

Title: Paul's Theological Defense: His Passionate Plea for Restoration

Text: Galatians 4:12-20

Theme: Paul pours out his heart to the Galatians believers.

Introduction: In light of Paul's heaviness for the Galatians' desire to turn back into bondage; he now pours out his heart to them. He speaks as a friend and not simply as a pastor, teacher, or mentor.

“At 4:12 **Paul turns from rebuke to request**: *I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. **Become like me is the first imperative in Galatians***. It sets the focus for the rest of the request section of the letter. This personal appeal (4:12-20) is followed by a scriptural appeal (4:21-31). Then Paul sets forth his authoritative appeal (5:1-12) followed by his ethical appeal (5:13--6:10).”

<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=7&source=1&seq=i.55.4.3>

“Thematic chiasm' in the letter, according to which **Galatians 4:12-20 forms the central and most important part of the letter**.”

<http://www.uniqwa.ac.za/faculties/documents/journal/6/20/157/01-Tolmie.pdf> Acta Theologica Supplementum 9 2007, D.F. Tolmie, THE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: 1995-2005, page 8.

“With regard to the Letter to the Galatians, Sampley (2004:301-302) argues that Galatians 4:12-20 is a '**rich and crucial passage**' that 'can be fully appreciated only in the context of **frank speech**'. It 'signals friendship from start to finish'.”

<http://www.uniqwa.ac.za/faculties/documents/journal/6/20/157/01-Tolmie.pdf> Acta Theologica Supplementum 9 2007, D.F. Tolmie, THE RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS: 1995-2005, page 17.

“There is a **major shift** in Galatians 4:12-20: **the dominant tone becomes** deliberative rather than forensic. Henceforth Paul's primary purpose is **no longer to accuse/defend, but to persuade** the Galatians to adopt a new kind of action.”

A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS, BY **Donald Francois Tolmie**, A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR IN THE DEPARTMENT OF GREEK FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE BLOEMFONTEIN SOUTH AFRICA. PROMOTER: PROF. J. VAN W. CRONJÉ, APRIL 2004, page 18

<http://etd.uovs.ac.za/ETD-db/theses/submitted/etd-09212004-154428/restricted/TOLMIEDE.pdf>

“The present section is **dominated by [an emotional] arguments**. As indicated in the previous section when this type of argument was discussed, the effectiveness of an emotional argument depends on the emotional bond between the speaker and the audience. In order for this type of argument to be effective, the emotional bond between the speaker and the audience must be such that the audience would like to please the speaker, for example by not doing something that will disappoint him or by being willing to do what he asks them to do. In this section Paul uses a series of emotional arguments.” (Donald Francois Tolmie, 145)

Paul's dominant rhetorical strategy in this section is the use of a series of emotional arguments. This section can be divided into four phases.

- The **first** phase is dominated by pleading.
- In the **second** phase he uses the Galatians' former behavior towards him as a basis for rebuking him.

- The **third** phase is dominated by the vilification of the opponents.
- In the **last** phase the tone changes again as he expresses his affection and concern for the Galatians. (Donald Francois Tolmie, 152)

“This is the point in Galatians where Paul, as it were stops talking theology, breaks off his train of thought, and speaks in quite a different way to his surprised hearers. He tells them what he’s thinking, how it feels, what sort of thoughts are rushing through his head at a more personal level. This is a heart-to-heart moment. Almost every line is an appeal to friendship, to family loyalty, to a mutual bond established by their common experience of what God has done for them together.” (Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 52, 53).

THE BIG PICTURE:

In considering the book of Galatians we can note a three-fold division.

- Chapters 1-2 = Personal/Biographical/ Authorization/Vindication
- Chapters 3-4 = Doctrinal/Biblical/Presentation/Exposition
- Chapters 5-6 = Practical/Behavioral/ Application

Its Eternal Value:

The deepest truths are taught in the context of meaningful relationships. What we have here is the fusion between Paul the theologian and Paul the Shepherd. Everyone needs both.

The Problem:

Imperatives and passion work best in the context of intimate relationships.

The Storyline:

God makes a consistent appeal to His people through His Shepherds to stay the course and not be pulled away by grievous wolves.

Questions:

1. What is Paul’s tone in verse 12? Why is this tone communicated? Notice verse 20.
2. Do you think the Galatians are perhaps embarrassed at their defection? Or maybe they are proud and thus offended by Paul’s tone?
3. What does Paul reference in verses 13 and 14 and why does he reference this?
4. Despite Paul’s appearance what was their initial response to him (v. 14)?
5. How does Paul describe their affection for him when he first came (v. 15)?
6. What caused their opinion of him to change (v. 16)?
7. Who does Paul reference in verse 17?
8. What was the goal of the false brethren (v. 17)? Notice Acts 20:30 [PLEASE READ].
9. How does Paul describe his ministry in their behalf (v. 19)?
10. What was Paul’s goal for them (v. 19)?
11. What is the meaning of the expression “until Christ is formed in you?”
12. How does Paul describe himself in verse 20?

13. If you haven't done so already, at some point in your life you will likely face the decision about choosing one church to be your regular place of worship/fellowship. There are many characteristics one can choose focus on in choosing a church. What insight can you gain from Galatians 4:12-20 about what to look for when choosing a church?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the Shepherd heart of God.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose the good shepherd over grievous wolves.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy resting in the protective and compassionate arms of God.

Outline:

I. Paul's Past Response to the Galatians (vv.12-13).

A. It was sympathetic (v. 12)

"He moderates and qualifies those things in which he might have seemed to have spoken somewhat sharply." (*The Geneva Bible Notes*)

"These brief and terse words can only be explained from the context." (Eadie, *Galatians*, 318). "He is urging the Galatians to drop the legal system, just as he had done, because he in doing that had become as they, Gentiles without the advantages of the Law." (Johnson, *Galatians*).

Paul, like the Gentiles, had become Lawless. Paul appeals to the Galatians to become as he is in reference to freedom from the law and to the freedom, which they have as sons of God.

Paul is essentially saying, "Hey, I have been hurt by your disobedience, but don't worry about it, just get back to obedience." The word Paul uses (**adikew**) means, "no justice." There was no injustice done to Paul by their spiritual failure.

B. It was sacrificial (v. 13)

He uses the same word for weakness in 1 Corinthians 2:3 and in 2 Corinthians 11:30 and in 12:9.

3 I was with you in **weakness** and in fear and in much trembling,

30 If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my **weakness**.

9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, **for power is perfected**

in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

"The plain meaning then, without resort to grammatical torture, undue dilution, or remote reference, is, that in some way or other unknown to us, but quite known to the Galatians, bodily weakness led the apostle to preach, or to continue to preach, in Galatia at his first visit." (Eadie, *Galatians*, 322)

It is impossible to determine decisively what Paul's affliction was. Perhaps the strongest case can be built around his eyes. Whatever it was, it was chronic and debilitating. The narrative in Acts 13; 14 does not read as if Paul had planned to pass by Pisidia and by Lycaonia but for the attack of illness. His visit to the people of Galatia was not in his plan, but it was in God's plan. Paul was on route to another city, but got sick. His sickness caused him to detour to the people of Galatia. While there recovering Paul preached, people got saved and a church was established. It is because of his illness that we have the book of Galatians. Think about this idea with me for a moment. What you and I deem accidents, God calls assignments. What we call trials, God calls tasks. God's perspective on our moments of being bed-ridden, shut-in, or held-up is very different than our attitudes and perspectives. I would like to make a few comments concerning Paul's trial.

1. God was not making the most of a mess up. He was not reacting to natural events. Paul's sickness was a part of God's purpose. God is the one who leads us into our trials (Matthew 6:13; Job 1:20-22; Job 2:10). God wants you in the midst of this heartache. God is not wringing His hands or pacing the floor.

Job 1:20 Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.** Blessed be the name of the LORD." 22 Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.

Job 2:10 But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. **Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

2 Corinthians 12:7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, **there was given me** [who do you think gave him this thorn?] a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in **weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

2. Temptations/trials are a time of testing our faith in God (Luke 8:13; Job 23:10; Psalm 66:10; 1 Peter 1:6, 7). Temptations/trials have the unique power of stripping away from us all of our excess baggage. He causes us to see Him as our only hope.

Job 23:10 "But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Psalm 66:10 For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

3. We will not be tempted/tested above what we are able to endure (1 Cor. 10:13). His grace will always prove sufficient (2 Cor. 12:9).
4. We should pray that we enter not into temptation (Luke 22:40, 46).
5. When we are being tempted we should consider it joy (James 1:2). We joy because His power is perfected in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).
6. Trials/temptations are part of the normal Christian life (1 Peter 4:12). 1 Cor. 10:13 "but such as is common to man."
7. God is the one who provides for us a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13; Matt. 6:13). The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations/testing (2 Peter 2:9).
8. All temptation/testing have an end. It might be by death, but there is always an end in sight.

Perhaps you are sitting back and saying to yourself, "That's easy for you to say you're not where I'm at." And in some ways you are right. And yet, God is faithful. He does provide with every temptation a way of escape. God is faithful. His grace is sufficient. He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations. While you are in the trial, you will find it hard to sing and to be thankful. You can know the truth and embrace it, but your heart might continue to break. Yet those who have preceded you in diverse trials will say, "God is faithful." Your life is not over. My friend, hold fast to the Word of God for grace and peace. God will make a way for your deliverance.

II. The Galatians Past Acceptance of Paul's preaching (vv. 14-15)

A. It was cordial (v. 14)

They respected Paul as an angel of God even though he had this infirmity. The contrast between Paul's appalling appearance and their reception of him is great.

They received Paul as a messenger sent to them from God. Their respect of him was great. It is interesting to remember the first part of this epistle where the apostle is seeking to establish his authority. They recognized it, but have allowed it to slip

through their minds.

When Jesus sent out the 12 in Matthew 10 this same principle was stated (See also Matt. 18:5; 25:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20; 2 Cor. 5:20; 1 Thess. 2:13).

Matthew 10: 40 "**He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.** 41 "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 "And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

I believe we must be careful in the manner we treat those who bring the Word to us. Although we might not agree with them on every point, we must treat them with grace.

B. It was compassionate (v. 15)

The Galatians were basically willing to give him the shirt off their backs or "the eyeballs out of their head."

"He again uses *hyperbole*: if possible, they would have torn out their eyes and given them to him – a metaphoric way of referring to a supreme act of friendship, since in antiquity eyes were considered one's most costly organs."
(Donald Francois Tolmie, 148)

By being brought under the umbrella of conditional acceptance they were failing to **enjoy** the showers of divine blessing.

"As long as the Galatians were feeding upon and resting in the doctrines of grace, rejoicing in the forgiveness of sins through faith alone, they counted themselves happy and blessed. Now that has gone, and what is the cause? **The legalism of the Judaists destroys the joy of the Lord.** Let us avoid like the plague all schemes by which spirituality is to be gained through human works, even such commendable activities as prayer, witnessing to our faith, and Bible study. These activities are the issues of spiritual life not the causes." (Johnson, *Galatians*).

There is a disturbing theology permeating the church of Jesus Christ. It says works do not matter for salvation or sanctification, but it does for placement and status in heaven. It says that unless you give yourself to ceaseless labor and selfless service here and now you will forfeit whatever rewards you might have attained. In fact your service to God could be so poor that you will get to heaven but you will not rule and reign with Christ and you will probably have the worst seat in the house.

Listen to the closing paragraphs of a very popular author and book.

“Picture **your** homecoming, the moment when all of eternity and all the angels and saints pause for **you**. Heaven will hush as **you** stand before your Savior to hear Him say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’ And then heaven will erupt with welcome and celebration as **you** accept the incorruptible crown that Jesus is reserving for **you**. It will be **your** unique moment to bless the heart of God. On that day, **you** will prove that you valued Jesus’ death for you, and **you** gave Him your heart and life in return. God wants that day, when unseen and eternal things become visible, to be the most wonderful day of **your** life.” (BW, ALGR, 117).

Friend, this is nothing but a man-centered theology that is stripping Christ of His preeminence. Heaven is not about your happiness, but His. It is not about you receiving your reward, but Him receiving His reward. The fulfillment of His plan brings me eternal joy, but I’m not the purpose of the Father’s plan, He is!

In this kind of theology we have simply traded one form of legalism for another. It is as if we are trying, in this life through our human efforts, to climb the celestial ladder of success. This is why we are a “Christ-Exalting, Grace-Based Fellowship.” Do not let the legalist rob you of resting in grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

III. Paul’s Probing Observation (vv.16-20)

A. Truth brought animosity (v.16).

Because Paul brought confrontational truth to the Galatians they viewed him in some sense as an enemy.

“Have I, who once was the object of your intense affection, become the object of your hatred? The two states being brought into distinct contrast.” (Eadie, *Galatians*, 327)

Here is a basic principle of life, “love confronts error.” Truth can hurt like a surgeon’s knife, yet is crucial to spiritual health and well-being.

Proverbs 27:5 Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.

Proverbs 28:23 He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.

B. Falsehood brought disillusionment (v.17-18).

The false brethren were trying to shake the Galatians’ confidence in the apostle Paul. “The contrast between the attitude of Paul toward the Galatians and the attitude of the Judaizers now comes to the fore.” (Johnson, *Galatians*). The Judaizers wanted center-stage. Their desire for them was selfish. They wanted the Galatians to become like them.

Consider the following translations of Galatians 4:17,18:

(NIV) “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.”

(NASB) “They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.”

The word that is translated “zealous” in the NIV translation and “eager” in the NASB comes from the Greek root (zelow), which has a number of meanings (also “jealous,” “envious”). These people who were teaching a false gospel (cf. Galatians 1:6-9) had something about them that the Galatians found appealing. Maybe it was their passion. Maybe it was the great conviction with which they held their beliefs. Maybe it was their eagerness to embrace and “help” the Galatians. Whatever it was, it is clear that their appealing manner caused the Galatians to be drawn into their false gospel.

IV. Paul's Paternal Appeal (v. 19-20).

“The apostle suddenly changes his tone; his mood softens into tenderness, like the mother beginning with rebuke and ending in tears and embraces.” (Eadie, *Galatians*, 352) “The accent of love will penetrate where the tones of anger will never find a way.” (Barclay, *Galatians*, 40).

Philippians 1:7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, **how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

Colossians 2:1 **For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf** and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face,

All of Paul’s concern is couched in deep emotion.

A. A father’s love (v. 19a)

Paul uses the claim of a father and a mother upon the Galatians to convey that his desire was to see them conformed to the image of Christ. Notice his language in verse 11, and then notice how he begins verse 12, “Brethren.”

“My little children – diminutives in Latin and Greek always express deep affection. John often uses this expression but Paul uses it nowhere else; his heart is running over.” (William Barclay, *Galatians*, 39).

B. A mother's claim (v. 19b)

“He uses a very effective *metaphor* to describe his concern for the Galatians. To my mind, this is the most striking metaphor in Galatians, in particular, because Paul uses a concept that describes a typically feminine experience. The fact that this is such an unusual metaphor to use for a man, makes it highly effective, thereby conveying his deep (maternal!) concern and affection for them in a very forceful way. This will continue until Christ is ‘formed’ in them.”

(Donald Francois Tolmie, 151)

Paul is using two different words between verses 11 and 19 for “labor.” Here the term is used for childbearing, whereas in verse 11 it speaks of “exhaustive labor.” Many have suggested that verse 11 Paul is speaking of a labor that resulted in their justification and now in verse 19 he is speaking of a labor that is to result in their sanctification. Paul was willing to lay everything down for the good of God's people.

Paul never gave up on people. He always went the extra mile. Whatever it took, Paul was there standing by the side of a fallen comrade.

C. A Christ-like goal (v. 19c)

The idea of progressive sanctification has as its goal our ultimate glorification. The Scripture speaks of this movement of the believer in their relationship to sin. All believers have been saved from the penalty of sin, are being saved from the power of sin, and will be saved from the presence of sin. Every aspect of this journey is Christ-centered. He is the source, the means, and the goal of our justification.

Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, **He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

1 Corinthians 15:49 Just as we have borne the image of the earthy, **we will also bear the image of the heavenly**.

2 Corinthians 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord**, the Spirit.

Ephesians 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, **that we would be holy and blameless before Him**.

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet

what we will be. We know that when He appears, **we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.** 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Our progressive sanctification is simply the aligning of our practice with our position. We do not “become” more Christ-like in our essence. We become more Christ-like in our action and attitude. The Galatians by their defection from Christ were not conforming to Christ.

“Calvin says well: ‘If ministers wish to do any good, let them labor to form Christ, not to form themselves in their hearers.’”

Paul’s singular goal (in contrast to the false teachers) for the Galatian believers was for them to be conformed into the image of Christ.

The word “form” (**morphow**) as a verb is only used here in the entire New Testament. The noun form (**morpha**) is used three times (Mark 16:12; Philippians 2:6, 7).

Mark 16:12 After that, **He appeared in a different form** to two of them while they were walking along on their way to the country.

Philippians 2:6 who, although He existed in **the form of God**, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, **taking the form of a bond-servant**, and being made in the likeness of men.

The compound word (**metamorphow**) is used four times in the New Testament (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2; Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Matt. 17:2 And **He was transfigured before them**; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light (See also Mark 9:2).

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

2 Cor. 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, **are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory**, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

“‘In You’ can mean either ‘in each of you’ or ‘among you’. The last option seems to be the best choice, since elsewhere in the letter Paul generally thinks of the audience in a collective sense. Furthermore, “in you” is used in the next verse in a collective sense. (Donald Francois Tolmie, 151)

Notice the contrast between the legalist and grace. The legalist wants you to conform to their man-made standard and thus to become fashioned in their image, whereas grace wishes for you to be conformed to Christ and thus to become fashioned in His image. This is why we are a “Christ-Exalting, Grace-Based Fellowship.”

D. A friend’s concern (v. 20)

“The doubts of the apostle were not merely what to think of them or of their condition, but how to reclaim them.” (Eadie, *Galatians*, 357)

In 1:6 Paul said, “I am amazed,” in 4:11 he said, “I am afraid,” and now in 4:20 he says, “I am perplexed.” How sad.

Paul, as a friend, no longer knew what to think of these people spiritually. Isn’t that a horrible situation to be in? Oh may God continue to protect us from falling?

Shepherding the Sheep: (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

“Theological argument is important; but unless it takes place within a context where people are bonded together in mutual trust and shared Christian experience, it will only reach the head, not the heart, and probably not the will. This little section, then, stands here in Galatians as witness to the marriage of head and heart in the teaching and pastoral work that belong to the gospel.” (Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 54, 55).

1. Let us stop seeking to conform people into our image.
2. Let us continue to embrace the rule of God over the pieces of our lives. Let us shout the supremacy of God in all things.
3. Let us continue to go the extra mile in loving people unconditionally.
4. Let us continue to make much of Christ. Let us find, celebrate and declare that He is enough in this life and in the life that is to come.
5. Let us continue to pray that we will never give anyone an occasion to doubt our deep love and devotion to Christ alone.