

“Truth *be told...*”

- Galatians 4:12-31 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Galatians 4:12-31 *Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. 13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. 14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you*

received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. 15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth? 17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. 18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. 19 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. 21 Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 23 But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 24 which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—25 for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— 26 but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27 For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband." 28 Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 29 But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. 30 Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." 31 So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.



4:12

It has been said that “*The further a society drifts from the truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.*” Certainly it is not hard to acknowledge that reality in the day in which we live! Theodore Roosevelt once said “*In the long run, the most unpleasant truth is a safer companion than a pleasant falsehood.*” Paul in this passage was trying to express that reality...to venture into that dangerous territory with the Galatian believers. It was anyone’s guess whether they would receive it or not, but it seems that that possibility had little effect upon Paul’s resolve. This issue was a “life or death” situation for Paul so he was seemingly “all in.”

Paul on more than one occasion made a statement akin to “be like me.” We would however be hard pressed to see any arrogance in those statements. Indeed he was bold enough to put himself out there in the bright light for everyone to see. Clearly he was a man that was “more than talk.” He was not exalting himself here by calling for the Galatians believers to “be like me.” In fact he was humbly reminding them that he first became like *them*...that he was just a guy who was found by Christ and had then embraced the freedom that such a relationship brought to him. No one had known more about legalism, and a life of false securities that were based upon his adherence to the rules and reg’s than Paul. He had literally embodied that position. But now he had come to embrace God’s grace, just like they had when they came to Christ.

4:13-14

Just what Paul’s physical ailments were herein have been the focus of a lot of conjecture over the years. And yet Paul never found it necessary to elaborate on the details. Whatever it was, it always seemed to work to the advantage of the kingdom, if not for Paul personally.

Such personal weights and difficulties in our lives are a hard thing to accept because we tend to think that a walk close to Jesus always means a comfortable journey. But that idea is a fallacy and an invention of modern religion and denominations.

In this case, his ailment must have delayed his departure from them. Clearly he didn't spend his recuperation in a resort spa someplace but instead he evidently used the time to do some preaching and teaching there in Galatia. For what history tells us was just a little guy, he was apparently a pretty tough dude! People tend to do a lot of things only out of duty, but for Paul and a few guys who have followed since then, some act out of passion.

He reminded the Galatians how they cut him slack on his ailment. In fact, they received what he taught with great joy! He reminded them of this event, and clarified that he wasn't angry but he was still the same guy after all. He seemed to be more incredulous than insulted. He was still saying the same things as he did before, and *before* they embraced his words. Why would they reject what he was saying now?

4:15-16

Paul had always told them the truth, no matter the cost. He loved them, and had protected them. He bears witness that in those early days, they would have 'plucked out their very eyes and given them to him.' This account leads many to believe that Paul's ailment had to do with his eyes, perhaps a 'leftover' from that journey on the road to Damascus. But his point was that at one time they had loved him, heard him out and supported him and his ministry.

People always love a pastor when he is telling them nice stuff and easy to swallow material. That fact is not lost upon the modern clergy and is the motivation behind the modern "Jesus lite" style in church ministry. We are clearly living in a day of wholesale departure from authentic doctrine and biblical positions in exchange for a cultural acceptance based upon what the "itching ears" of the sheep desire. It's quite easy to find flagrant examples of this wherein churches boldly claim that God didn't mean what he said or that what He *did* say is no longer applicable in our day and age. Its undoubtedly easier to find a pew in one of those churches today than take the heat for standing on the fact that God never changes (Mal 3:6, James 1:17). Numbers 23:19 says He does not change His mind, and Isaiah 40:8 says His Word will last forever. I have no idea why those who attend such "churches" do not ask their clergy about that. After all, if one's faith is not based on the Bible, then what exactly *is* it based on? I for one am not going to base my eternal position on what some guy is telling me. I need it backed up.

But what makes it all worse is that if a pastor holds to scripture, sooner or later, everyone is going to get their toes stepped on. That's what scripture does. It encourages, instructs, guides, blesses, clarifies, and causes worship. And it steps on your toes. That's not a new thing. God has been disciplining His creation since the beginning of time!

We all have to decide whether that will be the end of our relationship with Christ and/or the brotherhood, or whether we will take the heat. I have always been amazed how I can go from Billy Graham to the Anti-Christ in such a short time in the eyes of some. Yet invariably I had not changed my position any more than God Himself had. It was just that eventually every one's pet sin and entrenched positions comes up for review in a Sunday message! If you have not given God that latitude to correct, your time here will be short-lived. If you have not given me that same latitude, again, you won't be here long. Certainly we have seen this scene played out repeatedly over the years. People are generally passive and docile until you point out some issue in their lives and then they go nuclear.

Paul was loving his flock even through the difficult stuff he had to deliver. He loved them even when he had to confront them. I really don't know where we got the idea that we would just naturally love everything God tells us and be happy about every position He espouses. But *we* are the children and He is Dad. He is the Creator, the Boss and the King, and He doesn't check with me on my opinion on how He runs His kingdom.

It seems today that often the best way to clear a church sanctuary is to simply tell the truth! There will always be plenty of folks who will lie to get you and to keep you in their pews. They will distort the facts, twist the scripture, and tell you what you want to hear. It shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. After all, scripture tells us that this day would come. 2 Timothy 4:3-4 says *“For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. They will reject the truth and chase after myths.”*

The great mystery for Paul here is “why kill the messenger?” Especially one that at one time you would have “plucked your eyes out” for?

Paul's message? Don't ever leave your roots. Remember where and from what you came. You were saved through grace, and a love for Jesus, and you embraced that fact. Don't turn away from that now. Not ever. It's been told how John Newton, fabulously redeemed from being a slave trader, wanted never to forget where he came from. He wrote Deuteronomy 15:15 in bold letters across his mantle: **Remember that you were slaves in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you!**

4:17-18

Paul knew first hand via his “B.C. days” of going after Christians, that zeal can be terribly misguided. Over the years I have met many such lost souls who are “rebels without a cause.” Except they believed they have a cause! These folks are seemingly compelled to recruit others to their misguided causes, because after all, there is no satisfaction or comfort in being alone in such positions. They randomly call the church...probably one after another, to correct us in our belief on the Trinity, our unwillingness to necessitate the speaking in tongues, or to tell us that they are a new prophet and we should listen to them. We seem to invariably need others to support our cause to validate our positions. So rest assured, they will always come looking for you if they think you are venerable and accessible.

Those that were messing with the believers in Galatia were trying to convince them to do two things: First, to get away from Paul...*and that apparently required them to attack, ridicule and marginalize him*, and secondly to follow them, *which they attempted by exalting themselves through any means possible...no matter how*. The passage says these guys “courted” them. They “wooed” the believers into their realm through a feigned love for them, support for their positions and pretended they were watching out for their best interests. These are uniquely embodied in the “we just love people” folks. Both Jesus and Paul repeatedly warned that there would be those who would be found amongst you that are not believers, but wolves.

Like all of us, they wanted their cake and wanted to eat it too. We all want forgiveness of sin, the blessings of living under the umbrella a God's care, and of course *eternal life in heaven*. But we want it *our* way. There will always be those who want to lean upon the cross but not kneel at the cross.

These trouble-makers were quick to evoke “religious law” in an effort to bind the Galatians up through confusion and legalism. Paul was glad they were full of zeal, but he wanted what I want for you today. And that is to be sure your zeal is placed on solid biblical and Christ-centered ideals. After all, zeal is so emotionally based. Thus unless there is a static “never-changing” ground under what we are zealous for, we stand in great danger of being overcome by those emotions...and there is no biblical grounds to stand on emotions.

4:19-20

Paul's love for the believers was genuine. His life and motives were “out there” for all to see. He wasn't seeking to be a guru or to establish an entourage. He speaks in terms of endearment, “my little children.” But how do we know to trust Paul over these others? How do we know Paul isn't the one who is trying to “zealously gather up followers unto himself?” Again, one thing is a sure sign both then and now: *those who will try to mess with you will always operate in the shadows*. Emails, whispers, phone calls, and back alley negotiations. They don't sit

down and discuss the issues. Transparency is their kryptonite. Innocent people don't run away. A sure sign of integrity and honesty is operation in the open and public. When they sneak around and whisper behind closed doors, and won't come right out and address the issues in the light of day...if they refuse to directly talk to the one they are talking about, then you have a wolf on your hands.

Paul was pained over all of this. No doubt he felt somewhat helpless to fight shadows and innuendos. He felt responsible for these people...such is the heart of a pastor. After all, he had "birthed" these folks spiritually speaking. He was not in anguish just over their salvation, but over their discipleship, saying "until Christ is formed in you."

If all of this sounds rather cloak and dagger, and if it seems like Paul is overly distraught, it's not hard to see why. This was serious business. The stakes had eternal consequences. Heaven and hell; the *forever and forever*. Was he impassioned over this? Most definitely. Would *you* want to tell him to calm down?

4:21-31

Paul is still trying to reason with the Galatian believers. For those who think they actually wanted to go back to following the law, back to having a "school master"...a caretaker over them, Paul is asking that they just take a step back for a second and take a look at what they are pursuing.

In this debate, Paul now takes out the 'big guns.' He evokes the "big daddy of them all" by bringing in the "father of the Jewish nation, Abraham" as an example. We know the account...Abraham was given a promise by God that he would have a son. But such a promise was just so hard to believe because of his advanced age and that of his wife Sarah. Instead of waiting on God to fulfill His promise, he and Sarah decide to take matters into their own hands and "help God." They wanted what they wanted, and were unwilling to wait on God. So cooking up their master plan, they decide that Abraham would impregnate Sarah's handmaid and they would then claim the child as their own. I know that sounds a bit crazy and very 'Jerry Springer,' but it was a widely practiced method in that day for which to gain a child and an heir if you could not produce one yourself.

So they follow through with this plan and a son was born to this handmaid whom they named Ishmael. They thought 'that that was that,' but God said no, Abraham was still going to produce a son with Sara, and eventually we know they did and that son was Isaac. When will we learn? God is faithful, even when we are not. And further, we are not going to change the ultimate plans of God through our own stupidity and rebellion. God is going to do what He is going to do, and if there is a loser, it will be *us*, not God.

Isaac was the son of promise and grace, and Ishmael was the son of man's attempt to "do" something, a fleshly attempt to help God. The bottom line is that man has never had any luck with trying to 'help God.' God doesn't need any help, especially from us. This all is a picture of the law as presented in this passage. A picture of our attempts to add with our crayons to a perfect masterpiece painting.

For Isaac through Sara there was God's perfect work that happened because He promised it would...because He wanted it to. But Ishmael with Hagar the handmaid was an example of the law, an example of what happens when we try to add a little something of our own to the promises of God.

Today Jewish history traces the lineage of Ishmael to the modern Arab people, and in effect, the very source of Israel's current woes. Ironic isn't it? A perfect storm. A clear example of what happens when we reject God's total sovereignty and try to take matters into our own hands like we do when we try to be right with God through our own efforts and works...attempts to be right with God by following rules and regulations, denominational hoops, and self-righteous works. And sometimes...like with Abraham, Sara, Isaac and Ishmael...things cannot be undone and we must live under the fallout of our false dealings for the rest of our lives. He still will love you, but not everything can be undone.