

## **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL:**

### **A STUDY OF GALATIANS (LESSON SIXTY) “IS THE TRUTH OUR ENEMY?”**

#### **GALATIANS 4:12-16 (ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)**

- 12. Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.*
- 13. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,*
- 14. and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*
- 15. 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.*
- 16. Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?*

In verses **12-20** of chapter **4**, Paul continues his appeal to the Galatian believers to forsake legalism and return to a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. In this passage, he appeals to them in a very touching way, reminding them of their enthusiastic reception of him and the Gospel which he preached, and informing them of his longing to be with them, in order that he might speak to them personally. His expressions in this passage are some of the most personal and tender in any of his letters. In verse **12** he writes, “*Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.*” In this verse, Paul exhorts the Galatian believers to free themselves from their bondage to the Mosaic Law as he himself has done. He pleads with them not to abandon him and the Gospel that he preaches, because he has abandoned all for them. The Galatians were in danger of being brought into bondage under the Law by the Judaizers. So, Paul reminds them that he had died to the Law and that they would have to follow his example if they were to successfully live the Christian life. The phrase, “*You did me no wrong*” is explained in verses **13-15**, where he reminds them of their exemplary behaviour toward him. Not only had they done him no wrong, but they had received him openly and lovingly when he was in extremely adverse personal circumstances. He was shocked that they were rejecting him now after the way they had accepted them when he had first arrived among them. When he first came to Antioch, it was not his intention to evangelize that territory, but to go on to another place. It was a sudden attack of illness that made it imperative for him to stay there. It was because of his illness, that he had preached the Gospel to them.

We do not know for certain what bodily ailment Paul was speaking of in this passage, however the phrase, “*You know*” at the beginning of verse **13**, indicates that his readers understood exactly what ailment Paul was referring to. Whatever his affliction was, it made Paul somewhat repulsive in appearance, because he commends the Galatians for the way they received him in spite of the way he looked. Verse **14**, indicates that Paul’s affliction was a “*trial*” for the Galatians, in that its nature was such that a normal reaction to it would be in the form of disgust and loathing, which would be followed by the rejection of the one so afflicted. They would have been tempted to reject Paul’s message as not being a divine one, for surely a divine message would be accompanied by the strength rather than the weakness of the messenger. There was something in the physical

appearance of the apostle that tempted the Galatians to reject him and his message. It would have been very tempting for them to see Paul's dreadful affliction as the punishment of God, or the gods for great wrongdoing. But instead of rejecting him, they had received him "an angel of God, as Christ Jesus." In verse 15, Paul writes, "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." The **New Living Translation** renders the verse as follows: "Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible." Although the first clause of the verse is phrased as a question, Paul is undoubtedly referring to the sense of blessedness that the Galatians had enjoyed as a result of his early Gospel ministry among them. The word "blessedness" is the translation of a Greek word which secularly means prosperous. It indicates that the "blessed" person is in a state of prosperity. 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 as they did when Paul was with them. Paul's question is a rhetorical one. He well knew what had become of "that joyful and grateful spirit" that had characterized their early Christian experience. He knew that the Judaizers had come in and stolen their hearts. In 1964, the American vocal duo, the **Righteous Brothers**, recorded a song entitled "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'." Although the song has to do with the loss of emotions of a woman for a man, the words of the second verse and the chorus, may help us to understand the apostle's feelings:

*Now there's no welcome look in your eyes  
When I reach for you  
And now you're starting to criticize  
Little things I do*

*You've lost that lovin' feelin'  
Whoa, that lovin' feelin'  
You've lost that lovin' feelin'  
Now it's gone, gone, gone,...*

The believers in Galatia had "lost that lovin' feelin'" for Paul! The evidence of their former blessedness is that they would have been willing, to pluck out their eyes and give them to Paul if it had been possible for them to do so! As we noted in our last Lesson, Paul's statement here, together with his statement in chapter 6 and verse 11, imply that he was suffering with a serious eye disease.

**John MacArthur**, makes the following comments in respect of this matter: "*Paul may simply have been using a common figure of speech, suggesting that the Galatians would have given up their very eyesight, the most precious and irreplaceable of the physical senses, if doing that could have helped him. If, as some interpreters speculate, Paul's bodily affliction was a form of eye disease, he may here have been referring to the Galatians' willingness to have literally exchanged their eyes for his, had such a transplant been possible in those days...If Paul had an*

*eye affliction it could have been a condition of long standing, perhaps the ‘thorn in the flesh’ that was ‘a messenger of Satan’ the Lord allowed him to endure as a humbling reminder of His sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)...Whatever the specific nature of Paul’s illness, his primary point here is clear: the Galatians had loved him with a love that would have compelled them to make any sacrifice on his behalf.”* In light of the foregoing, Paul’s question to his Galatian readers in verse 16, is understandable: *“Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?”* Paul is contrasting the behaviour of the Galatian believers towards him in the past, with their new attitude toward him at the time he was writing his letter to them. He asks this question as a means of trying to awaken them to the seriousness of their situation. The judaizers, who were preaching the heretical, legalistic “gospel” of law to them, 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 word enemy is the translation of a Greek word which speaks of an enemy in an active sense. It refers to a person who is hostile to another. Paul says that he has become an enemy of the Galatians, not from his point of view, but from the standpoint of the Galatians, because he has told them the truth. The Greek verb “become” is in the **perfect tense** which depicts a continued state or condition. The Galatians were becoming convinced that Paul was actually their enemy!

Again we quote **John MacArthur**: *“The Galatian believers who had succumbed to the Judaizing heresy were guilty of spiritual defection. Nothing tears the heart of a faithful pastor, teacher, youth worker, or missionary so much as seeing someone he has led to the Lord turn away from the faith. How much more does such defection grieve the Lord Himself?...The implication 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 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. Many people appreciate a preacher or teacher only as long as he says what they want to hear. The confused and defecting believers in Galatia had once greatly admired Paul, but now they looked on him as their enemy, because he confronted them with the truth about the genuine gospel of God, which had saved them, and the false teaching of the Judaizers, which led them back into the bondage of legalism.”*

Paul had pointed out the “elephant in the room” to the Galatian believers—the “elephant” of legalism that they refused to recognize and deal with. They had grown to love the works-based, performance-driven “gospel” of the judaizers so much that they were upset with Paul for telling them the truth about their spiritual condition.

The **New Living Translation** renders **Proverbs 9:7-9**, as follows:

7. *Anyone who rebukes a mocker will get an insult in return. Anyone who corrects the wicked will get hurt.*
8. *So don’t bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you.*
9. *Instruct the wise, and they will be even wiser. Teach the righteous, and they will learn even more.*

**Grant Richison**, remarks that, *It is precarious business to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is incredible how many people are willing to count someone as their enemy when they tell the truth... There are times when pastors must tell their congregation the truth, but their church members do not want to hear it. They reject their pastors because they reject their message. This is a necessary peril of ministry. Preachers should bite the bullet and pay the price for truth even if it costs them their job. Sadly, some ministers and leaders withhold telling the truth for fear of offending people. Grace, amazingly, is a revolting thought to many people. Faithful teaching of God's Word will fly in the face of legalism. Many people in the church today are poised to embrace legalism. A faithful teacher of God's Word will confront this proclivity."*

Before we conclude this evening, there is something that I think we would all do well to consider. Earlier, we made the point that the believers in Galatia had "lost that lovin' feelin'" for Paul. But was it only Paul who they had fallen out of love with? Is it possible that they had also fallen out of love with Jesus Christ? There is evidence in the first chapter of this letter that clearly indicates that they had lost their love for Paul and for the authentic Gospel he proclaimed, because they had first lost their love for Christ! In chapter **1**, verse **6**, we read the following: "*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 the authentic Gospel of grace to a heretical "gospel" of law, because they had first turned away from the God of grace! Brothers and sisters, we would be wise to examine our own selves in the light of this. Have we lost "lost that lovin' feelin'" for our Lord?

In **Revelation 2:1-7**, our Lord dictates the following letter to the apostle John for the "*angel of the church in Ephesus*":

1. *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.*
2. *"I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.*
3. *I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary.*
4. *But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.*
5. *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*
6. *Yet this you have: you hate the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*
7. *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.' The word "*But*" at the beginning of verse **4** is one of the more dramatic terms of contrast in the Bible. Jesus uses the word to contrast all the things that He had commended the Ephesian believers for, with the one thing that He had against them. We would probably have thought that the many things that He had spoken positively about would be enough "credit" so to speak, to offset the one "debit"-the debit of love. But love supersedes everything else! As far as Jesus Christ

was concerned, the Ephesian believers' lack of love blotted out all of the credit accumulated by all that He had commended them for.

Commenting on this leaving of their "first love," **Charles Swindoll**, writes the following: *"Like an unexpected twist in the road during a pleasant drive through the countryside, Christ interrupted His commendation of the Ephesians with one abrupt word: "but." ...The small Greek word **alla** indicates a sharp contrast, and in the case of Ephesus, it's very significant: **The church in Ephesus had everything but the greatest thing.** The erosion of the love they had at the beginning didn't happen overnight. No one suddenly wakes up one morning and says, 'I don't love Jesus anymore. I'm tired of Jesus and I'm finished with all this Christianity stuff.' It doesn't happen like that. It happens over the years-after hardship, questions you can't get answered, trials that don't seem to have reason, loss of health, loss of hope, loss of a loved one. In the midst of the Ephesians' hard work and endurance for Jesus, their love for Him began to wane."*

The believers in Ephesus, like the believers in Galatia, had not **lost** their first love. Rather, they had **abandoned**, or **forsaken** their first love. First love had not wandered away from them; they had wandered away from first love. And so have many of us! Verse **5**, clearly indicates that their leaving of first love did not signify that their situation was hopeless, or else why would the Lord urge them to return to it. As one commentator says, *"It would seem a better picture is like a fire where blazing flame has died down and all that is left is the live coals. The coals have not completely lost their glow and therefore when blown on...they can be made to flame up again. So too the love of a genuine believer has not been totally lost but is clearly at low ebb, with 'coal' barely glowing, so to speak. When the wind of the Spirit and the Word come 'blowing' on such a heart, the potential is there for spiritual renewal and revival. Jesus says the 'steps' to 'revival' are 1 remember 2 return and 3 re-do. The psalmist writes of a heart with barely glowing coals in Psalm 119:25: 'My soul cleaves to the dust; Revive me according to Your word.' If the 'coals' of your heart, your love for Jesus, has grown cold, obey the commands of Jesus and consider adding the prayer of the psalmist. Then wait on the Lord. It is in His will that you experience revival, for in that state He is most glorified."*