

Until Christ be formed in you

How Christ Is Formed in Us

Galatians 4:12-20

Living Bible (TLB)

12 Dear brothers, please feel as I do about these things, for I am as free from these chains as you used to be. You did not despise me then when I first preached to you, 13 even though I was sick when I first brought you the Good News of Christ. 14 But even though my sickness was revolting to you, you didn't 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 Jesus Christ himself.

15 Where is that happy spirit that we felt together then? For in those days I know you would gladly have taken out your own eyes and given them to replace mine[a] if that would have helped me.

16 And now have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

17 Those false teachers who are so anxious to win your favor are not doing it for your good. What they are trying to do is to shut you off from me so that you will pay more attention to them. 18 It is a fine thing when people are nice to you with good motives and sincere hearts, especially if they aren't doing it just when I am with you! 19 Oh, my children, how you are hurting me! I am once again suffering for you the pains of a mother waiting for her child to be born—longing for the time when you will finally be filled with Christ.

20 How I wish I could be there with you right now and not have to reason with you like this, for at this distance I frankly don't know what to do.

Longing for the time when you will finally be filled with

Christ

How does that happen?

Under what conditions does it come about?

The answer is made plain by linking three verses.

First, link 4:19 to 4:6. Verse 19 says Christ should be formed in us. Verse 6 says that the way Christ comes to us is by his Spirit: God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.

Then, link 4:6 to 3:5. There Paul says that "the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you does so not by works of law but by hearing with faith."

In other words, the ongoing supply of the Spirit of Christ and his miraculous work happens through faith. So the answer to the question, how is Christ formed in your life? is: by your faith.

It's really quite simple: The Son of God comes and shapes us from within if we rely on him to come and shape us.

The Son takes shape in those who abandon themselves to him.

Christ forms himself in the lives of those who will let go of all the forms of life in which they have shaped on their own.

Christ takes shape in a life that is willing to become putty in God's hands. Christ presses the shape of his own face into to you or your family, the clay of our soul when we cease to be hard and resistant, and when we take our own amateur hands off and admit that we are not such good artists as he is.

Here we can see clearly what faith is. Faith is the assurance that what God will make of you, as Christ is formed in your life, is vastly to be preferred over what you can make of yourself.

Faith is the confidence that the demonstration of Christ's work in your life is more wonderful than all the praise you could get for

yourself by being a self-made man-or woman.

Faith is a happy resting in the all-sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross, what he is doing now in our heart, and what he promises to do for us forever.

So, it's clear how Paul's message and the Judaizers' message are opposed to each other. Their message caters to our natural pride our desire to be "self-made" people who get glory for ourselves.

Paul's message robs us of all such pride by saying we should be "Christ-made" people who get glory for God by trusting him to shape us every day.

God is not glorified by the self-wrought moral, aesthetic, or technical achievements of human life.

He is glorified when we turn from ourselves and trust him like little children to enable us to do his bidding. This is the best news in the world, because it opens up the way of salvation to the simplest and weakest of us all.

The Gospel at the Beginning

In trying to persuade the Galatians that it is indeed good news and that they should not forsake it to follow the Judaizers, Paul reminds them of how valuable the gospel was to them back at the beginning.

Look at verses 12b-16: "You did me no wrong; you know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first; and 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. What has become of the satisfaction you felt? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?"

To all his biblical and theological arguments in chapter 3 for why the Galatians should not follow the Judaizers but keep faith in the gospel, Paul now adds an argument from experience. He says in effect: Do you recall how my plans to move on were interrupted because of that terrible attack in my eyes-how they were red and infected and filled up with puss? You had every reason to switch channels and watch a more attractive preacher. My disease was a trial to you. My message did not come well-packaged. But you did me no wrong; you didn't despise me; you received me like an angel; you saw Christ in me; you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Why? Because you saw the beauty and truth of the gospel! It persuaded you. It satisfied you. It was so valuable that you would have given up your eyes to keep the message going -your eyes! Your eyes! Is the message of the Judaizers really more valuable, really more valid?

I think Paul must have believed that if he could just bring to their memory how powerful and beautiful the gospel was at the beginning, they would stop being attracted by the false gospel of the Judaizers.

And perhaps that's the way I should close today.

For some of you these are the very days in which for the first time the beauty of the gospel of grace is beginning to shine on the horizon of your soul.

But others of you look back months or years or decades, to a golden era of faith when Christ was powerfully taking shape in your life. But something has changed. There has been a kind of settling into the world, and the vibrant sense of being an alien and an exile in the world has faded. And the powerful shaping forces in your life are not coming from Christ within but from the world without.

The word of encouragement and admonition to us all this morning is this: the Spirit of the living Christ can be poured into us afresh today.

Paul would not have written this letter if there were no hope for the Galatians. Therefore, I urge you, take your amateur hands off the clay of your life and yield yourselves into the sovereign hands of God.

Disavow the praise of men and all your efforts to achieve it.

Turn your hearts to Christ and say: I am not my own; you have bought me; forgive me; be formed within me. Not to me, O Lord, not to me, but to your name give glory (Psalm 115:1). Amen.