

# UNTIL CHRIST BE FORMED IN YOU!

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*Galatians 4:8-20*

## Introduction:

We have come to a rather interesting portion of this letter to the Galatians. Did you notice the change in Paul's tone in this passage? Is this the same Paul who said just a chapter earlier, "You foolish Galatians...?"

After spending a considerable amount of time clearly and forcefully defending the authority of his apostleship and the authenticity of his message, Paul expressed his utter dismay at the foolishness and the irrationality of these Galatian believers to be taken in by the false teaching of the Judaizers.

The Judaizers were Jewish men who came from Jerusalem, professing to be Christians, and claiming to represent the Jerusalem apostles. But their message was that, while you may have become a follower of Jesus Christ by faith, if you really want to be a complete Christian you need to observe the rules and the requirements of the Law. Specifically, they were saying, you need to be circumcised. That was the sign that are really a part of God's people.

Paul became very agitated at the thought that the Gentile believers in the Galatian churches were being drawn into such heresy. He pointed out to them that even as Jews by birth, he and his Jewish co-workers had learned that they could not satisfy God by keeping the Law. If they as Jews were saved by faith alone, why would they expect Gentiles to adopt the keeping of the Law as a means of gaining acceptance by God?

In chapter 3, he called them out for their foolishness. "Are you so foolish...?" (v. 3) He goes on to some carefully crafted arguments to show the foolishness of turning to the Law as a means of gaining righteousness. The key is in v. 10 – the Law cannot save, it can only bring a curse, because keeping the Law is impossible.

He then proceeded to show them that the Law had a temporary purpose which was completely and entirely fulfilled in Jesus Christ. And

in Christ, through faith in Christ we are transferred from the slavery to sin, which the Law produces, to full sonship. As believers in Jesus, we are children of God with the full rights and privileges of sons – read v. 7.

So now we come to today's text. This is a very personal part of Paul's letter. For a few moments he steps back from his thundering message to speak on a more personal note. In these verses, Paul opens up his heart and bares his soul as he expresses his anguish over what is happening to them. There are a number of important points to consider in Paul's distressed expression of love for these wayward believers.

## Do you want to go back from sonship to slavery?

In v. 8 Paul again describes what their life was before they knew God – read it. Remember that these were Gentiles. They came from a pagan background. They were not like the Jewish people who were influenced by the Law of God and centuries of spiritual traditions and godly influence. We can only imagine the spiritual darkness in their previous lives. They were slaves of sin, enslaved to demonic spirits and practices. They were under the dominion of Satan. Their very nature was controlled all that was evil and Satanic.

Paul says that is what you once knew. You were enslaved to the world. But now things are different. You've come to know God. Or more accurately, God knows you – read v. 9a. Can you imagine what it was like for them? If you can't just look at your own life. What was it like to move from a life of emptiness, without God or the knowledge of God, to having a personal relationship with God?

Discuss knowing God and being known by God...

Now, Paul says, this is what you were—slaves to sin and everything that is not God. This is what you have become—a child of God, known and loved by God. Why would you want to go back? *Read vv. 9b, 10.* How can you turn back to the things of this world and the rules and regulations that would enslave you again?

At this point I really begin to hear the anguish in Paul's heart as he pours out his words onto the paper. *Read v. 11.* Paul's greatest fear is that all of his effort in bringing them the gospel might have been in vain.

His concern seems to be that perhaps they didn't really understand the truth in the first place. It's like he is saying, "What went wrong? Was your profession of faith in Jesus only a profession? Was it not real? Did the seed of the Word of God never really take root in your heart in order to grow and produce fruit?"

Remember Jesus' parable about the sower and the seed? (Mark 4) *Elaborate briefly.* Now Paul is saying, "Is that what happened? Was my work spreading the seed wasted? Was this just a lot of excitement over nothing? A flash in the pan?"

This is Paul's concern—that his beloved children's profession might be only that—a profession with no substance.

## A personal and affectionate relationship

In vv. 12-16 Paul reminds these Galatians of the relationship that developed between them back when he first came to them. And he urges them to follow his example of living the Christian life by faith without being in bondage to the Law.

*Read v. 12* – I have become like you are – in other words, living like a Gentile, not bound in slavery to the Law. So, you become like I am – live in freedom, the freedom to which you have been called in Christ.

Paul then begins to plead his case on the basis of their relationship. He had a great affection for them and he knew that they loved him for having brought the message of the gospel to them.

In vv. 13-15 Paul talks about a very personal matter—a physical ailment that seems to have had some impact on why he had been involved with these people in the first place. *Read these verses.*

We don't know what this ailment was, or how it affected him. Based on his comment about their willingness to take out an eye and give it to him, the problem may well have been an issue with his eyes. There are many questions we don't have the answers to:

- Was this related to him being stoned and left for dead in Lystra?
- Is this the "thorn in the flesh" he speaks about in 2 Cor. 12?
- How did all of this affect his ministry to the people of Galatia?

What we do know is that he felt a special bond with these Galatian Christians, and he is now concerned that the bold dressing-down that he has just given them over their sliding back from grace into works might affect that relationship. Look at what he says in v. 16 – *read it.*

You know, sometimes the truth hurts. But there are times when we need to be confronted with things that hurt. And sometimes, when people we genuinely love and care about are caught in something that is wrong, it is necessary to speak the truth in love, in order to bring them back to what is right.

There is one more part to this personal interjection by Paul that we need to look at. He wants them to understand the difference between his concern for them and the concern of these Judaistic teachers who are troubling them.

## Looking for Praise

*Read v. 17. They* – the Judaizers. Paul is calling into question the motives of these false teachers. He says that they are courting you for all the wrong reasons. Their motives are not right. They are flattering you but only because they are looking for flattery in return.

***They want to shut you out...*** The ESV Study Bible suggests: They want to form an exclusive club of people who observe Jewish ceremonial laws, keeping out any who will not give in to their demands. They want to keep you out of their exclusive society, so that you will come crawling back, fawning over them. They are looking for self-glorification.

It is all about them. If you do concede to their demands, you are nothing more than another notch on their belt. *Elaborate...*

Paul insists that his motives are much different. He had a genuine love and affection for the people God had entrusted to him. *Read vv. 18-19.* Paul sees these people as "my little children..." an endearing term used frequently by the Apostle John. This is the only place Paul uses this term. It is interesting that, after speaking so harshly to the Galatians, yet he wants them to know how much he cares for them and how dear they are to him.

His ultimate goal for them is that Christ be formed in them.

What does it mean that “Christ be formed in you.” This could be a whole message, which we do not have time for, but let me just say that it is really about Christlikeness. Paul’s desire for all of his spiritual children was that they would grow to maturity and become more and more like Christ. His personal mission statement expresses that desire – Colossians 1:28-29.

He speaks of this in his own life - “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.” (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

Paul’s anguish over what is happening in these churches is seen again in his statement in verse 20 – *read it and discuss briefly.*

## Conclusion

Well, again we come to the question of how to apply this to our own lives. I would suggest a couple of things:

1. There is the ongoing focus of keeping our own priorities straight in the area of faith and works. There is the urgency of keeping our relationship with God focused on his grace and not on our attempts to do something to attain his favor.
2. Let us never lose the personal aspect of our relationships with people, particularly those God has brought into our lives as objects of our ministry. Paul was not some musty theologian writing from an ivory tower. He felt a personal kinship with those whom he had served. They were not just another number on the records of new converts. They were people he loved and cared about, and was willing to risk their resentment in order to straighten out some problems.

I have been personally challenged by this passage this week. It is easy to lose track of those whom God has entrusted to me. I must not allow that to happen.

So let me close with one more challenge. Are you becoming more Christlike each day? It is my desire and prayer to see each one of you, along with me, keep growing until Christ be formed in you!