

Paul's letter to the Galatians



Paul's Concern for the Galatians

Galatians 4:8-20



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When you did not know God (4:8)

- “**know**” (*eidō*) ~ “to see or perceive,” but it can include the ideas of paying attention, discerning, or understanding.
- Their lack of awareness of God’s involvement in their lives led to being easily deceived and becoming enslaved to ungodly forces **“which by nature are no gods.”**
- Paganism was woven into the fabric of everyday life in the Roman world, and that culture was pervaded by idolatry. It controlled the lives of the people who **“did not know God.”** They were “held in bondage under the elemental things of the world” (Gal 4:3).

Now that you have come to know God (4:9)

- “**know**” (*ginōskō*) ~ “to know by personal experience or in a personal way.” Not the same word as in the previous verse.
- Their new knowledge of God was the result of God taking the initiative in making Himself known. God first knew, chose, and loved them, began drawing them to Himself, and opened their understanding so they could accept His gracious gift of salvation. Immense blessings were the result.
- It would make no sense to return to their previous impoverished condition under bondage to “**weak and worthless elemental things.**”

The situation in Galatia (4:10-11)

- Paul heard that the Galatians had already begun to follow some of the practices of Judaism. “**observe**” (*paratēreō*) ~ to watch closely in order to carefully fulfill the prescribed obligations.
- Apparently it was the *ceremonial* aspects of the Mosaic Law that appealed to the Galatians. They were observing “**days and months and seasons and years.**”
- “**fear**” (*phobeomai*) ~ conveyed Paul’s alarm and anxiety “**that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.**”
“**labor**” (*kopiaō*) is not the normal term for “work,” but it carries the idea of growing weary, tired, or exhausted with toil.

Their original tender fellowship (4:12-14)

- Paul implored them to “**become as I am**” ~ free from the Law (2:19). When Paul first came to the Galatians, he had lived as the Gentiles lived, apart from the Law ~ “**I also have become as you are.**”
- He had first “**preached the gospel**” to them “**because of a bodily illness.**” They had not wronged him, but instead they had responded to him with overwhelming kindness and care.
- They recognized Paul as a messenger of God bringing the good news of Christ Jesus, and they could not have received an angel or even Jesus Himself more courteously.

Blessing gave way to enmity (4:15-17)

- “**sense of blessing**” (*makarismos*) ~ originally they shared a joyful fellowship, but now some of the Galatians considered Paul to be their “**enemy**.” The Judaizers had persuaded them that Paul was in error and they must “cut off” (*ekkleiō*) fellowship with him.
- All Paul was doing was “**telling the truth**,” and it was ***Paul’s*** teaching that had brought such blessedness to the Galatians. Why would they now reject that blessing and the one who brought it?
- The Judaizers were “**eagerly seeking**” to influence them for the wrong motives. They wanted the Galatians’ exclusive devotion.

Zeal for others to aid their spiritual growth (4:18-20)

- It is not wrong to be “**eagerly sought**” (*zēloō*) as long as it is done “**in a commendable manner.**” Paul was concerned because the Galatians seemed to lack discernment and were vulnerable to false teaching when he was not “**present**” with them.
- “**again in labor until Christ is formed in you**” ~ the goal of their new birth was to grow to complete maturity in Christ, but their behavior demonstrated that the Galatians would require some additional spiritual labor in order to reach that goal.
- “**perplexed**” (*aporeō*) ~ in doubt about exactly what to do. Sending a letter may be a poor substitute for being with them in person.

Summary

- Paul provided a brief glimpse into the depth of his concern for the Galatians. Before they heard the gospel, the Galatians were in bondage to worthless things that controlled their lives. Afterward, they had experienced a sense of blessedness in their faith.
- Originally they had received Paul in the kindest possible way, but now the Judaizers were making him out to be their enemy.
- Paul revealed the false teachers' true motives, and he felt as if he was again in labor for their spiritual growth and maturity in Christ.
- He was perplexed about what to do, but sending this letter became a blessing for them and for others throughout history.