**UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU**

Galatians 4:8-20

Key Verse 19

“My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you”

**Introduction**



The churches in Galatia were pioneered by Paul. He was the first one who shared the gospel of Jesus Christ with the Galatian believers. Paul was their shepherd. So Paul’s heart was broken when he learned that their faith was wavering because of the bad influence and false teachings of the Judaizers. In this letter, he calls the Galatians “my dear children” (19). He had a loving relationship with them. And on the basis of their relationship, Paul admonished them to come back to their senses. As we study this passage, let us think about how Paul’s teachings apply to us today

1. Read verses 8-11. Describe the spiritual condition of the Galatians before they knew God? (8; Eph 2:2-3) What happened to them through Paul’s gospel message? (9a; 3:2) What would happen to them if they went back to Jewish legalism? (9b-10) What was Paul’s agony? (11)

1-1, Read verses 8-11.

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. **9** But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces[[d](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29141d)]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? **10** You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! **11** I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

1-2, Describe the spiritual condition of the Galatians before they knew God? (8; Eph 2:2-3)

***Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.***

* Paul reminded them that they had been slaves to worthless idols. When Paul and Barnabas visited the city of Lystra in their 1st missionary journey, he healed a crippled man who was lame from birth.
* When people saw what he had done, they shouted, “The gods have come down to us in human form!” Barnabas they called Zeus and Paul they called Hermes and they tried to offer sacrifices to them.
* They did not know God. Instead, they worshiped the gods of Greek mythology. Paul told them to turn from worthless things to the living God, who made heaven, earth, the seas, and everything in them (Ac 14:8-20).
* When people don’t know God, they automatically worship worthless things.
* Romans 1 teaches us that we became the objects of God’s wrath as we exchanged the glory of the immortal God for worthless man-made images (Ro 1:18-25).
* Many people who claim to be independent from God, worship something or someone as their god. They are slaves to false gods, to their own passions, or to material things.
* Likewise the Galatians had lived miserable lives subject to their sinful passions and feelings of guilt. Paul summarizes this spiritual condition in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:1-3 reads,

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath”

1-3, What happened to them through Paul’s gospel message? (9a; 3:2)

***9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—***

* Apostle Paul shared the truth of Gospel diligently with the Galatians. They believed what they heard from him.
* Then something amazing happened. They realized the fact that God sent his one and only Son Jesus to rescue them.
* The Son of God came to live with them to reveal who the Creator God is. Jesus gave his life on the cross, to show them how much God loves us. By believing in Jesus, they became sons and daughters of God with all the blessings and privileges as His children.
* They now know God and God knows them. Or rather, they are known by God - Paul makes an important point when he says ‘or rather are known by God’.
* It is really more important that God knows us (in the sense of an intimate, accepting relationship) than it is that we know God.

Matthew 7:21-23 reads,

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’**23** Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

1-4, What would happen to them if they went back to Jewish legalism? (9b-10)

***how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces[***[***d***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-29141d)***]? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!***

* Paul expressed his agony as a shepherd here. The Galatians, those whom Jesus had redeemed with his blood, were turning back to the “weak and miserable principles,” that was, Jewish legalism.
* They were in danger of enslaving themselves all over again. Paul’s heart was broken for them. They had joyfully accepted Jesus when Paul preached the gospel to them.
* But now they were turning their attention to religious rituals and thereby turning away from the grace of Jesus. Observing special days, months, seasons and years occupied their hearts and the cross of Jesus was becoming of secondary importance to them.
* We are also in danger of falling into this trap. Observing special days and months, going through religious rituals, or following certain religious traditions provide comfort to people and fulfill some psychological needs for us.
* So some people seek to do things like lighting a candle in a cathedral, reciting prayers with rosary beads, wearing some religious ornaments, doing yoga meditations, and so on, rather than seeking a personal relationship with God.
* However, we know that observances of religious rites cannot substitute our inward experience of God through the Holy Spirit.

1-5, What was Paul’s agony? (11)

***I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.***

* Paul was afraid of losing the Galatian believers to false teachings.
* Paul's fear was that this attraction to legalism would mean his work among the Galatians coming to nothing and ending up in vain.
* Paul worked hard among the Galatians, just as always (1 Corinthians 15:10).
* We can learn from him that he was concerned about God’s flocks as a good shepherd.

1. Read verses 12-16. What was Paul’s earnest plea? (12) How did the Galatians welcome Paul in the past? (13-14) How were they changed when they turned to Jewish legalism? (15-16)

2-1, Read verses 12-16.

I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.**13** As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, **14** and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. **15** Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. **16** Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

2-2, What was Paul’s earnest plea? (12)

***I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.***

* Paul pleaded with them to become like him for he had become like them. His plea was based on their love relationship in Christ.
* It wasn’t because Paul was a proud man. It was because he knew that they needed an example from a peer.
* Paul did not say simply, “Have faith in God.” He knew that they needed a concrete example to follow.
* He also said to the Corinthians, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1Co 11:1).
* Paul was telling them not to be like his former self, a hardcore Jewish legalist, but what he was now, a shepherd.
* When Paul first came to the Galatians, he didn’t come as an evangelist with impressive rabbinical credentials. He had been a zealous Jew. He was far ahead of his fellow Jews in his zeal for the Jewish traditions.
* But God changed him 180 degrees. God set him free from Jewish legalism. In Christ, he found true life, joy and peace.
* He set aside the barriers between Jews and Gentiles in order to bring the gospel of Jesus to them.

1Corinthians 9:19, 22, 23 reads,

“Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ… When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings”

2-3, How did the Galatians welcome Paul in the past? (13-14)

***As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, 14 and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.***

* Paul says that he first preached the gospel to Galatians because of an illness. Thank God for even using his illness for the glory of God. We never know that our predicament or disease may advance God’s kingdom contrary to our expectation.
* We don’t know what kind of illness he had. Some people think that it was an eye problem because of the references in this letter (15; 6:11).
* Whatever illness he had, the point was that the Galatian believers welcomed him as their shepherd in Christ.
* They were changed by the gospel of Christ. They had joy being with Paul. Jesus became the true source of joy and hope in their lives.

2-4, How were they changed when they turned to Jewish legalism? (15-16)

***Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?***

* Paul asked the question to the Galatians, “Where is your blessing of me, now?” Another version shows, “What has happened to all your joy?” He was reminding them of their first love for Jesus.
* “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” Although it is the same truth, their response was different. Paul became an enemy to them only because he spoke the truth of the gospel.
* Often times we see that our love for our shepherd and Bible teachers is a kind of barometer for whether or not our love for Jesus is there.
* Apostle Paul stood by the truth and continued to help them out truthfully. His message out of his love must have penetrated into their hearts.

1. Read verses 17-20. What did Paul say about the Judaizers’ motive? (17-18) Why should Paul be in the pain of childbirth again? (19) What was Paul’s hope for them? (20)

3-1, Read verses 17-20.

Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. **18** It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. **19** My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, **20** how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

3-2, What did Paul say about the Judaizers’ motive? (17-18)

***Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them. 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.***

* There was one thing in common between Paul and the Judaizers. They both were zealous to win the Galatians over. But their motives were totally different.
* Paul was zealous to win them over to Christ. The Jewish legalists were zealous to win them over for no good purpose.
* They wanted to snatch away believers from the gospel, only to bring them over to their side. This is a mark of false teachers.

3-3, Why should Paul be in the pain of childbirth again? (19)



***19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,***

* “My dear children.” He expressed his heartfelt concern for them. Paul felt pains when he thought about them. It was his labor of love for them.
* He really wanted them to be built up in their faith until Christ was formed in them.
* Paul was not satisfied with their outward changes. Circumcision was not enough. Baptism was not enough. Church attendance was not enough.
* He wanted them to be changed in their inner persons to have the heart of Christ. He wanted them to follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.
* Paul says that his painful labor of prayer for them was like the labor pains of a woman in childbirth.
* Paul went through many life-threatening situations and sufferings to preach the gospel of Jesus to them.
* He shepherded them as if they were his own children. But now they were being snatched away by false teachers.
* As a caring mother would scold her children, Paul had to endure the pain of rebuking them through his letter.
* As we try to help young people of our time with the gospel, we often feel like going through labor pains.
* When we see them harden their hearts and become proud before God, we feel pain in our hearts.
* Sometimes we just want to give up. But Paul’s allegory of labor pains to a shepherd’s sufferings is appropriate because, in the end, our joy will transcend all the pain.
* It also takes time to be rooted in the word of God and built up in Christ (Col 2:6). It takes time for Christ to be formed in a person’s heart and life.
* It does not happen overnight. So Paul did not give up. He had a “never give up” spirit.

Acts 14:22 reads,

“We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God”

Romans 8:29 reads,

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

3-4, What was Paul’s hope for them? (20)

***how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!***

* It was painful for him to write them a letter of reproach. He said, “How I wish I could be with you now and change my tone.”
* We can rephrase his last words in verse 20. "I desire to be present with you now. I not only desire that you be formed into Christ, into His image, but I desire to be present with you now, and to change my tone."
* He says, "I don't even like the way I'm talking. It hurts. I wish I didn't have to yell at you, to fire off all this stuff. I wish I didn't have this terrible depression. I'd like to be happy, to come and be with you, to have joy instead of sorrow."

**Conclusion**

When we see our Bible students repent of their sins and decide to follow Christ, we taste true joy. Let’s pray to have compassion for the young people of our times and patiently help them with the word of God. May God give us patience and the shepherd heart of Jesus until Christ is formed in us and in our Bible students.

**One word: Until Christ is formed!**