

“Where, then, is your blessing?” Galatians chapter 4 verse 15

I don't know how many of you picked up in my deliberate mistake yesterday. The verse I chose was from Galatians, not Ephesians. Having not been struck down, I survive to write today's devotional. A friend said she was going to have a look at Galatians 4:15 to see if that was what we were really supposed to be reading, so I had a look too.

It says, *“Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.”* Perhaps we need a bit of context.

Paul's letter to the Galatians was written to address a problem. The Galatian Christians had begun their walk of faith trusting in Christ but, subsequently, false teachers had got among them attempting to draw them back to religious legalism, and they were beginning to observe special days, months, seasons and years. In other words, they were defaulting back to the Jewish religious rituals and feast days.

So Paul is appealing to the strong bond of love and devotion that there was between them and him. So great was their love for him that he is convinced that they would have suffered injury to themselves on their behalf. Perhaps some tension has appeared between them because he has been straight with them about how they are going wrong.

Religious rituals and feasts appeal strongly to our human natures. Like the Galatians, we may start in faith but soon find ourselves drifting towards human traditions. We become comfortable with what we have built around our faith; our heated buildings, our celebrations and anniversaries, our social events, the relationships we develop, our liturgies, our form of worship and a multitude of other things. Slowly but surely, our worship becomes more about us - what we are able to do, what we need – than it is about God.

How, then, do we respond to those who warn us about the way we are going and attempt to turn us back to God? Well, what happened to the prophets of the Old Testament who tried it? What happened to Jesus? Even though it was out of a concern for God's name and his glory, and love and desire for the best good of the people, they were despised for their efforts, ill treated and often killed for their pains. They were challenging something people had created for their own comfort and indulgence; something that may have belonged to God in the beginning, but much of which they have now taken ownership of for themselves.

But it is invariably the people who love us most who are most willing to sound a warning for us where we are beginning to lose our direction. I am reading A W Tozer's book “The Knowledge of the Holy.” Written in the middle of the 20th century, it warns of the decline of the Church as, intimidated by secular influences on theological thought, it reduces God to a human level; something that we can define, describe and manage for our own convenience and even entertainment. His warning has proven prophetic.

God is again speaking powerfully to his Church in these days. He wants to claim back his place as its centre and its focus. He is stripping us of the human and legalistic elements that we have been putting in place, and restoring his glory.

Prayer

Father, we know that we have made much of the Church subject to our humanity rather than your holiness. We may have done it with the best of intentions, to attract others and

to bless one another, but we have become self-indulgent in the process. We know that we are not under your condemnation and judgment, but we also acknowledge that, for the sake of your name and for our own good, you will not allow us to continue to decline into idolatry. Please cause us to turn our eyes on you, make you once again the focus and centre of our lives and our worship, and acknowledge once again that you are Lord of your Church. In Jesus name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.