

Gal. 4:8-5:1
December 12-17, 1988
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A. Overview

1. Overall Structure

The book has two parts: ch.1-2, dealing with Paul's qualification, and 3-6, dealing with the error confronting the Galatians. This latter part in turn has three sections.

- a) Each section begins with a personal appeal to the Galatian's past experience and faithfulness (marked by a cluster of 2nd person plural pronouns), and then develops a contrast that shows the error with which they are being confronted.
- b) The characterization of the error moves from abstract to concrete as we progress through the three sections.
 - 1) 3:23-4:7 (first section) focuses on shift from law to faith, from childhood to sonship; introduces idea of bondage.
 - 2) 4:8-9, 22-5:1 (second section) develops idea of bondage, with an impassioned interjection by Paul in 10-21, and introduces the idea of flesh/spirit developed more fully in chs.5-6.
 - 3) 5:2-6:10 (third section) draws two applications from the flesh/spirit contrast:
 - a> Circumcision is not needed;
 - b> The same carnal tendencies that drove the judaizers to demand circumcision also threaten Christian life.

2. First section

- a) Overall theme: contrast of *works/law* with *faith/promise*.
- b) Structure: personal + contrast.
 - 1) 3:1-5, personal rebuke to Galatians
 - 2) 3:6-29, We get what Abraham was promised.
 - a> 3:6-14 Superiority of faith to law: synchronic
 - b> 3:14-22 Diachronic: superiority of promise to law
 - c> 3:23-29 Diachronic: law yields to faith.
 - d> 4:1-7 Diachronic: from bondage to freedom.

3. Second section

- a) Overall theme: contrast of *bondage* with *freedom*.
 - 1) Bondage in Galatians
 - a> Objective of the false brethren in 2:4
 - b> Does not exist in Christ, acc. to 3:28
 - c> 4:3, our status as children
 - d> Instances in 4:9-5:1: 4:9, 22, 23, 24, 25, 30, 31, 5:1.
 - e> No others.
 - 2) Freedom in Galatians
 - a> 2:4 and 3:28 again

b> In 4:9-5:1: 4:22,23,26,30,31,5:1
c> 5:13 as last instance.

- b) Structure: personal + contrast
 - 1) 4:8-20, personal appeal
 - 2) 4:21-5:1, Allegorical argument for freedom over bondage

4. Third Section

- a) Overall theme: contrast of *flesh* with *spirit*.
- b) Structure: personal + contrast
 - 1) 5:2-12 On the basis of 5:7 (compare 3:1), this qualifies as a personal section. First addresses the issue of their circumcision, which is the real issue (as it comes out in 6:12-13). But 6:12-13 make another point that is also developed earlier: the circumcisers' motive (self-aggrandizement) is one to which the Galatians are also subject, even if they succeed in rejecting the Judaizing tendency.
 - 2) 5:13-6:10, flesh and spirit: the proper use of liberty

B. 4:8-10, Surprise Transition

1. Note how this follows the first three sections of the alternation established previously, only to deviate strikingly in the fourth.
2. Built on an explicit contrast between 8 and 9, "then/now". Both sentences have an active verb with two modifying clauses: one to tell when the action takes place, the other to describe its circumstances.
 - a) When: "Then" (before their salvation) vs. "now" (as believers, but being tempted by the Judaizers)
 - b) Circumstances:
 - 1) Then, they did not know God.
 - 2) Now, God knows them. NB: Shows that God's knowledge is special. God "knows about" everybody, but he does not "know" everybody. Cf. Rom. 8:29 "whom he did foreknow"; "Adam knew Eve his wife." Knowing ABOUT someone is different from knowing them. One is knowledge of facts, the other is an intimate personal relation. That special relation is what God has with his elect church.
 - c) Main clause: they are turning back to that from which they were delivered. Note the disparaging tone in which their former and proposed allegiance is described:
 - 1) "them which by nature are no gods." They aren't even in the category of gods. Utterly unworthy of the worship that pagans ascribe to them.
 - 2) "weak and beggarly elements." Ref. back to the "elements of the world," v. 3, the basic instruction of "thou shalt not" that characterizes both OT law and pagan religion.

- 3) **APPLICATION:** Increased religiosity is not always a step forwards. Adding anything to Christianity actually detracts from it.
3. 10 gives the cause of his accusation: He has heard that they have already begun observing the Jewish calendar. They have already begun to succumb to the false teaching.
 - a) Days: sabbath and feasts, with their prohibition of work.
 - b) Months: Either the seventh month (with its abundance of feasts: trumpets, tabernacles, eighth day, and atonement), or the recurring observation of the new moon (cf. Isa. 66:23 for this metonymy).
 - c) Times: other feasts and fasts.
 - d) Years: sabbatical years, again prohibition
 - e) **APPLICATION:** Don't assume that just because someone has stumbled, they are gone for good.

C. 4:11-20, Personal Interjection

The apostle moves from logical argument to personal appeal in this second personal section. He seeks to touch their hearts so that he might appeal to their heads.

This paragraph is chiasmic: his personal doubt about them, the labor he has dedicated to them, and an examination of the personal dynamics involved, first between him and them, then between them and their new teachers. He wants them to realize more clearly just what has gone on between him and them, and what is currently going on between them and the false teachers, so that they can properly assess the directions in which they are being led.

1. 11, his doubt and labor toward them.

- a) 11a, "I am afraid of you." Precisely literal rendering of the Greek, but sounds as though they are monsters! His fear is not for his well-being, but for theirs. We would probably say, "I am afraid for you." "What I see in you leads me to fear for your spiritual well-being."

APPLICATION: In some circles, it is considered very poor spiritual taste to question someone's profession of faith, or to suggest that they might be better off than they are. Paul's example here shows that it is not in poor taste, but rather the duty of the Lord's servants.

- b) 11b, the content of his fear: "lest I have labored in vain toward you." Several lessons here.

- 1) It takes work, hard labor, to bring about spiritual growth in others. Labor in prayer, in nurturing with the scriptures, in personal confrontation and exhortation. We must never let the truth of God's sovereignty hide from us the equal truth of his use of human means, and our need to labor, both to enter ourselves into his rest, and to bring others on the way with us.

- 2) Our ministry is not guaranteed to produce what we consider happy results. Indeed, the word of God will not return to him void, but sometimes its result is judgment rather than salvation. Some of Paul's work yielded a Timothy; other yielded Demas, who forsook Paul, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:9,10). We serve out of love for our Lord, not because we know we will succeed.

2. 12-16, The dynamics of their relation with him.

a) The appeal in v.12 has been variously understood:

- 1) "I became like you Gentiles, leaving behind the very trappings of Judaism into which you are now being lured. Now turn away from these and become like me."
- 2) A more general statement of the reciprocal interests of friends: cf. 1 Kings 22:4, Ruth 1:16,17, mutually committed to one another's well-being, sharing all things in common, each accepting the other's circumstances as one's own.
- 3) The second seems to fit better here, with one additional twist. The second clause has no explicit verb: "were" fits the meaning better than "are". He goes on to explain how "you were," then how "I am". That is, he shows their past love for him, and insists, "I am as you were," that is, I love you as you loved me. Then he insists on his present love toward them, supporting the exhortation, "Be as I am," that is, love me in this same way.

b) "I am as you [were]:" 12b-15. They once showed love, not antagonism, to Paul, when he was in the bonds of an infirmity of the flesh. In the same way, in spite of their "fleshly infirmity" (their yielding to the Judaizing doctrines), he still loves them.

He states their love through a contrast: what they didn't do, and what they did do, on the past occasion of his preaching the gospel to them.

1) Summary: "You did no injustice to me."

- 2) The conditions of his ministry among the Galatians. "Through infirmity of the flesh." The Greek construction literally means, "because of." It was illness that brought Paul to Galatia. We do not know the details. Some have suggested that he contracted malaria in the lowlands along the Mediterranean, and sought relief by going up to the mountains. Others think he was epileptic; still others, that he had eye disease. If all these clues are correct, he must have been a basket case! But the point is not to identify the illness. Rather, take an application and an observation for understanding the passage.

- a> **APPLICATION:** Recognize God's leading through physical weakness. Why did Paul preach in Galatia? The theologian would say, "Because God sent him there." Paul would say, "Because I was ill." Example: my weak eyesight sent me to Princeton rather than Annapolis. Determined my wife, my training, no doubt my presence here in AA.
- b> Observation: "You know." They were aware of whatever the problem was. Critical for the next statement in the argument, which deals with their response to this weakness "in the flesh."

3) Their response to his apparent illness.

- a> They did not despise or reject it. Cf. the natural tendency that people have to avoid those who are ill; to feel uncomfortable around the handicapped. That was not how they responded to Paul.
- b> On the contrary, they received him as an angel from God, even as the Lord on whose behalf he came.
- c> In fact, they exhibited an attitude of self-sacrifice that seems almost unexplainable.
 - 1> 15a, "What could have made you so self-consciously blessed?" Lit., "What was then the declaration of blessedness of you." If "of you" is subjective genitive, then the subject is their statement of their own blessedness.
 - 2> 15b, the evidence of this sense of enthusiastic happiness: willingness for self-sacrifice.

4) The point of mentioning this now is that they are now falling into a "fleshly illness" of a rather different kind (but note the "flesh/spirit" contrast of ch. 5), and they may feel a bit insecure in his love for them. "We've deviated from what Paul taught us; surely now he won't love us." So Paul reminds them that their current failing through ethical flesh does not alienate him any more than his illness in physical flesh alienated them.

5) **APPLICATION:** What is our attitude toward the handicapped? Our natural reaction is rejection, but we know that the Spirit of Christ calls us to love. In the same way, when one who professes to believe falls into sin, while we must reject the sin, we must not despise the person. It's so easy to become self-righteous. God can love the righteous and hate the wicked, because he knows exactly who is who. We do not have this perception, so must act in love toward those who profess Christ.

c) "Be as I am:" 16. In spite of the harsh tone of his letter,

he still loves them, and so begs them to love him.

- 1) The verse is a rhetorical question, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" As a rhetorical question, it is to be understood as a statement: "I am not your enemy, even though I tell you the truth."
 - 2) **APPLICATION:** Love and rebuke are not inconsistent with one another. "Whom the Lord loves, he chastens," Heb. 12; Prov. 27:5,6, "Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful." We need to be open and honest with one another, exhorting and rebuking as Paul does in this letter.
 - 3) In the context, "Be as I am." Tell me honestly what you are thinking. Don't hide your changing understandings from me on the presumed ground of "love." Rather, let's reason together about the implications of your new ideas.
3. 17-18, The dynamics of their relation with the false teachers. Critical to the understanding of this section is the translation of the verb rendered here, "zealously affect." The verb can have this meaning (in modern English, "court the affection of s.o."), but in this construction, throughout the NT, it has the sense, "envy, be jealous," and that sense seems to fit very well here. Furthermore, it corresponds very nicely with a dynamic that we have all experienced with our unsaved friends.

Young people especially, pay attention, for you will be involved in this over and over if you seek to live for the Lord, and if you understand what is going on, you will escape the trap. In a nutshell, sinners are jealous of your happiness in the Lord Jesus, but rather than accepting him themselves, they try act like big shots and make you jealous of them. You need to recognize their jealousy, even though they will never admit it, and be strong enough to stand against it, even when your parents are not with you.

a) "They are jealous of you, but not well."

- 1) We are dealing here with Judaizers, who are probably themselves Gentile converts to Judaism. They and the Galatians have both begun in paganism, and now have found the "biblical religion," but in two different forms. The Judaizers labor under the bondage of the law, and are jealous of the freedom and liberty that the Galatians enjoy in Christ. This is not a good form of jealousy!
- 2) Modern equivalent: The gang at school sees your clean life. You don't need to swear to express yourself; they can't help it. You don't need drugs or alcohol; they are hooked. They are snared by sensual lusts; you are not. They are jealous of you! And if they were smart, they would come and get what

you have. But they are "not well" jealous.

- b) "They want to exclude you, so that you will be jealous of them."
 - 1) Rather than themselves laying hold of the liberty of Christ, the Judaizers now exclude the Galatians, trying to make them feel like outsiders to biblical religion, and thus to stimulate a sense of jealousy in the hearts of the Galatians for the Jewish ritual.
 - 2) The school gang feels outdone by you. In response, they will try to make you feel jealous. So they exclude you. They won't have anything to do with you, to make you jealous of them, and to tempt you to become like them. This is the heart of peer pressure to sin.
 - c) "But it is always good to be envied for a good thing." Neither the Galatians nor we should let this sort of jealousy get us down. It is good when people envy us for our riches in Christ. If they don't, we should have questions about our own conduct! God doesn't need "secret service" agents.
 - d) "Not only when I am present with you."
 - 1) When Paul was with the Galatians, they had the courage to stand up against the pressure of the Judaizers. They need to have that same courage now that he is away.
 - 2) Modern setting: It's easy for young Christians to refuse sinful habits in the presence of their parents. But they need to do this when they are by themselves, as well.
4. His labor toward them
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D. 4:21-5:1, Contrast of Freedom and Bondage