

• *'Let this time of controversy come to an end'*

1. Break away from the bondage of legalism!

• *Become like me - for I also became like you!*

2. He holds nothing against them

3. How and why their relationship has been damaged

The Galatians had started to criticize Paul. It is always a sad and painful matter when relationships begin to break down. Perhaps misunderstandings set in. Perhaps differences of character and temperament become almost unbearable. It gets worse when accusations and counter-accusations enter in. The suspicions in Galatia were beginning to grow. Paul appeals to his friends in a more personal matter to let this time of controversy come to an end.

1. **He begins with an appeal that they should come to straightforward faith in Jesus and break away from the bondage of legalism.** *'Brothers and sisters, I plead with you! Become like me! For I also became like you!'* ^{¶1} He says to them, 'Break away from this depressing bondage that you are getting into!' Paul knows that he himself is enjoying great assurance and joy. Everyone can see it. He is not very bothered about the minor details of the Mosaic law, and the big moral issues are taken care of by his walking in the Spirit. It gives him a loving and gracious attitude towards everyone and he knows it. 'Become like me!' he says.

Then he can add, 'For I also became like you!' He is referring to the way he adopted some gentile ways when he started preaching to the Galatians. No doubt he ate their food, whether it was forbidden by the Jewish law or not. He made it his practise to 'be all things to all people', that is to adopt the culture of unconverted people so as not to offend them. Paul knows what it is like to change cultures in order to get close to people. He is not asking them to do anything that he has not done himself. Paul says, 'I know all about making cultural adaptations, and now I am asking you to make one. Come back to freedom in Christ. Break away from this depressing bondage that is being pressed upon you in the name of holiness, and come to real holiness. Come to freedom in Christ, walk in the Spirit, and practise the law of love!'

2. **He assures them that he holds nothing against them.** *'You have done nothing wrong against me.'* ^{¶1} They have been doubtful of him and have criticized him, but he is not holding anything against them. He knows they sincerely want to live godly lives. They are listening to the Judaizers because they are 'bewitched' with the idea that the law is necessary for holiness. They have been misled by false teachers and they are thinking that the Christian needs to become rather Jewish! Paul does not want them to feel guilty about the way they have treated him more recently. Feeling guilty never helps anyone, and it does not do anything good for relationships between people.

3. **He asks them to consider how and why their relationship has been damaged.** *'You know it was because of a physical weakness that I preached the gospel to you at first...'* ^{¶1} Paul was ill at the time he visited Galatia. He had come from Perga at sea-level. ^{¶2} He seems to have chosen to go to the higher regions inland (where the towns of southern Galatia were to be found) because there it would be cooler. It was some illness (perhaps malaria) that led him to go inland. Whatever was wrong with him it affected his eyes and gave him an unpleasant appearance. It was difficult to preach in such a state (as I know from experience!), but he looked to God to give him the power of the Holy Spirit, and he carried on preaching. God blessed him. Many Galatians came to immediate faith in Christ. Paul says, *'I preached the gospel to you at first'* ^{¶3}, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus'. ^{¶4} When the Galatians first received the gospel from Paul, they loved him so much and valued him so highly. But something has changed all of that. *'So where is this happiness of yours now?'* Paul asks. ^{¶5} Has the entry of the Judaizers into their lives brought blessing or has it brought needless trouble? Has it brought joy or despair? Has it encouraged happy relationship or has it caused the Galatians to doubt Paul himself who had brought so much blessing into their lives? And if they are doubtful about Paul, why is that? They had once loved him so much. Paul says, *'For I am ready to testify to you that you would have taken out your very eyes and given them to me, if that were possible.'* ^{¶6} So what has caused their changed view of the apostle? He asks them, *'So have I become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?'* ^{¶7} This is really the heart of the matter. Paul is teaching a different **doctrine** from that of the Judaizers. When people move away from the gospel they get angry with those who have brought the gospel to them. Paul asks them to examine themselves.

Why have they been critical of Paul? We are making progress in our spirituality if we can see what our own motivation is, and why we are doing what we do. Hostility is often a sign of guilt. Will the Galatians not consider what they have done? Since the Judaizers came into their lives have they gone forwards or backwards? Are they stronger or weaker? What

¶1 4:12a

¶1 4:12b

¶1 4:13

¶2 Acts 13:13

¶3 4:13

¶4 4:14

¶5 4:13a

¶6 4:15

¶7 4:16

• *A different doctrine*

• *Restoring a kingdom of love*

4. Paul's sincere love towards them

• *The insincere love of the Judaizers*

• *True affection*

5. Paul's desire for Christ-likeness in his people

6. Paul's desire for Personal contact

• *True Christian leaders love people*

is the fruit of the new message? What was the fruit of Paul's message? They are questions that are always worth asking as we consider the various messages that are presented to us.

Even though relationships are breaking down between Paul and his people, he does not give up their friendship easily. He does what he can to restore a kingdom of love among the people of God. Law produces quarrelling. Walking in the Spirit leads us into a kingdom of love.

4. Unlike others, Paul is sincere in his love towards them. The Judaizers have been pretending to be very affectionate towards the Galatians, but their affection is insincere and Paul knows it. *'They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them'*. ^{¶1} The intruders in Galatia were very eager to win over the Galatian Christians. They showed a lot of interest in them and put on a great display of loving concern. But Paul knows this is all play-acting. The Judaizers want converts to their point of view, and that is all. They really have no love for the Galatians whatsoever. There is a difference between Christian love and a desire to get converts! Paul truly loves his people and he wants them to enjoy the freedom of joyful assurance in God. The Judaizers only want to grab people for their Jewish cult and add more converts to their number! If they succeed with the Galatian Christians, the result will be that the Galatians will become an exclusive sect, and the Judaizers will be the only people they are allowed to listen to! The proof that they have no real love is that they only make a fuss of the Galatians when Paul is nearby! *'It is always good to be given affection, but only if the intention is good, and not only when I am present with you'*. ^{¶2} The Judaizers show the Galatians much affection, but it is only for the purpose of getting converts, and their affection disappears when Paul is not around!

We can learn a lot from all of this. (i) It is good when there is true affection between preachers and people, but the affection must be real. (ii) We have to be gracious towards people truly; it is not a matter of showing a great display of love simply because we want to win converts. (iii) True affection allows people to be themselves! It does not shut them off from other people or hold on to them with jealousy.

5. Paul's greatest desire for his people is to see Christ-likeness in them. He says, *'My little children, again I am in the pain of childbirth! It will continue until Christ is formed in you!'*. ^{¶1} This is the true love of a pastor or preacher. It is not a matter of getting converts or counting numbers or accumulating admirers. The true pastor is like a woman in childbirth. He is in pain and distress until he sees the character of the Lord Jesus Christ forming in the people that God has given to him.

6. Paul desires personal contact. *'I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you'*. ^{¶1} It is worth remembering that the apostles only wrote their letters because they could not be everywhere at the same time. They would prefer personal contact to sending letters. ^{¶2} Paul would have preferred to go to Galatia and meet with his friends face-to-face. This is true love. It does not like dealing with people at a distance. It prefers face-to-face contact.

This is the true love of a Christian leader. The true preacher loves people more than he loves preaching. He is not simply gathering admirers; he is advancing the Christ-likeness of his people. He keeps contact with them as much as he can. His love is sincere and true.

¶1 4:17

¶2 4:18

¶1 4:19

¶1 4:20
 ¶2 note also 2 John 12; 3 John 13-14



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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