

**BECOME AS I AM!**  
**PART 6**

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:12-20

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

In his commentary on Galatians, Phillip Ryken writes, “Paul wanted the Galatians to enjoy the kind of freedom he had as a son of God, freedom from the legalism of godless religion” (p. 177). Out of fear for the Galatians’ standing before God (v. 11), Paul pleads (δέομαι) with the Galatians to become as he is: free from the Mosaic Law (v. 12a; cf. 5:1, a “Do this and live” covenant).

To motivate them to do so, he presents two sets of contrasting attitudes. First, he contrasts the Galatians’ previous attitude toward him with their present attitude (vv. 12b-16).

- I. THE GALATIANS’ PREVIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARD PAUL SIGNIFIED THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL. VV. 12B-14

However,

- II. THE GALATIANS’ PRESENT ATTITUDE TOWARD PAUL SIGNIFIED THEIR POSSIBLE REJECTION OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL. VV. 15-16

Thus, to further motivate the Galatians to live in the freedom of the gospel, Paul contrasts the Judaizers’ self-centered attitude toward the Galatians with his Christ-centered attitude (vv. 17-20).

- III. THE JUDAIZER’S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GALATIANS SIGNIFIED THEIR ZEAL TO BE PRAISED AND HONORED. V. 17

In comparison to the Judaizers,

**LESSON:**

- IV. PAUL’S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE GALATIANS SIGNIFIED HIS ZEAL TO PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL IN ORDER TO FORM CHRIST IN HIS HEARERS. VV. 18-20

Whereas the Judaizers sought to form Moses in the Galatians, Paul labored to form Christ in the Galatians. Clearly, the Judaizers’ misdirected, false, proud zeal was condemnable (v. 17). But, in comparison, Paul’s zeal was commendable (v. 18).

- A. PAUL’S COMMENDABLE ZEAL, V. 18

Paul writes, “It is good to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you” (NIV; “It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose” ESV; “it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner” (NASB).

Zeal is a good thing, as long as it is directed in the service of Christ and the gospel. Paul zealously sought out the Galatians when he first came and preached the gospel to them (see Paul’s first missionary journey to Galatia: Antioch in Pisidia, 13:14–52; 14:24; Iconium, 14:1–6, 21–23; Lystra, 14:6, 8–19, 21–23; Derbe, 14:6, 20–21).

Paul’s zeal was pleasing to God and beneficial to the Galatians because it was aimed at the right object. Literally, the Greek reads, “But it is always good to be zealous in good” (“καλὸν δὲ ζηλοῦσθαι ἐν καλῷ πάντοτε...”).

What is the “good” that Paul was zealous for? The “good” in the context is a gospel-centered purpose—Christ formed in the Galatians! Unlike the Judaizers, Paul says that his zeal was commendable because he was zealous to form Christ in them (v. 19). Paul’s zeal was driven by the love of Christ (Gal. 2:20; cf. 2 Cor. 5:14–15) and a deep desire for the Galatians’ to be rightly related to Him.

Such zeal is commendable because it seeks to address man’s greatest need (i.e., his status before the just judgment of God). The fact is every person will ultimately be called into account before God. This truth was central in the teaching of Jesus. For example, in John 5:22, 27, Jesus states, “<sup>22</sup> The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son...<sup>27</sup> He [Father] has given Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”

In Acts 17:30–31, Paul warned, “<sup>30</sup> Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, <sup>31</sup> because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Paul says Christ’s judgment will be a righteous judgment and those who will be judged are the unrighteous—those who did not trust in Christ alone but rather their works under the law. Paul lived with this eschatological view in mind and so he seeks to move the Galatians to repentance.

The Galatians then were faced with a choice. They could follow the Judaizers, who had no interest in them except to bring them into bondage under law for their own self-exaltation. This choice would lead to the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10) and eternal punishment (Gal. 1:8–9).

Or, the Galatians could follow Paul, who zealously sought them out in order to form Christ in them. This choice would lead to justification (2:16), redemption (4:5), adoption (4:1–7), in short all the blessings of the gospel! This is why Paul says his zeal was commendable because he eagerly sought to address their greatest need.

Notice also that Paul says his continuing zeal was appropriate even when he was not present with them, (“...and not only when I am present with you”). In other words, even though he wasn’t present, he was not jealous of the Judaizers. The Judaizer’s zealously desired for the Galatians to make much of them (v. 17). In distinction to the Judaizers, Paul states that he was not seeking to please man (1:10, this is what the Judaizers slanderously reported).

Paul wasn’t interested in building his own following and making a name for himself. In fact, when he discovered that personality factions had formed in Corinth, he was disturbed and exhorted the Corinthians to regain a gospel-centered focus (1 Cor. 1:10-17).

When one examine the life and ministry of Paul one thing is clear: *Christ is central*. Paul was zealous to protect the Galatians’ spiritual wellbeing before God by giving them Christ! In comparison to the Judaizers— who desired to be made much of— Paul says he desired to make much of Christ, “...may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (6:14). The object of Paul’s zeal was the substitutionary death of Christ!

In 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, Paul spoke in a similar fashion to the Corinthians concerning this godly zeal/jealousy. He writes

<sup>2</sup> For I am jealous (ζήλω, zealous) for you with a godly jealousy (θεοῦ ζήλω, godly zeal); for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. <sup>3</sup> But I am afraid (φοβοῦμαι, cf., Gal. 4:11) that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

Whether Paul was present or absent, his only desire was to see Christ formed in his hearers (v. 19).

Let me summarize what Paul is saying to the Galatians,

Look at what the good is that I am zealous for? To what and to whom am I constantly pointing you to? I constantly labor to point you to the gospel and Christ. I am not zealous for my own personal advancement and glorification. If others are zealously seeking you in order to deepen you in the gospel, I rejoice in this. I am not jealous of them. But, if they are exhorting you to live under the law for your status before God, I oppose them. I am exhorting you to live a gospel-centered life. I am not pointing you to follow a list of rules, regulations and rituals in order to earn or maintain favor with God. I am pointing you to Christ alone!

Paul opposed the Judaizers not because they opposed him but because they opposed the truth of the gospel! If misplaced (law-driven) zeal is displeasing to God, then commendable (gospel-driven) zeal is highly pleasing to God.

Making much out of oneself is offensive to God and destructive for the church—God’s people. But, zealously laboring to make much out of Christ and His gospel is glorifying to God and edifying to the church. This is the mark of gospel-driven ministry and a true servant of Christ.

A second mark is found in v. 19.

B. PAUL’S HONORABLE MOTIVE, v. 19

Paul writes, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” The Judaizers’ motive was to be made much of (self-glory/exaltation, v. 17). In distinction, Paul’s motive for ministry was to see Christ formed in people.

What does it mean to have Christ formed in you? To have Christ formed in you is to be fashioned after the image of Christ. Paul says his labor pains will not stop until the Galatians take the shape of Christ! He longs for his spiritual children to be transformed into the image of Christ.

The phrase “in you” (ἐν ὑμῖν) is plural in Greek. Paul is not only speaking of the individual believer’s growth but also of the growth of the Galatians as a church (see Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 290). A Christ-like community, however, is born through the growth of Christ in individuals (cf. F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 212).

Paul desires to see the image of God restored in the Galatians. In the Fall, God’s image/likeness in man was distorted by law-breaking (Gen. 3:11). After the Fall (Gen. 3), no amount of law-keeping can restore God’s image in a man.

By desiring to place the Galatians under the law, the Judaizers only added to the distortion of Christ’s image in the Galatians. Mark this: *Legalism distorts the image of Christ!*

Christ-likeness comes only through the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul writes, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

Paul longed for the day when his labor pains—astonishment, fear, anguish and perplexity—would end. These pains would cease when the Galatians reach maturity in Christ. Christ-likeness is the goal of the Christian life. Note carefully. Gospel-driven ministry has one overriding zealous passion: *to form Christ in a man's soul (Gal. 4:19).*

It was to this end that Paul, in Colossian 1:28-29, says he worked to the point of exhaustion, striving like an athlete to form Christ in every believer, “<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone complete/mature in Christ. <sup>29</sup> For this I labor/toil, struggling/striving with all His energy that He powerfully works within me.”

To be complete or mature is to be like Christ. In Romans 8:29, Paul writes, "...those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son..."

This conformity takes place by means of the gospel not the law! To be sure, gospel-driven ministry is conscientiously committed to not weakening the condemning force of the Law! But, neither does gospel-driven ministry seek to diminish the saving comfort of the gospel.

Like Paul, we must be committed to the priority of proclaiming Christ. "Preaching Christ is the great purpose of the Christian expositor," (see Sinclair Ferguson, "Preaching Christ from the OT," p. 1 from PT Media Paper Number 2, a ministry of The Proclamation Trust).

Paul gives the reason why preaching Christ is the great purpose of the Christian expositor in 2 Cor. 3:18. He writes, "...we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

Just as we begin the Christian life by looking to Christ, so we progress in the Christian life by looking to Christ (in the gospel)! Michael Horton notes, "As we mature in the Christian life, the goal is not to move beyond the gospel but to grow deeper in it" ("Law and Gospel," in *Modern Reformation*, March/April 2011).

Because self-help salvation is our default setting, we need to be regularly preached and taught out of it (see Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity*, p. 245). Preaching calls us out of our self-trust and ourselves and guides us to cling to Christ in faith and serve our neighbors in love (Ibid, p. 245).

Preaching directs us to look at the glory of the Lord. It is this outward gaze that transforms us into Christ's image. Paul says that it is by beholding the glory of the Son of God as revealed in the gospel that we progress from one degree of glory to another—we move closer to being formed into Christ-likeness. The goal of Christ being formed in you is realized as you fix your gaze into the face of Christ as He is revealed to you in the gospel. As you do this, Paul says the Holy Spirit forms Christ in you ("For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" 2 Cor. 3:18b).

The law cannot do this! It is impotent to effect Christ-likeness (Gal. 3:21). The author of Hebrews in 7:18-19 says the "<sup>18</sup> former commandment was set aside because of its weakness and uselessness <sup>19</sup> (for the law made nothing perfect)..."

To be sure, the law continues to direct you but only the gospel gives you life! Only the gospel fully forms Christ in you! Faith comes from the Holy Spirit, who works it in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and then strengthens it by the use of the sacraments (visible gospels). The sacraments are visible signs and seals instituted by Christ so that by their use He might more fully declare and seal (guarantee) to us the promises of the gospel (see Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 65-66).

This is how Christ is formed in us and we progress in the Christian life. Christ-likeness was Paul's motive and the gospel was his means.

**REFLECTION:**

As we reflect on Paul's words to the Galatians, I want to point out three important lessons for us to consider. We will consider the first to begin with.

1. THE MARK OF A TRULY AUTHENTIC GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS WHETHER IT LABORS TO SEE CHRIST FORMED IN PEOPLE.

Gospel-driven ministry has one overriding zealous goal/objective/aim/purpose—to form Christ in people. John Calvin writes, “If ministers wish to do anything, let them labour to form Christ, not to form themselves, in their hearers (*Calvin's Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 132*). Such a godly zeal will permeate a church's ministry when the gospel resides at the core of its DNA/culture and mission.

In his famous sermon, “The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God,” Jonathan Edwards asks, “What are distinguishing Scripture evidences of a work of the Spirit of God?”

He answers,

When the operation is such as to raise their esteem of that Jesus who was born of the Virgin and was crucified without the gates of Jerusalem, and seems more to confirm and establish their minds in the truth of what the gospel declares to us of his being the Son of God and the Savior of men, that is a sure sign that it is from the Spirit of God (taken from *Sermons that Shaped America, p. 83*).

Here are some questions a believer ought to ask in determining where to go to church:

Do the actions and activities of the church promote esteem for Jesus?

Is the DNA/culture of the church so permeated with a gospel-centered/driven focus that I am prompted and driven to worship, delight in and obey Christ out of a sense of profound gratitude rather than guilt?

Does the leadership consistently seek to drive the gospel deeper into my heart and mind in order to form Christ in my soul?

Churches have all sorts of aims, goals and ministries, but the “Paramount” essence of true, gospel-driven ministry is Christ formed within a man. In his personal journal, George Whitefield recounts how he came to understand “true religion” by reading Henry Scougal's classic work, *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*. Whitefield writes,

...though I had fasted, watched and prayed, and received the Sacrament so long, yet I never knew what true religion was, till God sent me that excellent treatise by the hands of my never-to-be-forgotten friend. At my first reading it, I wondered what the author meant by saying, ‘That some falsely placed religion in going to church, doing hurt to no one, being constant in the duties of the closet, and now and then reaching out their hands to give alms to their poor neighbors.’ ‘Alas!’ thought I, ‘if this be not true religion, what is?’ God soon showed me; for in reading a few lines further, that ‘true religion was union of the soul with God, and Christ formed within us,’ a ray of Divine light was instantaneously darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature” (*George Whitefield’s Journals*, pp. 46-47).

Paul labored in order to restore Christ’s image in the Galatians. This aim, writes Calvin, “ought to be their (ministers of the gospel-J.F.) employment during the whole course of their labour...” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 132).

From this text, Paul shows us that the only way to become like Christ is to live a gospel-driven rather than law-driven life. Paul zealously desired to make much of the gospel in order to see Christ formed in the lives of people. Phillip Ryken observes, “This ought to be the goal of every pastor: not the favor of men, but the formation of Christ” (*Galatians*, p. 177).

The mark of a gospel-driven ministry is that it labors to see every heart take hold of Christ—to cling to Him and to nothing else. This is the true ministry of the Word.

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