

“God’s Purpose for Us”

Galatians 4:12-20

The Apostle Paul was one of the most brilliant scholars to have written Scripture. He could argue and debate with Pharisees or Greek philosophers. His logic was irrefutable. But every now and then we also see the emotional side of Paul; his big Christ-like heart. It is no wonder that Paul tells us how to pray for each other in Phil. 1:9-11, when he says,

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul’s love for God and people grew from knowledge of God’s Word which enabled him to make better discerning decisions in his life; decisions that resulted in him being more filled with the fruit of right living that comes through Jesus living in Him. So doesn’t it make sense that if we are consistently reading God’s Word our knowledge about God should increase resulting in a greater love for God, for people and it should show by the God-honouring decisions we are making for ourselves and our children, at work, in our finances and recreation because we are being more filled with Jesus? But if that’s not happening, where is the breakdown? We’re not in the Word or we’re just hearing it and not doing it.

Here in Galatians Paul has been modelling this biblical intelligence and logic as he has been laying down powerful argument after argument why these Galatian believers should stop hearing and doing what the Judaizers were saying; that you had to become like a Jew and follow the Law if you want to please God. Now in Ch. 4:12-20 Paul makes an emotional appeal; we see his heart, his burden for these Galatians to stay on track with God. And in doing so he reminds them of God’s purpose for every believer. The main issue with the Galatians was that when they accepted Christ as their Saviour, they were freed from the slavery of sin; of living for self. But going back to the Law is a return to slavery of trying to please God by your own efforts. So Paul pleads from the heart this time,

Free Yourselves from Glorifying Yourself **(4:12-15)**

Living by doing good works is a form of self-glorification. What we do is the focus not on what God is doing for us. So Paul reminds the Galatians yet again,

¹² I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong

What did he mean? How did Paul become like them? Paul used to be a legalistic Law-keeping, trying to impress God with his good works Jew. When he encountered Jesus he repented of all that and gave his life to Christ.

He stopped trying to earn God’s favour and accepted it (v.12)

He accepted God's favour/grace in revealing Jesus to him. And he believed and he gave up trying to live as if doing certain things saved you. No they can't. Only God can save us. Now he lived in appreciation of God's favour by serving God and sharing his message. If you read Phil. 3:1-7 you hear what Paul used to be like before he was saved;

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. ² Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh— ⁴ though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.⁷ But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.

These were the things Paul 'put his confidence in'. His own good deeds, His Law-keeping. A works-based righteousness is about you; how good you can be, how much you can do. How much glory you bring to yourself. Paul says 'become like me'; free yourself from trying to please God and in doing so free your life from being about you.

And like Paul did,

Put your confidence in God through His Word (v.13-14)

Paul refreshes their memory to remind them how the gospel first came to them through him:

¹³ As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. ¹⁴ 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.

Without knowing the story, Paul had a physical ailment that he felt didn't make the gospel presentation very pretty. The word 'illness' means limitation or weakness. It's quite possible that he had some kind of eye infection or disease because of his comment in v.15 that if they could have they would have '*tore out their eyes*'. It's easy to get sidetracked by supposing what that could be and not see that they received him as an angel of God, as if he were Christ Himself. In other words they believed the gospel. They put their confidence in God's Word not their own works. Initially.

But sadly they were swayed by these Jewish legalists that they had to become like a Jew and keep all the traditions and laws in order to please God. And the joy that they initially had when they accepted Christ was lost because now it was about them and not God. When we free ourselves from making life all about us and accept God's grace in the gospel,

We discover what a blessed life is (v.15)

Paul writes,

¹⁵ What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

The word for joy is the same word Jesus used in the beatitudes for 'blessing'. What happened to the blessed life you were living when you put your confidence in God through His Word? Why did you abandon that? Legalism is a form of sin. Selfishness is sin. Works is sin because its pride. When

we're steeped in unconfessed sin we lose the joy of salvation. David found this out when he sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah murdered. He cried out to God in Ps. 51:12

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Sin sucks the joy right out of us because our relationship with God is damaged. We know that from our own relationships. If a relationship is fractured because of a disagreement or argument or one hurt the other, the joy is gone. But when we confess our guilt and admit our wrongdoing, the healing begins and the joy now has a chance for restoration. Paul says 'what happened to you guys? Don't you remember the blessing of living by faith? Do you notice that's gone now because you're trying to please God with your works? Free yourself from glorifying yourself. God's purpose for us is life is not about us, it's about glorifying Him.

Paul then shows them what these Judaizers are really like. They are joy-suckers. They are manipulative and flattering but their motives are selfish. So he encourages us to

Recognize our Enemy **(4:16-18)**

Sadly, these Judaizers had persuaded some of the Galatian believers that Paul was the enemy and not them. That's not unusual for the enemies of God to masquerade themselves as angels of light; as the 'true believers'. A telltale mark of a false teacher or an enemy of God is that they

Misuse God's Word to promote themselves (v.16)

Paul's question in v.16 shows the Galatians how ridiculous things had become. Paul in his physical weakness spoke the truth of the gospel – which they initially accepted. These Judaizers came after Paul left, persuaded them that Paul was not telling the truth, that keeping laws, customs and holidays was the true way to God and that Paul was now the enemy! Does that even sound right?

Sadly, we see this happening today in the world and even in Canada. Slowly our culture has been pressured and lied to about how intolerant and narrow minded followers of Jesus supposedly are (which of course is ironic because we are shown very little tolerance through others' misguided narrow-mindedness!) and that we have slowly become the enemy of society. That's the culture we live in now.

But even in Christian circles there are small pockets of groups that say if you don't have the right translation you're not following the truth. If you don't sing the right songs, we're not true believers, if we don't display certain spiritual signs or a specific theological system ... Boy, the enemy sure can sneak in and disrupt the household of faith. That's why we need each other to stay strong together. When we hear something that sounds spiritual but we're not sure to bounce that off mature believers in Christ. To recognize the enemy and where he likes to attack.

How else do they work?

They seek to alienate us from other believers (v.17)

¹⁷ 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 be zealous for them.

A common enemy tactic in war is always split up the opponent because it's easier to win small battles. But when the army stays united it becomes very difficult to defeat. These Judaizers belittled Paul to the Galatians. That caused some of them to question Paul and doubt Paul. Once they cast doubt on the leader, the rest would be easier to bring down.

How do they do these things? Flattery. Listen to Rom. 16:17

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. ¹⁸ For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.

To the Thessalonians Paul clearly said,

¹ Thes. 2:3 For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. ⁴ On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. ⁵ You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed —God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. ⁷ Instead, we were like young children among you. Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

The gospel is not a people-pleasing message. It points out everyone has sinned and falls short of reaching God. The gospel says you need Jesus and He wasn't accept you based on how good you are. But Paul presented it in a loving, caring manner. He served the people while he was there. These Judaizers, like other false teachers

Have a misplaced zeal (v.18)

Being zealous is not a sign of salvation. Trusting by faith in Jesus alone saves you, not your passion. This zeal was not for God but for themselves. They wanted to get more people following them and not the truth.

¹⁸ It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.

Paul wasn't a hypocrite. His message stayed the same whether he was there in person or in writing. These Judaizers however were flatterers when they were with the people only. They had ulterior motives. Their sole purpose was to gain a following and destroy the truth and the church that Paul started.

Paul now summarizes this section by bringing them back to God's great purpose for every believer, that each of us must ...

Let God Form Christ in You **(4:19-20)**

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!

Do you see Paul's love here? He was committed to the Galatians *'until Christ is formed in you'*. When will that happen?

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God will conform us completely into the image of His Son Jesus at the end of our life. When did He begin this work? At salvation.

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles,

Jesus came to dwell in all of us through His Spirit at salvation. We can't be conformed into Christ's image apart from being saved. This process is called sanctification or becoming holy. If we want to know whether Jesus is being formed in us, are people seeing Jesus through us? In 2:20 Paul said,

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

We know we're conforming into Jesus when we live for Jesus and not for ourselves. When we choose what Jesus would say and do over what we would say or do. When we choose to believe what Jesus says and trust His word and will for our lives. This is God's purpose for us but we do have to allow Him to work. If we're honest we resist Him and often. God grows us in community. Every time we deliberately choose not to meet together to pursue our own agenda, we hinder the work of Jesus being formed in us. Every time we deliberately refuse to serve when we could have we hinder the work of Jesus being formed in us.

What's central to all this is of course is the Word of God. Our willingness to be in God's Word and allow Him to speak to us will enable our spiritual formation into Christ. I saw a post on Facebook this week of a church sign that said,

'How can you become spiritually fit if you only work out once a week?'

We can't. But remember if Christ dwells in us through His Spirit then every time we spiritually exercise we taste and see how good the Lord is. And the more we taste and see how good God is the more we will enjoy Him and put our refuge in Him.

Here's another practical way we see Christ being formed in us. Col. 3:5 Paul writes

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. ¹² Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Our life will conform more to show Jesus is growing in us the more we allow His peace [He's the King of the world and holds all things together] to rule our hearts. When we let His Word dwell in us so that admonishing and encouraging words come out of us and how we're seeking to do all things in and for His Name a little bit more today than we were yesterday.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net