

Galatians 4:17-20 “No Compromise”

GAL 4:16-20 “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”

In this section here Paul really takes on the forces who have done their best in trying to convince the believers in Galatia to follow them and their teachings rather than the teachings of the word of God alone.

And it has always been this way. There has always been opposition to the truth, but the enemy has done it in a way where the truth is always sprinkled in so as not to give the impression that it is blatantly opposed to God's word.

It continues to be this way. In fact, yesterday morning a very nice couple with a 6 month old baby in a stroller came to our door. And the first thing out of the husband's mouth was, we're going through the neighborhood to encourage people to read the bible. Who could argue with that? Who could fault with a young family canvassing the neighborhood with a message like that?

But, being suspicious I quickly cut to the chase and asked him which organization he represents, because he wasn't going to tell me until he got through his entire speech. And his response was the Jehovah's witnesses. I politely told him that if the bible alone was what they encouraged then they would have to agree that Jesus Christ alone was the Savior.

Now, I know that this is not what they teach and I knew that he wasn't going to concede to my statement. But as I looked at this well-mannered, well groomed and very polite couple with their adorable child, I thought no one would see them as the enemy?

And yet, in so far as their message is concerned they most certainly are enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, even as these Judaizers were enemies of the gospel. Now, we are told to love our enemies but it doesn't mean we embrace the falsehood they espouse, nor embrace them as friends of the church.

What they are doing is abominable as they pervert the only true gospel as they promote a false gospel, which is really no gospel at all; a message which will send people to hell. We can't stand by in the spirit of "can't we just all get along" and ignore the fact that people's eternal destiny is on the line.

And this is precisely why Paul is devoting an entire letter coming against the Judaizers who are in fact promoting such a false gospel among the very ranks of the believers there in Galatia. Paul would be derelict as an apostle if he didn't confront this issue.

I know that there is an atmosphere of ecumenicalism in the world today where many groups are trying to unite under the common name of Jesus Christ. But these Judaizers would have been at the front of the line under this banner. And many "Christian" groups today would do the same, all the while not minding at all if the true gospel of Jesus Christ is watered down or eliminated all-together for the sake of unity.

But there is no true unity without truth. And there is no gospel which ignores the truth of who Jesus Christ is and what it was He actually came to accomplish so as to give mankind the hope of eternal life through the forgiveness of sins which only He can accomplish.

And so, to take the attitude that it doesn't make any difference what people teach as long as they're sincere is to sound the death knoll for the church, which of course we know Jesus Christ Himself will not allow because the gates of hell will not prevail against the Kingdom of God.

And so, Paul has essentially laid the groundwork here for an "us against them" mentality. And by this I don't mean a paranoid vindictive approach to mankind outside of Christ. I simply mean, as did Paul, an awareness that there is only one truth concerning salvation, and that any message outside of that truth must be acknowledged and confronted in love with the truth.

This is why Paul raises the question in verse 16 of our text.

GAL 4:16 "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

The language Paul uses here is quite strong. The word enemy in the Greek is *echthros* which comes from the primary word *echtho* meaning to hate or to be actively hostile against.

Paul is saying do you hate me because I have loved you with the truth? And who has stirred up this hatred? The Judaizers. But what Paul has done here in our text is to place the real enemies at the forefront for the Galatians as Paul has reminded them that at one time they accepted him as a friend and a father from a spiritual stand point. We saw this last week.

GAL 4:14-15 “Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”

But now they have embraced those enemies of the gospel because they have been deceived with a false sense of security that the law apparently gave them. And these Judaizers were in no uncertain terms devoted to their cause not to leave the Law of Moses out of their salvation experience.

GAL 4:17 “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.”

The “those people” are the enemies Paul alludes to in our text. And those people are zealous to win them over. This word zealous Paul uses paints a picture of their commitment to their cause and their teachings. They burn with a passion to win these Galatians over to their side.

Again, I go back to that couple who planted themselves on my front door step yesterday. They were zealous to win me over. They, like the Mormons, are zealous enough to walk the streets and go door to door to try and win as many people to their side as possible.

Now, granted, they do it not so much for the anticipation of actually converting someone that moment, but more out of obedience to their teachings which promote a works oriented salvation. The more persecution they encounter for their cause, the more times they can get their tracts in the hands of people, the more benefit it accrues for them in their zeal to earn heaven.

But it’s a zeal which is misguided. A zeal which will kill them in the final analysis as their false gospel will not deliver as they will have to account for their sin which can only be alleviated through

the shed blood of Christ alone on their behalf. No good work, in and of itself, will be put to their account as righteousness.

And this is what Paul is warning against in Galatia as he acknowledges the zeal the Judaizers have in promoting their cause. Unfortunately for the Galatians they don't seem to realize that the real intent of the Judaizers is not to seek the best of the church there, but to seek their own best.

“Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them.” (Verse 17)

It seems apparent that the Judaizers really had their own ego's in mind. And it involved a two pronged strategy. They would say and do anything to get the Galatians to agree with them so that the Galatians would be zealous for them, while trashing Paul with the objective of eliminating him from the picture, in this way alienating him from the Galatians.

The Judaizers evidently liked the attention of being in charge and receiving the adulation of the Galatians. In other words, it wasn't being a servant of God that was foremost on their list. It was being elevated to a position of importance that was taking center stage for them.

They wanted the Galatians to have a zeal for them, not God. Sure they would say all the right things which made it look like they truly wanted the spiritual best for the Galatians, but the bottom line is that once they start raping the very word God has given us, they end up taking its place.

And all the attention is directed toward them. It reminds me of that attitude the Pharisees had that Jesus points out.

MAT 6:1-5 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

The Judaizers in Galatia desired to be seen by men as the spiritual giants of the church, despite the fact that they were no more

spiritual than the Pharisees who only had their interests in mind. The Pharisees had a false gospel and so do the Judaizers and Jesus pulled no punches when describing the heart of these people.

MAT 23:13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.

Vs.15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are."

It is Paul's duty not to let the sons of hell, or if you will, the enemy who is subverting the gospel, to be triumphant in Galatia. And if anyone knew what it was like to be zealous with a false gospel it was Paul.

Remember, it was Paul, the former Saul, who actually persecuted the church with a burning zeal to where he actually participated in the deaths of people, specifically Stephen who was stoned to death as Paul held the coats of those doing the stoning.

But now Paul is zealous to combat such teaching. He is zealous to serve the living Christ he now knows to be the true Messiah. We must never become complacent in combating the enemies of Christ, the enemies of the gospel. And though our weapons are not worldly as they consist of the truth and love, they are weapons none the less and they must be employed for the sake of Christ's kingdom.

To suggest that we stand by and let the enemies of the gospel come in and teach the church their ungodly ways is to give up and allow the Lord to be dishonored. Why do you think Paul and the other apostles spend so much time and effort identifying and warning against such false teachers?

I mean, just look at some of the language Peter records for us about such teachers in his second letter.

2PE 2:1-3 "But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them -bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many

will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. Verse 22 Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud."

Does this sound like Peter is indifferent to the attacks of false teachers on the church? Even Jesus gives many warnings about such people.

MAT 7:15-20 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them."

When writing to the Romans Paul is emphatic about the way we should view false teachers who bring destructive teachings.

ROM 16:17-18 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people."

Paul was not naive when it came to realizing that the enemy would not stand still and simply let the truth of the gospel go out into all the world. Nor was he naive when it came to realizing that once people were saved that the enemy would try and side track the believers with falsehood so they would not be effective in serving Jesus Christ.

This is why we teach the truth. This is why we warn the church about false teachings which are out there and often find themselves inside the church. And they're usually the kinds of teachings which have an element of truth about them, but if followed to their logical conclusion are always destructive.

The false teachers are plentiful and you can even find quite a few of them on Christian radio and television. Where else would you

expect to find them? Don't be fooled into thinking that only Christians are teaching on "Christian" venues. The Robert Schuller's of this world, the Norman Vincent Peale's of this world, the Benny Hinn's of this world must be scrutinized according to the word of God, as should every other teacher.

Again, let me emphasize that we must not be hateful toward these people, we must not be rude or ugly, but we must not be accommodating either. This is why we need to be vigilant in being discerning and the only way we can be discerning is if we're grounded in the word of God and have a zeal for the truth.

GAL 4:18 "It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you."

Paul is not suggesting that having a zeal is bad, only that zeal alone doesn't determine the truth. Adolph Hitler was zealous, Joseph Stalin was zealous, but their zeal is not the determining factor to their truthfulness.

Paul says to consider the zeal of their enemies and turn it around and use it for the glory of God. Have a zeal for God. After all if we consider all that God has given us why not have a zeal?

People today will express zeal for anything and everything other than the things of God. If you don't believe me go home this afternoon and turn on one of the NFL games and look at the people in the stands, especially those who have outdoor games this time of year up north.

If I've seen it once, I've seen it a hundred times where you have people painted in the colors of their team wearing no shirts and cheering in sub-freezing temperatures as they zealously scream for their team. They're excited to be there. Now granted those extremists are usually filled with the spirit, and I don't mean the Holy Spirit, but their zeal is still real.

And I've often wondered why Christians can't be as excited about the truth and about the greatest news this world has ever known in our Savior Jesus Christ. "Well, we need to be more reserved about our faith", is the argument. Okay, I'll entertain that line of thought, but being reserved doesn't have to be synonymous with being comatose.

And unfortunately, when we look at the church in the United States, in many quarters, people have to wonder if having eternal

life is really something to get excited about. Paul would recommend that it should.

“It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.” (Verse 18)

Zeal goes a long way in allowing us to go forward with being a servant of our Lord and Savior as we stay the course. Paul points this out when writing to the Corinthians.

1CO 15:58 “Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

And what Paul suggests here is that you can't manufacture zeal. In fact, zeal can't be sustained on its own for very long especially if our zeal is based purely on emotions. Our emotions are up and down. People can please us or disappoint us. And to allow our zeal to be determined or deterred by things or people alone will usually result in a waning of zeal.

But as Paul points out to the Corinthians if we base our zeal on the Lord and His faithfulness and promises than it is less likely that our zeal will deteriorate when the enemy comes against us. Yes, it will be challenged from time to time and yes it may not burn as bright as we might like. But, the spark will always be there because it will be the Spirit of God who is fanning the flame as we stay true to His word and ways.

And the reason we can go forward with the work of the Lord in the zeal He provides is precisely because of what Paul says to the Corinthians. “Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.”

And I guess that this is where our zeal usually begins to take a downward trend. It's when we begin to lose that hope that it makes any difference how we serve the Lord that we get bummed out and become complacent.

But as we consider that the living God is paying attention and does take note of our service for Him that our zeal can begin to burn again. And I'll be the first to admit that I love to see the results of my labor, and when we don't see that we can become discouraged.

But if we'll consider that in God's economy it's not always the results, but rather the effort God desires, as we do it for Him and

His glory. It wasn't Peter who saved 3,000 on that day of Pentecost, it was the Lord using Peter.

God is looking for servants and ambassadors and witnesses to represent Him. He'll do the saving, and He'll change the hearts in His timetable. But whatever His timetable is, we are still to labor in the zeal of the Lord knowing that nothing we do for Him is in vain.

And as Paul winds down this section in our text it is apparent that his zeal is curbed somewhat and yet he will not allow it to stop him from trying to reach out to these Galatians.

GAL 4:19-20 "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!"

Paul is saying that he is concerned for their welfare even as a pregnant mother is concerned that she have a healthy birth and that her child will grow and mature.

When Paul left Galatia he left with the hope that he had given birth in a spiritual sense to these people and that they were well on their way in growing up in the Lord as they fed on the pure milk of God's word.

But now, he feels that he is having to go through all of the labor pains of birth once again as he spends most of his time in this letter defending and promoting the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Imagine thinking that you've left behind a strong group of people who can carry forward the banner of Christ as they responsibly bring the gospel to people.

That's what Paul had hoped. But that's not what happened. Instead, Paul feels as though there may be some question as to whether or not the Galatians were ever born again themselves. And this language is brought to bear, not because Paul is serious about their salvation being lost, but because of the way they are living their faith out as they are so susceptible to such falsehood.

In other words, he's saying that if I didn't know that most of you were truly born again I would be forced to preach the gospel to you once more so that you might become born again. This was meant to be a message to them that the life they say they have is not shown to be life. They weren't practicing their faith in Christ

alone as they were now entertaining the law being added to the finished work of Christ.

And if they would demonstrate half the zeal to God that they evidently were showing to the Judaizers they would be doing so much better.

As I've said in the past Paul is kind of throwing his hands up in the air and saying, "I'm stumped and I don't know what else to do. I've given you the message of hope found in Christ, I've given you the benefit of the teaching the whole counsel of God's word, I've given you my very life and it still doesn't seem to make any difference."

GAL 4:20 "...how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!"

I don't know if we get the full flavor of Paul's frustration here in the English. When he says he is perplexed about them the Greek word for perplexed is a bit more instructive. It is *aporeo*, and it means to be without resources, to be in doubt, not to know which way to turn.

This is the apostle of the risen and victorious Jesus Christ to the Gentile world basically saying, I'm at the end, I don't have any answers. Now, Paul certainly had answers and he has been giving them all throughout this letter. But this does show us the human side of Paul. It does show us that if it were in his power he would not have let this happen.

But it's not in the power of Paul, nor is it in the power of any of us to change the heart of a person. Only God can do that, but it also doesn't take the responsibility away from the person in question. All of us make choices and we are responsible before God to make the right choice.

If Paul could have his way he would be back in Galatia cleaning house, and like Jesus going through His Father's temple in Jerusalem, I could see Paul turning over tables or whatever else that got in his way as he tried to protect these sheep who belonged to the Lord.

He loved them because he knew how much Jesus loved them. And though he would love to be able to change his tone here he knows he can't, at least at this point. Sometimes a stern word with a stern look is appropriate. And Paul is hoping that these people, who

used to demonstrate a real love for him, will be compelled to take Paul's words to heart.

These words are the words of a shepherd who cares and who loves these people too much to simply let falsehood slide. Yes, his words are a rebuke, and yes it is really the Spirit of God who is grieved because of their behavior. But are we not told by the writer of Hebrews what it means to be a son or daughter of God as the Lord may have to get our attention at times?

HEB 12:5-6 "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

For the most part these Galatians truly were sons and daughters of God and Paul is reminding them that because God does love them He can't stand by and allow their lives to go down the tubes. And praise God He doesn't allow that for us either.

The Lord loves us more than we could ever know. And like the Galatians we may all get a little more zealous for the world at times, but His desire and His encouragement for all of us is that He can and will restore such a zeal for Christ as we will place Him above all.

He is Lord and as such He desires that cherished place in our hearts as we submit to Him and learn more of Him as we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, appreciating what it means to have eternal life and the hope of being with our Creator God forever.