

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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A Letter to Paul the Apostle

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Presbyterian Church in Asia Minor

Committee on Missions

Paul the Apostle

c/o Aquila the Tentmaker

Corinth, Greece

Dear Paul:

We recently received a copy of your letter to the Galatians. The committee has directed me to inform you of a number of things, which deeply concern us.

First, we find your language to be somewhat intemperate. In your letter, after a brief greeting to the Galatians, you immediately attack your opponents by claiming they "want to pervert the gospel of Christ." You then say that such men should be regarded as "accursed"; and, in another place, you make reference to "false brethren." Wouldn't it be more charitable to give them the benefit of the doubt—at least until the General Assembly has investigated and adjudicated the matter? To make the situation worse, you later say, "I could wish those who trouble you would even cut them selves off!" Is such a statement really fitting for a Christian minister? The remark seems quite harsh and unloving.

Paul, we really feel the need to caution you about the tone of your epistles. You come across in an

abrasive manner to many people. In some of your letters you've even mentioned names; and this practice has, no doubt, upset the friends of Hymenaeus, Alexander, and others. After all, many persons were first introduced to the Christian faith under the ministries of these men. Although some of our missionaries have manifest regrettable shortcomings, nevertheless, it can only stir up bad feelings when you speak of these men in a derogatory manner.

In other words, Paul, I believe you should strive for a more moderate posture in your ministry. Shouldn't you try to win those who are in error by displaying a sweeter spirit? By now, you've probably alienated the Judaizers to the point that they will no longer listen to you.

By your outspokenness, you have also diminished your opportunities for future influence throughout the church as a whole. Rather, if you had worked more quietly, you might have been asked to serve on a presbytery committee appointed to study the issue. You could then have contributed your insights by helping to draft a good committee paper on the theological position of the Judaizers, without having to drag personalities into the dispute.

Besides, Paul, we need to maintain unity among those who profess a belief in Christ. The Judaizers at least stand with us as we confront the surrounding paganism and humanism, which prevail within the culture of the contemporary Roman Empire. The Judaizers are our allies in our struggles

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against abortion, homosexuality, government tyranny, etc. We cannot afford to allow differences over doctrinal minutiae to obscure this important fact.

I also must mention that questions have been raised about the contents of your letter, as well as your style. The committee questions the propriety of the doctrinaire structure of your letter. Is it wise to plague young Christians, like the Galatians, with such heavy theological issues? For example, in a couple of places, you allude to the doctrine of election. You also enter into a lengthy discussion of the law. Perhaps you could have proved your case in some other ways, without mentioning these complex and controverted points of Christianity. Your letter is so doctrinaire, it will probably serve only to polarize the differing factions within the churches. Again, we need to stress unity, instead of broaching issues, which will accent divisions among us.

In one place, you wrote, "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Paul, you have a tendency to describe things strictly in black and white terms, as if there are no gray areas. You need to temper your expressions, lest you become too exclusive. Otherwise, your outlook will drive away many people, and make visitors feel unwelcome. Church growth is not promoted by taking such a hard line and remaining inflexible.

Remember, Paul, there is no such thing as a perfect church. We have to tolerate many imperfections in the church, since we cannot expect to have everything at once. If you will simply think back over your own experience, you will recall how you formerly harassed the church in your times of ignorance. By reflecting on your own past, you might acquire a more sympathetic attitude toward the Judaizers. Be patient, and give them some time to come around to a better understanding. In the meantime, rejoice that we all share a common profession of faith in Christ, since we have all been baptized in his name.

Sincerely,