

LSB Galatians 4:12 - 18

12 I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong. 13 But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I proclaimed the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They zealously seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will zealously seek them. 18 But it is good always to be zealously sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

Raise your hand if you can remember something similar to what I'm about to describe. You're trimming plants or sweeping a walk in the front yard and suddenly you hear tires screeching in the street and you look up in horror as you see a car narrowly miss your 4 year old.

What do you do? Well, chances are your kneejerk reaction is to get to that kid in about 2 seconds flat and accelerate him by one arm at a velocity that might pull his arm out of his socket while you have a lively one sided discussion about what you told him about going into the street.

Right? You're yelling at the kid in a way that's almost more traumatizing than the car that skidded to miss him. And warming up his butt if you're a good mom or dad. That's what we do.

And what does the poor little kid do. They burst into tears. Of course. Not only was I almost squashed like a bug, but I've never witnessed my mom or my dad quite this mad. At me!! Their little hearts are broken and the sobbing commences, and then the hugging begins along with the "It's all right, it's going to be alright."

On a slightly different scale, that's what we've witnessed in the first four

chapters of this first of Paul's letters written to his spiritual children. They are at the brow of a cliff staring into oblivion below and Paul arrives with all guns blazing, trying to rescue them from certain peril.

Paul's method is to jerk them out of harms way by one arm almost pulling the arm out of it's socket with his intensity. Consolation can come later. Like a frightened parent, Paul has been literally yelling at his beloved children for four chapters.

Now he takes a step back from the dazed and confused galatians and re-affirms his love for them. Chapters 1 - 4:11 has all been head. Logical expository argumentative polemic reasoning. The tone has definitely been that of a parent shouting at his child. Beginning in vs 12, Paul opens up his heart to them.

As I studied for these verses this morning a couple of axiom's from my long association with my own pastor, John MacArthur, kept coming to mind.

John always says: Hard preaching makes soft people. Soft preaching makes hard people. Similarly, John teaches young pastoral students to be tough in the pulpet, but very tender in one on one dealings. Both are wonderful advice I think.

That's what we've witnessed with Paul. He has shouted at these folks to wake up from their enchanted bewithed stupor and come to their senses. He's used stronger language, and we still have some more to come, than almost anyone else he ever writes to. Tough talk from his head, followed by tender encouragement from his heart.

12 I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

What does Paul mean here. Simply this. They were enchanted with the romance of the elemental religiosity of judaism. Feasts and festivals. Sabbaths and washings. Circumcision and laws. Do stuff. Do lots of

religious stuff. Ceremonial judaism was very "high church" compared to Paul's utterly simple gospel.

Ceremony makes proud flesh happy. Parading around with shields and banners and pots of holy this and plates of holy that and bobbing up and down saying words that are disconnected from your brain, as if all of that stuff made you more pleasing to God.

Paul is unimpressed. Jewishness and ceremony and righteousness in keeping laws doesn't impress Paul, because nothing they could do could even come close to the level of Paul's previous level of being the most jewish jew perhaps on earth.

Listen to Paul combat this same situation in his letter to the christians at Philippi. Ppn. 3:

2 Beware of the dogs! Beware of the evil workers! Beware of the mutilation!

Who are the dogs? Who are the evil workers? The next warning gives us definition. Beware of the mutilation. These judaizers who would mutilate your flesh, requiring circumcision to join the jewish club. Mutilate yourself as the costly and painful initiation into judaism.

*3 For **we are** the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,*

"The circumcision" was a code name for jews. If you were talking about 'the circumcision' you are talking about people seperate from everyone else because of their association with Moses law and being jewish. It was code name for a distinct group.

Judaizers had come to galatia telling the christians they aren't real christians without being jews first. Undergo a fleshly mutilation and embrace all of Moses law along with all of the jewishness of the ceremonial judaism to

join that club. Circumcision was the designation for God's chosen people, a people who were set apart from all the other nations. Set apart unto God. Historically.

Paul says, we are the real circumcision. Spiritual circumcision. We worship in the spirit, not in fleshly show. We boast in Jesus Christ, not in fleshy works righteousness. God has set Israel aside, temporarily, until the end, and the church was now those whom God was calling apart from the world. The church are those who God is setting aside as His own possession, not Israel.

And then Paul goes on with this idea of being a jew in order to be set aside unto God by fleshy effort at jewishness.

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish (the greek word here is the word for excrement. Rubbish is much too delicate) so that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own which is from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God upon faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Paul is saying, you want to become a jew do you. You'll never achieve the level of that system that I gave up as worthless excrement.

On a scale of one to ten of being jewish, you've achieved about a four. I'm

not impressed. I was at the ten level when I walked away from all of it, because it was dung. Worthless. Foul smelling worthless. Compared to what? Having Christ. Having Jesus.

So when Paul says; *12 I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.*

He's saying judaism is nothing. I walked away from that to have Christ. Paul left judaism behind in order to be a christian. Paul says leave the religious stuff behind like I did, and embrace Jesus, alone. Then he says, if you do that I'm no different than you. Jesus is our distinctive. Jesus separates us, together, jew and gentile alike, out of this world, and into Him.

Jesus is the great equalizer for all who embrace Him.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise. Gal. 3:27 - 29

I beg of you, brothers, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

Paul, the most jewish of jews possible on earth, had ejected jewishness and become like these gentiles. Jesus is the great equalizer. These gentiles gain nothing by embracing jewishness.

If you think God will be more impressed with you if you memorize and sing the shema in hebrew, think again. If you bob up and down and sing in hebrew monotones, it means nothing. Or perhaps it means you're in a dangerous place if your so called salvation is dependent upon your jewishness.

Question 2 from Evangelism Explosion's two questions. *If you did die and*

appeared before God and He asked, why should I let you into my heaven? and your answer is; I embraced judaism. I learned hebrew so I could join in jewish ceremonialisms in the original languages. I became a jew, for you.

Wrong answer. Here's how God is impressed with jewishness. Isaiah ch. 1

*10 Hear the word of Yahweh,
You rulers of Sodom;
Give ear to the law of our God,
You people of Gomorrah.*

*11 "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?"
Says Yahweh.*

*"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams
And the fat of fed cattle;
And in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats I take no pleasure.*

*12 When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?*

*13 Bring your worthless offerings no longer,
Incense is an abomination to Me.*

*New moon and sabbath, the calling of convocation—
I cannot endure wickedness and the solemn assembly.*

*14 My soul hates your new moon festivals and your appointed times,
They have become a burden to Me;
I am weary of bearing them.*

*15 So when you spread out your hands in prayer,
I will hide My eyes from you;
Indeed, even though you multiply prayers,
I will not listen.*

Your hands are full of blood. Isa. 1:10 - 15

Right answer, Isaiah 1:18

*"Come now, and let us reason together,"
Says Yahweh,*

"Though your sins are as scarlet,

*They will be as white as snow;
Though they are red like crimson,
They will be like wool.*

Yahweh's soul loathes jewishness. Jewish ceremonialisms. And by extension christian high church ceremony that is empty of the righteousness found by having your sins carried away in Christ alone.

Jesus is gathering cleansed sinners from every nation, every culture, every walk of life, in every place. Religiosity brings exactly nothing to the equation. Jesus blood and righteousness IS the equation. That's what pleases Yahweh.

So when Paul begs them to become like him as he had become like them, he is appealing to the equalizing cleansing of sins, both of jews and gentiles, slaves and freemen, boys and girls. Nothing else matters but simply being found clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus. Hidden in Him, we are all the same.

Paul, the most righteous jew, and the lowest of godless gentiles are all equal in Christ Jesus. Don't waste your time trying to be a jew. I walked away from being a jew, in order to be the same as you also are, a christian.

And then Paul adds something curious at first glance; *You have done me no wrong.*

How does this fit into this discussion? Well, like the frightened parent traumatizing the four year old with a lot of yelling, Paul pauses now, and gives this reassurance. He yelled at them for 4 chapters. Here he reassures them. Be like me. I came out of that stuff and became like you. I'm not mad at you. *You have done me no wrong.*

This is the reassuring parental hug, after the yelling, after the snatching out of harms way. I've been yelling, but we're OK. My love for you is unchanged. I'm not mad at you. You have done me no wrong. Albeit, you

were on a path to destroy yourselves. Thus the loud intervention.

Then Paul becomes very intimate. He appeals to their previous history together. Remember, please, our history.

13 But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I proclaimed the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

We can't be dogmatic, but the probability, reading a bit between the lines, is that Paul was under full steam going somewhere else. His intention was never to come to them at all.

But it sounds like perhaps he contracted malaria. That brings everything to a stall. And there are strains that have an effect on your vision. His eyes were a mess, apparently.

It's like he was journeying to some far place and got in a car wreck and was hospitalized in galatia. And a church happened while he was there. At least four congregations that we know of, and perhaps more in that combined region known as galatia.

And for their part, they had received Paul like he was an angel from heaven. No matter that he was hard to look at. A balding short jew with oozing eyes and perhaps bodily weakened by disease. Not exactly a rock star.

But he gave them Jesus and they were made alive. In Christ. New creatures. Their dead spirits were quickened to life, in Christ. Their sins were forgiven. They all received the Holy Spirit, Christ dwelling in their hearts. And as a result of all of that pouring out of blessing upon them, they adored Paul. They would have given him their own eyes, if they could

have.

But then Paul moved on to Macedonia. And in the vacuum, come these judaizers who dogged Paul's steps and followed him everywhere the gospel had taken hold, and spread this damning heresy to stall and stunt the church.

The judaizers had called them to depart from Paul's gospel, and thus from Paul. They had told them Paul was selling something short of christianity. Real christianity involves lots of jewishness and Moses, and Moses laws, and ceremonys and circumcisions and on and on in order to be good enough for Jesus to want to save you.

Forget Paul. Paul is selling an easy believism. Jesus plus nothing equals everything. No no no. That's too easy. God doesn't just give it away for free. You have to be jews like us before you can be real christians. It's not easy, it's hard work to be a christian.

And Paul is appealing to the memory of the sweetness, the intimacy of a very real friendship that had developed around the single common denominator. Jesus. Paul brought them Jesus. And the Spirit gloriously saved them. They had become like an intimate family. And Paul appeals to the memory of how intimate and real that communion between them, and with Jesus at the center, how very real those relationships were. Remember please, how real it was, how sweet all of us being equals in Jesus was.

15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had?

By bringing them Jesus, Paul had been elevated to the most valuable friend they had ever had. *15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had?*

16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?

I'm trying to save you from going over a cliff to perdition. Does that make me your enemy?? Ever try to talk to a family member who is heading over

a cliff. Some teenager who had decided that sexual promiscuity and gender confusion is OK. Share a biblical view of those issues and I can guarantee you'll be asking the question in vs. *16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?*

The trouble is, just like the split in our nation, there's no middle ground. We can't all be one happy family. Someone is right, someone is wrong.

Very quickly we get to Joshua's old line in the sand. Joshua 24:15b *choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh."*

Or Moses in Deuteronomy 30:17 *But if your heart turns away and you will not listen, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your seed, 20 by loving Yahweh your God, by listening to His voice, and by holding fast to Him*

This is the point in the discussion where Paul tells them, you'll have to choose between Judaizers and error, or me. You can't have both. There's no middle ground. Them? Or me?

The simple gospel that resulted in the Holy Spirit changing lives by forgiving your sins, OR lots of ceremony and high church and parading your self righteousness around and pride in your own works.

17 They zealously seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will zealously seek them.

If they pick Paul, the judaizers will shut them out. No middle ground. A

choice must be made. Will it be spiritual life by the indwelling Holy Spirit who came simply by believing Paul's gospel that Jesus died in your place for your sins and rose again from the dead to give you His righteousness.

Or will you choose to be under the bewitching enchantment of fleshly religion with all of it's pomp and ceremony and elemental earthiness . . . without Christ.

In our flesh, we tend towards the showy religiosity. We love to parade around and dress up and jump through religious hoops and bob around saying chants. We can't help ourselves. Pride of religious accomplishment is built into our fallen flesh. We want the priests and the holy water and all of the ceremonial religious trappings.

Why do you think organizations like the elks lodge prosper. Robes and ceremonies and religious sounding speech combined with commoradarie plus some alcohol equates to a religion not so dissimilar to what the judaizers had brought to the fleshly galatians.

Which is more beautiful. Some guy with no papers on the wall preaching simple Bible truths to 12 people in the middle of nowhere, or costumes and white hats and robes and smoking pots and all of the ceremonial la te da of Romanism. Or even mormonism.

Dress up fancy and do stuff. Or low church, with some old guy preaching, but with the presence and power of God often felt in our midst.

You can't have both. Paul says; if you return to me, they'll be excommunicating you. *17 They zealously seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will zealously seek them.*

Make no mistake. The devil is zealous about keeping his own. The choice is very real. And soon to perhaps be even more real than what we've ever experienced.

The lines between the secular world and genuine christianity that lives under and believes this book is the final authority in all matters of morality, are becoming strained. If you believe this is the Word of the living God and that the words of this book define what is and is not sin, there is a real separation with no possible middle ground. Those lines are getting drawn, as we speak.

And, oh, by the way, we are hopelessly outnumbered. When push comes to shove, we'll be a hopeless minority. Foolish christians who cling to the authority of an old book written by ignorant goat herds with bad teeth.

It's a quick jump to lebensunwertes leben. That's german for life unworthy of life. No middle ground. Think about your choice ahead of time, if it comes to that.

Paul is forcing the issue at galatia. You can have me, or you can have them. Life, or religion. Spirit or flesh. No middle ground. They will shut you out if you choose me.

18 But it is good always to be zealously sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.

Think about what Paul is saying here, in this verse. What does it mean to be zealously sought, and when is that activity commendable, and when is it not commendable.

We want to add people to our numbers. Right. We long for more folks who can come and share the joys and the fellowship that we enjoy. Why?

Think about the big picture here for a few moments. Two authorities to reign at war with each other. The kingdom of God. The ruler of this world, which is Satan. Two kingdoms. Two authorities to reign. The ruler of this world and the ruler of heaven who is also the rightful owner of this world, though He has allowed Satan to reign and rule here for a limited time.

Two kingdoms that clash against each other. Two kingdoms that zealously work to gain ground against each other. We are citizens of the kingdom of God, and every time the gospel snatches someone out of the fires of Satan's kingdom, God is glorified.

Every person added to God's rule and reign is a glory to God, and we long with all our hearts for those gains. For His glory. That's a definition of zealously seeking people to join us, in a commendable manner.

Satan fights back. Those judaizers with their heresy are actually duped workers in Satans battle to capture and hold souls and keep them on the trajectory of hell. Works righteousness systems lead only to destruction.

Think about how good what the judaizers were selling looks at first glance to these clueless baby christians. Like dangling candy in front of babes.

Paul didn't get the whole gospel. His gospel is short. Too easy. If you really desire to please God and belong to Christ, James, the Lord's half brother, who rules the church in Jerusalem, has sent us with the full gospel. The complete gospel. The hard gospel (which will appeal to your flesh and pride)

You need to be jews first, like we were, and then you can have Jesus, after circumcision, after you embrace judaism, after you follow Moses law, after you follow jewish laws and customs and celebrate jewish ceremonial religion. Then you can have Jesus.

It does sound good, doesn't it. A certain logic to it. Plus they throw the Lord's brother's name around as a higher authority than Paul who is commanding this. Sounds so good. Jesus without judaism was good, but Jesus through judaism is so much better.

It's a lie right out of the pit of hell. A lie worthy of pronouncing accursed. Which is what Paul does in the opening sentences. Faith plus works. That gospel is accursed. And those who bring you that gospel are dupes of

Satan. They are in Satan's armies zealously seeking to trap you in a damning heresy.

Both sides of this battle are zealously seeking people. True believers zealously seek souls to be saved out of the coming judgement to this world. That is commendable zealous seeking. And then there are those who zealously seek you to make you twice the sons of hell that they already are.

Paul is only reiterating what Jesus already taught; Matt. 23:15 *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You traverse 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. 16 Woe to you, blind guides!*

Martin Luther was reading the book of galatians in the 1500's. He was a papal priest of the catholic church. And it dawned on him that where the church was at in the 1500's sounded a lot more like something the judaizers had spawned than the pure simple gospel that Paul had brought to the regions of galatia.

He was correct. The Catholic church zealously seeks converts to a religion of salvation by grace plus works. Sacramentalism. Christ will save you, or is it Mary, it gets very confused, but there's no confusion about all of the sacramental works of righteousness that you must perform in order to perhaps qualify for less time in purgatory, which is not biblical.

Grace means different things in different systems. Jesus might extend saving grace if you work hard enough in this life jumping through religious hoops. Jesus and God are kind of hard to deal with, but Mary is sympathetic. Pray to the queen of heaven. It spirals out into idolatry from there. Extrabiblical.

Or, perhaps grace means, there is nothing remedial we can achieve and so Christ did it all, in our place, on the cross, and offers us free grace if we believe in the effectiveness of His finished work in our places, on the cross.

I want the grace where I am hidden and clothed with the garments of Christ. He has clothed me in His righteousness. I'm not forever trying to keep washing the filth off of my fallen fleshy garments. My life is hidden with Christ in God.

Solomon said there's nothing new under the sun. 19 centuries later, the church is still vexed with judaizers. Only the names have been changed. Any system that is telling you that you need to achieve your salvation by doing stuff, is, according to Paul, accursed.