

Gal 09 - A Labor of Love - Gal 4:12-20

So far in Galatians – we’ve seen the Apostle Paul primarily as the Great Defender of the Faith – as a Great Theologian . . .

He’s been bringing forth (with both barrels) his argument of Justification **BY** Grace & **THRU** Faith alone –

But now – Paul takes a major turn w/ the Galatians – Here – he reveals his **heart of love** for them . . .

Here we see Paul **the Pastor** - **the Shepherd** – **Laboring** for his flock –

he calls them “**Brethren**” – & “**Little Children**” - & he compares himself to a **Mother in birth pains** on behalf of his “**children**” in Galatia

John MacArthur Jr says these Vs’s are the **strongest words** of personal affection that Paul uses - in any of his letters in the N.T.

Paul’s **going to show us** – that seeing Christ formed in the lives of the Galatians – is his absolute **Labor of Love**

Let’s Pray

Paul **starts** by appealing to the Galatians **to not become** what he’d been **before** his Transformation on the road to Damascus

Gal 4:12A

12(A) Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you.

Paul begins his plea by saying –
“*look at me – become like me . . . for a became like you*” –

Back in **Gal 2:19** Paul said “. . . **I died to the law** that I might live to God”

More than anybody Paul had **the right** (& tendency) to **bring** the endless demands of the law & tradition **into** Salvation BY Grace THRU Faith

Phil Ch 3 tells us Paul was more “**Right**” in the law than anyone -
But then in **Phil 3:7** Paul counts all that LOSS – that he may gain Christ

& Phil 3: 8 says

8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

That **includes** the religious legalism he once thought made him Right B4 God

& Paul says in **Gal 4:12** - “I urge you” – become like me –
drop all this religious legalism the Judaizers are trying to burden you w/
“be as free from that bondage as I am”

& then he says “for I became like you” – meaning he actually became more like a Gentile than a Jew –

Paul had thrown off the Shackles of Jewish law & tradition –
& now he begs the Galatians NOT to become like he was . . .
but instead he urges them to be like he is now –

as he said back in **Gal 2:20** – “. . . *the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, . . .*” – **not** the rules & regulations of Law & Tradition

again **Gal 4:12(A)** *Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you.*

Now - the end of **V.12** actually goes w/ **Vs's 13-14** –

& here – **Paul goes back**, & reminds the Galatians of how they **first received him** - & to what extent they 1st respected him

Gal 4:12(b)-14

12(B) You have not injured me at all.

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

14 And my 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.

Paul **makes it clear** here – he’s **not harboring** any resentment . . .
& in real **Compassion** – he says “*you have not injured me at all*” –

Paul’s **not angry** – he’s **concerned** for them - & so he reminds them here in **Vs.13-14** of the wonderful way their relationship had started . . .

& he says in **V.13** - it was actually because of a **physical infirmity** that he had first preached the gospel to them . . .

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

Most believe that Paul had become **seriously ill** either while *on the way* to Galatia – or while *in the area*, & so he **stayed there** to recover

Many suggest he may have contracted **Malaria** while traveling -
& he may’ve *been suffering* under that disease

Most attach in some way these **Vs’s** w/ the “**Thorn in the Flesh**” of **2Cor 12**
BUT - the specific “*Physical Infirmity*” is never named in ether section - - -
(*altho some believe we have a hint of it coming up*)

In any case – what the exact infirmity was **NOT** the issue –
but that the Galatians *accepted Paul* - **even tho** he had this infirmity . . .

& **not only accepted** him – but *received him* overwhelmingly – as **V.14** says
14 And my 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.

Now – the beginning of **V.14** would be more clear if it said
“And **YOUR** *trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject . . .*”

Look how the NLT translates V.14

*14 But even though my sickness was revolting to you, you did not **reject** me and turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself.*

Whatever it was – this illness was **obviously evident** in Paul’s flesh & it would’ve been a **“trial”** or even **“revolting”** to those looking at him . .

which was often the response to an **outward infirmity** during that time

The word **“reject”** here – means to **“loathe”** – or to **“spit out”** – which is what people would do if someone had an outward illness – **(spit in their direction - as a sign of rejection)**

because many people felt an **outward infirmity** was a sign of God’s **judgment** but the Galatians had not done that to Paul - - - in fact, amazingly – they had the opposite response

V.14 says they **received Paul** as they would’ve received an **angel of God** - & **EVEN** – as they would’ve receive **Christ Jesus Himself**

Now – Paul’s **NOT** comparing himself to Christ – he’s trying to remind the Galatians of **how miraculously** they had received him & his teaching

Remember – When Paul was 1st in Galatia – **Acts 14** tells us the Galatians thought **Paul & Barnabas** were actually **gods** - & they wanted to **sacrifice** to them . . .

& **Paul’s** simply **reminding** the Galatians of their **excitement** when he 1st came

& so – he cont’s in Gal 4:15

15 What [where] 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.

Almost all other translations say here ;

“Where then is that blessing you enjoyed” – or
“What has become of that blessing you enjoyed”

Paul's saying – hey, **you guys received me** & the gospel so incredibly & miraculously – It was as if I was an **Angel** - or even **Jesus Christ** Himself

what happen – ***what has become of that blessing you enjoyed . . .??***

& then in the 2nd half of **V.15** - Paul reminds them of **just how much** they **appreciated** him at the first . . .

V.15B - *For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.*

Now – this is **the possible clue** to Paul's Physical infirmity –

& this is where most people get that Paul's "**Thorn in the Flesh**" may've been some type of an **Eye Affliction**

Malaria can effect the eyes - & that may've been what Paul struggled with –

but we know from **V.14** that the condition effected the way Paul looked – so his eyes may've been in a type of perpetual "**Pink Eye**" state *etc . . .*

In any case – the Galatians **so loved & appreciated** Paul – they would've gladly **dug out their own eyes** & given them to him . . . that was their **level of love** for him

. . . but then . . . something happened – **Pls Listen Very Closely** . . .

the Galatians **began listening** to someone with **another agenda** - & that agenda was to **turn the Galatians** against Paul – & against **the gospel** that Paul was teaching . . .

& **remember** – the book of Galatians is Paul **attempting to save** the Galatians from being "**taken in**" (duped) by those who would turn them away from the Gospel of "**Salvation BY Grace & THRU Faith**"

& Paul is trying to **open their eyes** to the deception . . . & so he says in **V.16** . . .

Gal 4:16

16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

Paul says – in the past you had such great love & respect toward me - - -

have I now **become your enemy** because I'm trying to save you from those who would **deceive** you into joining their fight against the Gospel . . .

Guys – I would in no way **compare myself** to the Apostle Paul – but I would like *to explain* to you from **personal experience** what Paul is saying here

& there's a **phenomenal lesson** here for every *minister* - about *Compassion* - & about *Unconditional Love* for those we are called to minister to . . .

In **this very church** – I have had people who at **one time** thought *so highly of me*, that they scared me . . .

I have *long letters* about how *overly appreciative* they were of me - & I mean I was **very concerned** about *how highly* they thought of me . . .

& then - - they began having **coffee at starbucks** with the *wrong person* – a person who had a **very specific agenda** to draw people into their way of thinking . . .

& **the more** these people who once loved me *sooo much* - **listened** to a person who's **ONLY** agenda was to *turn them* against me - **the more** they listened . . . the more *I became their enemy*

& I am **no where near alone** . . . this has *happened* in some way to **every pastor** I've ever talked to about it

& as I would go from being *too exalted* in their eyes - to being their *very enemy* I would **watch in amazement** at how easily we can be swayed

but **here is the lesson** Paul teaches **ALL** ministers in this section . . . look back at **V12B** . . . ***Gal 4:12(B) You have not injured me at all.*** . . .

Paul is **not** taking it **personally** – he knows the Galatians are being **deceived** & he wants them to know - *he loves them* as much as ever –

& he *will always continue* to **sacrifice** on their behalf – he has **NO** bitterness – *his effort* on their behalf . . . is a **Labor of Love**

May this be a “**life-changing**” lesson to every **pastor** – & every **minister**, who has ever had people **turn on them** - thru the “*deceitful efforts*” of another person . . .

May we always continue to **Love** - & to **Sacrifice** - for the people God has called us to minister to . . .

never taking either the **appreciation** or the **attacks** *too personally* –

May we **love them** & **serve them** as *representatives of Jesus Christ* - & for **no other reason** than that

Now - **Paul addresses** those doing the “swaying” directly in **V.17** . . .

Gal 4:17

17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

The word “**zealous**” can be a **Good word** or a **Bad word** – & we can be “**zealous**” for both good things & bad things - (*& Paul’s going to use the word in both contexts here*)

“Zealous” means **Lit.** – “**To earnestly strive after a thing**” –

& here –Paul says the people who are “**Swaying**” the Galatians are “*Zealously courting them*” – the same term used of a man courting a woman to “*Win her over*” . . .

Have you **ever had** someone “*Zealously Court You*” to win you over to their *way of thinking* – or to their “*side*” . . . well **that’s exactly** what Paul is talking about here

& he says – they “**zealously court you . . . but for no good**” -
& we’ve **seen that happen** right here in our own body . . .

people Zealously Courting people to win them over to their side
of some issue . . . **but for no good**

Paul cont’s in V.17 by saying – “. . . yes, they want to exclude you, that you may
be zealous for them”

The word “**Exclude**” is **Lit.** “shut you out” –

they want to shut you out of where you’re at . . . SO THAT –
you may be Zealous **FOR THEM** . . .

PLS LISTEN VERY CAREFULLY – the “**motive**” of people who
“zealously court you” to their way of thinking . . .

is **ALWAYS** to “shut you out” from those they want to **separate you** from . . .
SO THAT – you may be “Zealous for them”

meaning – so that **you** can “earnestly strive after **THEIR** goal” . . . !!!

There was a time here when people were “actively courting” anyone
who would accept a **coffee invitation** –
but they were doing it to **serve** their **own agenda** . . .

& **that’s exactly** what the **Judaizers** were doing to the church of Galatia - - -

They needed the church to turn against Paul
in order **to serve** their own agenda . . .

But it was **NOT** because they truly cared about or loved the Galatians –
but because they were **zealous** for their **own agenda** . . . !!!

Now – in **V.18** – Paul uses the word “zealous” again –
but this time in a **good way** . . .

Gal 4:18

18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

Paul says – you were **very zealous** for a good thing - when I was 1st w/ you - -
(they were even willing to give Paul their own eyes . . .)

So Paul says – **be Zealous** . . . earnestly strive . . . but do it for a Good Thing
& for a Good cause - & then . . . do it **always** –

Always **keep earnestly striving** for a “Good Thing” –
not only when I’m present w/ you – But **ALWAYS**

For a time **our Youth** was called “**Zealous Youth**” –
because they are called to Earnestly Strive after What is Good . . .

to **be zealous** in a good thing **ALWAYS** . . . not just when leaders are looking

So - Paul’s **heart is breaking** for the Galatians – he knows they’re being
“**Swayed**” by the Judaizers – but he’s not Angry or Bitter . . .

even tho it is him personally (& his message) they are being **swayed against**

Paul understands what’s happening . . . as he said back in **Ch 3:1**
“**O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you**”

& so in **V.19** – Paul makes his love & sacrifice for the Galatians perfectly clear

Gal 4:19

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

Paul refers to the Galatians as his “**little children**” to whom he has given birth

Now – Paul knows that **only** the Spirit of God brings about
the miracle of the “**New Birth**” in a persons life . . .

but **he's comparing** his "Labor" for the Galatians - to that of child-birth – which means **extreme personal sacrifice** . . .

But again – I want to point out the **M.I.P.** to all ministers listening . . .

Pls read this Vs very carefully with me . . .

"19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again . . ."

What does he mean "**AGAIN**" - - - he means he is willing to sacrifice again for them - as **if a mother** were to go thru **labor** again for their child

he is willing to **continue to labor** for them –
& continue to labor for them **until what**
until Christ is formed in you,

Now that is the **heart of a minister** . . . no matter what
I will continue to sacrifice for you – I will continue to labor for you . . .
until Christ is formed in you,

Paul's says – You've been "**bewitched**" - you've been "**swayed**" –
you've been "**deceived**" – but I will not give up on you . . .

I'll continue to labor for you - until Christ is formed in you !!!

THAT is the commitment we need toward **one another** in the church –
THAT is the commitment we need toward our **spouses** –
THAT is the commitment we need toward our **children** . . .

NO MATTER WHAT – I will continue to be poured out for you
as if I was in child birth – ***until Christ is formed in you !!!***

Guys - - - It doesn't get any more **REAL** that that !!!

In **V.20** – Paul ends this emotional section by saying he wished he could be w/ the Galatians **in person** to get them thru this turmoil . . .

Gal 4:20

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

Paul **cared so much** for the believers -

he wished he could drop everything & come running to them . . .
so he could change the tone of his concern for them

& at the end of the **V.20** he says ***“for I have my doubts about you”*** . . .

This word **“Doubt”** means **LIT** ***“to be at wit’s end”*** –

Paul says lovingly ***“I am at my wit’s end with you . . .”***

The **NASB** says here ***“I am perplexed about you”*** . . .

In regard to Paul’s feelings here – John MacArthur writes this: ***“Every Christian worker 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 – sometimes unbelievers, sometimes believers – remain completely out of reach and even turn against him.”***

May we say – each one of us who is called to **minister** to another . . .

Each one who is called to minister to a;

SPOUSE - - - **CHILD** - - - **CHURCH MEMBER** . . .

May we say with the Apostle Paul in V.19 –

**Gal 4:19 - [I am willing to] *labor in birth again,
until Christ is formed in you***

Let’s Pray