

**15. Paul's deep concern for the Galatian believers Gal 4:8-20**

1. vs 8-11 They faced a choice between living under the bondage of elements of the world or in freedom as a sons of God!

Vs 8. It is natural in our fallen, blinded, ignorant state before salvation, that we served those things that are not gods.

Vs 9. But the Galatians have known God & been in relationship to Him who is the living & true God, and yet now they placed themselves under slavery to works-based religion of rules & duties which are empty, worthless & powerless to accomplish anything!

Vs 10. Man-made religion always makes much of special 'holy days' with a lot of ritual & ceremony! Legalism caters to and recognizes our flesh by putting the focus on what we achieve for God.

Vs 11 Paul's fear was that this attraction to legalism would mean that the truth of liberty in the Gospel among the Galatians would be forfeited.  
*("Labored" is literally "to labor to the point of exhaustion." Paul was sad that his efforts in the gospel would be wasted.)*

There was a choice facing the believers: enjoy a living, free, relationship with God as a loving Father based on what Jesus did for us and who we are in Him, OR get tangled up by trying to please God by our own feeble efforts of keeping rules, living in the bondage of performance based religion!

2. A personal plea vs 12 - 20

vs 12 Paul enjoyed liberty in Christ, and he wanted them to also walk in the same freedom from the Jewish law.

"For I became like you": Paul could say to these non-Jewish Christians, "When it comes to legalism, I know about it. As a Jew I used to live my whole life trying to be accepted by God because of what I did. But I saw that it was a useless pursuit & a dead end, so I died to the law ... I gave up on it! In that sense I became like you Gentiles who did not try to follow the Law of Moses."

"You have not injured me at all." - not completely clear why he says this here. Maybe he is saying that by turning away from the Gospel he preached, they were really hurting themselves, not him - even though of course it grieved him much.

Vs 13-16 Paul recalls the close relationship they had with him when they first met. It seems he ended up in Galatia because of some type of illness while on his first missionary journey. The book of Acts doesn't tell us as much about this, but we can piece together a little of the story.

They had received Paul with joy, and appreciation. They would even have made the

sacrifice of their eyes for Paul! (Some think this is an indication that Paul had bad eyesight & that this was his “thorn” in his “flesh” spoken of in 2 Cor 12:7.) However, this may simply be a figure of speech to convey that they so highly esteemed Paul that they would have given him their most precious possession!

But somehow that had all changed. They now acted as though he had become their enemy, for the simple reason that he had been telling them the truth. BUT they needed the truth more than they needed to feel good about where they were at!

Vs 17-18 Paul appeals: "Beware of the affection the legalists show you." False teaching often comes wrapped in a cloak of "love."

Many cults use a technique informally known as "love bombing." They overwhelm a prospective member with attention, support, and affection. Yet it isn't really a sincere love for the prospect; it is really just a technique to gain another member! They are grooming you to be part of their own success at getting converts, and entrap you in their 'web.' Cf. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves." (Matthew 23:15)

They want to draw you away into their own divisive group... they will “close ranks” around you and exclude you from other Christians ... literally means to "lock you up" ...

The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice the group itself is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true "super-Christians." Too late you will realise that they will demand that you serve them. Legalism is almost always associated with some kind of religious bondage.

It is good to be zealous in a good thing always: Paul certainly wasn't against zeal. He wanted Christians to be zealous in a good thing always. But it is important to make sure that our zeal is in a good thing because zeal in a bad thing is dangerous.

Don't be impressed just because someone is passionate & sincere! Zeal in the service of a lie is a dangerous thing. *Cf. Rom 10:2 the Jews had a zeal... but not according to knowledge of the truth!* (Paul knew this well - before he became a Christian, he had plenty of zeal; even persecuting the church (Acts 7:58-8:4). Later, Paul deeply regretted it (1 Corinthians 15:9, 1 Timothy 1:15).

Vs 19-20 Paul appeals to them as his dear children : "I love you - please listen to me." He even compares himself to a mother in the pain of giving birth! He had experienced this once for their salvation; he was “in labor” again for their deliverance from false teachers. His work of forming Christ in them was not complete until they truly stayed in a place of trusting Jesus.

(The idea of Christ being formed in them is similar to the idea of Romans 8:29 “to be conformed to the image of His Son.”)

Vs 20 Paul was concerned about how they would react to his Letter. He would rather be speaking with them in person. Then he could better express himself by changing the tone of his voice. If they were receptive to his rebukes, he could be tender.