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Galatians

But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. Galatians 4:18

In the previous verse, it was noted that the Judaizers zealously courted the Galatians, but it was not for a good purpose. Rather, their intent was "to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them." Now Paul acknowledges that zeal "in a good thing" is always good. There is an emphasis on "always." He does not want to diminish what is good while correcting what is bad.

It should be noted that "zealous" is in the passive voice. This is then speaking of zealousness towards the Galatians, not their zeal. In other words, if someone is zealous for them in a good way, then that is always good; however, when someone is zealous for them as the Judaizers were, then it is not a good thing.

As an example, if someone is zealous to convert someone who believes in the deity of Christ into a person who believes that Christ is merely a created being, then their zeal is bad. However, if someone is zealous to have their students properly handle the doctrines of the Bible and to grow into sound Christian maturity, then their zeal is good. Paul acknowledges that even if it wasn't him, in such a case it would still be good. This is indicated by the words, "...and not only when I am present with you."

He is not jealously guarding the Galatians only for himself. Instead, he is jealously guarding them for the sake of the truth. Any true teacher will receive his approval. The reason he is saying this to them is to show that he isn't just jealous because they have found a new group of people to follow, but because the group they have chosen to follow are a bunch of heretics. As a father to his children, he is heartbroken over this.

The Judaizers want them to fall under the Law of Moses; they want them in bondage, and they want to control their very lives. Paul wants them to be free in Christ, held captive by His grace, and filled with joy in the Holy Spirit. To him, it doesn't matter who leads them down that second path, as long as it is the correct path.

Life application: Never underestimate the love of a pastor for those he teaches. His zeal towards their souls may seem as if he is overly zealous of protecting them, but it is better to be in that position than to be led down Apostasy Avenue by those who would steal them away into bondage. Be patient with your pastor if he is exuberant about your doctrine. Understand that if he is sound in his theology, he is looking out for your best interest.

My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,
Galatians 4:19

In the previous verse, Paul said, "...it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you." As noted, the word "zealous" was in the passive voice. The Galatians allowed themselves to be the object of the zeal of others, but in the case of the Judaizers, it was not a good thing. Now Paul was in need of reworking everything he had already accomplished for them. He was directing his zeal for the gospel to them all over again.

In order to show them that this is of the highest importance to him, he begins this verse with the words *tekna mou*, or "my little children." This is the only time he uses this term in his writings, but it is something John wrote several times. It

indicates the dearest of affections, as if speaking to one's own little children. Certainly this is how Paul viewed the Galatians as he had "begotten" them in the gospel, just as he had the Corinthians (see 1 Corinthians 4:15).

Now, he was in the process of labor for them once again. He was forced to expend his energies in redirecting their wayward doctrine. And yet, he acknowledged in the previous chapter that they had already received the Spirit and were baptized into Christ. Therefore, his words are speaking of the birth of understanding and obedience to the gospel of grace. This is evident by the words, "...until Christ is formed in you."

To make a comparable worldly example, we could look at a child who is from one culture. He is adopted into a family and learns the ways of that family. After a certain amount of time, he goes to school back in the land he came from. While there, he takes up the same habits that he had when he was young, forgetting the culture and refinement of his adopted home. Upon returning home, the family has to reeducate him on his position within the family, and proper conduct in the land of his inheritance.

This child never stopped being the son of his adopted parents, but he did lose his understanding of what it means to be a child in that family. This is the case of the Galatians. They had not lost any of their inheritance, but they had failed to be formed into the image of Christ. Paul's job was now to labor, once again, in that process.

Life application: Pity the poor pastor who loves his flock so much that he agonizes over those who walk away from the congregation and get swept up into crummy doctrine! If anything can be done about it, he will labor intensively to restore them to that which is proper. If nothing can be done for them, he will carry the memory of what happened and spend his years rethinking what he could have done differently.

I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you. Galatians 4:20

The words of the previous verse help to explain what Paul is relaying here. Taken together they say -

"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,²⁰ I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you."

He is addressing the Galatians as his own precious children, struggling with the notion that they had departed from the sound presentation and reception of Christ which occurred at their time of infancy. As mere babes, they responded to the gospel and were adopted into the family of God. Now, despite that exalted status, they needed to have the lessons of that infancy taught to them once again.

The letter has been written because of this sad state. But a letter is a one-way transmission of thought. Without actually being present, he would have no idea if his words were accepted or not. Instead of writing, he says, "I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone." By speaking to them and looking into their eyes, he could gauge if his words were having any effect. By hearing their questions and responses to his words, they could engage in calm dialogue, as a father with his children.

However, without such interaction, his tone needed to be direct and forceful. His letter contains words of doctrine and instruction, and there could be no room for a soft tone. And those same words carry the same sound doctrine and instruction down to us today. They do not waffle, nor are they ambiguous. The law is set aside through the work of Christ. Any person who comes along and teaches that some or all of the law must be followed is to be rejected outright as a heretic.

Without knowing if his words were getting through, he finishes with, "...for I have doubts about you."

Were the Galatians paying heed? Had they gone too far into the false teachings of the Judaizers to be rescued? He didn't know. Because of this, the doubts about them swirled around in his mind. Now, having told them this, he will go back to a direct and precise discourse concerning the law. He will use metaphors in this discourse, but they are metaphors which are clearly evident and easily understood.

Life application: Paul's concern for the Galatians has been seen ten thousand times since in faithful pastors and preachers who have watched those of his flock stray away from sound doctrine. It is a heartbreaking thing to have the meticulous effort of Bible studies and carefully prepared sermons get thrown away over a nutty fad or a crazy notion concerning Christianity. If your pastor holds fast to the word of God, be grateful for that and follow his example. One cannot know God properly without knowing Jesus, and one cannot know Jesus without knowing the Bible. Stand fast on this precious gift, and honor the pastor who holds it in high esteem.

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?

Galatians 4:21

Paul now breaks into a completely new line of thought without any sort of introduction. He has shown his exasperation at what has transpired between the false Judaizers and the believers in Galatia. Now, in order to get them to understand exactly where followers of the law stand in relation to believers in Christ, he will introduce an allegorical interpretation of life under the law in contrast to life in Christ.

In order to call their attention to what is coming; he cries out with his pen, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law." The believers who had been duped into the lies of the false teachers concerning adherence to the Law of Moses are who

he is referring to. They had gone from the natural path of trusting in the work of Christ in fulfillment of the law to a desire "to be under the law." Most likely, they were observing certain days according to the law, they were regulating their diet according to the law, and they were contemplating being circumcised according to the law.

However, Paul has some instruction for them coming directly from the law which they had not thought through. And so he says, "...do you not hear the law?" His thoughts will be taken directly from the Torah, the five books of Moses, and they will enlighten the Galatians to a spiritual truth contained in the law itself. During this instruction, he will then cite a later prophet who lived under the law, Isaiah, in order to properly interpret the spiritual message found in the law.

In following this pattern, Paul will show the supremacy of the New Covenant in Christ's blood. He will further show what the consequences of adhering to the law after the coming of Christ will result in.

Life application: When reading the Bible, Scripture should interpret Scripture. Paul shows us this many times in his writings. However, context must be maintained or a false sense of what Scripture instructs may result. Be careful to always look at the context of passages. Above all, be sure to evaluate everything in Scripture from the lens of Jesus Christ. He is the Subject of all of Scripture. Therefore, evaluating the Old Testament through what He has done will allow us to properly see the meaning of those often difficult to interpret passages.