

“Until Christ Be Formed In You”

Introduction. Up until Galatians 4:12, Paul’s approach in the book has been confrontational and impersonal. He has been writing like a scholar or debater, marshaling every possible argument and illustration to get his message across. But the apostle’s approach changes dramatically in 4:12. In fact, vs. 12-20 are the strongest words of affection Paul uses in any of his letters. He does not so much preach or teach as simply pour out his heart in personal exhortation.

The apostle’s spirit here reminds us that there must be a gentle side to every faithful servant (2 Timothy 2:24). No matter how serious the doctrine he may have to defend or how corrupting the immorality he may have to expose, he dare not lose his sensitivity and compassion.

In the course of his intimate outpouring to the Galatians in 4:12-20, Paul first appeals to them, then fondly remembers their loving acceptance of him, warns them about the ulterior motive of the Judaizers and finally tells them of his desire to be with them again in person.

I. ***His Appeal To Them***

- A. In vs. 12, Paul makes a rather abrupt change of emphasis, reminding the Galatians of how rich and deep their relationship with him had once been. For now, Paul presents no more arguments but rather gives a heartfelt exhortation.
 1. Paul’s appeal to his brethren was for them to live as he did. They knew that Paul had abandoned his former subservience not only to the rabbinic traditions but to the Law of Moses itself (cf. Acts 21:21).
 - a) When he came to Christ he had torn away every shred of legalism, in which he had been wrapped up more tightly than perhaps any other Jew (Philippians 3:4-6).
 - b) But now Paul never thought of himself as anything but a sinner redeemed by Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28).
 2. He wanted them to become as he was, free from trying to live by the Law’s outward symbols (Galatians 2:19). So he implored them to resist going back to the Law as the path of true sanctification.
- B. When Paul went to the Galatians, he did not stand on any special dignity or insist that the Galatians first come to him by becoming Jews. He became like them, in order to win them to Christ (1 Corinthians 9:20-22). Many of those Christians, like Paul himself, had paid a dear price when they turned from Judaism to Christ. Yet now they were being intimidated by the Judaizers into returning to their former bondage under the Law.

II. ***His Remembrance Of Them***

- A. They not only had done him no wrong but had openly and lovingly received him while he was in extremely adverse personal circumstances.
 - 1. When Paul first went to Galatia, many Jews turned against him when they realized his message was as much for Gentiles as Jews (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:19).
 - 2. But God used him in the salvation of many converts there, both Jews and Gentiles (Acts 13:43-14:1), and those who accepted his message also accepted him, despite a serious physical affliction he had at the time.
- B. On his first missionary journey Paul apparently either became seriously ill while in Galatia or else went there to recuperate. While many attempts have been made to identify the precise nature of Paul's illness, the only thing we can say with certainty is that some form of unpleasant sickness lay behind Paul's first visit to the Galatians and that, though they could have despised him because of it, they did not but, instead received him favorably.
- C. In spite of their initial perspective toward Paul, their opinion of him had changed. The "blessedness" (implying a feeling of joy, fulfillment and contentedness) they experienced as a result of his preaching had vanished, and they were now apparently regarding him as their enemy. Why had Paul become their enemy?
 - 1. Paul told them that the doctrines they had embraced were wrong. He furthermore condemned the character of those who led the Galatians astray.
 - 2. When people love the darkness, their deeds will be evil (John 3:19-21). Unfortunately, alienation is often the lot for those who are faithful in reproofing sin.

III. ***His Warning To Them***

- A. Paul again warns the Galatians about their real enemies, the Judaizers (cf. 1:7, 9; 2:4). The term translated "affect" carries the idea of taking a serious interest in someone and was often used of a man courting a woman.
 - 1. Most cults show keen interest and even affection toward prospective members, promising them great fulfillment and happiness to gain them as their followers.
 - 2. In a similar way, the nature of spiritual enslavement offered by the Judaizers was hidden. They had no interest in the Galatians beyond entrapping them (Matthew 23:15).
 - 3. The attitude of Paul was guileless and in marked contrast to that of those who had been attempting to woo the Galatians into legalism.
- B. Vs. 17 contains an interesting throwback to a previous verse. When

Paul says that the Judaizers "would exclude you," he is probably thinking of the function of the Law in "locking" people up under sin (3:23).

1. The locking up was the same action, but the purposes were different. The Law served a function in locking people up as sinners so that they might find salvation in Christ.
 2. The legalizers, however, were trying to lock the Galatians up under Law so that they might be separated from Christ and from Paul and serve their teachers.
 3. They must take note, for if that happens, the roles will be reversed and the Galatians will show ardent attachment, once reserved for Paul, to the false teachers.
- C. Paul had been zealous with a godly jealousy for the Galatians as he worked among them, and he encourages them to be zealous in regard to the gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:2).
1. Zeal in the service of Christ is a fine characteristic. In the case of the legalizers, however, this zeal was for their own glorification, and it was alienating the Galatians from both Paul and Christ.
 2. Paul encourages them to show the same zeal for the cause of Christ while he is away from them as they did when he was there in person.

IV. ***His Desire For Them***

- A. He had not come to them in order to build up his own personal following, as the false teachers had. He had come to help them -- to see that they were born again and to labor for them until Christ himself should be formed in them.
1. Paul was not arguing like a lawyer before a skeptical jury but pleading like a parent to a wayward child. He pictures himself as a mother who went through the pains of childbirth when they were converted to Christ; he is now in labor again as the result of their apparent defection.
 2. He wants them to know that his present concern matches his fervor; indeed, neither has diminished because of the Galatians' listening to false teachers.
 3. "Children" was a diminutive that was used figuratively as a term of special affection. The Galatians were extremely dear to Paul and his compassion was always evident (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8).
- B. With the Galatians, however, after having spiritually nursed them in their new life in Christ, he came to "travail in birth again" with them. However abnormal and tragic their spiritual condition, Paul would not forsake them until Christ was formed in them.
1. The verb "formed" means an essential form rather than an outward shape, and hence refers to Christlike character (Colossians 2:6;

Romans 13:14; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

2. Everything false and ungodly blurs and distorts the image of Christ which is supposed to dwell in our heart by faith (Ephesians 3:17). He must reign as the "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16).
- C. Paul's desire to deal more directly with these issues would require him to be present with the Galatians.
1. He hardly knew what more to say or how to say it, because he was in "doubt" about them. The verb "doubt" literally means to be at one's wits' end.
 2. He could not understand how they could have been taught the gospel so well, believed it so genuinely and then appeared to have forsaken it so quickly.

Conclusion. Every Christian experiences times when he comes to an impasse and finds his own resources are completely exhausted. After saying and doing everything he knows to say and do, those he is trying to help -- Christians and non-Christians -- remain completely out of reach and even turn against him.

The church needs people who, in listening to their preacher, listen for the gospel of Christ, and preachers who, in laboring among the people, look for and try to encourage the development of the image of Christ. Let's use this new year to be resolved to put away error and apathy and work until Christ is formed in us.