

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 14 – “The Desires of the Pastor”
Galatians 4:8-20
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Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain. Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (Galatians 4:8-20 ESV).

I wonder how many church members through the years have asked the questions, “What does the preacher want?” Sometimes that question has been asked in a genuine desire to understand the vision and direction of the leadership; and, sometimes it has been asked in frustration and doubt. There may have even been times when that frustration was justified. When a pastor’s desires are not consistent with the role Jesus has given to them it cause confusion within the body. That has led to many churches failing in their calling to be a place of healing and grace.

The solution is simple. As we study the ministry of the Apostle Paul we can find our direction both as pastors and congregation, shepherds and sheep. Paul is our model. He is so human and yet so spiritual. There is that in Paul’s life which inspires and challenges us. And, right in the middle of this doctrinal section of his letter to the church in Galatia we have a personal passage he shares his heart with them. It is the heart of a shepherd and not just a theologian. It is what every true shepherd desires. It is what I desire. Let me share three simple things that grow out of the apostle’s heart and mine for you and our church. I hope they are in your heart as well!

First, the Pastor Desires Freedom for the People of God (vv. 8-9).

1. *Paul reminded them of their past.* It was not unlike the past of anyone else. It was marked by bondage to false religious systems. Idol worship was just like the legal system of the Jews. It produced bondage. They were slaves to their old way of life. Before they came to Christ they had been spiritually the bond slaves of the empty idols around them. They were controlled by these false idols and their beliefs concerning them. When they heard and responded in faith to the gospel Paul preached they had been set free in God’s grace. It is even more important that we understand that this knowledge is two way. We know God AND He knows us!

2. *Paul reminded them of their present condition.* Those who had tasted freedom were returning to bondage.

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

This was a very gentle way of reminding them of their past! However it is not a very complimentary way to describe the Jewish legal system. The result stood. They were now much more “moral” in the view of the Jews, but they were enslaved never-the-less.

Paul reaction was one of deep concern. He feared they were slipping back into the bondage from which he thought they had been delivered. It now appeared all the time and energy he had invested in them was for nothing. Do you see the desire of his heart? He was not interested in getting people involved in religious programs and burdensome systems> He was interested in leading people to experience the spiritual freedom which can only come from knowing the grace of God! He wants to sense the joy and excitement that comes to people when they have been set free in the Lord. He wants to sense that people are free to become what God wants them to be by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives. He wants them to have a life blessed in the Lord, not burdened with the shame and guilt that comes from a legalistic way of life. Nothing brings a deeper grief to a pastor that to see people turning away from the true spiritual birthright which is freedom in the Lord!

Second, the Pastor Desires the Faithfulness of the People of God (vv. 10-16).

Paul had a wonderful beginning with these friends in Galatia. In spite of some rather adverse circumstances, they had welcomed him from the first day he arrived in their community.

*You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though **my condition** was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.*

There has been much discussion about Paul’s “condition.” The two best explanations seem to be either the result of the severe persecutions he had endured just before coming to Galatia, or that he had contracted Malaria on his trip. The first seems to best fit this context, but either would have provided the people a good reason for not listening to Paul. But, they received him as “an angel of the Lord.” The welcome they gave to Paul was the kind they would have given to the Lord Himself. They would have even “gouged out their eyes and given them” to the Apostle, which undoubtedly is a reference to his poor vision. They would have done anything for him.

But, the Judaizers came. After their coming, they completely turned from the freedom they had known, putting themselves in bondage again. Their attitude toward Paul began to change. One sign that something bad is happening in your spiritual life can be a change in your attitude toward your spiritual leaders. He even asks them why he has suddenly become their enemy.

Unless you have actually experienced what Paul is describing, you cannot fully appreciate it. As a young pastor this type of experience almost shattered me. Apart from the grace of God and the love of my wife, I would not have been able to handle it. A deep motivating desire of

every true shepherd is to see those committed to his care to be steadfast and faithful in the commitment to Jesus. He is bothered deeply when he senses that they are wavering in their steadfastness. On the other hand, there is no greater joy than of seeing your people abide faithfully in the grace of Christ.

Third, the Pastor Desires the Fulfillment of the Purpose of God (vv. 17-20).

It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!

What a revealing statement! Even though there has been a change in the attitude on the part of the Galatians, Paul has not changed his mind. His heart is still the same toward them. He still has an intense desire that they come into the kingdom of God. Paul is experiencing pain, like the “anguish of childbirth” that Christ would be found in them. He wants their inner life to be that which was in Christ Jesus.

It is a very serious matter. Sometimes pastors have been accused of being too serious, perhaps even severe; however, because the matter of a man’s soul is so serious, we often seem so.

Let me ask you ask you a question. Is this what you want in my heart? I tell you it is there. This is the model I wish to follow in the coming years. I want you to know the full freedom that is yours in Christ. Nothing else will satisfy my heart as pastor!