



Friend or Enemy?

By
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In reading the letter that the apostle Paul penned to the Galatians, we see that they were in deep trouble. False teachers had entered among them teaching a perverted gospel, and they were having some success (Gal. 1:6). These false teachers were advocating the doctrine that the Christian must keep the Law of Moses (particularly circumcision) to be justified. Much could be said about why such a doctrine would be false, and why those who were teaching such were false teachers but such is not the purpose of this article. We want to notice the apostle Paul's response to the situation.

We see that the great apostle had become very concerned about the spiritual condition of the Galatians. *"I am afraid for you, lest I have labored in vain"* (Gal. 4:11). Moreover, he points out that he had preached a pure, unadulterated gospel to them. A gospel that was

not according to man because he was not taught it by man, neither did he receive it from man, but it had been revealed to him by Christ (Gal. 1:11, 12). Therefore the warning, *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that, which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed"* (Gal. 1:8, 9). Sounds like strong language, and it is, but we need to remember that the apostles were guided into all truth (Jn. 16:13).

Paul calls them the "foolish" Galatians because they had rejected the pure gospel of Christ and had embraced the errors of the false teachers (Gal. 3:1). He asks, *"Are you so foolish..."* (Gal. 3:3). We might say it this way, "Can it be that you are so unwise?" Indeed, the Galatians had been very unwise in rejecting the true gospel. Paul even points out to them that to continue in such practices would lead to their eternal destruction. *"Christ has become of no effect unto you, whosoever*

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of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4).

As I read the things Paul wrote to the Galatians I believe that he did not find any pleasure in being so firm with them. (Cf. 2 Cor. 2:4). Paul was human, blood flowed through his veins; he wasn't a man void

of emotion. These were people he knew, people he had labored among, people he had come to love, yet because he loved them; he told them what they needed to hear – the truth!

Paul didn't know how all of them would receive his letter. Some might even become embittered and count him as an enemy. Therefore he writes, *"Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?"* (Gal. 4:16). We understand that the answer to that question is, NO! Paul had not ceased to be their friend; if anything, he had become a better friend to them.

But why did Paul put the preaching of truth before friendship? The answer: *"For do I now persuade men or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I still pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ"* (Gal. 1:10). Pleasing God was the principle that governed Paul's preaching, even though it might cost him friendship. He realized that God had entrusted him with the gospel, therefore his ultimate aim in preaching was not to please men, but God. *"But we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, even so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who tests our hearts"* (1 Thess. 2:4). Understanding that the faithful gospel preacher will preach to please God and not men, and that he

will teach what we need to hear from God's word, is the first step in realizing that he is indeed a friend, not an enemy. We have too many today who have "itching ears" and too many preachers who are willing to "tickle" them (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

In conclusion, consider the words of Mr. Albert Barnes commenting on Galatians 4:16, "...There is nothing more difficult than to regard with steady unwavering affection the man who faithfully tells us the truth at all times, when the truth is painful. Yet he is our best friend. *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful"* (Prov. 27:6). If I am in danger of falling down a precipice, he shows me the purest friendship who tells me of it; if I am in danger of breathing the air of the pestilence, and it can be avoided, he shows me kindness who tells me of it. So still more, if I am indulging in a course of conduct that may ruin me, or cherishing error that may endanger my salvation, he shows me the purest friendship who is most faithful in warning me, and appraising me of what must be the termination of my course." (Notes on the New Testament, Vol. XI, p, 366-367).

Preaching the gospel is not always an easy task. Let us learn to appreciate the faithful gospel preacher

who will "preach the word in season and out, convincing, rebuking, and exhorting with all long suffering and teaching." Let us not count him as an enemy, but as one of our best friends.

Together is Better

The word "together" is one of the most powerful words in the English language, and it's evident in nature that God created animals instinctively to use that word to their full advantage.

Scientists tell us that a flock of geese can actually increase their flying range by about 70% by flying together in a "V" formation, as compared to a single bird flying on its own. As each bird flaps its wings, it actually creates an updraft for the bird following. By itself, a lone goose experiences more drag that causes it to tire more quickly. Together, when the lead bird tires, it simply rotates back in the wing and another flies at the point.

Likewise, draft horses pull better together. At a horse pull at a county fair the champion pulled a sled of 4500 lbs while the 2nd place horse pulled 4000 lbs. For exhibition purposes the two were hitched together to see what they could do and pulled 12000 lbs.

If the birds of the air know it, and the beasts of the field know it, then why are we so slow to learn it? Together is better, especially when hard times come. And I think we all know there's a tough pull ahead. - Jeff Haught