

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works**Part fifteen - Teaching #2159****Sunday, January 30th, 2022 - 10 a.m.****Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON****IS IT EASY, OR IS IT HARD TO BE A CHRISTIAN?**

Galatians 4:12-20 - “I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me; [13] you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. [14] You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. [15] Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. [16] So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? [17] They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. [18] But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner — and not just when I am with you. [19] My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. [20] I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don’t know what to do about you.”

Before we move into today’s study, there’s a question we should all ask. We’ve been studying the message of these Jewish false teachers and their work in the Galatian churches. We’ve seen the length to which Paul goes with these Galatian Christians to try to reverse their drift back into ethnic Judaism.

The question we need to ask has to do with the whole **reason** for this epistle. ***Why would Christians ever be desirous to revert to the legal religious practice of Judaism - or any other religion?*** What would they find more **attractive** in these false teachers' message? Why would anyone, having found grace and mercy and pardon and freedom in the Holy Spirit, want to return to the law as a means of self-acquired righteousness before God?

Or, to put it a different way, what could possibly be **offensive** about Christian faith and redemption? Why would anyone **forsake** Christ Jesus for some other expression of religious endeavor?

Is the Christian life **hard**? Or is it **easy**? I think the answer is **both**. It is **easy** because salvation is all by grace and received through faith plus nothing else. And it is **hard** for exactly the same reason.

I believe **John Piper** is exactly on target when he says, ***“Just as naturally as apples fall downward, human beings gravitate toward ideas and actions which make them look great, and resist ideas and actions which make them look small....It does not appeal to the natural mind to be so transformed by Christ that we must give Him credit for all the good we do. This is the fundamental stumbling block to the Christian faith....”***

The Christian faith is hard because its central goal is always the glory of God and never the glory of mankind. And **we** are all mankind. We do not give up glory lightly. To turn from our own glory is to cut off a hand or rip out a wisdom tooth - **John 5:44 - “How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don’t seek the glory that comes from the only God?”- IPAD TEXT**

Note those two verbs - **“accept”** and **“seek.”** Accepting our own glory is easy. You just have to **accept** it. Living for God’s glory is harder. You have to **seek** it. Jesus hits the nail on the head here. In our pride, we love the esteem and applause of our peers. We love it more than the applause of Father God. And the Christian faith demolishes this death-dealing love of center stage:

IPAD TEXTS - Ephesians 2:8-9 - “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift — [9] not from works, so that *no one can boast.*”

Galatians 6:14 - “But as for me, I will never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. *The world has been crucified to me through the cross, and I to the world.*”

We need to think deeply about these words because usually we only see the **easy** part in them. We see the **freeness** of salvation. But we need to also see the **offensiveness** of the Christian faith to human pride.

There is no reason for any thinking Christians to be shocked that so many people turn on them once they accept Christ Jesus. You really can't make authentic faith attractive to the natural man. You can make **morality** attractive. You can make **love** attractive. You can even, I suppose, make **church** and **religion** attractive. But you can never make the **cross** attractive. Only the Holy Spirit can do that.

So the Christian faith is, at the very same time, both the easiest thing and the hardest thing in the world. And that's why the epistle to the Galatians had to be written. The teaching of these Judaisers wasn't as death-dealing to pride and self-will. It left room for the applause and glory of men. That's why there are other religions that thrive and flourish on God's earth. That's why the truth of the gospel must be protected and defended and argued and persuaded and proclaimed amid ridicule and persecution and the successful seduction of the world.

1) LEARNING THE LESSONS OF PAUL AND THE GALATIANS

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:12-15 - “I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have not wronged me; [13] you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. [14] You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. [15] Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”

- a) ***First, Paul calls the Galatians to learn the lessons of his own painful journey to faith in Christ:***

We should pay careful attention to **verse 12** if for no other reason than because it marks the very first **command** given by Paul in this whole letter. Here is something they must **do** - **“I beg you, brothers and sisters: *Become as I am, for I also have become as you are...*” - IPAD TEXT**

This is the only place in the New Testament where Paul says this. There are other places where he says something **similar**, but still quite different:

IPAD TEXTS - 1 Corinthians 11:1 - “*Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ.*”

Philippians 3:17 - “Join in imitating me, brothers and sisters, and pay careful attention to those who live according to the example you have in us.”

Both of these passages have to do with following Paul (or other leaders) as they follow Jesus. But that’s *not* what Paul is saying in our Galatians text. Look at it one more time -

Galatians 4:12 - “I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become as I am, for I also have become as you are....” - IPAD TEXT

These are very carefully crafted words. Paul is telling them he had to learn the lesson he is asking them to learn. Paul tried the law keeping of ethnic Judaism. It was, at one point, the passion of his whole life. But it didn’t work. The whole point of Paul’s theological meanderings in chapter 3 is that there is no *inheritance* through law keeping. The inheritance only comes through Christ.

So now Paul, a Jew, tells them he had to come to God just as any other pagan would come to God, through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. So now Paul, a *Jew*, says he became like the Galatians, who were *Gentiles*, and now he was appealing to those who were *Gentiles*, not to turn to the message of these false teachers, who were *Jews*.

Paul's message in a nutshell is this. ***"I had to become just as you are to find Christ for myself. So, whatever you do, don't desert me now to turn back to Judaism or you'll end up as lost as I was!"***

To underscore his oneness with them in faith, Paul places those words ***"Brothers and sisters"*** at the beginning of verse 12. These Gentile Galatians are Paul's true brothers and sisters through faith in Jesus Christ. To the contrary, the Jewish false teachers are ***not*** Paul's brothers even though they and Paul were all Jews. The oneness comes from being in Christ. Not from the externals of any religion. We need to be reminded of this.

Paul is urging these Christians to learn from his own tortuous journey to Christ. He had to turn from his zealous law keeping and pride (remember our introduction?) and forsake all for Christ. And he begs these Christians not to turn their backs on the truth they have embraced in Christ Jesus.

- b) ***Second, Paul calls for the Galatians to remember their own passionate response to the truth of the gospel:***

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:13-15 - "...you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. [14] You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself. [15] Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me."

While actual details are sketchy, historical sleuths have speculated that Paul actually detoured to Galatia while on route somewhere else due to a serious and debilitating eye disease.

They usually get this idea from Paul's own reference to the Galatians' willingness to give him their own eyes to assist him in his ministry, and the fact that Paul makes a very strange reference to the fact that his epistle was written in such "**large letters**"(6:11).

I hope you can see what Paul is doing here. He reminds these Galatians of a very unpleasant circumstance in his own life. He reminds them how debilitating and how deforming his own appearance had been among them when they first came to Christ.

There was Paul, preaching the gospel to them, his eyes red and filling with puss. He could hardly function. But they didn't change channels to find a more attractive preacher. They didn't shun or despise Paul. They treated Him like an angel - like they would treat Jesus Christ Himself (14).

Why? Because they found the gospel he preached so ultimately satisfying and freeing. They felt its power in their lives. They knew its transforming power. They didn't want Paul to leave. They would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to Paul to keep him preaching and teaching among them. ***Think about it! They'd prefer to give up their eyes than miss the gospel!***

And now Paul looks back on those times. He feels if he can only bring them back there - back to their first encounter with Christ by the Holy Spirit - they would rediscover that touch of wonder and promise all over again.

Do we need this call in our hearts? O how quickly we cool and forget! There comes a settling into this world. That excitement of being an alien here - that sharp cutting edge of being called **to** Christ and **out** from this decaying world - it seems to fade with the accumulation of things and the business of our schedules.

IPAD TEXT - Romans 12:1-2 - “Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.”

This is exactly what Paul is dealing with in these wayward Galatian believers. We are all so prone to falling upon times where the shaping influences of our lives are not coming from ***Christ’s Spirit within*** but the ***conditions of the world without***.

Let these verses from the heart of Paul in Galatians 4 serve to call you to a fresh, living remembrance of that time when the edge of discipleship and passion was still sharp and unblunted by the passing of time. See the preciousness of Christ all over again with fresh eyes:

**“Seeking You as a precious jewel,
Lord to give up I’d be a fool
You are my all in all!”**

2) THE ULTIMATE MOTIVE AND GOAL IN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MINISTRY

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:16-20 - “So then, *have I become your enemy because I told you the truth?* [17] They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. [18] But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner — and not just when I am with you. [19] My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. [20] I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don’t know what to do about you.”

You can’t help but notice the change Paul feels in the attitude of these Galatian believers toward him. First, they treated him like Jesus Christ Himself (4:14). Now they treated him like he was an enemy! What happened? Paul wouldn’t change his message to suit their changing interests. He *loved* these people dearly, but not the way they wanted to be loved. He wouldn’t alter his message to curry their affection or favor.

When people drift from God they want the message to drift with them. That's because they don't want to feel ungodly just because they change their affections and interests. Usually they will seek out some other voice, or some other church that will give them what they want to hear. Paul would have none of that.

But now notice how Paul describes the approach of these false teachers in Galatia:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:17-19 - "They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. [18] But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner — and not just when I am with you. [19] My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you."

These false teachers were eagerly seeking after the Galatian Christians, but only to keep them out of Paul's reach. That's what verse 17 is all about. Paul tells the Galatians that the false teachers wanted to ***"shut you out so that you will seek them."*** Shut them out from what? They wanted to shut them out from Paul and the truth of the gospel. They wanted these Galatians to be solely attached to them.

This is always the way of false religions and false doctrines. Beware of any group that is after you so zealously that they want to keep you bound up only in their particular emphasis of truth. Beware of movements that want to have you attach yourself **only** to them. Beware of places and teachers that phone and tell you that deliverance can only come through their program. Beware of places that tell you that renewal can only come through their new emphasis. Beware of centers that tell you you must come to them for the anointing or for revival.

Beware, beware, beware. This is the big deception of the enemy in these last days. Beware of anyone who tries to tell you that just the plain, regular teaching of the Scriptures, the regular, disciplined fellowship of the church, the power of prayer and the life of the Spirit somehow needs to be supplemented by something more exclusive and more sensational.

Paul said it was good to be sought after, but only if the right goal was kept in mind (18). Paul wasn't after these Christians to be big on him. He was out to have "***Christ formed in them***"(19).

Remember, as you try to bring others to Christ, or as you minister in this church body, it is very hard work to reach people deeply for Christ. Paul said it was as tough as labor pains:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 4:19 - "My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you."

There is no easy way to be a blessing to others. People can always be disappointing. They, just like us, can be stubborn and blind to the truth. Anyone who ministers for Jesus must be in it for the long haul. And they must be in it for the goal of having Christ formed in the hearts of others rather than personal success or glory. Let others have the spotlight if they need it. Keep the glory of Christ at the center of all you do. Let Him be formed daily and in increasing measure in all our hearts.