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**A1022 – May 30, 2010 – Galatians 4:12-20 – Paul's Plea For
Restored Friendship**

Alright, we've been working with Gal 4:1-11. This section teaches that during the OT period of time both the Jewish world and the Gentile world were under the demonic powers, involved in worshipping various things like nature, man and the state. Both world's, not just the heathen Gentiles, but both worlds worshipped at these altars until God sent forth His son, in the fullness of time, right on schedule. God sent forth Jesus Christ to redeem Israel, but Israel rejected Jesus Christ and only a remnant believed. Out of that rejection the gospel opened up to the Gentiles and many of them believed and so you have Jews and Gentiles coming to faith in Christ and being adopted as sons of God in one new entity called the Church, which is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female; we all through faith have become sons of God and we all received the Holy Spirit who dwells in us and who cries out on our behalf in time of trouble, "Abba! Father!" And so in this new position with all of these spiritual blessings Paul asks why are you turning back to the weak and worthless things of religious Judaism. That's Paul's concern. Why go back to that junk when you have all these wonderful things in Christ? You were slaves before faith, you were sons after faith, now you wanna be a slave again? That doesn't make sense. But this is one of the dangers with every person who comes to faith in Christ. They aren't accustomed to the new way of living so they resort to the old way of living and it's tragic. Paul said the only way to live the Christian life is the same way you became a Christian in the first place, by grace through faith. You do not become a Christian by grace through faith and then live the Christian life by works of the law. You become a Christian by grace through faith and you live the Christian life by grace through faith. This is what the Galatians have failed to learn. They became Christians by grace through faith but then they were trying to live the Christian life by works of the law.

And Paul says that won't work. You're just going back to slavery under demonic powers. The demonic powers thrive on getting believers to abandon grace and resort to works because they know that makes believers impotent. So in verse 10 here's what the demonic powers want Gentile Christians to do; "You observe days and months and seasons and years." That means they were scrupulous about religious observance, they were sticklers for all the ritual, the calendar, the festivals, all the religious activity; the demonic powers love that because that has absolutely nothing to do with spiritual growth. Why do I say that? Because unbelievers can do ritual, unbelievers can calculate festivals, unbelievers can do religious activity. So what makes a religious unbeliever different from a believer? Answer, the Spirit of God living within them. The Spirit of God is only living inside of believers. So true spiritual growth can only be attained by depending on His work in our life through the application of Christian doctrine. And Paul is concerned, you can see it in verse 11; he's really concerned that all the labor he's poured into them, all the life-giving doctrine he's preached to them is just in vain because they're not applying the doctrine, they're rejecting the doctrine and therefore the Holy Spirit isn't applying it in their life and that means no spiritual growth.

That's the same danger for every believer. There are one of three scenarios going on right now in every believer's life on the planet. First, there are some believers that are not getting doctrine at all because their pastor doesn't teach the word of God because they're in a church that hates the word of God and believers that stay in these churches would just rather have their ears tickled and have the pastor make them feel good on Sunday morning. If you're listening you need to leave that church immediately. You don't owe them an explanation. That church has capitulated to the culture and isn't really a church. It's nothing more than a social group of warm bodies to fill the pews. Go find a church where the pastor is teaching the word. Second scenario: there are believers that are getting doctrine but they don't like the doctrine and they go negative volition to the doctrine and they sit around and rationalize their sin and justify themselves, self-righteous believers and eventually they leave the church because it was too convicting and the Bible wasn't affirming their way of life. They're accommodating Christians, want to get along with the world (on the world's terms) and they're compromising Christians, riding the fence all the time. The third scenario is a believer who is getting doctrine and they are positive to the doctrine and God the Holy

Spirit utilizes the doctrine to produce fruit in their lives, to cause spiritual growth, these are Counter-Attack Christians.

Now if you're here it's impossible that you're in the first group because week in week out we teach the word. We love the word of God and we teach the word of God and we're not going to stop teaching the word of God. So if you stick around you have one of two choices, you can go negative to the doctrine or you can go positive to the doctrine. The Galatians were going negative to the doctrine that Paul taught, they were going negative to the truth. And Paul is trying to get them to go positive. They had at one time been positive, what's happened now so that they were negative? What it's caused is destruction to the close friendship that once existed between Paul and these Galatians. Some commentators and I tend to agree, think that the theme of this passage is friendship and what happens to friendships when people go negative to the truth of God's word. So on one side you've got the teacher and on the other side you've got the learners and as the word is taught and the learners take in the word and they go positive and they start to love the teacher because the teacher tells them the truth and they're positive to the truth and the teacher warns them about all the deceptions and so over time they begin to look upon the teacher as a close friend, and they'd do anything for the teacher. But then something can happen. The people who were once positive to the truth and would do anything for the teacher start to go negative to the word of God and then they start to pick at everything and they eventually hate the teacher. They become the enemy of the teacher. And in this scenario, sometimes the teacher knows it, sometimes they don't, usually they know something is wrong because these people were your friends, but many times they don't know what's caused it because the person who is negative to the word and has rejected the teaching doesn't tell them and so they don't know even what the issue is and then what happens as this person harbors all this is they begin to have this inner hatred of the teacher and eventually they leave the church and then all the bad-mouthing goes on around the community. Now, in that situation what is the teacher supposed to do? Answer; love the person who is hating him and turning against him. Love them, don't hate them, don't hold grudges, and don't take it personally. But all the while the teacher is loving this person or persons he has to tell them the truth (if he gets the chance). Sometimes they don't get the chance because these people run off and won't have anything to do with you. But you love them and give them the truth. You can't compromise the truth. That's

what Paul exemplifies in today's passage. Paul shows us the mature response. Paul could take it very personally: oh, they're out to get me and they don't like my teaching and blah, blah, blah. That would be the immature Christian response. But Paul's not going to do that because Paul's a mature believer. It's the believer who is negative and hiding from the teacher and harboring hate that's immature. They haven't learned how to resolve differences, they just get mad and harbor hate and go hide in a corner like an immature brat. Not big enough to get it out in the open and solve problems. And in this scenario the mature teacher is just to try and appeal to them - come here, I'm not angry with you, I don't take it personally, I'm not holding a grudge.

So we want to learn how Paul handles it. Paul's the mature believer and the Galatians are the immature brats running around rejecting his teaching and beginning to harbor hatred in their souls for Paul. And you'll see how Paul appeals to their past friendship. What happened? We used to be friends; things were great, what happened?

Gal 4:12, **I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong;** Look at that, I don't take it personally that you're rejecting my teaching; **you have done me no wrong.** Now every teacher of God's word has to learn this lesson or they will drive themselves crazy worrying about what other people think of them and their teaching. All a teacher can do is be faithful to the text and if people don't like it or turn against it he can still love them and want to win them to the truth (as Paul does) but he should not hold a grudge

Look at the expressions of friendship in this verse. One, he calls them **brethren** and that's an endearing term, down in verse 19 he'll call them "My children," so this passage has friendship, from Paul's side, expressed all over it. Notice then how he says in verse 12, **become as I, for I also have become as you.** Now it's expressed strangely in the translation but what Paul is saying is you're not my friend because you've turned to legalism, and you know I don't teach legalism, but I'm still your friend, so become as I am, become my friend again by being restored to grace orientation. I beg you to become as I am, grace oriented. I'm still your friend, I'm not your enemy, Paul says, **You have done me no wrong;** and down in verse 16 what does he ask? "have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" I'm not your

enemy Paul says. I never have been and I never will be because I'm a mature believer and I'm not going to let you rejecting my grace teaching get in the way of my side of the friendship. You're letting it get in the way but I'm not going to let it get in the way. If you'll just come back to grace we can be close friends again.

Then he begins in verses 13-14 to appeal to their past treatment of Paul, how they first received him and the friendship that formed, strong bonds of friendship. He says, **but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; ¹⁴and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.** Now in verse 13 he's reminding them of why he came to them, what the occasion was in the first place that brought Paul to Galatia to preach the gospel. The occasion is narrated by Luke in Acts 13. Acts 13 is the first missionary expedition. Paul and Barnabas were selected to go out from Antioch. Antioch was the base of the first missionary expedition. And Barnabas and Saul were chosen, later to be called Paul, his Gentile name. That missionary expedition was funded largely by Barnabas. The church didn't fund them. It was funded by the personal accounts of Barnabas. We know Barnabas was a wealthy Jew; he sold some beachside property on the island of Cyprus in Acts 5 and gave all the proceeds to the church at Jerusalem. So it could easily have been the equivalent of half a million dollars that man gave to the church. Cyprus real estate was prime real estate in the 1st century. So Barnabas had means. And when they went on that trip the first place they visited was the island of Cyprus. Why Cyprus? Obviously because that was where Barnabas was from. Barnabas was familiar with the territory, he knew the local businessmen, and he had friends, a logical place to start. So Barnabas and Saul set out, they took John Mark with them sort of as a helper and to give him some training. John Mark was Barnabas' nephew. At the beginning of that trip Barnabas is the leader, by the time they reach the other end of the island of Cyprus Saul is the leader and so rather than reading Barnabas and Saul you read from there on Saul and Barnabas. Barnabas took the back seat, Saul took the lead. That's the work of God the Holy Spirit in Saul's life, he was to be the leader. And then they sailed across from Cyprus and John Mark left them. We think John got upset about something and whatever it was Saul didn't like it too much; Saul thought John Mark was a flake because later he and Barnabas have a big

disagreement over whether John Mark gets another chance to prove himself on the second missionary journey. But in any case they head into regions Saul was more familiar with. Saul was from Tarsus, up in Cilicia, and so closer to his stomping grounds, very logical movement on that first missionary expedition. When they reached the shores at Pamphylia, (it's very swampy lowlands, lots of mosquitoes) they had a lot of people contract malaria. We think Paul got malaria and that's why they retreated up into the highlands of Galatia.¹ That would explain what Paul is saying in verse 13, you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; Galatia apparently wasn't on the agenda of the first missionary journey, but God the Holy Spirit had it on the agenda and so when Paul got malaria they headed up into these highlands, very high, 3600 feet above sea level, away from the swampy lowlands, for him to recuperate. It was on that occasion that Paul attended the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch and was able to preach the gospel the first time.

Now verse 14 goes on to say this was a trial for the Galatians. Here Paul shows up with malaria. The symptoms of malaria are cold sweats and a dry cough and you get real nauseous and lots of headaches and you start vomiting all over the place. So this vomiting, coughing, sweating man gets hauled into your town and this sick guy attends synagogue, real attractive. Paul apparently wasn't much to look at, sort of a short, gangly creature and now he's vomiting all over the place and in cold sweats and the guy is trying to preach the gospel. That message is in Acts 13 if you want to see how Paul preached the gospel. So yeah, verse 14, it was a trial for them that he shows up looking pretty ragged and yet how did they receive him? as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. The normal reaction if a guy came in here like that, just think of some malaria infested individual walking in here, they would clear out as they hauled him in and sat him down. And then the guy has something to say and gets up in the pulpit? Yet he says you did not despise or loathe me. That's the natural response. What is this thing? The natural thing is to say, get this guy out of here. But they didn't do that.

Most people judge on first appearance, but they didn't do that, they received him as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. It really matters not what a person looks like, it matters who that person is, their character and the content of their message. Jesus' own appearance was not one people looked upon favorably. Think of the descriptions of Jesus. He's no Greek Adonis,

He's a Jewish carpenter, Isa 53 says, "He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him." When God sent salvation into the world He didn't send a celebrity. God's not interested in people wanting to be with Jesus because of Jesus is a celebrity. God is interested in people wanting to be with Jesus because of who He is, His character, and what He did for them. But the nation Israel didn't recognize Him. They were more interested in what he looked like. "He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face." Didn't even want to look on Him. If Jesus walked in the room people walked out of the room. I'd like to see just one person in Church History, someone who has artistic ability, take the descriptions of Jesus and paint Him as the Scriptures paint him. Then someone could paint Paul and put the two side by side and we could have an ugly contest. But inside these men were giants, these men had so much character, they were fascinating people. And too often we don't give people a chance because they're ugly; they couldn't possibly have anything to offer. But originally that wasn't the Galatians. Originally they responded not to Paul's appearance but to the content that Paul preached, they were thankful that God had sent this gangly sick creature to preach the gospel which set them free.

But now things have changed, verse 15, Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Now the word blessing is the idea to count yourself blessed. They considered themselves blessed that they knew Paul. Paul was a great proclaimer of the gospel that set men free from demonic powers, free from the penalty of sin, freedom through Christ. And Paul says, what happened? Where is that sense that we're so blessed to know Paul and be friends with Paul? Had it entirely evaporated? For I bear you witness, I would step into the witness box, Paul says, and I would swear that your reception of me was so wonderful that you would have plucked out your own eyeballs and given them to me. Now that's pretty close friends. You don't just give your eyeballs to anyone. Eyeballs are some of your most precious possessions.ⁱⁱ So they were ready to do anything at all for the apostle Paul. They loved him, he was a great friend. What's happened now? Where's that sense of friendship?

Verse 16, here's the logical inference, so what, now I'm your enemy? Because I told you the truth? Huh, is that all I am to you? Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? Logically, they have. See, what happens, let's repeat what happens. We all know it happens we just don't talk about it; this is hush, hush stuff. The teacher comes up here and he teaches the word and you don't like it because you don't like the truth, the truth is hard sometimes and so you get angry and you don't want to change your life and so you get bent, you're negative to the word, and then you start taking it out on the teacher, behind his back, in the privacy of your soul and you harbor all this and you start to hate. He who was once your wonderful friend because he told you the truth, the truth that set you free, the truth that was so wonderful, now has become your enemy for the same reason, because he told you the truth. It's not the teacher you're mad at, it's the truth you're mad at. You're just negative. The truth is a double-edged sword. And Paul just deflects the anger. He says, you've done me no wrong, I'm not holding a grudge, I just told you the truth and for that you look at me as your enemy. But it's fascinating because Paul is a mature believer and Paul says I'm not your enemy. I still love you, you're still my children and I'm so concerned about you I'm sending you this letter. Now I'm not going to back down on the truth. The truth is I'm not going to compromise so we can get together. Compromise is not the road to harmonious friendship; steadfast love and resolution of the doctrinal issues is! Very little of that is going on today. Oh, we don't resolve differences, you have your opinion and I have mine and all truth is relative. We might as well jump on the relativism bandwagon. That's all it is.

In all truth, telling someone the truth is being their best friend. By telling them the truth Paul became their best friend. And the truth he is now telling them is the same as what he told them before, and on that occasion it won their friendship for him.ⁱⁱⁱ So truth is a double edge, it creates friends when people are positive to it; it creates enemies when people go negative to it. The problem is not with the truth, the problem is the people, how they're responding to the truth.^{iv}

Verse 17, They eagerly seek you (that's the Judaizers), They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. Here's the deal with the words "eagerly seek". It means to court your favor, to butter you up. They tell you so many good things about yourself and it makes you feel good and you start to like these people, these people tell me

I'm so great and I'm doing such a good job and all the rest of it. But this can be done honestly or dishonestly. Paul says they're doing it dishonestly, with wrong motives. The word not commendably means "not from honorable motives." Paul right here is judging the motives of the Judaizers. I want you to see this because it is wrong at times to judge others' motives, but at other times it's not wrong. Paul had enough spiritual expertise and contact with the Judaizers to know the motives of this sect. He had seen this before and upon seeing it again he didn't hesitate to judge the true underlying motives that had become so apparent to him. Perhaps the Galatians were unaware of the underlying motive so by revealing it to them they will be in a position to recognize these motives and see what was really going on, an attempt to win them over to the Judaizers position, so that they would seek the Judaizers. If that were to happen then that would decisively break their fellowship with Paul and with Christ, whose apostle Paul is! To break with the apostles writings is to break fellowship with Christ because it is through the apostolic writings that we have fellowship with Christ (1 John 1:3). Since legalism is contrary to the apostolic writings then to follow legalism is to sever yourself from Christ, to depart from grace orientation and Christ.

So verse 18, But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. In other words Paul says, it is good to be eagerly sought in an honorable manner, everyone likes to be sought after in an honorable manner, for honorable purposes, there's nothing wrong with that. There's nothing wrong with telling someone they did a good job, encouraging them, if it's done for noble purposes. And Paul says it is always good to do that, and not only when I am present with you, but also when I am absent. It is good to be spoken well of.^v It's such an encouragement to have someone come up and say, yeah, so and so told me about you, they said good things about your work, they said good things about your character, that's all fine and well. The problem is when someone comes along and says all those nice things, but the only reason they're saying the nice things is to get something out of you! That's what these Judaizers were doing to the Galatians. It was a whole lot of hot air and baloney talk, flattery. Paul obviously was not trying to flatter them; this is tough talk.

But he's not speaking face to face with them so he tries to be gentle, verse 19, My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— look at that word labor, this is the word for birth pangs, this is the thing that

a woman goes through just before the child is born, those last few hours, all that pain and agony and Paul says I shouldn't be in pain and agony again over you but I am, it's a second labor for Paul to get them to grow up spiritually because they haven't progressed in the Christian life. They've digressed, they've fallen back. But notice Paul doesn't say, ah, the hell with them. No, Paul is in labor again over them and will be until Christ is formed in them.

Now what is this? Christ formed in you. Obviously not all Christians have Christ formed in them. The Galatians didn't, yet...That's why Paul was laboring. What this is is another expression for walking by the Spirit. We're going to get to that in Gal 5. Paul wants these Christians to learn to walk by the Spirit and not by the flesh. But obviously they're walking by the flesh. It takes time and labor by the teacher to help immature believers learn to walk by the Spirit. And the product of that is the fruit of the Spirit. His fruit borne through us. That's what it means Christ formed in you. It means that your life is reflective of Christ, that you're a living witness of Him. Paul said earlier in Gal 2:20, "Christ lives in me, the life I live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." So Christ living in me, Christ formed in me occurs by learning to live by faith. I've got to live by faith. But if I'm going to live by faith I've got to have content to my faith. What am I going to have faith in? The doctrine of Scripture. What God has revealed. That's why the Galatians are having such a problem. They went negative to Paul's true doctrine and positive to the Judaizers false doctrine. And with that comes the absence of spiritual growth, the inability to walk by faith, the inability to walk by the Spirit with consequent fruit of the flesh.

Christ simply can't be formed in a person who is not learning the teaching of Christ since the Holy Spirit utilizes the doctrine a person learns to form Christ in them and produce His fruit through them. We should remember how Paul did things in the Book of Acts. Paul would go into a new area and Paul would preach the gospel and people would believe. Then he didn't just leave them. He would immediately follow up quickly with teaching for several months to get them established in the truth. Always preaching of the gospel followed up quickly by teaching doctrine to get new converts established in the truth. Then Paul would leave, give them some room to grow so they didn't rely on Him but the Holy Spirit. Then he'd come back at a later time or send someone to check up on them and see how they were doing. This time when

Paul left the Judaizers came in and began to destroy the work Paul had done. Thus Paul was in labor again or still in labor to bring them forth to the point that Christ was formed in them. It's just like a father working with his children, as Paul expresses here, who works and works and works with a child to get that child in shape, to develop character and see the fruit of the character shine forth. They hadn't gotten there yet and they were actually regressing.

Verse 20, but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Now we don't know why Paul couldn't be present with them at the time. All we know is that he was in Antioch training the disciples at this time. But Paul wishes he was present with them because Paul recognized there is something about face-to-face teaching that you just can't duplicate in a letter or e-mail. There are limitations to writing letters. There is no substitute for face-to-face teaching. If Paul was there and he was making his arguments he could emphasize by inflection, by tone, by facial expressions; things that cannot be conveyed by letter. If only he could be with them they would be able to see both sides of what was going on with Paul.

On one hand Paul's tone in the letter is pretty harsh, but if they could only see his face they would see that he's very concerned about their spiritual well-being. He doesn't hold it against them, but the words alone don't convey the precious concern he has for them. And so he writes, I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Why you would return to legalism, to a system of religion that enslaves, that Paul says, perplexes me. Having become sons of God, heirs of God, the indwelling Spirit, why return to legalism? Why not return to what I taught you, to walk by the Spirit, to walk by faith, that Christ might be formed in you, the Lord of Glory?

ⁱ Others have assumed he had the affliction of epilepsy because the word *exepusate*, translated "loathe" in verse 14 literally meant "to spit out" and was a term used of the practice of spitting out evil spirits which caused epilepsy. Still others because of verse 15 have supposed that Paul had eye problems and could use some transplants and thus the bodily illness refers to his eyes.

ⁱⁱ Does this imply that Paul had eye problems? In other places Paul indicates he had eye problems. He says, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand." Its possible Paul wrote larger letters because he couldn't see smaller letters. He probably studied a lot in his earlier years at night by candlelight and over the years his eyesight dwindled. In another passage Paul says that due

to the surpassing greatness of the revelations” he received, “to keep” him “from exalting” himself, “there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself.” Was the thorn in the flesh related to poor eyesight? We don’t know for sure. But in any case the Galatians were so grateful to the Lord for sending Paul to preach the gospel that they were willing to pluck out their own eyes and given them to Paul.

ⁱⁱⁱF. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Includes Indexes.

(Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 211.

^{iv} It was natural that a certain uneasy reserve should begin to mark the Galatian Christians’ attitude to Paul. They knew that the teaching to which they were now giving ear could not commend itself to him, and that he would disapprove of their accepting it. This reserve would be reinforced if they entertained suggestions tending to discredit him, or to diminish his standing in their eyes. When he heard of what was happening, he could be trusted to tell them they were wrong, and such plain speaking was bound to be unpalatable.

^vF. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Includes Indexes.

(Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 212.

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