

Helping Brothers Grow Spiritually

Galatians 4:12-20

A. A desire to help people grow in faith requires building relationships **12-16**

1. Paul speaks to the Galatians as brothers, evidence of that relationship
 - a. Up to this point in the letter Paul has laid the groundwork for a studied refutation of his opponents
 - 1) He begins his defense of his 'not by works' position with a direct, personal appeal to the Galatians
 - 2) He does this because Christian doctrine is not purely intellectual; it demands personal commitment
 - 3) Faith in Christ brought them into a personal relationship with Jesus and with his servants, like Paul
 - b. Whatever false teachers said about him, Paul wanted the Galatians to know he still counted them as family
 - 1) His love for them as brothers had not diminished even tho the tone of this letter has been stern
 - 2) As his brothers, he wanted the very best for them in life and took his stand with them, as one of them
 - 3) He had become like them, rejecting that Jewish exclusivism that saw Gentiles as spiritual inferiors
 - 4) He did not boast in his descent from Abraham or his zeal for the law; he counted such things as loss
 - 5) Like them, he came before God with nothing more than the righteousness of Christ to be justified
 - 6) He pleads with them to become like him, having no hope save in Christ's sacrifice for his sins
 - 7) Though he had every advantage Judaizers boasted in, he never spoke of these as a goal to aspire to
 - 8) He wants them to see by his example that the path of legalism was not advancement in spiritual life
 - c. While he was saddened with their turn towards legalism, he did not take it as a personal offense
 - 1) He is not speaking as he does from any sense of personal resentment; they had done him no wrong
 - 2) He was not angry, but was startled at their sudden turn, concerned and anxious for their welfare
 - 3) As his brothers, he wants them to know he is not attacking them, and is not seeking apology or loyalty
 - 4) All he wants is for them to return to the gospel of grace so they can enjoy fellowship with God
2. They had proven the great value they placed on fellowship with Paul **13-15**
 - a. He had come to them in weakness and not as some heroic figure
 - 1) Paul did not ride into town as a conquering hero of some sort who expected an admiring audience
 - 2) He did not even come as an honored leader among the Jewish people who could demand respect
 - 3) He was in the Galatian province because of an illness that apparently forced him to stop for rest
 - 4) Though he was not where he had planned to be, he took advantage of the pause to preach the gospel
 - b. They did not recoil at his illness as their culture taught them to
 - 1) Whatever the nature of his sickness, it was a trial for them, a temptation to reject his message
 - 2) Physical illness of a notable sort was widely seen by those of that day as a sign of the gods' disfavor
 - 3) Despite the sign that told everyone to steer clear of Paul, they did not treat him with contempt or scorn
 - 4) When outward appearances told them he should be avoided, something about him attracted them
 - c. They saw him as an angel with a message straight from heaven
 - 1) That something that attracted them was not a powerful personal presence, but a powerful message
 - 2) They welcomed him as an angel, a messenger from God with a word that they found compelling
 - 3) They had accepted him as Christ Jesus himself, convinced he spoke authoritatively for the Lord
 - 4) This was not Paul patting himself on the back, but a reminder of how they had once seen him
 - 5) He was not what the false teachers were painting him to be, one who was holding back on them
 - a) He didn't cheat them out of the blessings of obeying the law when as a Pharisee he knew them well
 - b) He was as he first appeared to them, a messenger who gave them the best God had to offer
 - d. Their love for him was such that no sacrifice for him was too great
 - 1) They had found in the message he brought from the Lord a thrilling discovery that changed their lives
 - 2) The Judaizers then came and offered another 'gospel' that had robbed them of what grace had given
 - 3) They had once counted themselves greatly blessed, but now they seemed to have lost all their joy
 - 4) They counted Paul's message so great they would have willingly sacrificed their best for him (eyes)
 - a) Put in less graphic modern terms we might say they would have given him the shirt off their back
 - 5) They did not think of Paul merely as a teacher, but as a friend who they would help any way they could
3. The message that bound them together had not changed, but they had **16**
 - a. That message of salvation by grace alone thru faith alone still stood for the gospel is unchangeable (1:9)

- b. This message that had brought them together before the Lord as equals, as brothers, remained intact
 - c. Paul had not changed his message, nor in his attitudes towards them, but they had begun to change
 - d. By insisting on the truth of that message they once received with such gratitude, he had become an enemy
 - e. While hatred for the truth makes this common when sharing with unbelievers, they were his brothers
 - f. It is part of being a friend to admonish each other for wrongs; the response should be gratitude (Ps 141:5)
- B. The enemies who were at work trying to destroy this relationship 17-18**
1. Their goal was to make disciples for themselves, not for Christ
 - a. What kind of person would join themselves to a church for the purpose of bringing divisions?
 - b. Likely as often as not they do so out of a zeal for some doctrine or practice they consider crucial
 - 1) They want to expose evils of modern Bibles, enlighten brothers about TULIP, get rid of drums, etc
 - 2) They do not see what they are doing as divisive, but as promoting unity on important matters of truth
 - c. These teachers were zealous for God and his law, but their zeal was not based on knowledge (Rom 10:2)
 - 1) Because it was not based on God's Word it was contrary to his will thus not good for the church
 - 2) When we abandon God's will, even for what seems a good cause, our motives become warped
 - 3) By alienating the church from Paul, God's chosen representative, they hoped to win over the Galatians
 - 4) They were so zealous for their good cause they were willing to cripple the greater good of the gospel
 - d. When we lose sight of the most important things, it is easy to elevate smaller things to our harm
 - 1) As Christians we must be careful to avoid temptations to win people to our cause rather than to Christ
 - 2) We are to win people to Christ and then trust that he will be able to care for them better than we can
 - 3) We ought to be jealous for them, for the goal of seeing them brought under his protection, not ours
 - 4) We will of course usually have a role to play in that, but the burden rests on his shoulders, not ours
 2. They were zealous, but not for the spiritual welfare of the Galatians
 - a. However it may have started, in the end the zeal of these false teachers was sinfully misdirected
 - b. It is fine to be zealous for the spiritual good of those with whom we share the gospel
 - c. When a brother becomes more interested in winning arguments than edifying saints, he has lost his way
 - d. The one who teaches so he can be admired, to enhance his influence, is to be watched closely
 - e. It will not be long before such a one will say whatever he feels necessary to hold on to his authority
 - f. If we are loving we won't care whether we or a stranger wins a one to Christ and helps him grow in faith
 - 1) This is so because we recognize that the power to draw a person to Christ is the Lord's, not ours
- C. Helpful mindsets on leading others to spiritual life and growth 19-20**
1. Cultivating for a godly harvest can be long, hard, heartbreaking work
 - a. Like a farmer awaiting a harvest, one who loves others will face times of stress until Christ is formed in them
 - b. We plant the seed, we water and nourish it, we watch and wait to see if the seed of life matures in them
 - c. Our labor for spiritual life does not end when we introduce someone to Christ by sharing the gospel
 - d. We continue to provide for the growth of that seed until we see the person walk as spiritually mature
 - e. The intensity of pain Paul felt at their retreat from the faith is compared to that of a woman in childbirth
 - 1) And childbirth is only a beginning since there is ongoing struggle to help them grow **2 Cor 11:27-28**
 - f. If we want the new believer to grow, we must be prepared for long, hard, sometimes heartbreaking work
 2. Setbacks don't lead to anger but do leave us perplexed and concerned
 - a. Paul knew how this letter to this point sounded and longed to be with them so they did not misunderstand
 - 1) A drawback to online communication is people cannot hear our tone of voice or see our facial expression
 - 2) Paul implies that were he with them they would not be offended for they would see and hear his love
 - b. What he wants them to know though is that his severity was not due to anger but to confusion
 - 1) He could not understand how they could walk away from God's grace to embrace the law
 - 2) We are angry when people reject us; we are sad and concerned when they reject God's grace in Christ
 - 3) These bumps on the road to spiritual maturity are not uncommon, but that does not make them easy
 - 4) We think we see one we care for slipping away from the truth, and it feels like a kick in the gut
 - 5) This does not lead, however, to angrily distancing ourselves from them, but only to greater prayer
 - 6) There is no greater prize for the believer than knowing he has helped another come closer to the Lord