

Teleios: Christ Formed in You

Galatians 4:10–20

When your small child is running into traffic, there's a time, to yell, "STOP!" There's a time grasp their arms and pull them face to face and bring correction. And there's a time to lower the volume and temperature and reassure them, while their tear-filled eyes spill over, that you were sharply intervening — not because you were mad at them, or didn't love them — but precisely because you do love them and want to see them mature and live a long life. Love compels you to do anything to protect them and point them to life, and warn from danger. If that means yelling or sternness, so be it.

Imagine, parents, and future parents, if your child were almost run over, where you are in this sequence of correction? Are you in the front yard seeing your child foolishly charging into the street? Perhaps, you now have them by the arms with your eyes locked on theirs. Or do you have them in your arms consoling them inside the house after your rebuke brought tears? Imagine these different steps in the sequence. What is the tone of your voice at each place? Does your voice sound the same when they are running street-ward as it does when you are in the living room? Of course not. And the tone even changes based on the age of the child and her place of life, doesn't it? You may want to grab your 17-year-old and force their eyes onto yours, but may not be the most effective approach at that point. At that point, when you've let your *almost-adult* make a mistake, or experience a negative consequence of their not-yet-mature decision-making, when it's time for input, perhaps you take more of a "how did you get here" tone, "what choices did you make that ended here," or "how did the company you were with play a part this less-than-stellar choice?"

Today the Apostle takes the Galatians in his pastoral arms and **moves out of the street where they are to be killed by the bus of feast-keeping and traditions and circumcision toward the safehouse of justification by faith alone**. He lowers the volume; the fiery tone begins to change as he reminds of their mutual love. And I'm glad, because when Paul yells, the sermon tends to yell as we capture the fullness of what he is saying. He transitions from sharp correction to a more pastoral, more fatherly appeal that is motivated by their devotion to, and love for Christ, and their devotion to, and love for each other.

Galatians 4:10–20 — ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years!¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

¹²Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. ¹³You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, ¹⁴and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. ¹⁵What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? ¹⁷They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make

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much of them. ¹⁸ It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, ¹⁹ my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! ²⁰ I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

PRAY — What we do not know, teach us; what we do not have, give us; what we are not, make us.

Galatians 4 presents some interpretive challenges, but not on the major doctrinal focus that we are justified by grace through faith alone. That is clear, without question, confusion, or disagreement. But as we saw in the first part of the chapter there are at least two clear interpretations that are valid. In our passage today, and through the end of the chapter, R C Sproul said he wasn't exactly sure he knew what the Apostle getting at in some places. Alistaire Begg said he was bamboozled moving through this part. Now with the challenges before us, I like the way Alistaire Begg organized this middle portion of this paragraph to help us understand the plain things, and I am influenced by his outline, which was influenced by John Stott's helpful scholarship, which was influenced by 17th Century Puritans. I'm not preaching Begg's sermon, but his approach is very helpful in getting down to some very helpful application and wisdom as we move from yelling "bewitched and foolish Galatians" at the beginning of this long argument, to "brothers I entreat you."

Pastor and People

Paul was an apostle, which was unique. As a proto-pastor he certainly had a pastor's heart for God's people and set the standard for pastoral care and ministry. We see his passionate heart for the Galatians emerge in this passage. Paul's authority was in his God-given apostleship, which a pastor does not have — the office of Apostle is closed. The pastor's authority derives only from his faithfulness to preach and teach the Word of God and his obedience to the word of God. As we look at this relationship between Paul and the Galatians, let's look at several things in the passage that describe what is not to shape the attitude or submission of a people to their pastor, and then, what *is* to form the basis of how to evaluate this sweet relationship of shepherd, defender of the flock, and champion of doctrinal purity, and diligent discipler.

v. 12 — **Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.** First, I think what he is getting at here is saying that he loves them and his heart is open to them even though his approach has been sharp and even harsh. Moving through the paragraph he reminds them of how they have expressed love to him, and he certainly still loves them, so let's continue to love each other in this hard place.

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The recounting of their love points out what many suggest is Paul's thorn in the flesh, in 2 Corinthians 12 — that is, his eyes. He apparently did not see well, and perhaps, considering the limitations and realities of 1st century medicine, his eyes may have even drained, causing some passerby on the street who noticed the disease or difficulty to be repulsed or quickly look away. Whether the physical illness was his eyes, or other disease, we know it was an obvious bodily ailment that would have caused some unkind people to scorn him, or humiliate him in some way. But the Galatians, though he was by appearance a below average man, embraced him rather than despising him,. That gets us to the first thing that is not to be used to evaluate pastor:

How Not to Evaluate a Pastor

1. External gifts or physical attributes. A pastor's physical appearance and his external gifts, his voice, his personality, his charisma, his eloquence... these gifts may be useful in office of pastor, but are not necessary for the effective work of pastoring. Our western, entertainment-influenced world values looks and cleverness and fashion. Check out, sometime, the hashtag #preachersandsneakers and see how all the cool pastor/influencers wear \$800 sneaks. Or have aviator glasses. Or tell the funniest stories. I'm all for great stories, including at my own expense — or Carol's. And telling stories well, having a deep voice, good looks, stage presence, hipster jeans, straight teeth and a youthful, glowing complexion may be helpful, they have nothing to do with guaranteeing the effectiveness of a pastor. When the wolves come in, when persecution comes, would you rather have a smooth talking, dynamic personality, pretty boy... or would you rather have a Paul with draining eyes and a weak voice— or an old man in his 80s or 90, like John, who will get up and go to war for the sake of your soul, as Paul has done with them? Don't be influenced by the world in what a pastor looks like. Pray for your pastors that they are not so influenced by the world in these prideful man-centered notions.

2. Pastoral evaluation should not be made by keeping up with the latest theological trend or topic. v. 16 — **Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?** Paul's approach is consistent, line upon line, doctrinal preaching of truth, regardless of its popularity. He does correct, necessarily, their departure into trendy legalism, which was the fad of the day. Fads and trends come and go in preaching and Christianity, do they not? What is the latest preaching fad? The reason the latest fad matters to the pastor is that it might need to be corrected if there is error or an over emphasis on some point. But preaching to the latest Top 10 issues is undisciplined and leaves the people of God The modern term we use for that ancient systematic approach is Expository Preaching. We are simply working verse by verse through the whole counsel of God's word, which,

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as we get through it, equips us in every way for godliness and obedience and life and flourishing. It may not be flashy, but the week in, week out proclamation of truth is a safety and protection for your soul.

3. The Pastor should not be evaluated by who is offended by faithful preaching and correction. v. 17 — They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

Consider how the Judaizers, these false brothers in Galatia, probably responded to this letter. Have we had any indication that they said, “Oh, thank you for the sharp rebuke! We were inadvertently feeding our pride and taking the church into a damnable heresy but now we are happy to jettison all of our self-righteousness and destroy our pride and humbly repent.” You think that’s what they said? I’m sure they didn’t, because **v. 17** tells us their motivation for legalism was that they would be made much of... that is, that people would look at them and glory in them. This echoes Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 6 of those who draw attention to themselves through some religious work. Jesus said they have their reward. The goal of preaching is not to avoid offending someone, or leaving pride in tact. The goal of preaching is Christward formation through the cruciform life. In other words, through the systematic wielding of the word of God, the old man and his lusts and ungodly passions are killed so that the life and character of Christ are fully formed. Brothers and sisters, that is offensive. The old man dies hard and with great resistance. Frankly, if the pastor is offending sinfulness and pride, then the character of Christ isn’t being formed, and it’s doubtful he’s doing his job.

Well, Pastor, how should we evaluate you?

Here we see 2 major things on which the pastor may be evaluated: **the content of the message**, and the **devotion to discipleship**. This is not an exhaustive list, but it does echo **Colossians 1:24 – 2:5**, if you want to review that from our time in Colossians last year. The necessary character qualities of a pastor are not noted here, but figure prominently in the pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus. But let’s look at the pertinent things here in Galatians 4.

1. The Pastor should be evaluated on the Content of the Message.

There are 3 statements in this passage that form one truth:

v. 13b — I preached the gospel to you;

v. 14b — you received me as an angel of God — do you recall, perhaps, what *angel* means??

Messenger! One presenting not his own message, but like an ambassador, proclaiming the

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message of another without alteration, without bias, without omission or addition — just faithfully presenting God's message

v. 16 — Have I then become your enemy by **telling you the truth**.

The pastor's influence and authority is derived only from his faithful, accurate proclamation of God's truth in his word, and the centrality of the Good News of Jesus Christ — that's what *gospel* means — good news. The content of the preacher's message is restricted to God's message. The pastor is not a freelancer, vomiting his own ideas. His preaching must be faithful to the whole counsel of God's word — faithful when it wounds, faithful when it heals; faithful when it angers, faithful when it brings comfort; faithful when it confounds, faithful when it clarifies; faithful when it divides the goats, faithful when it embraces the sheep, faithful in season and out of season. When the world says shut up or go to jail, the pastor must say, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4:19–20)

Men pleasers are not qualified for pastoral ministry — they will shrink from truth when something unpopular arises. Lazy students who are not wrestling and struggling through texts, working to fully make the connections and present God's word with accuracy and authority, are not qualified. These men are not merely disqualified through by laziness or distraction—they are disqualified because through are dangerous. In **1 Timothy 4:16**, Paul tells Timothy that he must persistently keep a "close watch" on himself "and on the teaching, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." Lack of diligence in doctrine and teaching doesn't save, but endangers. Isn't that kind of careful watch on doctrine exactly what we have been experiencing as we work through this letter?

The Pastor is to be evaluated by his faithful, careful preaching and teaching of God's word.

2. The Pastor is be evaluated by his Devotion to Discipleship

The Pastor is to have the best interest of the people at heart. His decisions must be made based on the best interest of the church, not his own interests. He is to be evaluated by his diligent and abundant labor of discipleship among God's people, giving himself to the process of maturing people in Christ.

v. 11 — **I am afraid I may have labored in vain**. The word *labored* means to work hard to the point of weariness. In **v. 19** he compares his labor to **child birth**. The pastor's energies and resources are to be given to long days, and long visits, and long conversations, and long study to disciple, and

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teach, and cultivate spiritual growth in the life of God's people. And he is to keep it up. There is no clocking out. It is daily work with sheep, and sheep are rarely members of the Gifted and Talented class. Sorry, sheep. No offense. Spiritual growth takes spiritual work fought in spiritual battles against spiritual foes in the power of the Spirit of God. That's a high bar, and one that will spend the life of the faithful pastor. None of this is to say that pastors should not take time off, or that they are Superman, not needing anything. But the 20th Century megachurch model of corporate ministry that superintends souls from a distance or through a program is not a faithful New Testament model. Hence the model we embrace for pastoral care is a costly approach of investing in lives, checking on people, not only praying for them, but praying with them. And frankly, we aren't doing as a good a job in this area as we know we need to. We understand what we need to do. And we know that is it costly. But it is a joyful assignment for the glory of God and the good of his people — it not a burden. You recognize the gifting of a pastor by seeing the delight with which one gives himself to the work of ministry. We are all spending the resource of life on something. What better investment can pastors make than in spending the resource of life on seeing God's people be formed into Christ's image.

And this is the one goal, the *teleios* of the relationship between pastor and people: **That Christ be formed in you**, as **v. 19** says. Whether toughness or tenderness, sharpness or smoothness, all of it is for one purpose: that the goal of faith be brought to maturity, and you look like Jesus.

The Teleios of Pastoral Care: Christ formed in you.

How long will you need a faithful pastor? When will the job of pastoral care be completed in your life? When people look at you and see the beauty of Jesus in you, rather than seeing you. So, you know you better than I know you. How long will *you* need a pastor laboring to faithfully wield the sword of the word of God? Are you close to being mistaken for Jesus? Then you need a faithful pastor who will love you enough to yell at you if it looks like you are running out in the broad road that leads to destruction. You need a pastor who will ask hard questions, though they may offend: My brother, I am deeply concerned that you are not progressing in Christlikeness. Have you come to saving faith, or are you trying to do something on your own that cannot save?

You need a pastor that is disciplined in his study of God's word, mining the depths of eternal truth to serve, if you will, the words of life on the table every Sunday, and then to spend himself checking to see if your soul is growing and advancing in Christlikeness and godliness.

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When I look at that list, I pray that God gives you a pastor who does all that well. Perhaps if you will pray for Steve and I, we ourselves will grow to fill these enormous shoes that are needed to walk faithfully in the office of pastor. It is a sobering and staggering task, and one that will only achieve the *teleios* of Christ being formed in you when we are devoted to each other, working through rough patches and hard places by bringing the word of God to bear in all our lives. If we are not making progress toward being conformed to the image of God, the apostle would be alarmed as he has been with the Galatians: Has my effort all been in vain? Are you even converted; are you even a Christian if you are trying to keep these calendar feasts and cutting rituals to finish the work of justification?

Let's recommit to love each other, to tear our eyes out for each other, if needed, and to lay down our lives for each other until we reach the teleios of the Christian life: Christ formed in me.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.
All his wonderful passions, and his purity.
Holy Spirit divine, all my being refine,
till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.
Let Jesus be seen in me.

Pray

Gospel Thread

Giving Options

- General Fund
- Missions
- Go! Missions Fund
- Benevolence