“Paul wanted the Galatians to be zealous for what is good when he was absent, not only when he was present among them.”

The lie that we can become acceptable to God by a strict observance of the Law, or any other system of rule-keeping, is a lie that makes much of us. Instead of being about what Christ has done for us, it becomes about what we can do for Him. All the focus of religious rule-keeping is on our performance. In contrast, the focus of salvation through faith in Christ is on His performance. It makes much of Him.

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with the following quote from **“The Bible Says”**:

“True zeal often appears in various forms, but not all expressions are rooted in genuine concern for good. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul highlights this discrepancy, urging them to discern between sincere and self-serving motives. Some had turned their zeal toward false teachers who sought to sway their affections for selfish gain. Paul poignantly states that there is true value in being zealous for good at all times, not just in fleeting moments or when he was physically present among them. This underscores the need for a consistent commitment to the truth of the gospel.

Zeal directed toward good brings about spiritual growth and strengthens the community of believers. As stated, *“It is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.”* This principle serves as a reminder that our efforts should be constant and rooted in genuine love and truth, rather than in passing trends or self-interest. True zeal enriches not only our faith but also the lives of others, reflecting God’s glory through our actions.”