

Pleasant Valley
Church of Christ

3317 Amidon
Wichita KS 67204
(316) 838-4195
www.letjesusleadus.org

Schedule of Services

Sunday

Classes 9:30 am
Worship 10:30 am
Evening 6:00 pm

Wednesday

Classes 7:30 pm

The Pleasant Valley Church of Christ is a non-denominational group of believers who are committed to following Jesus in our attitudes, our relationships, and our worship. If you want the same thing in your life, please contact us. We'd like to help.

Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are from the New King James Version Bible, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Wings



*"But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31)*

February 14, 2010

Courted by exclusion

by David King

"They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them" (Gal. 4:17).

At first glance, this passage presents a rather odd image: How can someone get others to follow him ("be zealous" for him) by excluding them? You would think that shutting people out would alienate them and destroy any chance of winning their trust.

I puzzled over this for a long time. But as I explored more deeply into this epistle, Paul's meaning began to make sense. In fact, Paul is describing a phenomenon that has many counterparts in modern life.

To understand what Paul is describing, let's review the setting. Paul had established these Galatian churches during his first missionary journey, then revisited them during his second journey. These churches were predominantly Gentile; they had had little or no involvement with Judaism prior to become Christians. Shortly after visiting them the second time, Paul received word that Judaizing teachers, likely from Jerusalem, had begun circulating among them, teaching that they needed to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order for their conversion to be complete. This letter was a quick response to stem this error.

So these Judaizing teachers were "zealously courting" the Galatians. Their goal was to win the affection of these Gentile converts, and draw them into their more restrictive religion. These teachers portrayed themselves as possessing a higher, purer version of Christianity. Paul may have given them the essentials, but

there was so much more available to them, if they only had access to it.

These Jewish brethren, of course, held the key to this new level of knowledge. They would share it with the Galatians, but only on their terms. If the Gentiles would submit to the Law of Moses and circumcision, they could share in this advanced form of their religion. They would become members of a more elite class of Christianity.

The strategy was subtle, but brilliant. By holding these Gentiles aloof as outsiders ("excluding them"), the Judaizing teachers were creating a burning desire to be initiated into this inner circle ("be zealous" for the Judaizers). It's the same strategy that high school cliques use to maintain their power: the clique is closed to all but a select few, but that very exclusivity is what makes everyone else so desperately want in.

The same game is often played among preachers and churches today. Preachers will teach a higher, purer form of the gospel that renders most ordinary brethren as lost or in danger. The solution, of course, is for brethren—only those who are worthy!—to embrace the more restrictive message of this elite cadre of professionals. Churches may be split and brethren alienated, but a "pure" remnant of super-saints will be preserved. Praise God!

Paul's response to the Galatians is the same one we need to hear today: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).