

UNTIL CHRIST BE FORMED IN YOU

Our key verse of the sermon today is Galatians 4:19: “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.” This is the most tender statement of Paul recorded in inspiration. In the New Testament we see Jesus use this term and John repeatedly uses the term, but this is the one and only time that the Apostle Paul addresses anyone as “my little children...” Paul uses the word “teknion” which can be translated “infant, darling or little children.” Then he goes on to take the role of a loving mother who travails in birth for the little infant. And the goal is stated: “...until Christ be formed in you.” The word “form” is from the Greek word “morphoo” meaning to “fashion.” This is where we get our English word “morph” which means to “undergo or cause to undergo a gradual process of transformation.” We visualize Paul laboring in prayer and in his teaching for the Christ-life in the life of the Galatian believers. We see this goal was what he had in mind for all the people to whom God gave him the opportunity to minister. He said to the believers at Corinth, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Corinthians 3:18).

For Christ to be formed among the Galatians, Paul wants them to see two truths:

I. THE POTENTIAL OF THE BELIEVER

A. A Needy Place

Galatians 4:1. Paul is addressing the son, who has not yet graduated into sonship with all the privileges. He has all, but possesses nothing. In the Revelation, our Lord addresses the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3:17: “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” Then earlier our Lord addressed the church in Smyrna in Revelation 2:9: “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.”

We see from these two examples, one church was poor in worldly goods but rich toward God. Then another church is rich with worldly goods, but not only poor, but miserable, blind and naked!

I Corinthians 3:21 says, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours." As believers we have by right of inheritance all that we need in Christ, but if we are (like the Galatians) trying to please God by the law we perform, we fall short of "...the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8b).

B. A Nanny Place

Galatians 4:2. The Lord plans for us to grow up and has even appointed us to this great privilege. I Corinthians 13:11 says, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." In ancient Greece the boys would go through a ceremony where they would give up their toys. The girls, before they would marry, would give up their dolls in a similar ceremony (II Peter 3:18; I Peter 2:2; I Corinthians 3:2; Hebrews 5:12).

C. A Natural Place

Galatians 4:3. The "elements of the world" seems to be the system of basic rules that represents the best that natural man (without Christ) has to offer. Paul addressed this again in Galatians 4:9: "But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" The same thought is expressed in Colossians 2:8: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

The Christ-life, which is miraculous, leads from victory after victory over the flesh. The natural life always falls short, frustrates and ultimately fails. Romans 8:8 puts it in the proverbial nutshell: "So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

II. THE PLAN OF THE AGES REVEALED

A. The Birth

Galatians 4:4a. Christ is sent into the world, born of the virgin Mary, fully God and fully human. Christ came to earth according to the Word of God in the "fullness of time." God is always right on time. (Philippians 2:5-8).

B. The Bar Mitzva

Galatians 4:4b. For the first eleven years of a Jewish young man's life he was taught the law and commandments. If done properly, the first Sabbath after a Jewish boy's 12th birthday he becomes "Bar" (Son) of "Mitzvah" (Law). Jesus seemed to be doing a similar thing when he astounded the doctors of law in the Temple at 12. After the Bar Mitzva the boy is now called "a Son of the Law." He is now under the obligation to live according to the law without coercion of his parents and elders. Some would say this formal ceremony by name was not yet in use at the time of our text, but the principle was in effect and this is what Paul seems to be referring to. Many cultures, especially ancient cultures such as Greece and Rome, had a coming of age celebration.

This is a beautiful reference! When we come under the law, we are condemned because we can never live it. When Christ came, the Mighty God clothed Himself in human flesh, came under the law and lived it for us. Jesus said in Matthew 5:17, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."

C. The Buying

Galatians 4:5a. There are three Greek words used when translating into English our word "redemption." The picture used in this culture is most often of purchasing a human being from the inhuman bondage of slavery. The first word is "agorazo" meaning to buy in the market place. The second word is "exagorazo" means to buy out of the market. The prefix "ex" bears this connotation. Then finally the word "lutroo," is used, which means to set free. If the man who buys a slave sets him free there was not a law in Rome that could ever place him in bondage again!

D. The Bringing

Galatians 4:5b-7. The "adoption" which the Bible is referring to here is the coming of age, when the birthed son now begins to walk in his inheritance. And because we received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we have the witness of the Spirit crying out from our hearts, "Abba, Papa!" Now the empowered son can enjoy the inheritance of a son, not the humiliation of a servant. Hebrews 2:10 reminds us, "For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

Conclusion:

In Galatians 4:8-21 Paul is so concerned with the Galatians' embracing of a works oriented salvation that he goes so far as to say, "I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain" (Galatians 4:11). The apostle is concerned that some have not truly embraced the Gospel! Paul now gets very personal as he says, "Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all" (Galatians 4:12). As a Jew, Paul abdicated the law-life in exchange for the Christ-life. Now he says, you are trying to live as I once lived; come back to the truth in Jesus! In Galatians 4:13-18, Paul reminds them of how he and the Galatians became so close that they in their tender care of him during his physical crisis would even have "plucked out" their own eyes for him. And now he asks, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16). In essence Paul explains in these verses, that you Galatians have been torn from the truth by false teachers and therefore you reject the truth that God has revealed through me. He is saying, you went out of your way to help me once; please let me help you now. He is saying he is in labor like a loving mother to see the Galatians come back to the truth held in the Gospel, until Christ is formed in them.

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