THE PITFALLS OF LEGALISM

**DATE: 9/23/2015 Wed.**

**TEXT: Galatians 4:8-18**

**INTRODUCTION**

Paul has argued well that the Believer has been freed from the bondage of the Law and adopted into the family of God as a son

Once saved, we are no longer servants under the Law …

But now, we hold a greater position as adult children

However, the Legalist had managed to persuade many of the Galatian believers to their view

Legalism is detrimental to the Christian life

Paul points this out in these verses …

**“The Pitfalls of Legalism”**

Let’s stand to read God’s Word and then pray

Read **vs. 8-18**

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. THE “SLAVERY” – vs. 8-12**

**… of Legalism**

Legalism enslaves the Believer

It brings someone into Bondage

A different form of Bondage then that of sin

But, non-the-less, Bondage

The Christian's life is not designed to be lived as a slave under the rigid rules of a slave master,

But rather as a son under the care of a loving Father

**John 8:36 *– “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”***

There is no way to enjoy our freedom as a son when we are fettered as a slave

*At the same time though …*

Christian liberty is not the freedom to live any way we want

Nor is it the freedom to ignore the clear commands of God's Word

Jesus said – ***“If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; And ye shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall make you free”* - John 8:31, 32**

Liberty is always based upon the Word of God

**Psalm 119:45 – *“And I will walk at liberty: for I seek thy precepts”***

Christian liberty does not ignore the Moral Law of God

Law and Liberty go hand in hand

You cannot separate one from the other

When Paul refuted Legalism he wasn't saying that we could scrap the Law and live like the world

Paul was dealing with the Legalist who made the Law a requirement for salvation

Legalism says that Christ died for our sins, but that we still need to maintain our Salvation

Or else we lose it / that's Legalism!

Endeavoring to live and promote holiness is not Legalism

Let’s look at what Paul teaches here

Paul first reminds them of …

**A. Their ‘Pitiful Past’ – v.8**

**1.** Their lack of Understanding **– v. 8a**

***“Howbeit then, when ye knew not God,”***

Their former religion was a religion of ignorance

***“Ye knew not God”***

The Galatians were ignorant of the true God until the Gospel came

Thus they had not known God

In **John 4:22** Jesus told the woman at the well

***“Ye worship ye know not what”***

**2.** Where it took them **– v.8b**

***“ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods”***

Not knowing the true God …

They worshiped false gods, therefore they Served these false gods

Whom you worship, that’s who you will serve

Christ informed Satan of this truth when Satan tried to get Christ to worship him

**Matthew 4:10 –*“Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve”***

We’ve all been in the same place

Everyone, including the atheist, worship something

In the atheist, you have material / self worship

Paul reminds them that before they were saved, they were under the bondage of idolatry

In their ignorance they didn't know the true God so they served whatever came their way

Man is a religious creature …

He was made to worship and he will worship someone or something

Hence, we see why all the idolatry exists in the world today

The Galatians had once served idols because they didn't know any better

**Eph. 2:12** says they were *“****without God”***

**Eph. 4:17, 18** says they operated, ***“… in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:”***

Such is the sad condition of multitudes today

Next, he remind them of …

**B. Their ‘Present Position’ – v.9a**

***“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God…”***

*To know God* and *to be known of God* speaks of a personal relationship

The gospel had been preached and they had turned from their sin and idols, to the true and living God

They Knew God and God Knew them

Christianity is a Relationship, not a Religion

Turn to **Matthew 7:21-23 …**

Notice in **Matthew 7** that these people where religious

-- They addressed Jesus as Lord

-- They had prophesied and cast out devils

-- They had done many wonderful works in His name

All religious activity

Yet, Jesus commanded them to depart and declared their works to be nothing more than iniquity

The main thing was missing

Jesus said, ***“I never knew you”***

They had Religion, but they didn't have a Relationship

We saw that when the Galatians worshiped idols they ...

***“knew not God...”***

The word ***“knew”*** carries the idea of *perceiving, being aware of*

But when Paul says in **v.9a *“ye have known God” …***

He uses the word that speaks of *a personal knowledge that comes from experience*

Jesus said in **John 17:3 – *“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent”***

These Galatian believers knew God and He knew them

These were saved people

But let’s look at …

 **C. Their ‘Perilous Practice’ – vs.9b, 10**

Paul then asks …

***“... how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?” “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years”***

… How is it, being saved, that you turn to something inferior? - ***“the weak and beggarly elements”***

It’s tragically possible for a believer to get sidetracked by false doctrine

These Galatians knew better and they did!

They had heard and embraced the truth

They knew what was right and yet the Legalist had deceived them, and as a result they went off into error

How could that happen?

They were saved, *but they were not serious about the things of God*

Paul addressed this back in chapter **3:1**

***“O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?”***

Paul uses the word ***“foolish”*** twice in reference to the Galatians

The word ***“foolish”*** carries the idea of *ignorant, no understanding, unwise*

It speaks of *someone who is lacking in discernment*

They had been taught the truth, but had failed to examine the teaching of the Legalist in the light of the truth

As a result, the Legalist led them out of truth and into error

Paul further states that they had been ***“bewitched”***

Meaning *to charm or fascinate by false representation*

It carries the idea of bringing evil upon someone by using *trickery and flattery*

The Galatian believers had been fully instructed in the doctrine and details of the Gospel of Jesus Christ …

Yet they had been tricked and deceived into turning back to the weak and beggarly elements and going off into error

They were back to ***“observing days, and months, and times, and years”***

The Legalists had charmed the Galatians into Legalism

 **Their ‘Perilous Practice’**

**D. The ‘Perplexed Preacher’ – v.11, 12**

In **v.11** he says – ***“I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain”***

Their foolishness struck fear in Paul's heart

There is not a pastor in America who doesn't know how Paul felt

The word ***“labour”*** means *to work hard, to be weary*

The idea is that of laboring to the point of exhaustion

As a faithful preacher, Paul had labored diligently among the Galatians winning them to Christ and teaching them the truth

Paul was fearful that his labor was in vain

The word ***“vain”*** means *to be idle, without effect*

It carries the idea of failure

For them to forsake that truth and go off into Legalism would be a failure

**v. 12 – *“Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all”***

Paul uses the word ***“beseech”*** over 20 times in this letter

It means *to invite or entreat* and carries *the idea of begging*

When Paul makes the appeal ***“be as I am”***

He is reminding them that he has been faithful to the gospel of grace and he's begging them to do the same

Paul says – ***“for I am as ye are...”***

The Galatians were Gentiles and Paul is reminding them that he had forsaken the religion of the Jews to become a Christian

He had realized that there was no salvation in the law and by grace he turned to Christ alone for salvation

Paul pleads with the Galatians … to abandon the law and trust Christ alone

When Paul says – ***“ye have not injured me at all”***

He is assuring them that his rebuke is not personal but a matter of principle

It’s not a personal fight, but they are in error and must be corrected

 **THE “SLAVERY” OF LEGALISM**

**II. THE “SCORN” – vs. 13-15**

**… of Legalism**

Most folks don't take rebuke well

Scorn – Extreme contempt / disdain

The old flesh kicks in, pride flares up, and there's trouble

Unfortunately, the Galatians had rejected Paul's message

Even to the point that they were treating him as an enemy

Having just assured them that this was not personal

Paul takes them back to the time they came to know the Lord

**A. He Reminds them of their ‘Conversion’ – v.13**

***“Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first”***

Paul takes them back to when he first preached the gospel to them

He reminds them that he did so with an infirmity

The word ***“infirmity”*** means *to be feeble; diseased, sick, weak*

We are not told exactly what Paul's *infirmity* was

But it was obviously something that greatly hindered him

Our context suggests that Paul's ***“infirmity”*** had to do with his eyesight

**v. 15b** says – ***“... if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me”***

In chapter **6:11** he says – ***“Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand”***

Again suggesting eyesight problems

Many believe this was a result of the day he meet Jesus on the Road to Damascus

Paul reminds the Galatians how he came to Galatia and even though hindered by a great physical ailment …

Preached the gospel and many of them were saved

Then …

**B. He Reminds them of their ‘Confidence’ – v.14**

***“And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus”***

Paul's infirmity did not turn the Galatians away from the Gospel message

Instead they ***“received”*** him ... ***“as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus”***

At that time they did not despise or reject him

But accepted him and treated him as a messenger of God

They cared for and respected him as they would have Christ Jesus, had He personally come to them

Isn't it amazing how quick folks can turn on someone when they are rebuked or someone preaches something they don't like?

Finally …

**C. He Reminds them of their ‘Compassion’ – v.15a**

***“Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?***

The word ***“blessedness”*** means *to attribute to good fortune*

When they were first saved the Galatians praised God and exhibited great joy

Paul asks – ***“Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?”***

In other words, *What happened to all that joy and happiness?*

The implication here is that Legalism destroys Christian joy and friendships

Legalism sucks the joy out of Christianity

**THE “SLAVERY” OF LEGALISM**

**THE “SCORN” OF LEGALISM**

**III. THE “STRIFE” – vs. 16-18**

**… of Legalism**

Paul now speaks of the conflict and struggle that is caused by the Galatians going off into error

 **A. The ‘Disregard’ – v.16**

***“Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”***

They no longer considered Paul a friend, but an enemy

Why? Paul says – ***“because I tell you the truth...”***

The very message that had brought them together, the truth, had now come between them

The Gospel that once brought great joy to the Galatians, now irritated them

Paul was now considered an enemy because he stood on the truth

When folks don't like the message, they almost always take it out on the messenger

Isn't it amazing that the Legalist became their friends by telling them lies? …

But Paul became their enemy when he told the truth

**Proverbs 9:8 – *“Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee”***

The messenger they once loved and accepted, they now hated

When he first came they would have given him their eyes, now they wanted to give him the boot

Why? Because he told them the truth

He exposed their Error

**B. The ‘Defilers’ – v.17**

These are the Legalist / the False Teachers

They Fake that they have your best in mind

When in reality they are only looking out for themselves

For Personal or monetary gain

**1.** Their Display – **v.17a**

***“They zealously affect you”***

The Legalist were zealous in their attempts to infiltrate the Galatian Church with their Legalism

The phrase *“****zealously affect”*** speaks of a *passionate enthusiasm*

The idea is that of courting someone

When a man courts a lady he has to be at his best

He does everything he can to make her like him

That is what these Legalists were doing

They were courting the Galatians

**2.** Their Design**– v.17b**

***“But not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them”***

Paul shows the purpose of this show of affection

***“They would exclude* *you”***

They wanted to shut out all other teaching and be the only teaching acceptable

Error is forever trying to monopolize

An example is evolutionists trying hard to make teaching creation forbidden in our public schools

***“That ye might affect them”***

***“Affect them”*** means *to show affection for, to be devoted to, to be loyal to*

Their courting was nothing more than manipulation designed to bewitch the Galatians

To get the Galatians to like them

Paul warned, ***“they would exclude you, that ye might affect them”***

They wanted to exclude the Galatians from God's grace and gain control over them for their own profit

They did not seek the good of the Galatians, but their own gain

This is how Legalists works

And lastly …

**C. Paul’s ‘Defence’ – v.18**

***“But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing...”***

Zeal is not a bad thing as long as it is about a good thing

They were zealous about the Gospel of Grace when Paul was with them and that was a good thing

Now they had lost their zeal for the Gospel of Grace

***“... and not only when I am present with you”***

If it's worth standing for when the preacher is around,

It's worth standing for the rest of the time

Some folks get pretty excited when a big shot preacher shows up and mesmerizes the crowd with his oratory skills

They get all excited and fall on the altar making commitment after commitment

But it's not long before they lose their zeal and the fire is gone

May we remember that our allegiance and faithfulness is to God and never contingent on the preachers presence

**CONCLUSION**

Let the Galatians make no mistake

Paul sought only their good

Nothing about Paul was mean-spirited or jealous

He had no objection to people coming to their churches even in his absence, as long as it was to hear the truth

But Paul could see through the Legalist

They wanted to come between Paul and the Galatians

They wanted to ***"exclude"*** them

They wanted to slam the door of salvation and shut people out from all that was available to them in Christ

That was their evil goal as far as the unsaved were concerned

As for those who were already saved, they wanted to exclude them from the fellowship of other believers

Be careful, lest you believe a lie

Not believing the Truth, always leads to believing a lie!

**THE PITFALLS OF LEGALISM**