

**BECOME AS I AM!**  
PART 7

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:12-20

May 15, 2011

**INTRODUCTION/REVIEW:**

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

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

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

By exposing their true motive, Paul shows the Galatians that the Judaizers are their true enemies (v. 16).

- 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 them.

- 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).

The “good” Paul was zealous for was a gospel-centered purpose—Christ formed in the Galatians! His 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 Christ as He now was.

## B. PAUL’S HONORABLE MOTIVE, v. 19

Paul writes, “My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.” Last time we examined the contrast between the Judaizers’ motive to be made much of (self-glory/exaltation, v. 17) and Paul’s motive to see Christ formed in the Galatians. I want to revisit vv. 19-20 this morning and point out several more insights from these verses. Paul’s language in vv. 19-20 is startling, emotional, personal and reproving.

### LESSON:

#### 1. STARTLING

Notice in v. 19 how Paul likens himself as the Galatians mother who is in the anguish of childbirth (a man in labor who is about to give birth! But, notice also how his language immediately shifts to speaking of Christ as the one who is to be born in the Galatians and now the Galatians are the mother! Timothy George notes,

This is a striking metaphor without parallel in any other Pauline writing... Only here in Galatians does he appear in the role of a mother, a mother who willingly undergoes the ordeal of pregnancy and delivery all over again in order to secure the well-being of her children. This image bears witness to the deep personal anguish Paul was experiencing over the defection of his spiritual offspring in Galatia (*Galatians*, p. 329).

Thus, Paul’s startling mixing of metaphors was intended to awaken the Galatians out of their “spellbound” stupor (3:1).

#### 2. EMOTIONAL

Paul’s language is deeply emotional. He writes, “<sup>19</sup> my children, for whom I am again in the *anguish* of childbirth... <sup>20</sup> I am *perplexed* about you” (emphasis mine).

What exactly are the “labor pains/anguish” that Paul experienced? Part of his anguish (labor pains) involved physical suffering. Thomas Schreiner observes, “When Paul speaks of his labor pains, he has in mind his suffering as an apostle, for his apostolic sufferings are a corollary to the gospel and the means by which the gospel became a reality among the Galatians” (*Galatians*, p. 289). Paul uses the word “again” (πάλιν) to recall the physical suffering he endured when he first brought the gospel to the Galatians (e.g., his stoning in Lystra, Acts 14:19).

In addition to his physical suffering, was his emotional suffering. The Galatians possible converting back to paganism (4:9) produced in him great emotional trouble. For example,

in 1:6 he expresses astonishment, “I am astonished,” (θαυμάζω, “to be extraordinarily disturbed by something”). In 4:11, he expresses fear, “I am afraid,” (φοβέω, “to be in an apprehensive state”). In 4:19, he expresses anguish, “I am suffering birth pains,” (ὠδίνω, “to suffer birth pains = suffer greatly”). In 4:20, he expresses perplexity, “I am perplexed,” (ἀποροῦμαι, “to be in a confused state of mind, be at a loss, be in doubt, be uncertain”).

In 2 Corinthians 11:28, Paul makes a similar statement when he writes, “Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” Pastors carry a unique burden for the health and welfare of the church. Moreover, it is a sad but true fact, there are times in ministry when after saying and doing all one knows to say and do, some people just remain out of reach or worse turn against you. Paul was experiencing all of these deep emotional disturbances over the state of the Galatians’ status before God.

Paul says that his anguish will remain “until Christ is formed in you.” 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 Thomas 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).

It is clear from the New Testament that the primary means by which the church grew was through the preaching of the gospel (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; Rom. 10:17). Paul desires to see the image of God restored in the Galatians. In the Fall (Gen. 3) God’s image/likeness in man was distorted by law-breaking. After the Fall no amount of law-keeping can restore God’s image in a man. The Judaizers only added to the distortion of Christ’s image in the Galatians by seeking to place them under the law. Mark this: Legalism distorts the image of Christ! The Gospel forms the image of Christ.

Christ-likeness is the goal of the Christian life. Paul longed for the day when his labor pains—astonishment, fear, anguish and perplexity—would end. His anguish would cease when the Galatians reached maturity in Christ.

### 3. PERSONAL

Rather than thinking of the Galatians as trophies of self-glory, he calls them “My children.” This is a term of personal endearment. Paul demonstrated compassion and loving concern for his spiritual children. For example, in 1 Corinthians 4:15 Paul writes to the Corinthian believers, “...I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” In 1 Thessalonians 2:7, he writes to the Thessalonian believers, “...we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.”

However, at the same time his description of the Galatians as “my children” serves as a mild reproof. Just as any caring, responsible parent knows, there are times children need personal compassion and there are times when an erring child needs correction and reproof.

#### 4. REPROVING

The Galatians were very dear to Paul but they were acting like spiritual infants who refused to develop. In 4:1-7, Paul has already exhorted the Galatians to move beyond their infantile ways and lay hold of the full inheritance that was theirs as adopted sons through faith in Christ alone.

John Calvin commenting on the descriptive title, “my children” writes, “...the diminutive, little children, is an expression, not of contempt, but of endearment, though, at the same time, it suggests the tender years of those who ought now to have arrived at full age (Heb. 5:12)” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, pp. 131-132*).

Paul’s reproof of their spiritual infancy highlights a critical point we need to grasp: *Spiritual infancy in the things of the gospel is never set forth in the NT as that which is commendable or desirable. Rather, spiritual infancy is shown to be negative and dangerous (cf. Eph. 4:13-16; Gal. 4:1-6; 1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 5:11-6:3).*

Spiritual infancy in the things of the gospel always elicits warning, reproof and correction because it is the source of sin, strife and division in the church (cf. Gal. 5:15; 6:1; Eph. 4:13-16). Moreover, spiritual infancy is used here in Galatians 4:19 to refer to believers on the verge of apostasy! As we have repeatedly emphasized, Paul fears that he may have labored over the Galatians in vain (4:11).

It is abnormal and unnatural for a baby to refuse to want to be born and develop! Because of the Galatians’ desire to live under the law (4:9), he is fearful that they may never have been truly converted. Genuine conversion is not a one-time event that occurs in the past. All who are genuinely converted demonstrate their new life in Christ by persevering and moving forward in faith. All who have truly come to know God (or rather be known by God) have a desire to grow deeper in their knowledge of Him.

Thus, Paul is admonishing the Galatians to move beyond their infantile ways. His admonishment reveals that those who are characterized by spiritual infancy in the things of the gospel must be urgently warned against the danger of apostasy.

The same reproof and warning is found in Hebrews. In Hebrews 6:12, the author characterizes spiritual infancy as spiritual sluggishness or laziness ( $\nu\omega\theta\rho\acute{o}\varsigma$ ). In Hebrews, this term characterizes a person’s heart that is unreceptive to grow in the deeper implications of the gospel (cf. O’Brien, *Hebrews*, p. 233).

Moreover, like Paul in Galatians, the author of Hebrews links spiritual infancy to the path of apostasy. Both Paul and the author of Hebrews are seeking to motivate their hearers to move on to maturity in the things of the gospel (6:1-3).

In 6:1ff, the author of Hebrews is not suggesting that the believers leave behind the gospel for some kind of “deeper/higher life” teaching. Rather, his exhortation is to them is to progress in the Christian life by increasing in their understanding of the gospel. The

solid food (5:14) is the development and increasing understanding of themes such as repentance, faith, and resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment.

In 5:13-14, the author of Hebrews characterizes spiritual infants as those who are “unskilled in the word of righteousness.” To be “unskilled in the word of righteousness” signifies ignorance of Christ as our righteousness (cf. 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:21) as opposed to self/works-righteousness (Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9).

The whole structure of the Christian life is built on the foundation of justification by grace through faith alone. This fundamental truth can never be emphasized too much. It is precisely this foundation that the Galatians were in danger of abandoning rather than growing deeper in!

One of the most serious errors that constantly resurface is the tendency to live the Christian life on any other basis than the gospel. The reason is because self-righteousness in contrast to Christ’s righteousness is so alluring! Self-righteousness is our natural, default tendency.

Learning to live a gospel-driven life is comparable to learning to drive in Ireland! While in Ireland on a mission trip, learning to drive on the right side of the car on the left side of the road was quite unnatural. Everything inside of me wanted to get in the left side and drive on the right side of the road. I had to intentionally retrain my mind to think in a totally different way to keep from having a wreck! The same is true when it comes to learning how to live a gospel-driven versus a law-driven life. Our natural tendency is to drift toward the law. This is why we have to intentionally seek to be self-consciously gospel-centered or else we could be headed for a disastrous wreck!

Paul addresses this destructive error in 3:3, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” In other words, the Christian life progresses and finishes exactly the way it starts. The way *INTO* the Christian life is also the way *ON* in the Christian life.

Justification is a doctrine for the whole Christian life from beginning to end. “Sancification is...our justification in action” (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching The Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 237). New life in Christ begins with faith, continues by faith, and will be completed through faith.

*Simply put, the gospel is for Christians just as much as it is for non-Christians.*

Believers never move beyond their of the gospel because they never move beyond their need of Christ! Nothing that we “do”—even as believers—endears us to God. We are never to look to our performance as the basis for entering into or maintaining favor with God.

For example, for the struggling Christian who knows they have blown it, the answer is not:

“Surrender more!” or, “What are you holding back from the Lord?” or, “Come forward and rededicate your life.” These responses are nothing more than well-intentioned failure. Everyone knows what it is like to make a resolution—“This time I am really going to be committed. I am committed to sticking with my Bible reading. I am going to wake up early and pray every day for an hour”—only to find yourself breaking it and falling back into familiar patterns that grieve your heart (cf. Rom. 7!).

The gospel-driven answer is quite different. For the struggling Christian, the gospel-driven answer is: Hurry back to the second use of the law (3:24) and flee to Christ where justification/sanctification is truly, completely, and perfectly located. Only in this way will you ever sense the desire and freedom to obey (thus fulfilling the third use of the law, Gal. 5:13-6:10).

A Christian then is one who always looks to Christ—who is freely given to us in the gospel—and never to the law (i.e., performance) as the basis for his/her righteousness before God.

Sinclair Ferguson writes, “...sanctification means this: in relationship both to sin and to God, the determining factor of my existence is no longer my past. It is Christ’s past” (*Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, p. 57). Thus, like Paul in Gal. 2:20 we confess, “...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith with reference to the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

The gospel is the means of growth for the church corporately and individually. This is why the Scriptures do not call us to have a minimalist understanding of the gospel (i.e., only applying to initial conversion). The gospel is not simply a message that people need to hear to “get in” (converted) so they can go to heaven.

Rather, the gospel is the “power of God for salvation” (cf. Rom. 1:16, i.e., every aspect of the Christian’s salvation, justification, sanctification, glorification, etc...). Paul is teaching us here that the path of Christian maturity is not to move beyond the gospel but to grow deeper in it. The reason is because the gospel is the means by which Christ is formed in you! We are called to increase in our understanding of the gospel and in response work out its implications for our lives. In 2 Peter 3:18a, Peter exhorts, “...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...”

The point is this: Spiritual infancy is dangerous! A reluctance or indifference to grow deeper in the gospel and to press forward in working out the deeper implications of the gospel in one’s life is disastrous! Spiritual infants know have minimal knowledge and little sense of:

- the resurrection and its role in one’s daily life (1:1);
- being justified (2:16);

- knowing the Son of God as the One who loves me and gave Himself for me (2:20);
- being redeemed from the curse of the law, and its condemning power (Gal. 3:13);
- being released from the debt of the law, which requires perfect obedience as the condition of life—"Do this and you shall live" (Gal. 3:10, 21; 3:25);
- the unfolding of salvation history—the priority of the Abrahamic covenant and the temporary nature of the Mosaic covenant (3:15-4:11)
- the highest privilege of the gospel—your adoption as a son of God (Gal. 3:26-4:7);
- the love of the Father in originating your redemption and adoption (4:4-5; cf. 1:4);
- the necessity of Jesus taking on our human nature (Incarnation) and living under the law for you (4:4); ("If we would see what God intends for our humanity, it is most clearly revealed in Jesus Christ" (Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 116). Justification, imputation of righteousness, substitutionary atonement, redemption and adoption were impossible without an incarnation.)
- and the awareness of being known by God (4:9)—visited by Him in mercy, to be received as a son and not treated as a slave, to be the object of God's love and affection before we were ever born!

The point is this: *the greater you understand and sense gospel blessings such as these, the more Christ will be formed in you.*

This is where the sacraments come to play such an important role in the Christian's growth in sanctification. For example, the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ so that by its frequent use the Holy Spirit might more fully declare and seal (guarantee) to us the promises of the gospel (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 65-66). 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). A gospel-driven Christian recognizes the benefits of regularly celebrating the Lord's Supper—which is a visible proclamation of the gospel.

The preaching of the gospel and the sacraments are the ongoing means through which disciples are made—Christ formed in you—over the course of a lifetime. In fact, these means are essential to the very ministry, mission and existence of the church. They are the means by which the Holy Spirit gives, nurtures and strengthens faith and thereby forms Christ in us.

Preaching, baptism and the Lord's Supper are means of grace—"that is, God's act of raising us from spiritual death by the word of the gospel and ratifying publicly His covenant pledge through baptism and the Supper..." (Michael Horton, *The Gospel Commission*, p. 165). Rather than being understood as our acts of commitment, the sacraments are to be understood primarily as God's gracious actions toward us! The sacraments are not signs of a "Do this and live covenant" (Mosaic Covenant). The sacraments are signs of a "Live, now do this covenant" (New Covenant/gospel). Christ-likeness is our goal and the gospel heard with our ears (preaching) and ratified before our eyes (sacraments) are the means by which Christ and all His saving benefits are given to us.

### C. PAUL'S PERPLEXED DESIRE, v. 20

Paul concludes this section of his letter in v. 20 with a personal expression of his desire to be with the Galatians in person, "I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you." As good as a letter may be, it can never take the place for one's personal presence.

Martin Luther writes

It is commonly said that a letter is a dead messenger, because it cannot give any more than it has. No letter is written so carefully that nothing is lacking in it. Circumstances vary; so do the elements of time, place, person, custom, and attitude, none of which a letter can express. Therefore, it affects the reader in various ways; sometimes it makes him sad and sometimes happy, depending on how the reader feels. But the living voice, on the other hand, is able to interpret, soften, and correct whatever has been said in a rather harsh or intemperate way. Therefore Paul wishes that he could be present, so that he could modify and change his tone as he saw that the circumstances and attitudes required... a living voice is a queen in comparison with a letter; for it can add and subtract, and it can adjust itself to all the forms and qualities of attitude, time, place, and person. In other words, I would like to convert you by letter, that is, call you back from the Law to faith in Christ. But I am afraid that I shall not accomplish this with a dead letter. If I were present with you, however, I could change my tone, scolding the stubborn and soothing the weak, as the circumstances of each require" (*Luther's Works, vol. 26, pp. 431-432*).

Since he is currently absent Paul had to resort to writing (Paul was absent perhaps because it was the eve of the Jerusalem Council, see Timothy George, *Galatians*, p. 331; F.F. Bruce, however, observes that the information is too insufficient to know why, *Galatians*, p. 213).

Whatever may have been the reason for Paul's absence, he writes to them and states, "I am perplexed about you" (v. 20b). The word "perplexed" (ἀποροῦμαι) means "to be in a confused state of mind, be at a loss, be in doubt, be uncertain" (BDAG). Paul was at a loss for words because of the Galatians' desire for slavery over sonship (4:9, 21).

He wonders why the Galatians would desire to be under the bondage of the law (“Do this and live”) rather than under the freedom of the gospel (“Live, now do this”)? Paul is like perplexed parents who have done everything they know to do for their wayward child. He is like perplexed parents that have sought for advice and answers but to no avail and now do not know what else to do (see *Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 133*).

As previously stated, it is a sad but true fact, there are times in ministry when after saying and doing all one knows to say and do, some people just remain out of reach or worse turn against you.

### **REFLECTION:**

As we reflect on Paul’s words to the Galatians in this section, I want to point out three important lessons for us to consider.

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

We examined this point last time (see *Become As I Am!*, Part 6).

2. THE MARK OF A TRULY AUTHENTIC GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS THE IT REBUKES AND COMFORTS.

Paul gives us an example of how a pastor is to relate to those who are struggling in the Christian life. On one hand, he uses quite severe language and offers sharp rebuke (Gal. 1:6, 8-9; 3:1). Yet, he also expresses love, deep affection and compassion (4:19-20). Paul grants the Galatians the judgment of charity (e.g., he addresses them as brother, 1:2, 11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18) while at the same expressing fear over their contradictory profession (4:11).

Paul’s love and care for the Galatians as their spiritual parent is made clear in vv. 19-20. He likens himself to being their mother as one who brought them forth into life (cf. 1 Thess. 2:7). His affectionate address reveals that he regards the Galatians as his spiritual children in the gospel. But, as we also learned, his addressing them as “my children” indicates a mild rebuke of their infantile ways. Thus, there are times in ministry when a pastor must sharply rebuke and at other times express love and compassion. Martin Luther writes,

A teacher punishes his pupil, not to do harm but to do him good...a father punishes his son, not to ruin him but to improve him...A physician gives a sick man a very bitter medicine, not because he wants to harm the sick man, but because he wants to help him this way...Truly apostolic feelings are being described here. He does not miss anything; he scolds the Galatians, beseeches them, soothes them, commends their faith with wonderful words, and as a genuine orator presents his case with great care and faith- all in order to them back to the truth of the Gospel and to win them away from the false apostles. His words are

not cold; they are ardent and hot. Therefore they should be carefully considered” (*Luther’s Works, vol. 26, pp. 416, 432*).

Paul’s love wasn’t guilty of sentimentality because it was also accompanied by rebuke and exhortation to grow. At the same time, his rebuke wasn’t guilty of excessive harshness but was accompanied by a genuine concern for the Galatians’ spiritual wellbeing. Tom Schreiner writes,

Such affection and love does not mean that there is not church discipline. We discipline those who refuse to follow the Lord and turn their backs on him. But we give people time to repent and to turn to the Lord. We exhort them so that Christ will be formed in them. Do you have that kind of ministry to others? Are there any whom you are discipling or praying for and anguishing over? Let us rest in the gospel. Let us look to Christ to change them. Let us look to the broken body and the shed blood as their hope and ours” (*Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, p. 291*).

3. THE MARK OF A TRULY AUTHENTIC GOSPEL-DRIVEN MINISTRY IS THAT IT MAKES CLEAR THAT CHRIST IS THE OBJECT OF SAVING FAITH.

Many “religious” people are zealous but wrong in their beliefs. In Romans 10:2-4, Paul writes, “<sup>2</sup> For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. <sup>3</sup> For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. <sup>4</sup> For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Paul has thoroughly demonstrated in this letter that Christ is either all or nothing. There is no middle ground when it comes to a right standing with God, as Paul writes in 2:21, “...if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” A man’s obedience can never be the basis of a saving relationship with God (Gal. 3:10).

The Judaizers labored to form Moses in the Galatians so that their faith rested not in Christ alone but on the works of the Law. Their “conditional gospel” made an uncertain sound that troubled the souls of the Galatians (1:6-7). A distorted gospel always results in a troubled soul (1:7). But, a clear gospel gives relief and comfort to a sin-wearied soul (Matt. 11:28-29). Consequently, Paul labored to make the gospel crystal clear in order to form Christ in the Galatians so that their faith rested in Him alone!

Graeme Goldsworthy writes, “Any sermon...that aims to apply the biblical text to the congregation and does so without making it crystal clear that it is in Christ alone and through Christ alone that the application is realized, is not a Christian sermon. It is at best an exercise in wishful and pietistic thinking. It is at worst demonic in its Christ-denying legalism” (*Preaching the Whole Bible As Christian Scripture, p. 124*).

The gospel announces that a person is declared to be righteous before God only through faith in Christ alone (2:16) and the pastor labors to make this crystal clear. Such is the mark of a genuine gospel-driven ministry.

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