

“Am I Therefore Become Your Enemy, Because I Tell You the Truth?”

The apostle Paul had enjoyed a wonderful relationship with the congregations of the Lord's church in Galatia. He loved them and they returned the affection. In Galatians 4:15 he noted that “if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.” In spite of this, the time had come in which these Galatian brethren had begun drifting from the truth. Rebuking them, Paul wrote, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6-7). Later in the epistle he wrote, “But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” (Galatians 4:9-11).

Writing by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul was blunt throughout the epistle regarding the error into which these brethren were going or had gone. He was concerned about their souls. The relationship had been peaceful and joyful but now it was time for some correction. How would they accept Paul's rebukes and exhortations? Apparently, some did not take them well. In Galatians 4:16 Paul asked, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” It would seem that as long as they agreed with Paul, the Galatian churches didn't have a problem with what he wrote or said to them. When he taught them something that was contrary to what they wanted to hear, however, some forgot that loving relationship they had had and turned on him. The one with whom they had formerly gotten along was now counted as an enemy, simply because he taught God's truth and they didn't want to hear it.

Our English Bibles have been divided up into over 31,000 verses. Each verse has the innate ability to teach us something that God wants us to know (Deuteronomy 29:29). Included in these teachings are some wonderful words of peace, comfort and joy. However, there are also passages of warning and rebuke as well as plainly stated commands from God. We could choose to overlook the latter types of passages in favor of the former, thus focusing on only those verses that make us “feel good.” In so doing, we would be neglecting inspired words that were written to reprove, correct and instruct us in righteousness (I Timothy 3:16-17). We would be rejecting “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27) in favor of that which tickled our ears (II Timothy 4:2-4). In John 12:48 Jesus said, “the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” It's obvious from this statement and from the statement regarding the opening of the books in judgment (Revelation 20:12) that it is the Gospel of Christ in its entirety that shall be the standard of judgment in the end. We cannot pick and choose what we want to hear and read.

Having said all this, let's return to Paul's question. “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” There are those who will sing the praises of a preacher, teacher or writer as he says those things with which they agree. Let that same preacher, teacher or writer say something that is challenging or even outright contradictory of these individuals' wants or lifestyles, however, and witness a fascinating change in their attitudes. The preacher, teacher or writer is now meddling. He is no longer delivering God's truth but instead is advancing his opinion. When formerly bouquets of praise were tossed his way, now brickbats of animosity are hurled at him. The preacher, teacher or writer has not changed. His mindset toward those he is teaching has not changed. The difference in this scenario is that now people are hearing or reading something that convicts them and urges them to change, and change, even that clearly demanded by God, is very often met with resistance.

What changed in the relationship between Paul and the Galatian churches? Did he as the writer become mean-spirited and hateful? No, he had the same love for them as he had previously had. What changed then? Was the change not in the hearts of those brethren who did not want to be told what to do? Was it not the case that they didn't want anyone correcting them? Did they not want to just keep on going the way they wanted to go, regardless of the eternal direction it was taking them?

It is required of Christians that we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Doing so involves reproof and rebuking (II Timothy 4:2). It's sad that our doing so sometimes turns people against us but we must not hesitate to tell the truth. In like manner, we must be sure that we ourselves accept

correction when it is evident from the Scriptures that our actions are not pleasing to God. We must turn to God's Word to determine the validity of the correction and then humbly accept it.

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