

The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians

Telling the Truth in Love

Galatians 4:12-20

1. **An Admonition** (Gal. 4:12)

Paul had left a system of works-righteousness when he was converted when Christ called him on the Damascus road (Acts 9:3-6). The recent behavior of the Galatian believers leaves Paul uncertain as to whether some of them had been converted (vs.8-11). He now pleads with them to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6). and not to be shackled into a system of works-righteousness that can only condemn (cf. Gal. 3:10-12).

2. **A Remembrance** (Gal. 4:13-15)

The occasion for Paul's initial preaching of the gospel to these churches was a severe illness that was afflicting him (v.13). The exact nature of his illness is not certain, nor can we be sure if this ailment is the same thing that he later referred to as a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7ff), but it is possible that he had suffered from a severe ocular malady (Gal. 4:15; 6:11; cf 1 Cor. 16:21). Illnesses, particularly ones that were debilitating, were often regarded as the evidence of divine disfavor (cf. John 9:2). However, the Galatians received both the messenger and the message as they would have received Christ Himself (cf. Gal. 3:1-5).

3. **A Warning** (vs.16-18)

The Galatian Christians had found themselves in the middle of a tug-of-war between Paul and the Judaizers. Similar to a common tactic used false teachers of different types, the Judaizers sought to have the Galatian Christians separate themselves from both the teachings of Paul and from fellowship with others who believe the true gospel in order that they would have the Judaizers as the sole source of teaching and instruction (Matt. 23:4-5, 15; 2 Pet. 2:18-19; Jude 16; cf. 1 Thess. 2:5-6). If those who sought to denigrate Paul were teaching the true gospel, he would have ignored their personal attacks (cf. Phil. 1:15-18), but since the attack was upon the gospel itself he responded severely.

4. **A Hope** (vs.19-20)

The work of the faithful shepherd is not complete when a person trusts in the Lord Jesus, his work is only beginning. Paul was very uncertain about exactly how to regard the Galatian Christians, but he is absolutely clear in his resolve to remain steadfast in the agonizing task of bringing them to maturity in Christ. Paul was willing to endure the agonizing pain of a woman in labor for these people whom he loved (cf. 1 Thess. 2:5-12).