

## Galatians 4:12-20

### "A Pastoral Plea"

Throughout the book of Galatians we've been (time & again) blown away by Paul's brilliance. He's a brilliant theologian, a brilliant thinker, a brilliant apologist/defender of the faith; he's a brilliant debater... His position is always airtight.

& Sometimes when someone is laying out the facts in such a systematic, intellectual, unrelenting fashion we can almost get the impression that they don't have much for feelings. They're just a "lay it on the line" kind of person & the chips will fall where they may... & though Paul was definitely a "no compromise" kind of guy (as should we all be when it comes to an appropriate understanding/application of the scripture) he definitely wasn't mechanical in his ministry. He wasn't a man who lacked depth emotionally.

& What we discover in this section of scripture we're considering today is that he's at a point where he's willing to set aside theology (momentarily) in order to plead w/the Galatians personally. He's stated where we should be on a theological level; he's developed what our understanding should be on a doctrinal level. Now he wants to speak (for just a moment) on a personal/pastoral level. As a pastor, simply sharing his heart w/his people.

As our time came to a close last week that Paul was illustrating the fact that to go back under the law (seeking to relate to God on the basis of do's & don'ts) after you've received a right standing before God on the basis of His grace through faith in J.C. isn't to move *forward* into *maturity*, it's to move *backward* into immaturity. It's not *progression* in your walk w/God; it's *regression*...

He said, "Look, I get being in bondage before you knew God; that was all of us in some manner or form. But to be set free *from* bondage & then to go back *into* bondage willfully after you know God (or rather are known *by* God), to want to find your standing before God on the basis of *formality* when God (in Christ) has made you *family*... I don't get it." He said (Vs 11), "I'm afraid for you lest all that time I spent sharing w/you & pouring *into* you was for nothing." Look at Vs 12.

### Vs 12

As you study your bible there are certain things you want to keep an eye out for in your effort to learn & to grow. You want to look for things like *sin to forsake* (the bible points out something as sin [it's in your life] now you know, "I need to forsake that, I need to repent & turn from that.").

You want to look for *errors to avoid*. When God records people's struggles and downfalls in the word, it's not so we can look down *on* them, but rather that we might learn *from* them & avoid making the same mistake. So we look for sin to forsake, errors to avoid, we look for *examples to follow*...

Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, at the last supper He would share w/His disciples, after they had finished eating He took a towel & girded Himself. Then He grabbed a basin of water & began to wash His disciple's feet. & He said, *"You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."*<sup>1</sup> He was saying that we're to serve one another & that there's no service so base as to be beneath us. Jesus... the quintessential example to follow.

We also look for *commands to obey*. What we have before us here in Vs 12 is just that. The verb "become" is in what's called the "imperative mood" meaning that it's a command. Paul pleads w/the Galatians to turn from approaching God legally & formally & come back into that relationship of family. He says, "I urge you, *become like me*."

Now for many of us that sounds like a strange sort of command. "What do you mean Paul? Become like you? Shouldn't you be pointing us to Jesus? How is it exactly that we should become like you?" Well let's get one thing out of the way right off the bat & that is this... *Paul didn't walk around w/his head in the clouds considering himself sinlessly perfect & therefore you didn't need to worry about being like Jesus, you could just be like him. There was none of that, all you need to do is read the rest of his writings, look at Romans Ch 7, or 1 Cor 15 where he said he was the least of the apostles, not even worthy to be called an apostle, because he persecuted the church of God.* He told Timothy (1 Tim 1 :15) that he was the "chief of sinners". Paul was aware of his personal shortcomings, his flaws & failures more than anyone else.

But here's the deal; Paul was following Jesus, he was established in the fact that it was by faith *in Jesus* that he found his justification before God. So if the Galatian believers were to become like Paul, they wouldn't look to the system of do's & don'ts. *They wouldn't rely on personal merit or their own ability to make themselves worthy to be accepted by God, they'd be looking to & trusting in Christ just like Paul.* That's the idea here; there were some things that were happening in Paul's life that needed to be happening in the lives of the Galatians as well that they would do well to *glean from & grow by*.

<sup>1</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [In 13:13-15]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

For instance there was a *consistency* about Paul's life that was lacking in the lives of the Galatians. Paul wasn't all over the map when it came to his Christianity. He stayed the same. When Paul got saved that day on the road to Damascus he trusted in Jesus alone for his justification before God & the strength of Christian life. **Now here he is decades later & he's still on that same page. The Galatian Christians weren't like that, they started well, but now they've deviated off the path of faith alone in Christ Jesus for righteousness before God & they're trusting in their works to get them where they need to be. Paul could point to his life as a model of consistency.**

Isn't that something we need in our Christian lives today? Man, some Christian lives are anything *but* consistent. They're up & down, back & forth, tossed to & fro like a wave of the sea (sad really). But when you look at someone & 5 yrs, 15 yrs, 20yrs later they're still walking w/Jesus that's an amazing testimony of consistency in the Lord. That doesn't happen by accident, that's the work of God in their life!

**Paul could also say, "Become like me in my liberty." Paul didn't advocate for the *law* of Moses, but rather *liberty* in Jesus. To go back under the law is to slap Jesus in the face & say, "I don't trust in *Your* work, I'm going to count on my own works to gain me acceptance before God." Paul would say, "Be like me, not bound by the law of Moses, but enjoying the freedom w/which Christ has made us free."**

So though it may sound strange initially, we don't have to think too hard to realize that ultimately it makes a lot of sense for Paul to urge the Galatians, "Become like me."

Here's the question to consider. Can you (I) say to other people, "Become like me"? & If you *can't* say that, why not? Think it through, if Christianity is true, shouldn't be true in *your life*, in *my life*? Every Christian *should be* able to say something like this (especially to the unbeliever) "become like me." **Now if you were to become like *me* I promise you wouldn't learn anything about sinless perfection, you'd learn a lot about repentance & confession of sin, but at least you'd be on a path of pursuing Jesus, right? Every believer should be so satisfied w/Jesus, w/His freedom, joy & salvation that we want others to become like us.** Jesus said that He gave us an example & even so we should be examples of what it means to follow Christ to one another. Would we grow closer to God if we read our bibles like you? If we prayed when/how you pray? Would people be coming to Christ if we all shared our faith like you share your faith? Convicting questions to consider aren't they?

**But people need to see what Christianity looks like in real time, to see what it looks like to abide *in* & walk *with* Jesus.**

Paul says, "Become like me." Notice, "For I became like you." Now there are a couple different things this could mean, there's credible application to either.

Paul could be saying, "I've been where you are, seeking to be justified by the law of Moses. Trust me it's a dead end, I was delivered from where you're at, I know what I'm talking about." Write it down, look it up Phil 3:3-9. Paul knew what it was like to seek after righteousness by the law. But he counted all those things as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord. He discovered that the true advantage was to be found *in Him*, not having his own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by *faith*.

So he's saying, "Look, I've been where *you are*, you need to be where *I am*." It's interesting that Paul was in bondage before he was saved, they want to be in bondage *after* they've been saved, they want to be *under* that which Paul was delivered *out of*.

Or it's possible that Paul is speaking of contextualizing his evangelism. That even though he was a Jew, when he was around them he lived as a Gentile. Again write it down, look it up later 1 Cor 9:19-23. Paul spoke of the philosophy, not of compromising our walk w/Christ to reach people, but being willing to build a *bridge* in identifying w/where people are at, rather than building *walls* so that people can't be reached. Listen, when it comes to sharing the gospel w/people we're not trying to put a wall between us whereby they can't identify w/us & we can't identify w/them. We're trying to build bridges that span the gap so that they can be where we are (in Christ). Paul was a master of building bridges to reach people w/the gospel of J.C. He would meet you where you were (they called Jesus the friend of sinners). He didn't walk around high & lofty & beyond the reach of the common man. He got right down where they were & gave them the hope of eternal life through faith in Him.

When Paul came to Galatia he didn't build a wall to keep the Galatians out, he built a bridge that welcomed them in. He got down on their level, ate their foods, went to their homes, ministered to them in a context they could receive...

He says, "you have not injured me at all." In other words they're abandoning the things he's taught them, but he's not writing to them to retaliate as if to fight fire w/fire. When you read this letter, up to this point he's used strong language. He's called them fools, he's said they're bewitched, he's said that those who give a different message other than the gospel he's given should be accursed... & Sometimes when people are confronted strongly & directly people think it's because they've been hurt somehow so they're lashing out.

Paul says, "That's not the case at all." He wants them to get right, but for their own sake, not for his, it's not a personal injury that they've inflicted.

### Vs 13-16

Couple things we want to highlight in this small section of scripture. 1<sup>st</sup> of all I want you to note that Paul the apostle had a "physical infirmity", some kind of affliction that seemed to distress him regularly. Now to me this is interesting because God used him to heal others (it would seem) semi-consistently, yet he himself had to wrestle w/infirmity.

Now we don't know what it was specifically, there are all kinds of conjecture & ultimately that's all it is. It seems plausible that it was some kind of eye disease or something simply because of the way he speaks, but we don't know for certain.

Here's why I highlight his affliction. There are those who will seek to say that w/out exception it's always God's will for you to experience physical healing anytime you're afflicted or sick in any form or fashion & if you're not it's simply because you lack the faith. Yet if we're to survey the scripture openly & honestly we have to say that's not true. There were those Paul prayed for & they were healed, others he prayed for (including himself) were not. Do me a favor, leave Gal 4 & turn quickly to **2 Cor 12** (Vs 7-10)

So w/this we consider the scenario, there is a context in which we might ask, do we want to be healed *physically*, or used *powerfully* of the Lord? Our natural mind rationalizes that to be healed is where the power is at. God says, "No, My strength is made perfect (or brought to completion) in weakness." So that when it's obviously not you, it has to be the Lord, right? It's natural to desire healing physically, yet in the end we trust that the Lord will do what's best according to His sovereignty. Had Paul not experienced this affliction, he'd have never stopped over in this region. But this entire region was given the gospel because God used a physical infirmity to cause Paul to take a detour.

So through infirmity God can get us to slow down, & consider things that otherwise we may never take the time to look *at* or think *about*. There you are in the hospital sharing the gospel w/some people whom otherwise you'd have never met...

But note how Paul praises them. Evidently this affliction was pretty gnarly, difficult to even look at. He says, "Yet you didn't despise me or reject me, you received me as an angel (messenger) of God, even as Christ Jesus." In other words, "You didn't look at my weakness & because of that reject the message, you received me as a man who had a message for you from the Living God, if it were possible to give me your own eyes you would have!" He's speaking of their love *for* him, their compassion *toward* him.

What a great testimony. When a people doesn't decide on receiving or rejecting the message on the basis of the outward appearance of the man. But they listen & receive because they believe him to be a representative of the Lord, bringing to them His word.

What's Paul doing here? He's making a passionate plea on the basis of love. He's reminding them of how much they used to love him, respect him & respond to him...

& Honestly that's the way it *should* be. Listen, when it comes to the man whom you consider to be your pastor, (perhaps you're looking for a church) it's of vital importance that you be in a place where you can *love & respect* your pastor. You need both, if not you won't be able to receive *from* that pastor, not gladly, not readily as it should be. You'll have a little defense mechanism up in your heart & you'll begin to filter everything he says through a lens of skepticism &/or cynicism & that's not healthy for you or for your church.

Paul, reflecting back says, "It used to be love & respect, now it's not, now something has changed; now you regard me as an enemy. & Why? Because I tell you the truth?" Look at **Vs 16**.

I don't know a pastor in whose heart these words don't resonate. Perhaps you can relate as well. "You used to respond *to* me, receive the message that came *through* me, but now that I'm telling you truth that you don't want to hear, am I your enemy?"

It's interesting isn't it? How many people will be on your side & rally around your cause so long as you tell them exactly what they want to hear... "Keep it positive preacher, tell me I'm ok, you're ok & we're all going to heaven." But you start pointing out the problem of sin, the need for repentance, more times than not rather than hearing, "Thank you for that, it's tough but it's what I need." What you get is a letter in the mail, or an email spelling out what kind of judgmental jerk you are, how God's judgment is going to visit you & they're never coming back.

Listen family, the bible is clear, "*Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*"<sup>2</sup> The psalmist said, "*Let the righteous strike me; It shall be a kindness. And let him rebuke me; It shall be as excellent oil; Let my head not refuse it.*"<sup>3</sup> That's the heart we want, yes we want to be spoken to in love, but we want the *truth* in love. Write it down & look it up, Eph 4:11-16, my responsibility is to equip you saints for the work of the ministry through speaking the *truth* in love.

<sup>2</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Pr 27:6]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Ps 141:5]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We are to have people in our lives who will be faithful to tell us (in love) not what we *want* to hear, but what we *need* to hear. That we rise up, if necessary repent & lead lives set apart to J.C. by faith.

### Vs 17-18

Some folks will do what's right, if the right person is around them. Paul says, "Don't be that way, pursue what's right regardless."

Vs 17 speaks in large part to cultic behavior today. "They zealously court you, but for no good." They don't want you to follow the Lord, but be in their group, so they seek to wall you off from everyone else & bombard you w/love & acceptance so as to win you over to their agenda.

It's a term unofficially known as "love bombing." They're trying to get you in their group so they fawn over you, are always loving on you, but it's not for a good cause, it's to serve them, & their own agenda. Jesus spoke of the religious leaders of His day in a similar fashion. He said, "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.*"<sup>4</sup> They want to win you over, but not for a good cause, but so you can be zealous for them. The task of a spiritual leader is to encourage & exhort you to love & follow Christ, not to promote himself; or his ministry.

### Vs 19-20

It's almost as if he's at a loss, can't believe what's going on there. He's like, "I realize the language I've used has been strong so you might think I'm being harsh; not true. I love you, I'm pleading w/you, I wish you could see my face & hear my voice, I'm not *lashing out against* you, it's in love that I'm *pleading with* you."

Paul, as their father in the faith, the one who led them to Christ had labored over them seeing them delivered from sin, now he's laboring that they might be delivered from self imposed rituals & religious efforts of self righteousness.

Listen family, this is God's desire for each & everyone of us; that Christ be formed in us, that we take on His nature, His character. He has predestined you to be conformed into the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). In 2 Cor 3 (vs18) Paul said that we're being transformed from glory to glory by the *Spirit* of the Lord into the *image* of the Lord...

<sup>4</sup> The New King James Version. (1982). [Mt 23:15]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Question: Is Christ being formed in you? Are you becoming more *like* Him as the result of seeking *after* & spending time *with* Him? Draw near to Him & He'll draw near to you, people will see Him *in* you & He will be glorified *through* you... Amen? Amen.

### Prayer Points:

God that's the desire of our heart, that You would be glorified in us. Make us more like Jesus, teach us what means to abide in Christ & have His word abide in us. Strengthen us to be examples to one another of what it means to pursue You, to serve You & submit our lives to You. Set us on fire *for* You...

Listen, God wants to make you like Jesus. But before you can be *like* Jesus, you 1<sup>st</sup> have to belong *to* Jesus. The bible calls it being "born again", we've been born physically, we have to be "born again" spiritually as by the Spirit of God. That happens through simple faith in J.C. died for our sins & rose again the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that we might be forgiven & made new in Him. He died for us, that we might live through Him. Turn from your sin, trust in J.C. today.