

## Galatian 4:8-20: The Sweetness of Gospel Unity

Exegetical Big Idea: The Galatians' lack of love for Paul is evidence of their being swooned by the false teachers. Paul however, as a true minister of the gospel maintains his love for the Galatians painful though it is.

Homiletical Big Idea: **If you love Christ, you will love your brothers and sisters in Christ.**

Fallen Condition Focus: Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. We were meant to live in community with each other. If we think we are growing in our love for Christ, but are not also growing in our love for each other, we are fooling ourselves.

Background:

Paul has shown the Galatians that true freedom is found by faith alone in Christ alone. It's not his first time preaching this message to the Galatians, but circumstances have necessitated him writing a letter of warning to them. They are being wooed by false teachers back into slavery. The slavery that they are in danger of wondering into is the slavery of legalism, which is trying to be right with God by their obedience. Paul has used every tool in his tool belt to show them the foolishness of their ways. He has shown them theologically, biblically, and experientially, and even from Paul's own history that the only true freedom is found in faith in Christ.

But these verses are different. Paul exposes his heart in these verses. Paul is deeply pained by the Galatians. Their relationship has changed. He wants them to see that in these verses. He's not going to introduce any new theology, but he wants them to see that this change of relationship is based solely on their wondering from true faith in Christ.

He wants them to see how the breakdown of their relationship, is just a symptom that their relationship with Christ is breaking down.

Intro:

The story of Ruth in the Old Testament is not one that gets a lot of attention, but it's a beautiful story of God's provision and his grace. It starts with an Israelite family who moved from Israel because of a famine, and settled in Moab. It serves to note that Moab during the time of the Judges was not exactly friendly to Israel. But nonetheless, they settled in Moab and as time went on, the kids got married to two Moabite women. However, soon all the men in the family died, the husband and two sons. So the wife, whose name was Naomi, and her two daughters in law (one was named Ruth) were left. Naomi decided it would be best to go back to her home land of Israel and told both her daughters in law to stay behind in Moab, and get remarried so they could have a life and sustenance to live.

One of the daughters goes back, but Ruth decides she will not leave her mother-in-law.

What she says next is amazing. Ruth says to Naomi "...your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die, I will die...May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me" (Ruth 1:16-17)

Why is this so striking? Because Ruth could have said "You're right, you go your way and I'll go mine and I can be a follower of YHWH with my people in Moab on my own." Ruth recognized something so

profound, and that is that to be a follower and worshiper of YHWH, means being part of and having love for his people.

And the story doesn't even end there! Ruth meets a man named Boaz, who sees the desperate state of Ruth and her mother, and works things out to marry her!

Ruth went from being a foreigner and part of the enemies of God's, to a married in full-fledged Israelite!

God saves people to himself, but doesn't save them to individualism. He saves individuals, and folds them into one people, his people. And since they are united by worshiping one God, as one people, then the natural outcome is that those people will show love and concern for each other!

And since we worship a God who does not change, it should be no surprise when Christ tells us that the mark of his Church that the world will recognize is our love, both for the world but also for each other.

That's what Paul is focusing on here in these verses.

Paul sees this played out in the verses today. Their love for him has grown cold. He wants them to see his pain, so that they will further understand their danger of turning their back on Christ and the freedom that is in him, and embracing slavery.

Their lack of concern and love for Paul is simply showing their lack of concern and love for Christ himself.

If you confess Jesus as your savior, then we are brothers and sisters in Christ. God has put us in a family. If we claim to have love for God, but show no love and concern for each other, then we are fooling ourselves. Love for God, always means a love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

**If you love Christ, you will love your brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**Vv. 12-15 – Brothers and sisters in Christ love with a sacrificial love.**

Paul opens with a plea to the Galatians. He pleads with them to "become like him" because, Paul says, he has "become as they are". This is Paul calling them back into fellowship in Christ. When Paul says "become like me" in verse 12, he is speaking of the freedom that he has in Christ. Remember that the Galatians were turning from that freedom and enslaving themselves all over again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world as Paul put it back in verse 9.

Paul is showing the Galatian church that they are the ones who have moved, not Paul. Paul has remained steadfast in his position in Christ, but the Galatians are starting to drift away, and the fearful question is if they have drifted too far.

But Paul does say that in one sense he has become like them. He clearly does not mean in a theological sense. He hasn't met them in the middle with their false theology. He has stood steady in his convictions about God, but he has become like them in a sense nonetheless. What does he mean? He doesn't tell us, but the most likely meaning is that Paul, who was born a Jew and grew up in the Jewish tradition and pharisaical tradition, has thrown all that aside. He tells the Galatians this back in chapter 1. He has become like a gentile, in the sense that he himself threw off the chains of obeying the Mosaic Law for righteousness with God.

In doing that he has become like them, and the irony of course is that in a sense they have switched spots. Paul now believes rightly, and is free from the law, but the Galatians have jumped into the law for justification.

Even with this shift, he still calls them “brothers and sisters”. He loves them. And once upon a time, they loved him too.

Paul continues and in the next few verses reminds them of what they had. He reminds them that it was some sort of illness that first brought him to the Galatians. We are not told exactly what kind of illness this is, and many have speculated, but we won't do that today. He does tell however that it was a bodily ailment. Likely what happened, scholars believe, was that Paul was planning on travelling through Galatia, but something happened. He was injured, or became sick and chose instead to stop in Galatia to heal up. Well Paul being Paul and having a deep sense of the providence of God, wasted no time in ministering the gospel to the people of Galatia. And guess what, many came to faith in Christ! Paul says in verse 14 that they received him as they would have an angel of God, or even Christ Jesus himself! Clearly they heard the message of the gospel, and believed it with joy.

And here is what Paul really wants to drive home: Their acceptance of the gospel brought with it a love for Paul, a fellow Christian. Paul admits that his sickness was a burden to them in some sorts. And though the Galatians could have been bitter about this, kept their distance from Paul, they embraced him in love.

[This Kind of makes me think of when one (or more!) of my kids get a cold. It's one of those nasty colds that brings with it all kinds of grossness. They are wiping their noses on their sleeves. They are coughing all the time. They sneeze and more comes out than you thought could fit into such a tiny nose. Now I don't particularly like having someone else's sickness on me. Honestly if it were you, I'd keep my distance. But it's my kid. If my kid comes into our bed in the middle of the night because they are sick, do I reject them and turn them around and send them back to endure it themselves? No. We bring our kid into the bed, we get coughed on, the nose gets wiped on my pillow. Why? Because we love them. They need the closeness of mom and dad in their time of need, and we give it. Is it a burden? Well I guess in some sense, but do we despise them? Not at all!]

This is the kind of gospel love that the Galatians were showing to Paul! In some sense he was a burden to them, but did they keep their distance and despise him? No, look how Paul says they treated him. He says in verse 15 that if it were possible, they would have gouged out their own eyes and given them to Paul. Maybe Paul is being hyperbolic, meaning maybe he's using big language to show just how much they would sacrifice for him. When we put our kids to bed at night we say “I love you to the moon and back”. It's a way of saying that we love them so much. Is that what Paul's doing? Maybe, but maybe he's being literal. It's this verse that makes some scholars think that Paul's illness was some sort of eye problem. I think Paul's serious here!

I think Paul is reminding them that their passionate acceptance and love for Christ, brought with it a passionate love and acceptance of Paul, a fellow Christian.

But why is that the case? Why is sacrificial love for brothers and sisters in Christ connected to love for Christ? I hope you see the connection. When someone is overwhelmed with the reality that Christ

sacrificed everything, so that they could be reconciled to God, they cannot help but overflow with that same love for other people.

But Paul asks them in verse 15 “what happened to your blessedness?” The answer? They lost sight of the grace of Christ. It’s no different for us today. When we lose sight of the grace of Christ and his love for us that we accept by faith, our love for each other goes right away with it. So what’s the remedy? Simply put, it’s God’s kindness. God’s kindness leads us to repentance.

Thinking again of a child who has a cold. We are messy people. We are those kids who walk around spreading grossness everywhere we go! Does Christ despise us? Keep his distance? Reject us? No way. He pulls us in, comforts us, heals us.

I admit, my first reaction (yes even as a pastor) sometimes is to keep my distance from your messiness. I don’t think I’m alone in this. Are you struggling with sin or doubt? Are you struggling with fear or despair? It’s a human reaction to think “you stay over there with your messiness, I’m fine right where I am”. But that’s not how Christ responded to us, and that’s not how brothers and sisters in Christ should respond to each other. If Christ has sacrificed himself for me, how then can I not be growing in my desire to sacrifice myself for you, to the glory of Christ? Instead, we ought to be willing to draw near to each other. Do you have a spiritual runny nose? Here’s my sleeve.

Is it a burden? Sure in some ways, but aren’t we called to carry each other’s burdens? That’s glorious.

**If you love Christ, you will love your brothers and sisters in Christ.**

**Vv. 16-18 – Brothers and sisters in Christ point each other to Christ.**

Paul’s now going to show a comparison between him and the false teachers. And to do that he asks them a cutting question in verse 16. He asks them if now he has become their enemy, because he simply is telling them the truth? Obviously suspicion of Paul has set it. The false teachers have come up the scene and they are teaching a different message than Paul’s.

So naturally, the Galatians are forced to decide who to believe. If we are made right with God by faith in Christ alone, then Paul is right. But if we are made right with God by faith in Jesus *and* obedience to the Mosaic Law, then these new teachers are right. Which is it? Paul then gets them to think of a very important question: “who is concerned for your highest good? These teachers, or me?”

Paul says in verse 17 “They make much of you...” That’s a bit of an awkward translation. Literally the word used there is to be zealous. So Paul is saying, “they are zealous for you”. These teachers are obviously trying very hard to win over the Galatians! Ok, but so is Paul. Paul would admit that he is also zealous for the Galatians.

So what’s the difference? Well, Paul continues that they are zealous “for no good purpose”. So if their zealousness is for no good purpose...then why are they zealous for the Galatians? Paul explains that as well. These teachers have 2 goals.

The first is isolation. These teachers want to shut out the Galatians. The idea here is that they are telling the Galatians to have nothing to do with Paul and his crazy beliefs. But is this really about isolating the Galatians from Paul? Of course not. It’s not ultimately about Paul, it’s about Christ. By trying to shut out Paul, they are trying to shut out the message of Christ from the Galatians!

And why would they want to do that? Well that leads to their second goal, which is personal gain. If these teachers can cut Paul and his gospel off from the Galatians, then they will be able to be the savior to the Galatians. Paul again uses the word zealous to describe what the false teachers want. They want the Galatians to be “zealous” for them! Not for God, not for other Christians, but for them.

It’s the age old struggle of self-righteousness and self-worship. It all boils down to a matter of worship. And this is nothing new, isolation and personal gain is the goal of every cult leader! Paul is simply revealing their true colours.

[Last Sunday we had a surprise snowfall. It was just cold enough to snow instead of rain, which means the snow that fell was wet, and perfect for snowman building. The kids were so excited to get home from church so that they could get outside and build a snowman. I decided to go out with them and we built 4 full-sized snowmen with the snow that was on our yard. Needless to say we have wet jackets and snow pants hanging to dry, and hats and mitts on the vents. But this week has been warmer. It’s been so warm that the snowmen have now melted. Something interesting happened when those snowmen melted. Where the snowmen once stood is now a big pile of leaves. See the heat melted the snowmen and revealed the fact that I didn’t rake my lawn before the snow fell! The heat revealed that what we made was more of a “snow-leaf” man rather than a snow man.]

Paul is putting the heat to the false teachers and revealing them as not what they seem. They are not out for the good of the Galatians at all! They are out for their own good. Paul is here implying that his own brand of zealousness is totally different than that of the false teachers. What is Paul zealous for? He wants nothing more for the Galatians than for them to be in Christ. And this, is for their highest good.

Paul’s not looking to get personal gain, or isolate for himself a following of people who will tell him how awesome of an apostle he is. He doesn’t have a savior complex. He wants their highest good, which is them to be in Christ. Paul has the same mindset as John the Baptist when John said Jesus must increase, while he himself must decrease.

What is it that makes a person sacrifice their own gain, and to desire the highest good for another? What motivates a person to say that they must decrease in the eyes of fellow Christians, so that Christ may increase?

The answer is fulfilment in Christ. Paul doesn’t need or want anything from the Galatians, he already has all he needs in Christ! On the other hand, what makes a person selfishly desire their own good above the good of another? They lack fulfilment.

[Alana and I have had the privilege of walking with a few engaged couples through premarital counseling. It’s sometimes surprises people that after hearing testimonies and getting to know the couple, the first session we do has nothing to do with marriage at all! The first session is all about fulfilment in Christ. It’s vitally important in a marriage, as is it in other relationships, to understand that it is Christ who has given you all you need for life and godliness. If the couple can truly grasp and live in that truth, then it guards against all kinds of selfish desires and behaviours, and replaces those with the desire for the spouse to grow in their fulfilment in Christ.]

It’s the same thing here. What motivates a Christian to desire the highest good for another Christian? It’s no less than their fulfilment in Christ. Do you see that our love for each other is directly connected to our love for Christ.

If I desire your highest good, then what I want for you is to grow in your relationship with Christ. The highest form of love that I can have for you, and you for me, is to point each other to the One who meets all of our needs according to the glorious riches of his grace. If I want less than that for you, I am scamming you with an inferior product.

Of course it's not always received well...Paul felt as if he was now an enemy to the Galatians. The reality is that putting aside pride and surrendering to Christ is a hard work. You might be here and be listening to this message of the love of Christ and think it foolish. You might think it's ridiculous that Christians believe these things, and even maybe that we are a stain on society and enemies. I'm not your enemy. I'm trying to give you the truth. Trusting in the Lord Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and acknowledging him as the King of your life is the best thing for you. It's for your highest good.

**If you love Christ, you will love your brothers and sisters in Christ.**

We don't stop preaching this message, both to those who don't believe, and to ourselves, because the work of loving each other is never done.

**Vv. 19-20 – Brothers and Sisters in Christ persevere in love for each other.**

The Galatians have hurt Paul, but he won't give up on them. Paul's relationship with the Galatians he likens to that of a mother to her children. In verse 19 he calls the Galatians his "dear children". The picture he uses to show his love and concern for them is the picture of an unborn child in his or her mother's womb. The picture is one that I admit I can't fully identify with. I've certainly never been pregnant, let alone been in labour!

But that's the picture Paul uses. He says of the Galatians "for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." I admit I don't often think of gospel work as "mothering", but it is!

Many of you can relate to this. Think of a mother, who for 9 months endures fluctuating hormones, aches and sickness, restless sleep, not to mention concern in the soul for the wellbeing of the child, and all of that is *before* labour and birth! Labour and birth...well that's just next level. And guess what, even after the baby is born, there are often permanent scars and changes.

Why? Because of love. Because she knows that this living person is dependent on her, and she will sacrifice herself for the good of her baby. It's a beautiful reality, that is equally difficult, but it's worth it.

God has put us in a family that is dependent on each other. We are called to love each other, and to point each other to Christ until Christ is formed in us. That's an ongoing job. That's a job that requires sacrifice of ourselves for each other, often leaving permanent scars, but it's worth it.

Notice how Paul says he's "again" in the pains of childbirth? That means he's been here before, and he's for the sake of the Galatian church willing to go it again. It amazes me that after all a mother goes through to have a child, she is willing to do it again!

Paul is willing to do it again, because he knows God won't disappoint. Paul says that he's in childbirth pains "until" Christ is formed in them. Notice how he doesn't say "if" Christ is formed in them, but "until". That's language of hope. That's language of faith that God is going to use the pain and labor to bring about salvation of the Galatians for his glory.

This task is not just given to pastors. It's given to us all. There are days when the labor pains seem to much. There are days when the last thing I want to do is show gentleness and mercy and humility to by brothers and sisters in Christ. I think if you're honest you'll come to the same conclusion. And yet we're called to persevere in love and affection for each other. Why? Because Christ persevered for you. He persevered to the cross so that you could be reconciled to God. And because of that, he empowers us by his Spirit to persevere for each other so that we can call each other to Christ.

If you love Christ, you will persevere in love for each other, even when it's painful.

We end with verse 20, which at first seems not too important, but it is. Paul says "I wish I could be present with you..." Yes he's hurt. Yes he's confused at their turning. Yes he's frustrated with them. But above all that, he loves them. He loves them, but he can't help it. He loves them because he loves Christ.

**If you love Christ, you will love your brothers and sisters in Christ.**