Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Paul's Doubts about the Galatians
Scripture: Galatians 4
Code: BQ71311

My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you-but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.(Galatians 4:19–20)

Speaking like a mother, Paul now addressed the Galatian believers as**my children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you**. He was not arguing like a lawyer before a skeptical jury but pleading like a parent to a wayward child.

Childrenis from*teknion*, a diminutive that was used figuratively as a term of special affection. Literally, it referred to a small child, and therefore can be translated here as “little children,” as in the King James Version. In light of Paul’s figure of childbirth, both ideas are appropriate. The Galatian believers were extremely dear to Paul but were acting like infants who refused to be born.

Paul’s compassion was always evident. For example, to the Thessalonian church he wrote, “We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us” (1 Thess. 2:7–8).

With the Galatians, however, after having spiritually nursed them in their new life in Christ, he became **again in labor**with them. “That is abnormal and unnatural,” he implies. “You have already experienced the new birth, but now you are acting as if you need to be spiritually born all over again. You make me feel like a mother who has to deliver the same baby twice.”

But however abnormal and tragic their spiritual condition, Paul would not forsake them**until Christ** was**formed in**them. The verb (*morphoo*) carries the idea of essential form rather than outward shape, and therefore refers to Christlike character. Christlikeness is the goal of the believer’s life. “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,” he exhorted the church at Colossae (Col. 2:6; cf. Rom. 13:14). God has predestined believers “to become conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). “We all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18). The Father sent the Son to earth not only to die that men might be saved but also to live as the divine example for those who are saved.

Paul’s great desire was to deal more directly with these issues that would require him**to be present with**the Galatians in person and to be able to**change**his**tone**with them. He hardly knew what more to say or how to say it, because he was so**perplexed about**them. This verb (*aporeomai*) means to be at one’s wits’ end. He could not understand how they could have been taught the gospel so well, believed it so genuinely, and then appeared to have forsaken it so quickly (cf. 1:6).

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.

As John R. W. Stott has commented in his*The Message of Galatians,*“The church needs people who, in listening to their pastor, listen for the message of Christ, and pastors who, in laboring among the people, look for the image of Christ.”

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