

Intro: As we began considering this epistle together I pointed out that there are three major divisions in this letter:

- (1) Personal (1, 2).
- (2) Doctrinal (3, 4).
- (3) Practical (5, 6).

These are general divisions. It does not mean that the personal cannot have doctrinal points, etc.

So, we can say that really from 2:15 to 4:7 Paul has been doing some wonderful teaching--proving again that salvation comes to men by faith and faith alone, without any works on our part. The work of Jesus Christ on the Cross and in resurrection is sufficient for the salvation of the whole world.

This morning we come to the other side of the picture.

Legalism cannot bring salvation, but it does bring other things. IT IS MY PURPOSE THIS MORNING TO POINT OUT WHAT PAUL HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE TRAGIC EFFECTS OF LEGALISM.

What are they? They are many, but I just want to point out three. Let me give them to you, and then we will consider them in the order in which Paul presents them. They are:

- (1) Legalism extends the period of spiritual infancy (vv. 8-11).
- (2) Legalism extinguishes Christian fellowship (vv. 12-16).
I may have fellowship with those in my group, who believe what I believe, but I can no longer have fellowship with all who know the Lord Jesus Christ.
- (3) Legalism excludes me from Christ (vv. 17, 18).

I. LEGALISM EXTENDS THE PERIOD OF SPIRITUAL INFANCY (vv. 8-11).

In these two verses he is speaking to the Gentiles of Galatia as Gentiles.

There might be some reason for idolatry before one knows God, BUT HOW ANYONE CAN GO BACK TO "THE WEAK AND BEGGARLY ELEMENTS" AFTER THEY HAVE COME TO KNOW GOD PRESENTS A MYSTERY WHICH PAUL HAS DIFFICULTY IN UNDERSTANDING.

Paul uses the same language here that he did in v. 3, "the elements of the world," i.e., the elementary knowledge, the ABC's.

There are two other places where Paul speaks with rebuke for the prolonged babyhood of some Christians. Cf. Heb. 5:11-14 and 1 Cor. 3:1-5. There is nothing wrong with being a babe in Christ, but there is something very wrong if you stay a baby!

What will keep me a babe, restricting me in my spiritual growth?

It is significant that in these three passages spiritual infancy remains when we fail to understand three truths:

- (1) In Corinthians, the doctrine of the Church.
- (2) In Hebrews, the doctrine of the present ministry of Christ in heaven.
- (3) In Galatians, the doctrine of salvation by faith alone.

These are strong words, but they are the truth!

If you and I are confused about the basis of our salvation, we are not going to do much growing spiritually.

The legalists were misusing the Law. Their doctrine had to do with "weak" promises which could never produce salvation, and "beggarly" doctrines which left you as spiritually poor as you were to begin with.

How could a person who had been introduced to the forgiveness of his sins, who had been made a son of God, who had been indwelt by the Spirit of God, ever go back to a doctrine of salvation which was based on human works, ignoring the glorious work of Jesus Christ on the cross?

You follow the legalists, and you will never grow up as a Christian.

II. LEGALISM EXTINGUISHES CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP (vv. 12-16).

It is God's desire that all who know the Lord Jesus Christ should be able to have fellowship with each other. Christ has only one body, the Church. (Do not confuse this with the present-day ecumenical movement.)

What had happened in Galatia?

The doctrine of the legalists had turned the Galatians against the very one who had brought the Gospel to them in the first place. Note how Paul reminds them of the past days.

He had evidently gotten sick (v. 13), and this led to a prolonged visit with them.

His sickness (evidently eye trouble which had a certain unfortunate effect of Paul's appearance) they did not despise with contempt or with indifference, nor did they reject him, spitting in his direction to protect themselves from the disease, but instead they received him "as an

angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." And they would have taken out their own eyes, and have given them to Paul.

What love! What fellowship! How this must have delighted the heart of God.

But some false teachers had come in, teaching salvation by works, and Paul had suddenly become their enemy **EVEN THOUGH HE HAD NOT CHANGED HIS TEACHING FROM WHAT IT HAD BEEN AT THE VERY FIRST.**

Thank God for men who stand faithfully for the Gospel of Jesus Christ regardless of the pressures placed on them to change.

Note the ideas in vv. 17, 18.

If the doctrines I hold make it difficult for me to have fellowship with other believers (I am not talking just about professing Christians), then I had better take a long hard look at what I believe.

But this leads to our final point for this morning.

III. LEGALISM EXCLUDES ME FROM CHRIST (vv. 17, 18).

Why do I say, "from Christ."

Read v. 19 and Gal. 5:2, 4.

It is nothing short of Satanic to see how the doctrines abound which would shut us out from Christ.

A legalist may pay lip service to Jesus Christ, but he does not make the Lord Jesus the only and complete Saviour.

He wants you to know that you must be your own Saviour.

He would never have you sing,

"My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood
and righteousness . . ."

Concl: All of this had happened in Galatia. The purity of the Gospel was being threatened. How thankful we can be that Paul stood for the truth in these most trying circumstances, exalting the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of those who believe.

May God keep us faithful to the same message, ever proclaiming the truth of Acts 4:12.