

The Epistle to the Galatians: The Gospel of Grace

Lesson 12: Till Christ Be Formed in You (4:12-20)

Confronting someone that we love is never easy. Many times we are scared to confront a brother or sister, because we know that confrontation can go sour quickly. We don't want to offend them. We don't want them to get angry, and potentially damage our relationship. We don't want them to strike back, and point out the sin in our life, so we settle to simply pray for them. For a hundred more reasons than that, we desire that Christ be formed in others, but also desire to not be a help to that person.

I wonder, perhaps, if that person you know is desperately looking for your help, but for a dozen reasons cannot find the words to ask? Maybe they are embarrassed? Maybe they are proud? Maybe they are scared? Depending on the nature, and spiritual maturity of the person you have in your mind right now, the outcome of our effort to nurture them spiritually will vary. I believe that as followers of Christ, we need to remain teachable, and realize that it doesn't matter how many years we've been saved, or how many times we've read scripture, that we can always be more like Christ through the careful guidance of a brother or sister. Have we ever meditated on how we would handle the situation where a brother or sister gently rebukes us? I think our sinful nature is to take an eye for an eye. Our nature is prideful. Our sinful nature brings our anger to the surface. *"How dare you judge me for that? Have you looked in the mirror? You're like this, and you try to correct me for that?"* I think it takes a disciplined and mature Christian, one who has done the work in their heart to cultivate humility, who prepares themselves for that moment. Anytime we are confronted, without doubt the one confronting us has sin in their life, but we need to ask ourselves the question: Is there any truth to what they're saying?

This is why confrontation must be done prayerfully, thoughtfully, with humility and gentleness. There is nothing wrong with desiring that a brother or sister overcome a particular sin in their life. But we must act in the power of the Holy Spirit, humbly approaching them with carefully thought out words. We need to remain delicate with them, and open to them about our spiritually depraved condition. We need to remember that we're not feeding them (we're not the source of the food), we we're homeless and starving once! We're simple reminding fellow former, homeless, starving people where the food is. If we truly love people as we say that we do, we will take the initiative to help them see Christ, and not protect our own comfort.

This is example that we have seen in Paul throughout this letter. He has seen the sin in the life of these Galatian believers to abandon the gospel, and once again cling to the law for justification. And so Paul has been careful to remind them *from* the Old Testament that the gospel of free grace has always been before their eyes! He's also drawn from their own, short, personal experience as followers of Christ, to remind them of the gospel that they believe. Paul is doing what is difficult with them, so that they see and savour Christ. What follows next in this letter is arguably the most heartfelt pouring out of emotion that we see from Paul in the entire scripture. He is still confronting them, but this time he is pleading from the broken heart of a brother in Christ. For Paul, seeing Christ formed in these believers wasn't a light or trivial, it was extremely important. So he approaches them in the gentleness of Jesus Christ, that they may know Him better.

Verse 12, **"Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong."** The first word ought to jump out at us. He calls them 'brothers'. We might have concluded by his astonishment at their desertion (1:6), how he thought of them as foolish (3:1), and how he

wondered if he laboured in vain (4:11) that he thought that maybe they weren't saved. Not to take away from any of the words that Paul has said, he still regarded them as brothers and sister in Christ. Perhaps they needed to hear this term of affection from him.

Next, we see how Paul begs (entreats) these brothers in Christ to live by the spiritual freedom that Christ purchased for them. He begs them to 'become as he is'. How is Paul? He's already said back in 2:19, **"For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God."** Paul was free from the bondage of slavery to the law. Paul was no longer dead in sin, but alive in Christ. This is how Paul was, this was how the Galatians were too! So Paul is begging them to cling to the reality of their full and free liberation from sin, and adoption as sons through Jesus Christ. He'll go on to say later in 5:1, **"For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."** Paul knew the strong pull on their hearts from their former manner of life. The legalistic life had been embedded in their brains all of their lives. Not many would understand the sudden abandonment of any attempt at attaining a right standing before God through law-keeping. No one (outside of the revelation of the Holy Spirit) would have understood how these Galatians trusted in Christ alone for full salvation. These Galatians would have felt the pull from not only their own sinful minds, but their families, close colleagues, and certain as is relevant to this letter, the Judaizers.

We can relate to these Galatians. From my own perspective, coming from a RC background, I was taught from birth to consider matters of Heaven and Hell in terms of a divine scale. So long as my good deeds outweighed my bad deeds, God would allow me into Heaven. Coming to Emmanuel, and hearing the gospel changed my life. But understanding the gospel, and applying the gospel are quite different. I understood the gospel by definition, but it took some mental gymnastics to settle in my mind how the law couldn't even help me out just a little bit. Paul could relate to the Galatians too, he wrote **"For I also have become as you are."** He left Judaism too. In fact, in terms of falling from the heights of Judaism, no one fell more than Paul did. So he is appealing to them in this verse, on behalf of someone who has come from the same bondage, on behalf of a brother saved by Christ, to stay the course and live as free men.

Next he says to them, **"You did me no wrong."** This is one rare occasion where all of my commentaries provide very little to say about this short sentence, and what they do say, is completely different. One commentary interprets 'you did me no wrong' to mean that although the Galatians had made a serious deviation that needed correction and saddened Paul, that it had no lasting hurt on Paul. Otto Schmoller has an interesting interpretation. He teaches that the emphasis of the sentence does *not* rest on the word 'me'. Schmoller teaches that the word 'me' is an enclitic word in the Greek. The definition of enclitic is: a word pronounced with so little emphasis that it is shortened and forms part of the preceding word. We use enclitics when we add n't at the end of a word (couldn't, wouldn't, shouldn't). Schmoller's point by implication is that the Galatians hadn't done Paul any wrong, the direct wrong was against God the Father and Jesus Christ.¹ Another interpretation that makes sense of this sentence is to consider it within the context of the next verse. Many times we read verses in isolation. This verse is argued by John MacArthur to better be included in verse 13, then be at the end of verse 12. He says to them, "You did me no wrong", and then he recounts their love and affection for him in times past. This

¹ As cited in Leon Morris' commentary on Galatians, p. 137

recollection of past love and support help to contrast Paul's confusion over their current rejection of him at present.

Verses 13-15a, **"You know that it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of your blessedness?"** Exactly what bodily ailment Paul had is unknown as the scriptures tell us nowhere else. William Ramsay has an idea that is worth mentioning at least. He thought that perhaps Paul contracted malaria in the lowlands around Perga, and was forced to go into the higher elevation in Galatia to recover.² Whether Ramsay was right or not, we'll never know this side of Heaven. Theologians have shared their medical opinions over the course of time. One guess is that Paul was epileptic, as suggested by the reference to "scorn" in verse 14 (literally spitting out). I must say I don't see how anyone draws that conclusion, but it's on the table. An actually reasonable guess to Paul's ailment is Ophthalmia, which is having inflammation in the eyes. This guess seems to fit well with what Paul will say next in verse 15, **"For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me."** That may simply be a figure of speech concerning their love for him, or it might literally be connected with their desire to restore his sight, at the loss of their own. Another verse that strengthens the case for the eye ailment is 6:11, **"See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."** Those of you with large-print Bibles know what we're talking about here! I actually believe that verse to have mean something other than Paul's eyesight, and we will handle that verse in due time, but for now I'm giving you all the angles for you to decide. Nevertheless, whether it was malaria, or epilepsy, or ophthalmia. Whatever it was, something unplanned brought Paul to Galatia at a prior time in history. Paul was found in Galatia recovering, and so came an extended opportunity to preach the gospel to the Galatians.

Verse 14, **"and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me."** Recalling what century Paul is living in, we must remember that they didn't have a Big V Drug Store on every corner. When people became ill with what we'd consider even marginal illnesses today, things got ugly quick. Many diseases weren't treated properly, and so they spread quickly. The impact of these diseases were unsightly, and the smell would be almost unbearable. In those days, people treated the onset of disease as a direct judgment from God. Do you remember the account of the blind man in John 9:1-2? **"As He passed by, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?'"** This was the mindset of the people. Job's friends thought the same of him when hardship and calamity fell upon him. When people saw someone who fell ill, they immediately thought of that person as someone who was repulsive, rejected and under the judgment of God.

But this wasn't the reception of the Galatians at first when Paul arrived ill in their midst. Not only did they not cast the same judgment that many in their culture would have, they actually **"received [Paul] as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus."** They were able to look past whatever visual displeasure would have resulted from his illness. They looked past the possible smell of his infection. What the Galatians saw in Paul was God's man sent to them. They heard and believed the message of the gospel, they recognized and fell subordinate to the apostolic authority of Paul. The news of the gospel took, and spread widely because of the positive reception of Paul's unplanned visit to them.

² Ramsay, William, *St. Paul the Traveller and Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids) p. 92

But then Paul asks them two questions in verses 15 and 16, **“What then has become of your blessedness? Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?”** The Greek word for ‘blessedness’ is *makarismos*, which translates ‘happiness’ or ‘satisfaction’. It implies the feeling of joy, fulfillment, and contentedness. He’s in a sense asking them what happened that they went from being happy and satisfied with him, in the gospel, to now turning against him by turning against the gospel.

These Galatian believers had deserted their faith in Christ alone for salvation, and they had listened to the false teaching of the Judaizers. By believing in this heresy, they had in effect chosen sides, and sided against Paul, and the gospel. Charles Spurgeon spoke on becoming the enemy of those who desert the faith, he said, *“There comes times with all God’s servants when certain people proclaim something fresh and new in doctrine, and then the old messenger of God, who was blessed to them, comes to be despised. I have lived long enough to see dozens of very fine fancies started, but they have all come to nothing. I daresay I shall see a dozen more, and they will all come to nothing. But here I stand. I am not led astray either by novelties of excitement or novelties of doctrine. The things which I preached at first, I preach still, and so I shall continue, as God shall help me. But I know, in some little measure, what the apostle meant when he said, “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”*

Spurgeon also commented on verse 16, how Paul questioned becoming their enemy because he told them the truth. Spurgeon again comments, *“There are many who have incurred enmity through speaking the gospel very plainly, for the natural tendency of man is toward ceremony, toward some form of legal righteousness: he must have something aesthetic, something that delights his sensuous nature, something that he can see and hear, to mix up that with the simplicity of faith. Paul was clear as noonday against everything of that kind, and so the Galatians got at last to be angry with him. Well, he could not help that, but it did grieve him.”*³

I think we can all relate to Paul pain, and even Spurgeon’s experience. We know what it is like to pour our hearts affection into someone, only to have them defect from the faith, and trample it as worthless. Perhaps, we can even look into our own past, and see how we pained the person who pleaded with us to keep the faith. But here is Paul, pleading with all of his heart for them to come back to the faith they once embraced. Here is Paul, confronting a wayward bunch of believers with the same truth he taught them at first. You can read the raw emotion in Paul’s words. You can feel the strength of his words, you can feel the urgency in his words. It’s almost like he’s chasing the runaway cart down the railroad track, and he knows that the track ends and there is a cliff. So he’s begging them to stop dead in their tracks and listen to him.

Many time the truth can be painful to share with someone, but the truth just might be the most valuable thing that you can give to that person at that time. The doctor who has the devastating news of cancer to give, does no favor to the patient by not telling them for fear of upsetting them. It’s no good to insist that everything in life is great, while your house is on fire. So Paul is urgently pleading with them to address the serious, waywardness of their faith, and to come back to Christ.

Verses 17-19, **“They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only**

³ Spurgeon, Charles *Commentary, Galatians* Lexham Press p.94

when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth with until Christ is formed in you!"

The Galatians had turned on Paul, treating him as though he were their enemy. In these verses Paul shows them who their true enemies were, the Judaizers. He says, "They make much of you." Other version of scripture word it, "They are zealous for you", "They eagerly seek you" or "They are envious of you." The idea behind the interpretation has to do with taking a serious interest in someone else. In much the same way as a man would pursue the woman of his dreams, she would remain at the forefront of his thoughts. His love and desire is for her well being, the he provide strength and security for her. So Paul is saying, *"These guys, the Judaizers, do you see how eager they are to teach you their religious conviction toward works righteousness? They don't love you. They're not seeking your best interest. They're doing it for no good purpose!"*

The Judaizers had no other interest than to share the same dry, confining message that they themselves were tied too. They were in the same category of people as the scribes and the Pharisees. Do you remember what Jesus said to them in Matthew 23:15, He said **"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child hell as yourselves."** The Galatians needed to heed Paul's warning against the wooing of the Judaizers. Their goal in eagerly pursuing the Galatians was evident to Paul. Their goal he warned in 17b was **"to shut you out, that you may make much of them."** The intentional goal of the Judaizers was to get the Galatians out of God's grace somehow. The Galatians had abandoned pursuing righteousness through the law, and they had trusted in Christ alone. The Judaizers message was intended to bring them back, so that the Galatians might 'make much' of the Judaizers. They eagerly sought after the Galatians, in hope that the Galatians would eagerly seek after them in the run for salvation.

Paul continued in verse 18, **"It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you."** I think we all understand that statement. We have all pursued someone with the gospel. Some of us have prayed for, witnessed too, been an example to, the same person for years. Some of us can sing the praises of God's grace eventually being effectual in that persons heart, and some of us keep on keeping on. What Paul is reminding the Galatians of, is the good pursuing of them that Paul had for them at first. Paul did, and still had, their best interest in mind. He wanted them to die to themselves, and to live for Christ. He wanted them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Paul always had the highest desires for their life's fulfillment. And he wanted them to know that his desire for them was just as high when he was not present with them.

Verses 19-20, **"My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."** The Judaizers were aggressive almost like a lawyer might be towards the Galatians. But Paul spoke in the language of family. He loved them like a father loves a child. And in this case, he is anguishing over them as wayward children who are disobedient and rebellious. Paul is seeking after them with all of his heart until Christ is formed in them. His desired to be with them in person so that he could change his tone. In person he could have spoken with more detail and compassion. But not being present added to his frustration over them.

Let us by God's grace be a people who pursue others until Christ be formed in them. And let us be a people who will humbly let others pursue us to the same end.