

BECOME AS I AM!
PART 1

TEXT: GALATIANS 4:12-20

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INTRODUCTION:

So far in our study of Galatians, we have seen Paul's authority as an apostle and his expertise as a theologian. He starts off out of the gate by asserting his apostolic authority and passionately contending for the truth of the gospel (1:1-4).

He insists that the gospel is over everything. He argues it is over the church, over the angels and over the apostles. So great is the gospel that whoever preaches a gospel different from the one he preached is to fall under the eternal curse of the law (1:8-9). In chapter 2, we see Paul's authority when he confronts Peter face to face for his hypocrisy and failure as a leader (2:11-21).

But, then we come to 4:12 and a great shift in his tone and approach takes place. John Stott writes, "In Galatians 1-3 we have been listening to Paul the apostle, Paul the theologian, Paul the defender of the faith; but now we are hearing Paul the man, Paul the pastor, Paul the passionate lover of souls" (*Galatians*, p. 111).

This section of Galatians has much to say about the proper relationship between a pastor and his people. We see from the relationship between Paul and the Galatians that there are times when it is necessary for a pastor to reprove and rebuke erring sheep (2 Tim. 4:2). At the same time, a pastor is to offer words of gentleness and compassion (2 Tim. 2:24-25; but never to ravenous wolves!).

Commenting on this passage, Martin Luther notes that Paul, "teaches by his example that pastors and bishops should take a fatherly and motherly attitude, not toward the ravenous wolves (Matt. 7:15) but toward the miserable, misled, and erring sheep, patiently bearing their weakness and fall and handling them with the utmost gentleness" (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 413).

This is what we see going on with Paul in his relationship with the Galatian believers. Paul utilizes some of his most severe language in all of his letters in Galatians. For example, he refers to the Galatians as turncoats/treasonous (1:6), foolish and bewitched (3:1, 3).

And then we come to this section and a great shift in his language and tone occurs. Paul's forcefulness and harsh words turn into an affectionate and temperate appeal. For example, his love and affection for the Galatians is exemplified by his addressing them as "brothers" (v. 12) and "my children" (v. 19).

The source of Paul's meekness and gentleness was Christ Himself, as demonstrated in his appeal to the immature and rebellious Corinthian believers (2 Cor. 10:1, "I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...").

4:12 marks the beginning of a new section in Galatians (4:12-6:10). Having argued for the truth of the gospel based on the Galatians' conversion experience (3:1-5), Scripture's (i.e., OT) own teaching (3:6-14) and salvation history (3:15-4:11), Paul now appeals to the Galatians based on his personal relationship with them to live in the freedom the gospel brings (3:12-20).

The new section begins with a personal, passionate plea from Paul, the perplexed pastor "Brothers, I beg of/plead with you (δέομαι), become as I am, for I also have become as you are." v. 12a.

Verse 12, actually begins with the phrase, "Become as I am" (Γίνεσθε ὡς ἐγώ) and reads, "Become as I am, because I [have also become] as you, brothers, I plead with you."

Paul's personal exhortation ("become") is the first imperative in Galatians where he now calls on the Galatians to do something (cf. 3:7). There is a principle of far-reaching importance in conjunction with the occurrence of this first imperative that we need to pause and take careful notice of before moving on.

Paul's command (i.e., law/call to action) comes after he has explained in depth the reasons why the Galatians must not subject themselves under the Mosaic Law. Simply put, Paul gives a mountain of gospel before issuing a single call to action (imperative/law in its third use).

Paul first sets forth the truth of the gospel from 2:15-4:11 (Note: 2:15-21 really serves as a transition to chapters 3-4). From 1:1-4:11, there is only one imperative (3:7), which is not a call to action (see Schreiner, *Galatians*, p. 281). Thus, it is highly instructive to note that Paul spends nearly 2/3 of his letter expounding the gospel before he issues a single call to action.

It is only after a careful and thorough exposition of the gospel that Paul gives an imperative (law, issues a call to action). Paul expects the Galatians to act on the truth of the gospel they have received but only after they have first been given a gospel feast!

Properly understanding and distinguishing the relationship of the Bible's imperatives (i.e., the things we are commanded to be/do, 4:12; 5:1, 13, 16) **to the Bible's indicatives** (i.e., the things that are already a fact; we are justified through faith in Christ, 2:16; we are sons of Abraham, 3:7; we are redeemed from the curse of the law, 3:13; 4:4; we are no longer under the Law as covenant of life, 3:25; we are adopted sons, 4:5; we are recipients of the Spirit, 3:5, 14; 4:6) **is critical.**

Without this distinction, one doesn't possess a true knowledge of the Christian faith and life. Whenever imperatives (whether they are derived from Scripture or offered as tips for a better marriage) are consistently divorced from the wider context of the indicatives (i.e., the gospel), the default message that is communicated is that being a Christian is simply a matter of trying to live a good life.

A steady diet of imperatives only results in moralistic, legalistic, soul-killing exhortations. Let me say this as plainly as I can: Trying to obey the exhortations of Scripture without a self-conscious, gospel-saturated focus is legalistic!

Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "The life and ministry of the local church needs to be self-consciously gospel-centered if it is to maintain any kind of effectiveness for the kingdom of God" (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 129).

The importance of the relationship of the gospel and imperatives to the Christian faith and living cannot be overstated. We must learn from Paul's example that all imperatives (call to action) must be given and clearly seen as implications of the gospel. Otherwise, as Graeme Goldsworthy wisely instructs, "The alternative is to preach law and to leave the impression that the essence of Christianity is what we do rather than what God has done. Legalism easily creeps in even when we think we have avoided it," (*Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, p. 59).

So, as we come to v. 12, how are we to understand and obey this imperative (call to action), "Become as I am."

In order to have a proper understanding of the Christian faith and life, you must possess a proper understanding of the relationship of indicatives and imperatives in Scripture. So, before we begin to examine this section in detail, I want to first show you how to read this imperative in its context.

Paul's command is an appeal to the Galatians to become free from the Mosaic Law as he is. This command not only constitutes the main point of vv. 12-20, it also constitutes the main exhortation of this letter (i.e., a call to live in freedom from bondage under the law).

We are not called to live under a "Do this and live" covenant relationship with God (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). Rather, we are called to live under the freedom of a "Live, now do this" covenant relationship with God (i.e., the new covenant).

Notice from the context, how Paul motivates the Galatians (and us!) to obey this imperative. Let's begin looking back at 3:6-14. Here, Paul argues that all believers through faith in Christ apart from the works of the law enjoy the privilege and blessing of being a son of Abraham (3:6-14).

In our day and age, it may not seem like a big deal to be a son of Abraham. But, in Paul's day, the idea that a Gentile could be considered a son of Abraham and have a filial,

intimate relationship with God and call him Father was of huge significance. The Jews didn't even address God as father!

Remember what John the Baptist, as he was preparing the way of the Lord, said to the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham" (Matt. 3:9).

John was intimating that God would do this. The point is that we are all miracles. You and I are not natural children of Abraham (of physical descent). In fact, physical descent has never qualified anyone, Jew or Gentile, to be a true son of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). Rather, we are spiritual heirs of Abraham because we are united to Abraham's offspring, Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Because Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, everything that Christ is and has accomplished for us is the source of our salvation and acceptance before God.

Because the eternal Son was born of woman (Gal. 4:4) and became one of us, He is the one who brings us into this filial, intimate relationship with God as adopted sons in which we can address God as our Father. Because the eternal Son became human and we are human, we can have the same relationship to the Father as He has. This is what Paul says in Galatians 4:6 concerning the ministry of the Spirit, whereby we cry out "Abba, Father" (cf. Mk. 14:36).

When we trust in Christ, we get in on all that He has won for us. We come into a family relationship of trust and delight. Because of what Jesus has accomplished for us, you and I have exactly the same relationship to the Father as Jesus does. For God the Father, there is no difference in His love for His eternally existing Son and His adopted sons.

In 4:9, Paul says we have been known by God (i.e., we have become recipients of divine love and favor; we have been singled out by grace). Just as the Son is the eternal object of the Father's divine love so too are all who are united to the Son through faith. Just as the Son receives the commendation, "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased," so do all of the Father's adopted sons.

J.I. Packer writes that God's knowledge of us, "implies personal affection, redeeming action, covenant faithfulness and providential watchfulness...salvation now and forever," (*Knowing God*, p. 41).

Just as there is never a moment when the Father's love for the Son lessens, so there is never a moment when the Father's love for His adopted sons lessens. God the Father now knows us as His friend, as one who loves us and there is never a moment when His love is distracted from me.

In 3:15-4:11, Paul has shown from salvation history how all believers now enjoy the privilege of freedom from the Mosaic Law (3:15-4:11). We are no longer under its crushing authority and curse (3:10-14).

Instead, we have received the blessing of justification (2:16; 3:24), the gift of the Holy Spirit (3:14, which is the fruit of the gospel as the work of Christ in us), the privileges of adoption as sons and being known by God (3:26-4:11).

All of these blessings flow from a “live, now do this” covenant (the gospel). This is why Paul pleads with the Galatians (and us!) not to return under a “do this and live” covenant but to live in the freedom and blessing of the gospel (a “live, now do this” covenant).

So, if you want the exact same relationship to the Father as Jesus has you cannot live under the law. Why? The reason you cannot is because the obligation of the law for this kind of life is to observe every one of its requirements perfectly (Gal. 3:10).

If you give perfect obedience, then you can have the same relationship with the Father as Jesus has. If you do not, then you are cursed (Gal. 3:10; Deut. 27:26)!

Who is able to accomplish this? There is no one who is able to fulfill even a single requirement of the law, let alone the entire law (cf. Rom. 3:9-20). We must not be deceived. God doesn't have two paths for obtaining His Fatherly affection and favor. God is not interested in good intentions. He is not looking to see if we are simply willing. God is only pleased with perfect obedience to all that He commands (see Gal. 4:4; cf. Matt. 5:17; Jn. 6:38; Heb. 10:7, 9). He has declared in the law that whoever does not perfectly fulfill it will be cursed!

However, the Judaizers had come in and cast a spell over the Galatians (3:1) and caused them to begin to forsake this glorious freedom of the gospel and revert back to their pagan past, when they were ignorant of God in this manner (i.e., under the law 4:9, 21). They were seeking to bring the Galatians under the demands of a conditional covenant (i.e., “Do this and live”).

They imagined that by submitting to circumcision, following dietary laws and observing holy days, they were winning God's favor and fulfilling the law. Similarly today, during this season of Lent, they're as those who observe Ash Wednesday. They receive ashes on their forehead, they abstain from meat on Friday, or perhaps give up something dear to them during Lent as an act of devotion, etc...

They believe that by doing these things they are meriting God's favor, or at least demonstrating authentic devotion and piety. But, in reality, Paul says that just like the Galatians, they are really rejecting Jesus and the gospel!

Jesus was sent to be our advocate in order to atone for our sins and reconcile us to God the Father. He has set us free so that we have no need of human traditions. To trust in

ceremonies is treasonous. It is to desert him who called you in the grace of Christ for another (ἕτερος) gospel (Gal. 1:6).

Paul says if we enter into such an agreement/covenant with God, then we make ourselves debtors to keep the whole law. But, there is nothing we can do in our own strength to please God and therefore make Him obligated to us. This is why the Father sent the Son to be born of woman, born under the Law (Gal. 4:4).

God is not obligated to dispense His blessings in return for our imperfect obedience to the law. We do not live in a mutual covenant with God whereby we do our part and then God is obligated to do His part. To return under a “do this and live” covenant, is to be unknown to God (i.e., to be a recipient of His judgment rather than His favor! 4:8).

So then, out of fear for the Galatians’ standing before God (v. 11), Paul now earnestly pleads (δέομαι) with them on a personal level to become as he is (i.e., free from the bondage of the Mosaic Law).

This is how we are to understand this first imperative. Once we are self-consciously aware of the unspeakable blessings of the gospel, we are then in a position to obey the commands of Scripture. Our hearts will never be driven to obey based on a “Do this and live” covenant. A steady diet of imperatives only imposes continual demands and expectations upon a believer. The more demands and expectations a believer receives, the more he or she realizes they don’t measure up. As a result, the law-driven believer either gives up in exhaustion or moves forward in prideful hypocrisy. explained in depth the reasons why the Galatians must not subject themselves under the Mosaic Law.

Paul, however, shows us a better way! He first explains in depth the reasons why the Galatians must not subject themselves under the Mosaic Law. He unfolds the immeasurable riches of the gospel and then issues a call to action. This is how we are motivated to obey in Scripture. We must learn to be gospel-driven rather than law-driven! The good news of the indicatives (what God has done for us in Christ) drives the imperatives (what God commands us to do).

REFLECTION:

Living under a “do this and live” covenant with God is like venturing out into the ocean in a sail boat where the wind eventually stops blowing and you just sit in your sailboat, unable to move forward to your destination.

This is what trying to obey God’s law is like without the gospel and Holy Spirit. It is like sitting in the open ocean in a sailboat in a dead calm. A “dead calm” might be right after you finish arguing with your spouse and you feel ashamed for the things you said and thus cannot even look at your husband or wife in the eye. At this moment, no amount of exhortations or helpful advice can be of any help to fill your sail and get you moving again. Like a GPS tracking system, the Law can provide you with the direction you are supposed to go but it cannot provide the power.

In moments of “dead calm,” only the Holy Spirit working through the gospel is the power (wind) that will fill your sail and move you forward to your destination (cf. 2 Cor. 3:6-9). In order to move forward and obey the commands of Scripture, you need the continual assurance that God accepts you as His son and approves of what you do. When you have this kind of assurance, you will be like a ship’s sail that has been stretched and filled by the wind!

When you are assured that God delights in you and accepts you for Jesus’ sake, then and only then will you be driven to live in freedom and to serve God with zeal. When you here the demand of the law, “Become as I am,” your heart will be driven to obey God like a sailboat driven along by the wind.

John Calvin taught this exact gospel-driven truth in a sermon entitled, “Absolved Only Through the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ.” In it he writes these comforting words of assurance,

We need the assurance that he accepts us as his children and supports us so compassionately that he approves of what we do, though it is worthless, because of the fatherly love he bears us. If we do not have this assurance, the thought of serving God will make us grind our teeth. If, however, we are persuaded that God looks upon us favourably; if, though we are weak and can do nothing worthy of his approval, he accepts us in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, then we will surely be filled with courage. We will be like a ship’s sail that has been stretched and filled by the breeze! Thus, our hearts will run to obey him, like a ship driven along by its sail, when we know that God delights in us and accepts our works, not wanting us to be compelled into servitude. He is happy for us to be his children, and that we desire to obey him. Knowing this, we can serve our God with all the more zeal. With his grace as our foundation, we are so filled with his joy that we can offer the sacrifice of praise. Likewise, having sought him in prayer, we can know that he will answer us and, in return, we can thank him for the priceless gifts that he communicates to us every day.

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