

How Quickly You Turn Away from the Truth

Gal. 4:12-20

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I. Historical Background and Biblical Context

A. Historical Background

Galatians was Paul's earliest letter that he wrote to the Galatian churches. He had just planted several churches in the South Galatians region, when to his surprise, false teachers entered the churches to turn the new believers from grace to legalism. He was also astonished at how quickly they turned away from the truth. Paul argued for his apostolic authority and for grace over the law.

Paul's own career of persecuting Christians proved that zealous behavior can be tragically misguided (Gal. 1:13-14). Paul was showing that false teachers in Galatia were making the same mistakes he had made prior to his conversion. In Chapter 4, the apostle's care and concern for the Galatian believers began to come through. Paul's argument was against the false teachers who taught the Galatians to seek salvation through obedience to the law rather than through Jesus Christ. He wanted to convince them of their error in returning to the practice of Mosaic rites and customs. In a previous chapter Paul showed them that believers in the Gospel were the true children of Abraham, that they had been delivered from the curse of the law, that the law was a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ and that they were all children of the living God.

B. Biblical Context

The verses being studied today reveal a serious rift in the relationship between Paul and the Galatian Saints. Whenever men depart from the truth, there will be division which is a symptom of sin. When the Galatians chose to follow the false teachings of the Judaizers instead of the Gospel Paul preached, they turned away from Paul and the Gospel. Doctrinal deviation is disobedience, and it severs personal relationships, even deeply rooted ones. Paul realized that the backsliding of the Galatians had put a strain on their relationship with

him. He began Verse 12 by calling the Galatians “brothers” or “brethren”.

II. The Lesson: How Quickly You Turn Away from the Truth

1. Verse 12.

To get beyond the present dilemma, Paul appealed (“I entreat you”) to the Galatians to follow his example (1 Cor. 11:1). He had abandoned the ceremonial rules and regulations connected with Judaism so that he could freely preach the Gospel of Christ to Jews and Gentiles alike in the cities of Galatia. They were not to hinder the Gospel of Christ with laws and regulations. Intensifying his appeal, Paul challenged the Galatians, “become as I am, for I also have become as you are,” that is, he was essentially saying become free from the law as I am, because after my conversion, I became like the non-Jewish Gentiles, no longer living under the law”. However, the Galatians Gentiles were putting themselves under the law after their conversion.

2. Verses 13-14.

In these verses, Paul related how he was received by the Galatians on his first visit to them (Acts 13-14). The Galatian believers received Paul very well or warmly during his first visit to them, doing him no wrong. Paul described the closeness and understanding that had existed between him and the Galatians when he had preached the Gospel to them initially. At that time, he labored under the difficulty of an ailment but remained until he had preached the Gospel to them. Whatever his illness, the Galatians did not treat Paul with contempt or scorn as a weak messenger but rather received him as one would receive an angel or even Christ Jesus Himself. Paul recalled how the Galatians had cared for him in his illness.

3. Verses 15-16.

The Galatians had received Paul with joy or gratefulness. They considered themselves fortunate for having been under Paul’s earlier

ministry. They were so grateful that they would have given him their own eyes had it been possible. But now all that had changed. The people used to esteem him highly. They were beginning to regard him as an opponent because he spoke the truth about the Gospel, pointing out their erroneous ways. Sometimes the truth hurts, but a faithful friend will courageously and gently confront another. The Galatians were turning against the Lord, the Gospel of grace and the messenger who brought them the news of justification by faith.

4. **Verses 17-18.**

The false teachers were wooing the Galatians with improper intentions. They wanted to exclude or cut the Galatians off from Paul so that the Galatians would then court the Judaizers' favor; in other words, they wanted to shut out Paul and his teachings so that the Galatians would be focused on the false teachings and its influence. Paul said that the Judaizers were making much of the Galatians for no good purpose. It is good to be sought when those doing the courting do so with pure motives. Paul sought to prevent the readers from thinking that his remarks in Verse 17 meant that he wanted to monopolize them: "I do not wish to have you all to myself, " to paraphrase the apostle, "I am glad others are fond of you, provided it is with honorable motives." This was not the case with the Judaizers.

One of the marks of a false teacher is that he/she tries to attract Christians to himself or herself and not simply to the truth of the word or to the person of Jesus Christ. A true servant of God does not "use people" to build himself or herself or their work up; they minister in love to help people know Christ better and glorify Him. The task of the spiritual leader is to get people to love and follow Christ, not to promote themselves and their ministry. As Pastor so aptly stated in his sermon, "A Pastor's Prayer", Sunday, September 11, 2022, "Any good pastor wants something for you, not something from you. A good pastor can not be everything for you; only God can do that"!

5. **Verses 19-20.**

"My little children" revealed that Paul's concern for the Galatians was like that of a parent for his children. Paul compared himself to a

mother in anguish of birth pangs. “I travail in birth” disclosed the anxious concern, hard work and pain experienced on his part for his converts. This labor will last until Christ be formed in you, that is until Christ’s life, character, and virtues are fully cultivated in their lives. He had experienced this once for their salvation; he was in a struggle again for their deliverance from false teachers. The foolishness of the Galatians was needlessly causing him to suffer this pain again.

The last verse (V. 20) exposed Paul’s grief-stricken heart even more fully. He expressed his wish that he could be with his children and speak tenderly to them. However, he could only tell them in this letter how puzzled and pained he was at what had happened to them. If they still possessed the love that they once had toward Paul, his pain would stop. They must reassess their decision to follow other teachers whose messages were contrary to that which saved them.

III. Conclusion

Paul’s genuine care for the welfare of the Galatians was highlighted in Chapter 4. He had lived among them during his missionary journey and had a deep desire to see them retain a correct view of the Gospel so that they would not be led astray.

To help us realize that being children of God, we must examine our own daily living by asking ourselves these questions:

- a. Do we understand our adoption into the family of the Lord?
- b. Do we remind ourselves about the honor of being a child of God?
- c. Do we treat God as our Father, loving, honoring and obeying Him?
- d. Do we think of Jesus Christ as our Brother?
- e. Do we love our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- f. Do we understand that we are no longer living under the law but by faith through Jesus Christ? “The Law doesn’t just tell us how sinful we are, but it also provides us with a lasting solution as to how we can overcome sin” (Rev. Tesfaye’s lesson, September 18, 2022).