

Galatians

Chapter 4:8-20

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Paul has just concluded his remarks regarding our sonship and inheritance which he contrasted to those who are not sons. Just as in our natural lives we did nothing to direct our birth, so too in our spiritual birth we are born as sons of God solely by the volition and pleasure of God. In the following verses, Paul reminds the Galatians where they have fallen from in their new thinking.

8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. 9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

- Paul reminds them of their activities prior to becoming known by God. Paul's parenthetical correction here (rather known by God) really is wonderful. Frequently we refer to things by the way they look from our perspective. Yes, it is true you did come to know God at some point in time if you are a true Christian. From our perspective that is how it looked. But Paul gives the deeper truth which we must never forget, it was then that we became known by God. His pursuit of us is what allowed our knowledge of Him. His love for us is what produced our love for Him. By nature we were haters of God although we frequently knew better than to say such things, our actions revealed our true positions.
- As humans, we are by nature creatures. We did nothing to create or assist in the creation of ourselves; our existence is totally dependent upon God. Therefore there is nothing within us that is inherently worthy of worship as if we were the creator. Our sinful natures, not wanting to worship the creator, turned us to worshipping the creation. Paul refers to these things as the beggarly elements cf. Verse 3 & 9, 1 Kings 12:25-33, Romans 1:18-26.
- An important doctrine which rose out of the reformation is the regulative principle. The regulative principle says that that which is not commanded by God as worship of Him is forbidden. What this means is that God has told us to worship Him in a specific way. Although we can do many things in a worshipful manner, how we worship God is not up to us. We need to obey our God not our preferences. The main point of this is that we cannot devise certain ways of worshipping God and bind them to our consciences as though they were the commandments of God.

11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain. 12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

- It is evident from these and other verses in Scripture that Paul suffered from some ailment that he called his "thorn in his side". However, we don't conclusively know what that ailment was but these verses give the most clear evidence that it could have been some sort of offensive eye problem. We know that his eyesight was not good and that at his conversion the Lord blinded him until Ananias washed his eyes and scales fell off. This conclusion is the most popular and best supported.
- After having given a lengthy harshly worded rebuke of the sin of the Galatians he begins to take a slightly more milder approach so as to restore the church. Paul takes his own advice in doing this as he instructed Timothy in 2 Tim 3:2. Paul pleads with them and calls them brothers. What Paul is saying to them is given that I have no other intention than to seek your benefit, it is proper that you should lend a willing, obedient ear to my instructions. Paul had no secret agenda nor was he seeking his righteousness through their conversion. Paul simply had a love for the Galatians. This attitude toward people is evident as Paul called the people his crown.

15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

- Paul reminds them of the zeal by which they had previously greeted him so as to contrast their current attitudes. He reminds them

of the love and joy that they demonstrated earlier in their Christian lives that was now gone. This new teaching had robbed them of their joy. Many Christians consider asceticism a virtue with regard to their Christ maturity. Although the excitement which many experience early in their walk as they make profound new discoveries may convert into a humble awe of God, our joy should never dissipate but rather mature.

17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you. (NKJV)

- The Judaizers very zealous, but as Paul has said in Romans, the Jews were zealous for their religion, but without knowledge. Zeal is not the measuring stick by which we evaluate truth from falsehood. Rather, we are to be students of His word which has been left for us for this purpose. I believe that Paul is telling the Galatians that although these men are zealous the effect of their zeal would be to exclude them from the kingdom of God because the message they are delivering is not the Gospel at all.
- Paul was concerned that Christ had not been formed in them. Although he had spent a great deal of time with them he is concerned that their situation is more than needing corrective teaching but that they aren't even Christians. Naturally, Paul hopes for the opposite.