

Galatians 4:12-20

Fears for the Church, Part 2

How should a pastor and the church he serves treat one another? In Ephesians 5:19-21 the apostle Paul instructs all of us to encourage one another with the Word of God and to submit to one another in the fear of God. All of us are to be humble and submissive to one another as we find ways to encourage each other. Although we all have our unique calling and gifts from God¹ no believer is inherently superior to any other.

We are all equal before God and equally loved. And so in 1 Peter 5:1-4 Peter tells leaders to serve as an under-shepherd of Jesus Christ; to serve willingly and not to lord it over people. And Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:17, 18, states that people should esteem their preacher to be worthy of double honor.

Here in Galatians there is obviously tension and a strain in the relationship between Paul and the churches of Galatia. The apostle has been arguing that both his ministry and his gospel are from Jesus Christ. He is stunned that these believers have turned away from him to follow false teachers. His words have been biblical, but heated and intense. Paul has called the Galatians bewitched and fools.

But in our present section of Scripture the smoke clears from the battlefield. Paul lowers his voice. And we will see that Paul and the Galatians once enjoyed a deep and strong relationship rooted in the love of God.

Brethren, I urge you to become like me,
for I became like you. You have not
injured me at all.
(Galatians 4:12)

When Paul was in Galatia (you can read about this in Acts 13 and 14) he preached first in the synagogue of the Jews and some of them believed the good news of Jesus Christ. Many more did not and they persecuted Paul. The Gentiles on the other hand welcomed Paul with open hearts and received the gospel with joy. They did nothing to injure Paul at all.

To lead them to the faith Paul became like them. He was willing to live and eat with Gentiles. Paul was free from all the Old Testament laws because of

¹ Romans 12:3-8

Christ. And so out of love he was willing to adapt his life-style to whatever culture he was in. In 1 Corinthians 9 the apostle wrote that to the Jews he became like a Jew to win them to Christ. To the Gentile he became like a Gentile; to those who were weak, he became weak that he might lead people to faith in Christ.

Paul wasn't being a hypocrite. He was mindful of the people he was with and did not want to offend them. He wanted to set a good example so he could preach Christ. So Paul told the Galatians, "I was like you. Now you become like me. Put off the bondage of the Old Testament law and live by faith in Jesus Christ. Let's re-read Galatians 2:20, 21 to see how Paul lived.

I have been crucified with Christ;
it is no longer I who live, but Christ
lives in me; and the *life* which I now
live in the flesh I live by faith in the
Son of God, who loved me and gave
Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the
grace of God; for if righteousness comes
through the law, then Christ died in vain.
(Galatians 2:20, 21)

Paul lived his life motivated by the love of Christ and by his faith in Christ. he was righteous because of the grace of God in Christ. He was free from the law as a child of God. It was great irony to Paul that he, a Jew, lived like a Gentile. But now the Galatians, who were Gentiles, were trying to live like Old Testament Jews to please God. Back in Galatians 4 Paul reminds the believers how much they cared for him and loved the gospel.

You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. ¹⁴ And my² trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.
(Galatians 4:13-15)

When Paul and his companion Barnabas were first in Galatia he stopped in the city of Antioch in Pisidia because he was sick or physically impaired. We

² This should read "your trial."

do not know what Paul's sickness or physical infirmity was, but it was a trial or a test for the Galatians. Whatever Paul had it was bad enough for the Galatians to despise and reject both Paul and his message. The Greek word translated "despise" literally means to spit upon.

But when the Galatians heard Paul preach about Jesus Christ they received him warmly as if he was an angel. In fact they treated Paul with the love and honor and respect they would have shown Jesus Christ! And they were willing to go above and beyond warm hospitality and sacrifice for Paul. They were willing to pluck out their eyes and give them to Paul.

I don't know if Paul's infirmity was in his eyes or if this is a figure of speech for how deeply they were willing to sacrifice for Paul. Paul and the gospel he taught was a blessing to the Galatians. Paul was loved and esteemed worthy of double honor. But that all changed and the apostle wrote to the Galatians as a wounded brother in Christ.

Have I therefore become your
enemy because I tell you the truth?
(Galatians 4:16)

Paul's love for the Galatians had not changed. His gospel had not changed. But the Galatians had changed. Here is why Paul was now their enemy for speaking the truth. There is in every human heart a deep and powerful desire for praise. Actions that make us look good and righteous that others compliment, make us look great and big. Following a law or ritual does that.

The false teachers said, "Christ is OK, you can believe in him. But if you want to be great follow the Jewish rituals and obey the law of Moses." And when the Galatians did this the false teachers heaped praises upon the believers. The false teachers offered the law as a means of being prideful in a morally acceptable way.

What Paul offered was more humble and radical. He taught the truth. No one can keep the law with a perfect heart. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. We are all guilty of sin. Humble yourselves therefore and receive the grace of God. And let Christ's love motivate you to live for him. And let Christ be seen in all you say and do.

False religion always says "Look at me. Look at what I did." The truth says "Look at what God can do in you through Jesus Christ." The Galatians had been so poisoned by the false teachers that even though they once loved Paul they had come to see him as an enemy of righteousness.

They zealously court you, *but* for no good;
yes, they want to exclude you, that you
may be zealous for them.
(Galatians 4:17)

The false teachers were using flattery to gain power over the believers. The apostle declared at the root, the false teachers were motivated by a love for human praise. They too wanted to be admired, to be sought out, to be looked up to. Every Galatian gentile who gets circumcised and follows the Old Testament law was another feather in their war bonnet. But contrast this with the apostle's heart.

But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. ¹⁹ My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,
(Galatians 4:18, 19)

The difference between the false teachers and Paul was that the false teachers wanted the Galatians to make much of them. Paul wanted the Galatians to make much of Jesus Christ. As an apostle and as their pastor he labored and taught and prayed so that Christ would be formed in them. Again let's read about how Paul lived from Galatians 2.

I have been crucified with Christ;
it is no longer I who live, but Christ
lives in me; and the *life* which I now
live in the flesh I live by faith in the
Son of God, who loved me and gave
Himself for me
(Galatians 2:20)

By the power of the Spirit of God in us and by the power of the Word of God in our hearts and minds, we will no longer be conformed to this world, but we will think and feel and hope and serve like Christ. And when we do his joy will be manifested in our lives. We will be living like free children of God, not as slaves to the law.

They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.
¹⁸ But it is good to be zealous in a

good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

¹⁹ My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,

²⁰ I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

(Galatians 4:17-20)

Here is the heart of the matter. Paul poured his heart out to these believers” “My little children...let Christ be formed in you.” How do we do this? How is Christ formed in us? Earlier in Galatians 4:6 we were told that God has placed the Spirit of His Son in our hearts. And Romans 12:2 tells us not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Therefore as we read God's Word our thinking and attitudes change and Christ can then work in us. And we begin to love what he loves and who he loves. And we begin to do what he did and the life of Christ is seen in us. So you can either follow a law and say look how moral I am and what I have made of myself. Or you can say look at what the grace of God in Christ has done for me.

Paul declared, “I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.” What Paul is saying is this: Oh dear Galatians, do you remember when I came to you? I was very sick. I was not a pretty preacher. But you did not despise me; you loved the gospel. And we loved one another. You were growing up in Christ. Don't lose God's grace and power.” The apostle's heart is open and aching and full of fear for the church.

For some of us here we are starting to see the power and beauty of Christ in our hearts. We haven't stopped growing. But some of us have stopped receiving grace. Something has changed. There has been an encroachment of the world into our hearts. There is no joy in the things of God—no joy in church. And so you are looking for something to give you zeal again.

I have good news for you. Let grace fall on you again. Stop your own efforts to achieve joy and pray this prayer: “Dear God, You are the potter and I am the clay. I am not my own. You bought me with the blood of Jesus Christ. Forgive me, revive me. Energize the Spirit of Your Son in me. Let him be formed in me for my good and Your glory, alone. Amen”

