

The Gospel In Galatians: Lesson 9

Paul's Pastoral Appeal

Memory Text: "Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all." (Galatians 4:12)

Setting The Stage: Joe Girard did something pretty extraordinary that earned him a place in the Automotive Hall of Fame. Between 1963 and 1978, a period of 15 years, he sold 13,001 cars at a Chevrolet dealership. His big innovation was having people get an appointment in order to have him sell to them, so that he could have an assistant research, pre-screen and qualify each customer. Joe took a hit-or-miss business and turned it into an assembly line.

Salesmen all have one thing in common – persistence and the ability to persuade. Think about Meg Whitman who took Ebay from a \$4 million a year company with 30 employees to an \$8 billion a year firm employing more than 15,000. Then there's Thomas Edison who constantly promoted, positioned and publicized, and in the process convinced the world to embrace technology that, at the time, was almost miraculous. And what about Benjamin Franklin, who practically single-handedly, sold the idea of the United States not just to his countrymen, but also to the rest of the world.

Each person urged others to accept their product, whether that product was a vehicle, an item, a plan, or a vision. Each person thought they had something important enough to offer that a person or populace ought to embrace that certain thing. But could any of these products be more important than truth or eternal life? How much more should these items be urged on others?

The gospel isn't to be peddled. Neither are arms to be twisted, or a person's will to be coerced. But if there were one product above all others that needed to be presented with persistent and persuasive appeals it has to be the gospel, doesn't it? So far in our study, Paul has been graciously persistent and theologically persuasive in asking the Galatians to turn from their wrong thinking regarding justification and how salvation is acquired, and to order their steps once more on the path of truth and righteousness by faith.

The fact that Paul persuades theologically makes it clear that correct theology matters; truth matters. Just because I believe a red traffic light means, "Go," doesn't make it so. The consequences of such careless thinking could lead to an accident or worse yet, death. Contrary to popular opinion, truth matters. Contrary to the spirit of ecumenicalism, correct theology matters.

Sunday – The Heart Of Paul

Galatians 4:12-20; 1 Corinthians 4:15; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; Psalm 126:5, 6

While Paul was a master theologian and could humble the best of his intellectual opponents, Paul had a pastor's heart. He wasn't driven simply to win an argument; he was driven out of genuine concern for those he labored for.

The following poem speaks to the unfortunate attitude of many pastors today:
"There is a pastor, himself he cherished, Who loved his position not his parish; So the more he preached, The less he reached; And this is why his parish perished."

Galatians 4:12-20. The essence of Paul's pastoral appeal is for the Galatians to become as he is as he became as they were. More on that in a minute. You can hear the passion in Paul's words. Unlike the salesman who is out for his own interests and who appeals to the customers baser passions, Paul's persuasive plea reveals that he has his readers best interest at heart, appealing to their loftier virtues.

"Urge" The Greek word is *deomai*, which carries a strong sense of desperation. Essentially, Paul was begging them. Paul's concern was not merely doctrinal points of view or theological ideas. His heart was bound up with the lives of those whom he had brought to Christ. When you truly care for someone and you see they're in danger, your appeals to them will always have a sense of urgency.

How much did Paul care about them? Gal. 4:11, 19. Like a mother who deeply loves the child she has just brought into the world. (Jen was in labor with Aaron for 18 hours, Joanna for 12 hours, and Abby for 8 hours. They say the average length of labor is 6.5 hours. How is it that a wife gets angry with her husband during labor, yet can comfort and pour all her affection out on the child that just caused her intense pain? ☺)

1 Corinthians 4:15: "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel."

From a different perspective: laboring for something can generate a greater appreciation for the thing labored over. You work hard, you have a greater appreciation for the value of money. You plant a garden, you have a greater appreciation for the food you've grown (you chew a little slower). If something comes hard you appreciate it more.

1 Thessalonians 3:5: "For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain."

We can't know of Paul's pain unless we've labored for the salvation of others like he did. We can only truly experience the joys and sorrows of Jesus' ministry when we have invested in someone's salvation and growth in Jesus Christ.

Psalm 126:5, 6: “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

Do you have a burden for the lost like Paul had? We can't help everyone, but we can help somebody. God has called you to reach those who only you can reach and those I cannot. If we fail to engage, we deprive a person of the chance to respond to the gospel.

Monday – The Challenge To Become

Galatians 4:12; Acts 26:29; Proverbs 4:23

Galatians 4:12. On more than occasion Paul invited his readers to imitate him or do the things he does. But there is something different about this appeal. 1 Cor. 4:16, Paul urged the believers to imitate him because he had begotten them to the gospel. Eph. 4:17 and 2 Thess. 3:7-9, he urged the believers to follow his example. But here in Galatians he doesn't say, “Do as I do,” but instead he says, “Be as I am.”

Why, in this instance did Paul say, “Be as I am”? Before his conversion experience, Paul was a Jew entirely devoted to the legal system as only a self-righteous Pharisees could be. But he had given up the legal system and had become a “Gentile” to win the Gentiles to Christ, and so why should the Gentile converts now accept Judaism?

But there's more. There didn't appear to be any unethical behavior in the church in Galatia. The problem in Galatia was with the heart of Christianity itself. Paul wasn't saying, “Act like me,” but “Be what I am.” And what was Paul? Paul was no longer under the law – that is, not under the law as another way of salvation, or in other words, not practicing righteousness by works. He wanted them accept the basics of Christianity; to know justification by faith again; to have complete faith and confidence in the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

Acts 26:29: “And Paul said, ‘I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am, except for these chains.’”

Only when we know who we are in Christ can we have the confidence that Paul expressed in these words to King Agrippa. And who God declares us to be He makes us to be. Who we are as followers of Jesus is not *based* on our works and deeds (although works and deeds reveal whether we follow Jesus or not), it is based on what God has declared us to be and is doing in us.

Someone said, “I am not what I do. I am not what I have. I am not what people say about me. I am His son/daughter. I am His beloved.”

Proverbs 4:23: “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.”

Your heart is like a spring. If the spring is pure then the water that comes from it will be the same. But if the spring is dirty, then dirty water will flow from it. Being must precede doing, because what you do flows out of who you are.

Matthew 7:17, 18: “ Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.”

Is it easier to act like a Christian or to be a Christian? Is it easier to act like a good parent or to be a good parent? The heart needs to be changed before we can live changed lives. The parable of the leaven teaches us that God’s grace works from the inside out. God doesn’t modify or improve the old. He makes those justified by faith completely new. We are His new creation in Christ Jesus. Old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

Tuesday – I Have Become As You Are

Galatians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; 10:31-33

Galatians 4:12. **What is Paul saying in the last part of this verse?** Before his conversion, Paul was a Jew entirely devoted to the legal system, but he had given up the legal system and had become a “Gentile” to win the Gentiles to Christ. Without compromising principle, Paul sought to identify with the Gentiles, not to become like them (as he just got through saying, “Be as I am” implicitly trusting Christ for salvation) but to point them to Christ as Lord and Savior.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23: “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.”

Paul was more than willing to work for others, even as a slave did without reward or pay, to advance their welfare. Like a slave, wishing to please his master, or because he is forced to do so, he was willing to comply with customs, habits, opinions of others as far as possible, without compromising principle.

In Acts 16, Paul had Timothy circumcised because in their work they were going to encounter Jews. So to remove any potential barriers of prejudice, Timothy willingly succumbed to the procedure. Was there wisdom in what Paul did? Surely.

“The servants of Christ should accommodate themselves to the varied conditions of the people. They cannot carry out exact rules if they meet the cases of all. Labor will have to be varied to meet the people where they are.” (Testimonies to the Church, vol. 2, p. 673)

Some people see in Paul a people pleaser, bending over backwards to accommodate people’s ideas and customs. Sadly, Christians who have thought this and integrated this philosophy into their witnessing experience have done damage, not only to their own conscience but also to their influence. **Was Paul really a people pleaser?**

1 Corinthians 10:31-33: “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”

Paul’s burden to conform to custom and culture without compromising principle was for the purpose of reaching people for Christ. His example doesn’t give any Christian license to adopt local customs and culture that are contrary to the Word of God for fear of offending someone.

Is better to offend someone (not by being rude and disrespectful) because of your conviction to do what is right, which has greater potential to win their respect, than to violate your conscience so as not to offend and thus very likely lose their respect and any influence you might have had over them for the good?

Wednesday – Then & Now

Galatians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 12:7-9; 4:8-12

Galatians 4:13. The Galatians weren’t to think that Paul had a complaint against their treatment of him. They actually treated him very well (see v. 13-15) even though they could have considered him under the curse of the gods and left him to care for himself. But hey didn’t do that. Yet because of his infirmity (whatever it was), he had the opportunity to share the gospel with them, which they gladly received.

When was the last time you felt like sharing the gospel with someone when you weren’t feeling well? We all have varying temperaments, but in spite of that, the love of Christ in the heart compels a person to share the hope they have in Jesus.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9: “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

The incident in Galatia may have had something to do with Paul's continual "thorn in the flesh." The weakness he refers to isn't incompetence but genuine discomfort.

According to these verses, why did God allow Paul to suffer as He did and why does He suffer us to as well? It was a reminder to Paul of His continual dependence on Christ's strength. Are we prone to go it alone and do the work of God in our strength? God often reminds us that without Him we can do nothing. Why? So that we might be more inclined to listen, be more inclined to follow His lead, be more inclined to trust in His wisdom and strength, which if we do will greatly benefit God's work than if we didn't.

2 Corinthians 4:8-12: "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you."

Paul's scars testified of the suffering he had endured for the gospels sake. The scars also spoke eloquently of the reality of Paul's daily conversion – to be willing to die to self and even die – that others might know the gospel.

Some of us are like Peter who said to the Lord, "I am willing to die for Your sake." But when it came down to it, Peter wasn't even willing to surrender his own opinions or die to self, let alone die for Jesus. Does Jesus have our hearts? Are we entirely His? Do we have such a connection with Him that we live in such a way that Christ is exalted above our own thoughts, opinions, and ways?

Thursday – Speaking The Truth

Galatians 4:14-18; Proverbs 27:6

Galatians 4:14-18. The genuine concern the church in Galatia expressed toward Paul in his sickness was remarkable. Paul was not exaggerating when he said that they cared for him as if they cared for Jesus Himself. What incredible hospitality they had. Oh, that all of God's people would do what they could for a brother or sister who suddenly finds themselves in a difficult place!

"You did not despise or reject." But Paul highlights their generosity toward him when they could have rejected him for what they would have considered good reasons. He wanted to help them understand that their negative attitude and actions toward him at the present was at best inconsistent with their past disposition toward him. Their earlier conduct testified against their present attitude.

"Where is the blessing?" On top of that their present attitude had brought no added satisfaction. Their former joy had dissipated. They once hoped in Christ's ability to

save. Now they were trusting in their own. A recipe for spiritual disaster and a life of misery! No greater evidence could they have given for their devotion to Paul and his gospel than that they were willing to give him their own eyes if they could. (We would say, "I'd give you the shirt off my own back")

"Enemy". He had told them the truth earlier and they didn't mistreat him, why now? After all, it was the same gospel he was sharing at this time as he had when he first came to Galatia. But truth is better than a lie. It might not feel good going down (much like medicine), but it's good for us.

Proverbs 27:6: "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

Why don't we like to hear the truth? The truth hurts. It's inconvenient. We would prefer to avoid pain and seek pleasure. We expect to be spared our feelings even at the cost of truth. As a result we prefer to be lied to or live in a lie.

But there's more. If, as a friend, I mentioned to you that I was concerned about a small malignant growth on your back that you weren't aware of, would you be offended? Now as a friend, if I tactfully and lovingly share out of genuine concern for you that you are prone to negativity and bitterness (because you are) and it's affecting your friendships, how would you feel then?

Why do we get more offended with the later than the former? It's because pointing out a potentially malignant skin lesion isn't a judgment of character. This makes pointing out negative behaviors riskier to the relationship, but no less important. Pointing out such flaws from a competitive or malicious place casts an entirely different light on the practice and isn't the subject here.

Who would make the better friend: the one who knows about your problem but for fear of offending you doesn't say anything thus allowing you to expose yourself to possible future hardships, or the one who knowing the risks involved, lovingly highlights your problem because he/she genuinely cares about you? What type of friend would you prefer?

King Ahab of the OT didn't like it when he heard the truth. Speaking of Michaiah the prophet he said, "I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." (1 Kings 22:8) But another man, in the NT this time, accepted correction. His name was Apollos. Aquila and Priscilla ministered to the mighty preacher and he accepted the truth immediately (see Acts 18:25, 26). What quality in Apollos allowed him to accept correction? It was humility. He didn't have a high opinion of himself or his knowledge of God's Word. He was open to course correction and willingly accepted the truth as it was revealed to him. Do we possess the same spirit of humility?