

THE DESIRES OF THE PASTOR

Galatians 4:8-20

"What does that preacher want?" These words have been uttered many times by some frustrated church member. Often the frustration with the spiritual leader of the fellowship was justified. What the pastor was wanting was not consistent with the role the Chief Shepherd had assigned him. A chief qualification for a spiritual leader in the church is to have a "shepherd's heart". Such a heart is a gift from the chief Shepherd to those he would appoint to such places of ministry.

Every pastor finds help in studying the ministry of the great Apostle Paul. He has become something of a model for us. One reason he is such a favorite is the personal insights into his life that we are given in his letters. He is so human, and yet so spiritual. There is that in his life with which all of us can identify, yet there is that which always challenges us. Right in the midst of this great doctrinal section of Galatians we have such a personal passage. In spite of the deep theological truths he is setting forth, it is evident he does it with the heart of a true shepherd --- not the heart of an academic.

What Paul wanted for the Galatians is what every under Shepherd wants--or should want. From this passage I believe we can see at least three motivating desires in the heart of the pastor. If you do not sense that they are in my heart, then this gives you something to earnestly pray for. Consider them with me.

I. THE PASTOR DESIRES FREEDOM FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Paul reminded the Galatians of their past. It was not like the past of all people. Their past had been marked by bondage to a false religious system. "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." Idol worship was just like the legal system of the Jews --- it produced a bondage for the people. "Did service" means literally to serve as slaves. Before they came to Christ they had been spiritually the bond slaves of the empty idols about them. Their lives had been controlled by these idols. But with the hearing and believing of the Gospel there had come a liberating knowledge of the true God. "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather known of God." This points us to the two sides of the knowledge of God. We know God, but more importantly He knows us. This reminds us that whatever knowledge we have of God, it came at His initiative. Is it not a beautiful thing to see someone who has been bound down by false religions come to know the Lord. It is such a liberating thing! Paul had known the joy of seeing this happen in the lives of these dear friends in Galatia.

But now an unthinkable thing was happening. Those who had tasted freedom were placing themselves into another system that resulted in bondage. "How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in

bondage?" This was not a very complimentary way to describe the legal systems of the Old Testament. Specifically for the Gentile Christians in Galatia it involved, "days, months, times, and years." "Observe" is an intensive word that suggests that they observed these things with great care. They went about it like their spiritual welfare depended upon them. The result was that they were in bondage all over again. The outer form had changed but the inner essence was the same.

What is the reaction of the pastor? "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." His wholesome fear was that they were slipping back into the bondage from which he thought they had been delivered. It now appeared that all of the time and energy he spent laboring among them was for naught.

Do you see what the desire of the true pastor is? He is not interested in getting people involved in religious programs and burdensome systems. He is interested in people experiencing the spiritual freedom which comes when they come to know the true God by grace. He wants to sense that joy and excitement when people have been set free in the Lord. He wants to sense that people are free to become what God wants them to be by the inner workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives. He wants life to be *bie3* in the Lord, not burdened with the rules and regulations of religion. Nothing brings a deeper grief to a pastor than to see people turning away from the spiritual freedom that is their birthright in the Lord Jesus Christ.

II. THE PASTOR DESIRES THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Paul had a wonderful beginning with these friends in Galatia. In spite of some rather adverse circumstances, they had welcomed him from the first day he arrived in their community. "Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first." There has been much discussion concerning the nature of this infirmity that marked the work of Paul at this time. The two best potential explanations seems to be that it was either the result of the severe persecutions he had experienced just before coming to Galatia, or possibly that he had contracted malaria just before coming there. Some see the purpose of this missionary trip to the highlands as involving the health needs related to Malaria, which was prevalent in the lowlands along the coast.

Whatever the infirmity, it would have provided the people a good reason for not listening to Paul. "And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected." This might lend support to the idea that his infirmity was the result of the stoning and beatings. Why should you listen to a man who has just been driven out of a neighboring city with stones and threats? But this did not prevent the Galatians from receiving him. Rather they received him as the "angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." The welcome they gave to Paul was the kind they would

have given to the Lord Jesus Himself if He had come to their community. Their commitment to Paul was so great that "if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." Some have seen this as evidence that the infirmity was his eye-sight, but it is probably better to just see it as a measure of the sacrifice they were ready to make for him. There is nothing they would not have done.

But then the Judaizers came. After their coming, the people began to forsake their freedom, and to put themselves in bondage. And their attitude toward Paul began to change. One sign that something bad is happening in your spiritual life can be a change in your attitude toward your spiritual leaders. Paul asks of them, "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?" Before they had spoken of themselves as a people most blessed to have received the Word at the hands of Paul. But now he asks, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?"

Unless you have experienced what Paul is describing, you cannot fully appreciate it. As a young pastor this type of experience almost shattered me. Apart from the enabling grace of God, I would not have been able to handle it. A deep motivating desire of every true shepherd is to see those committed to his care be steadfast and faithful in the commitment to Jesus Christ. He is bothered deeply when he senses that they are wavering in their steadfastness. On the other hand, there is no greater joy than that of seeing your people abide faithful. Contrast the spirit of this paragraph with that of the Philippians' letter, or the one of the church at Thessalonica. There Paul addresses them as his "joy and his crown".

III. THE PASTOR DESIRES THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PURPOSE OF GOD.

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." What a revealing statement. Even though there has been a change in attitude on the part of the Galatians, Paul has not changed his mind. His heart is still the same toward them! "Travail in birth" refers to "birth-pangs" that marked the bringing of a child into the world. The word "again" suggests that Paul had already known such pains over them once. Their coming into the kingdom of God had been accompanied by an intense desire in the heart of the Apostle --- it could be called travail.

But he is experiencing this again as their spiritual leader. Why? That "Christ be formed in you". What does he mean? It surely suggests that the Apostle desires that the inner life of these dear friends be filled with the fullness of the life of Christ. He wants Christ to become preeminent in their inner life. But surely it must include the expression of this inner reality of Christ in an outward expression of Christ-likeness in life style. His desire is that the purpose of God for them be fulfilled-- which is that they be conformed to the image of his dear

son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren, that we should show forth the praises of him. What does the pastor want? He wants the attitudes and actions of his people to begin to reflect the presence of Christ in their lives.

Do you think that the pastor is too serious or severe? Pastors have been accused of this. But if a pastor has the type of desire that was in the heart of Paul, it is a serious matter. I have never been in a "labor room" at the hospital many times, but I have been often enough to know that travail is serious business. It is usually marked by outcry's and groans. It would be of no avail to counsel such a one not to take the process so seriously. I remember as a young man a thing that happened in the little town near us. The pastor of one of the churches became very deeply concerned about the spiritual state of his people. True travail over them settled on his heart. One Sunday morning as he went into the pulpit to speak, it overcame him. All that he could do was stand in the pulpit, and weep. It startled his people. Many of them thought that he was experiencing a nervous breakdown. They had no comprehension that a man could be so concerned about their spiritual welfare. Yet this is basic to the desires of a pastor. He desires the fulfillment of the purpose of God in the people he serves.

CONCLUSION:

Let me ask you a question? Is this what you want to be in the heart of your pastor? Or do you just want a good religious programmer, a church administrator? I submit to you that this is the model I want to follow.

As we begin a new church year together, these are the desires that are in my heart. I desire for you to be free in the Lord, for you to be knowing experientially the fulness and freedom that Christ gives. I desire for you to be faithful to Christ. My heart is burdened about that great host of our people whose attitude toward me and the church seems to have changed. Then I desire for you to be experiencing the fulfillment of the purpose of God in your life.