

Radio Broadcast for January 31, 2016

Christ Formed in You

Galatians 4.9

Today's message comes from Galatians 4 verse 19:

My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you...

Salvation is a grand and glorious work, characteristic of the God who works it. It is grand for the depths to which it goes to claim its subjects. Paul wrote, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief." God's salvation is not for the righteous or the nearly righteous, or even the moderately righteous. It is for sinners. God glorifies Himself in taking a people for Himself from among the worst of men. Those doctors most highly regarded among men are those who can restore to health the ones whom all others have given up for lost. And so it is with God: His work of salvation is a display of His glory by saving those whom no one else could or would save.

God's gospel is glorious for the heights to which it raises the wicked men it finds. I am certain that heaven is a wonderful place full of beauties and glories that the human mind cannot imagine no matter how hard it tries. But heaven is not the ultimate blessing held out in God's gospel. Paul wrote in Romans 8:29:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he [the Lord Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Predestination is not so much a predetermination of our destination, but a predetermination of our destiny. It is not so much concerned with WHERE we shall be, but WHAT we shall be. The hope of the gospel is not that we shall be in heaven, but that we shall be like God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How God's grand gospel differs from the gospels most often preached up in this day! The gospels of men are suitable only for those who have not sinned so badly, or who can turn away from their sins and walk a strictly laid-out pattern of life. And the most the gospels of men can offer is a happier life here and mansions and golden streets in the sweet by and by. But God's gospel finds the very worst and grants to them to have the very best, and makes them worthy of their inheritance by making them to be like the Lord Jesus. Our hope is to be with and like the Lord Jesus. The worst of men made like the best of men: that is God's glorious gospel.

And God does many other glorious works of salvation: election, redemption, regeneration, and preservation. All of these works are His works alone, and show Him to be glorious above all gods, indeed, as He Himself said, "There is no God except me; a just God and a Savior."

When we step back and see all of God's works of grace in panorama, it is comforting and it increases our joy. When hearing the gospel enables us to see the whole work of salvation from beginning to end, peace rules our thoughts and confidence fills our hearts.

But our lives are lived in the present moment, not in the panorama, and in our experience, we cannot see the whole work of salvation. This is what Paul meant when he said that we live by faith, not sight. We have not witnessed election. We did not witness our

redemption at Calvary; and even those who did were unaware of what was happening. Not even the New Birth has any sensory experience tied to it. It is an emotional experience for some, but not all. Solomon wrote that God has put a vanishing point in our minds so that “no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.” We cannot see into the future with any certainty, so we cannot see the fulfillment of our salvation. As far as the eye of the flesh can discern, believers are no different from anyone else. They are born, live out their time on earth then, just like everyone else, they die. When believers look at themselves they see little to convince them that any good work has begun, much less that it will ever be finished.

Paul’s position as an apostle did not give him any special knowledge of whether the members at Galatia’s church had truly believed the gospel. So he was in doubt of them, and there was only one thing that would give him any comfort about them: if he could detect that Christ was formed in them. In this verse, Paul illustrates his concern for the Galatians under three metaphors concerning parents and children.

First, he addresses them as “My dear children, as though they were, in all reality, born into the kingdom of God. For all of his doubts about them, Paul was not ready to write them off as lost. Their troubles were troubling, indeed, but their condition was not beyond remedy. Let us not be quick to write off those who have become subject to grievous error: their wandering may look like that of a stubborn goat, but it may prove to be the wandering of God’s sheep.

Because he was not ready to write them off as lost, Paul was willing to expend himself as much as possible to recover them. He steps back in time from the position of a parent with children, to the place of a woman about to give birth. He travailed for them. A

woman's travail in giving birth provides a good illustration of what Paul was going through. He labored hard for them in prayer, preaching, and writing. He was a firm believer in the power of God's grace to call and preserve His people; but that did not prevent him from his own labors to bring that salvation to fruition. Furthermore, Paul was focused on this singular work. As a woman in hard labor is doing nothing else, so Paul was consumed with the work of defending the gospel to these people for the purpose of their rescue from the heretics in the church. And the work was painful. The fact of the Galatians' quick departure from the gospel he preached was painful in itself; but added to this would be the pain of lost friends, for never is the gospel preached or defended but that the preacher risks the loss of relationships. And what of the pain of care that his work would prove ineffective?

Then Paul takes one more step back in his illustration and speaks like a friend, loved one or even a doctor who is concerned about the progress of a pregnancy and can find no comfort apart from some assurance that a human being had formed with all the proper parts and without deformity. "I will be in agony of soul", says Paul, "until I can see evidence that Christ is formed in you."

Paul's use of these three metaphors drawn from pregnancy and childbirth give us a good description of the nature and product of God's grand and glorious salvation.

First, these illustrations teach us that salvation is the impartation of life. When a child is conceived, there is created a brand new person, a brand new life that was not there before. Conception does not reform or improve upon a life that is already there, but initiates a life that, previously, did not exist. God's salvation is the creation of new life: if any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. God's work does not merely reform or improve upon what is already there, but creates what did not previously exist.

God made man in His image. The Lord Jesus taught us that God is spirit: that is His essential nature. When God created man in His image, He took the animal of man and infused Him with this nature called spirit. This is the image of God in man. It is spirit that separated Adam from all the rest of animal kind; and it is spirit that enabled Adam to know, love and fellowship with God.

When Adam sinned, that nature of spirit died, and man lost his connection with God. The New Birth restores that nature, recreates it anew so that a man can, once again, know, love and fellowship with God.

But, just as new human life is not created in the womb fully formed, so those newly born in the Kingdom of God are not perfect. There is no fault in their spirits, but they have not fully matured. In fact, a person born of God's Spirit may be so immature that none but God recognizes them as His offspring. Just as it is well into the time of pregnancy before the new life is recognizable as human, so can it take awhile to recognize the work of God for what it is. A newly-conceived child in the womb is fully human, but not fully mature; and a newly conceived child of God is fully a son of God, though not fully mature.

This maturity is described by Paul as "Christ being formed in you." Paul does not mean "Christ formed in you personally," as though the very person of Christ is forming in us. Christ is in and among His people, but He is not forming in them, but is already fully formed. Rather, Paul means a new person with the same nature and attitude as Christ.

The goal and perfection of our salvation is that we be like Christ. It is what we were predestined for. To have Christ formed in us is the beginning of this likeness. Christ being formed in us is to, spiritually speaking, have the mind of Christ settled in our hearts.

This could be applied in many ways, but the chief point is this: that we relate to God the same way Christ does. That is to say, that we relate to God as a son to a father rather than a slave to a master. It is written that the Spirit of God would take the things pertaining to Christ and reveal it to His people. Galatians 4:6 describes that in this way:

Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

All that the Spirit of God teaches God's people is summed in the witness of the Spirit that we are the sons of God. Romans 8:15, 16 says:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

The Lord Jesus constantly referred to God as His Father, often using that tender Aramaic expression, Abba. Abba denotes more than mere paternity and includes all the closeness and compassion a father has for his child and the trust a child has in his father. While in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord prayed:

Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.

There are three son-like attitudes revealed in the Lord's prayer. There is faith and trust: all things are possible for You. Do you remember that, as a child, you thought your father could do anything? As we grew up we learned that our fathers have limitations. But no amount of spiritual growing up ever teaches us anything different about our heavenly Father: He can do anything.

Therefore, all our hope is in Him and all our prayers are to Him, our Father, who is in heaven.

There is the attitude of boldness: take this cup from me. Children are bold to ask their fathers for anything. Since they believe their fathers capable of anything, they ask them for anything and everything they desire. As we grow and learn the limitations of our fathers' resources and even their willingness to give, we learn not to be so bold in our requests. But the children of God never need learn any such caution in their prayers. It is their all-powerful, all-wise, all-loving Father to Whom they pray, so no request do they withhold. Christ was praying for no small thing, but that did not hinder him from freely expressing His desires to His Father. And maybe that is a good word to use: free. There was a freeness between Christ and the Father that bespoke the trust the Son had in the Father.

And there was submission: "not what I will, but what you will." So great was the Lord's trust in the Father, that He could gladly subject all His requests to the Father's will. These were not the words of a servant who must submit, but of a son, who gladly submits.

But this sonship does not come to us at no cost. When our Lord hung on Calvary's cross, He spoke to God several times: Father forgive them; My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?; and Father, into your hands I commend my spirit. Did you notice the change of address in the middle quote? In that very hour when the Lord Jesus bore the wrath of God for the sins laid on Him, he could not relate to God as a son to a father. Instead, He was as a criminal before the judge, a rebellious slave in the presence of his master. After Christ declared that all was finished – that all the suffering necessary for putting away sin was done - he once again

said “Father.” In that limited time, when Christ could not act the part of a son, he purchased an eternity of sonship for God’s people.

This is what it is to have Christ formed in you: to relate to God just as God’s Son did: to leave off the attitude of a slave who feel compelled to work in order to gain the master’s favor and blessing, and to take up the bearing of a son, who is cherished by the father, and an heir of the household. It is to relate to God by gospel principles rather than law principles.

Is Christ formed in you?