

A Pastor and His People

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Date: 20 August 2017

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bibles to Galatians chapter 4. This morning we will be directing our attention to verses 12 through 20.

! And the Apostle Paul has been correcting them.

And this section of the letter that we come to this morning marks a transition in the letter. In this section, the Apostle Paul makes a personal appeal to the Galatians as he recounts his history with them, his relationship with them.

And we're able to see that what began as a strong pastoral relationship became a strained pastoral relationship. And we're able to see the reason why.

In this account of the Apostle Paul's relationship with the Galatians, there are lessons for us to learn as a church. So let us open our hearts and hear and heed these lessons.

[1 : 24] I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Children, please follow along as I read. Galatians 4, 12 through 20.

Brothers, I entreat you. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong.

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first. And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

[2 : 41] It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose. And not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.

I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Let's pray together. Lord, what a blessing it is to gather in this place today. What a blessing it is to gather in the name of Jesus, to be reminded of his great sacrifice for sinners, to be reminded that we have been rescued from the wrath to come and there's therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

Lord, thank you for the privilege of being able to lift our voices up in song. And Lord, now we sit under the preaching of your word and we ask for your help.

Would you give us all ears to hear would you give us hearts to obey? I pray, oh Lord, that you would grant me the grace to be faithful, to proclaim the truth of your word.

[4 : 12] And Lord, we thank you for the promise that you will watch over your word and you will cause it to accomplish the purpose that you've sent it to. Lord, one of those purposes is to build your church.

Will you build this church through the preaching of your word? We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, this passage that we have just read gives us some insight into the relationship between Paul and the Galatians.

Although at the time of this writing, the Apostle Paul's relationship with the Galatians is strained, it was not always strained.

We see that the Apostle Paul recounts his relationship with the Galatians. And in this account, we find some answers to this important question.

How should pastors and congregations relate to each other? As Paul is addressing the Galatians and reminding them of their history together, I believe he provides some answers to this important question.

[5 : 26] How should pastors and churches or congregations relate to each other? And this morning, I'll be answering this question by considering the relationship between Paul and the Galatians, and I'll do so under two headings.

The first, the Galatians' attitude to Paul. And second, Paul's attitude to the Galatians. In preparing this sermon, I have once again been helped tremendously by deceased pastor John Stott, his commentary on Galatians, and I credit him this morning for the wording of these two headings that I'm going to be using.

I could not improve on them, so I'm using them. So first, let's consider the Galatians' attitude to Paul. We learn in verses 13 and 14 how the relationship between Paul and the Galatians started.

It appears that Paul, on a missionary journey, ended up going to the region of Galatia because he was sick. It doesn't seem to be that this was his intent, but it seems like Paul perhaps went there to recuperate because he had fallen sick.

He had some ailment. But while there, he preached the gospel to the Galatians. And evidently, the illness that Paul faced was such that it seems that it was difficult for the Galatians to look at him or even be around him because he tells the Galatians in verse 14, And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God as Christ Jesus.

[7 : 22] So instead of despising or scorning Paul for this illness that we don't know what it was, but evidently some serious kind of illness that was a trial for the Galatians, Paul says, you gave me an overwhelming reception.

He says, you received me as an angel of God. You received me as Christ himself. Now obviously, Paul is using what we call exaggerated speech.

He's using hyperbole. He is not likening himself to an angel of God nor likening himself to Christ. But he's using very descriptive words to communicate how reverently and how carefully the Galatians received him when he went to Galatia and how they heard him.

They didn't just hear him as some man who landed on their shores and who was preaching some message they'd never heard before. No, they received him as someone special, as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

And clearly, the esteem that Paul was receiving was not for Paul in and of himself, but it was because he was a servant of Christ. He was a bearer of the gospel and God, no doubt, bore witness to his preaching.

[8 : 47] So Paul's relationship with the Galatians began around the gospel. There was nothing attractive or appealing about Paul and the distractions of his illness didn't matter.

What mattered was the gospel was being preached and the Galatians persevered through Paul's health trial to hear the gospel. Brothers and sisters, if we just consider this for a moment, the Galatians' attitude toward Paul and the gospel he preached should be the attitude of congregations to their pastors and the gospel they preach.

Congregations should not be drawn to pastors by fleeting physical appearances if they're positive, nor should they be deterred by them if they're negative.

Instead, congregations should be drawn to pastors because they see them as the men of God. They see them as the servants of God. They see them as the messengers of God preaching his gospel to them.

But the reality is that when the hearts of pastors and congregations are joined, truth is, God joins them. We could not in and of ourselves bring about that divine joining.

[10 : 13] God himself joins. hearts together, the hearts of pastors and congregations and no doubt this is what he did in the church at Galatia.

And early on, the Galatians' attitude to Paul was shaped through the gospel he preached and the fact that God's gospel was being proclaimed and he was God's messenger.

I love the way John Stott put it. He writes, how is the congregation's attitude to their minister to be determined? To begin with, it is not to be determined by his personal appearance.

He may be ugly, as tradition tells us the apostle Paul was, or good looking. He may be physically fit or he may be sickly like Paul when he visited Galatia.

He may have a pleasing personality or may be quite unprepossessing. He may have outstanding gifts or be just a faithful man with no unusual brilliance.

[11 : 28] But the people should not be swayed in their attitude to him by his outward appearance. They should neither flatter him because they find him attractive nor despise and reject him because he is not.

The Galatians resisted the temptation to let their attitude to Paul be influenced by his personal appearance. And he ends by saying, so should congregations today.

And brothers and sisters, this is so, so true. It is so sad when this is not the case and when the hearts of people are drawn to pastors for all kinds of other reasons that are fleeting and that are fickle.

Not even the trial illness that the apostle Paul had prevented the Galatians from gladly receiving him and gladly hearing him and gladly blessing him as an angel of God or Christ.

things changed. So Paul asked them in verse 15, what has become of the blessing you felt?

[12 : 50] What has become of your blessedness? He's asking them what happened to all the blessing that you used to give me, that you gave me at first? The blessing you felt concerning me.

And then he goes on to remind the Galatians how they would have if possible gouged out their eyes and given them to him. Now this statement has caused some theologians to speculate that Paul's sickness related to his eyes.

But we don't know that. We can't be sure of that. But here's what we can be sure of. We can be sure that in this statement Paul is communicating how much the Galatians loved and were willing to sacrifice for him.

He's saying this to them. He's not saying this behind their back. He's saying you would have gouged out your eyes for me if it were possible. So what happened?

What happened between Paul and the Galatians? We were told in verse 16, Paul became their enemy because he was telling them the truth. The false teachers who had infiltrated the Galatian churches turned the Galatians away from the gospel and when Paul corrected the Galatians, the Galatians turned away from Paul.

[14 : 17] The one who they originally, initially received as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself, is now seen as an enemy. Why?

Because the truth Paul preached clashed with the error the Galatians embraced. Brothers and sisters, I believe that it's important to see this morning that if you are in a faithful church long enough, you will come to experience times when your personal beliefs or opinions are challenged by your pastor's preaching of the word of God.

And there will be the temptation, just like the Galatians, to view him as your enemy. Obviously, this does not mean that you cannot question your pastor when he says something that you don't understand.

It doesn't mean that the pastor is never wrong. You can and should question your pastor or anyone else for that matter when they're teaching something that you don't see or you don't understand.

And yes, pastors are sometimes wrong. But here I offer a word of caution as we consider this experience of the Galatians and the Apostle Paul.

[15 : 44] Even after questioning, and you're still not persuaded by what your pastor may teach from God's word, don't view him as your enemy. Don't make it personal.

Because if you do, if you do view him as your enemy, you will play into the hands of the real enemy who is Satan himself. And that's what we see took place in the Galatian churches.

Listen once again to the wise commentary of John Stott on this point. He writes, Paul became an enemy to the Galatians simply because they did not like the home truths he was teaching.

A congregation should be aware of assessing their minister according to their own subjective doctrinal fancies. Instead, a congregation's attitude to their minister should be determined by his loyalty to the apostolic message.

If he is faithful in teaching what the apostles taught, a godly congregation will humbly receive his message and submit to it.

[17 : 04] They will neither resent nor reject it. Rather, they will welcome it, even with the deference which they would give to an angel of God, to Christ Jesus himself, because they recognize that the minister's message is not the minister's message, but the message of Jesus Christ.

John Stott wrote those words some 50 years ago, almost 50 years ago, back in 1968. And so much has happened with pastors and pastoral ministries since then.

and it hasn't been good. It's been quite sad. And so it is a small feat today for congregations to receive pastors in this way that John Stott talked about some 50 years ago.

yesterday I was reading the NASA Guardian and I saw the headline, Pastor Charged with Theft. And I was drawn to it and I was wondering, what is this?

And I began to read, because next to the headline there is this gentleman in handcuffs, two police officers, escorting him.

[18 : 33] And when I read the first sentence of the article, this is what it said. Former Ministry of Finance Accounts Clerk and Youth Pastor James Anwood Johnson was charged yesterday with stealing over \$400,000 in cash from the Ministry of Finance.

And immediately I knew that the headline was misleading. First of all, Mr. James Anwood Johnson, according to the first sentence of the article, was not a pastor, he was a youth pastor.

He was employed with the Ministry of Finance and clearly in a full-time capacity, so he was no doubt volunteering as a youth pastor in some church, but he was employed with the Ministry of Finance.

And in the article, they didn't even mention the church he was associated with. They only mentioned the Ministry of Finance, but not the church that he was associated with.

Yet still, the headline read, Pastor charged with theft. Why? Because it's sensational. And because it is consistent with the kinds of things that pastors have fallen prey to.

[19 : 57] pastors and some have been worse than what Mr. Johnson is accused of, but it is a reminder that even today, pastors have fallen into such disrepute that it is not even off bounds for a newspaper to take that and craft a misleading headline to slam pastors once again.

and I raise it this morning just to remind us that it is in this context that still congregations are called to receive their ministers as the messengers of Christ that they truly are, with the reverence and with the deference that we see laid out in this relationship with the Apostle Paul and the Galatians.

not because Paul was special, but because Paul was God's messenger and he was bringing God's gospel. And again, we remember that only God can, especially in the midst of this environment, in the midst of this context in which we live, knit the hearts of ministers and their congregation.

So we must look to him to be able to do that even as we exert human effort to accomplish it. Now, should pastors be criticized?

Absolutely, they should be. If they stray in their life or doctrine and they are clearly contrary to God, they are to be criticized. And it also means that churches are to be faithful, congregations are to be faithful.

[21 : 50] Because if congregations are not faithful, they would not hold their ministers accountable. They would not even know when they are slipping into doctrinal error. They would overlook immoral lifestyles if they are not faithful.

faithful. And so, this is a necessity that congregations are faithful as well so that pastors can be held accountable.

Again, John Stott writes, certainly people have cause for criticism if the preacher is unfaithful to his commission, if he makes no attempt to preach biblically, or if he is not himself subject to the apostolic word.

But when the minister expounds scripture, the word of God, the proper reaction of the congregation should be to receive the message rather than criticize it. Not on the authority of the minister, but on the authority of Christ whose message it is.

Most Christian congregations today could be more alert, more humble, and more hungry in listening to the exposition of God's word.

[23 : 06] And since that was true back in 1968 when John Stott wrote those words, it is certainly true in our day. Well, that's the Galatians' attitude towards Paul.

They esteemed him and his ministry at first until they disagreed with him. Let's now consider Paul's attitude to the Galatians.

Paul's attitude to the Galatians is seen in verse 12. And first and foremost, it is an attitude of spiritual concern for their souls. Paul is concerned for their spiritual well-being.

And for almost four and a half chapters, he has been correcting them and he has been adjusting them because of their doctrinal error. But behind that strong correction is an expression of an enduring love for them.

And despite all the doubts he had about their salvation, which he expressed just earlier in verse 11, when he said he was afraid that he had labored over them in vain, Paul now addresses the Galatians and he entreats them as brothers.

[24 : 27] And you'll notice that he goes back and forth in this way where in the one sense he is, on the one hand he is saying, you know, I'm not even sure you've been converted.

I may have labored over you in vain. He does that in verse 11 and elsewhere. And now he says to them, starting in verse 12, brothers, brothers.

brothers. And I imagine when the Galatians receive this letter as they're going through it and they're hearing Paul express concern about them and put in doubt their very salvation, that now he would transition, he would say to them, brothers.

That's a precious term. And I say to us this morning, we must not use those words lightly. Brothers means something that is very profound.

when we say brother or sister, what it means is this. It means that God has done a work in that person's life. He has adopted that person to be his son or his daughter.

[25 : 29] And when we say brother, when we say sister, we recognize this one belongs to God. This is God's child. And so this church that has caused Paul all this heartache and headache, we see him in treating them and he says to them, brothers, brothers.

And notice what he says to them. He says, I urge you to become like me as I become like you. And what Paul is really saying to them is, here you are, busy trying to keep the law to be justified.

He says, become like me. I put my trust in Jesus Christ. I was a Jew. I did all that stuff. I don't do that anymore. I now have put my faith in Jesus Christ. Become like me.

as I have become like you. I, a Jew, I'm like a Gentile now because I don't keep the law anymore. He's saying, become like me as I have become like you.

How I've become to believe the gospel. Sadly, the Galatians, instead of becoming like Paul was, they were trying to become like Paul used to be by keeping the law.

[26 : 51] Paul then gives them a particular assurance I think was very essential and needed because no doubt they probably thought Paul was upset with them. That Paul was taking very personally the fact that they have abandoned the gospel and they have abandoned him and they have latched on to these false teachers, these Judaizers in their midst.

And Paul says to them in verse 13, you didn't wrong me. You did me no wrong. You did me no wrong.

Paul was saying to them, I've not taken your actions personally. It's not about me and how easy it could have become about Paul. How easily do we take things personally and we bear them and we bear them and then we respond to people based on them.

Paul says, no, you did not wrong me. Here Paul is a mature pastor and more than being a mature pastor, he's being a mature Christian as he says to them, no, you didn't wrong me.

And once again, what we see is his attitude of concern, spiritual concern and spiritual care for the Galatians.

[28 : 11] And Paul's concern for them is also expressed in his honesty with them. You know, we would call this, in our local vernacular, we would call this throwing it in people's face.

How Paul says, you know, you would have gouged out your eyes, if possible, and given them to me. We would often, when confronted with truths like that, we would say, don't throw that in my face.

Paul was being honest with them and he was reminding them, he had to remind them of where they came from, remind them of their love for him, and how it is only because he is telling them the truth that he has become his enemy.

And brothers and sisters, this is an expression of care, an expression of care. Sometimes there's a proverb that says, faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. See, a friend, one who truly is concerned about us, who is a true friend, will confront us with the truth, and sometimes that truth will hurt us.

[29 : 23] That truth will prick us in a certain way. It will wound us. But Scripture says it's faithful, you can trust it. But be wary of the kisses of an enemy.

the one who would see wrong and overlook it and not say anything just because of the discomfort that it brings. But Paul doesn't do that. He raises the issue with the Galatians.

It would have been so easy for him to say, look, let's just kind of get along, let's just get along. He doesn't do that. He tells them what the real issue is, and in so doing, he demonstrates spiritual care and spiritual concern for the Galatians by telling them the truth.

And then he also tells them the truth about what really was happening with them. Look what he says to them in verse 17. He says, they make much of you, but for no good purpose.

They want to shut you out that you may make much of them. Paul is calling the Galatians to see the false teachers for exactly who they are, to see the relationship for exactly what it is.

[30 : 37] He says, it seems to be about you. They make it seem like it's about you. He says, it's not about you, it's about them. They're making much of you because they want you to make much of them. They're putting you on a pedestal because they want you to put them on a higher pedestal.

He says, and they want to isolate you. They want to shut you out so that they can manipulate and so that they can control you in this particular way.

You know, one of the most common ways to deceive and lure people is to appeal to their pride. And that's what the false teachers did with the Galatians.

And Paul points it out and he calls it out. He says, they're making much of you because they want you to make much of them.

Verse 18, Paul shows his selflessness. It wasn't that Paul was jealous about the Galatians. He didn't want anybody to go in there after he left. He says to them, he says, it's always good to be made much of for a good purpose.

[31 : 49] And not only when I'm present with you. I'm not the only one who can do this. I'm not the only one who make much of you. But he's in essence saying to them, look, I'm not a petty, possessive person.

The issue is not that I don't want anyone else to be around you. It's okay to be made much of for a good purpose. But those who are doing it for you, they're not doing it for a good purpose.

If they were, Paul would have rejoiced. But he couldn't rejoice because he understood what was happening with the Judaizers. And the reason that he did is Paul knew their MO.

He knew they operated. He knew what their ultimate goal was. And so Paul didn't have a problem with them being made much of.

His problem was they weren't being made much of for any good reason. And so he could not rejoice. It was for a bad reason. And so he pointed it out.

[33 : 01] In verse 19, the apostle Paul says something that the Judaizers and indeed no one else could say. He calls the Galatians his little children. Here Paul lovingly identifies with the Galatians.

These individuals in these churches who had abandoned the gospel, abandoned him, but treating him as an enemy.

He says, you're my little children. And in so doing, he recognizes their immaturity and he recognizes their vulnerability by calling them his little children.

And what we see is Paul's care for them. Paul is not matching them like this, saying you're my enemy and you're my enemies. I'm going to fight with them. He is looking at them as his little children.

And what's interesting is the language that Paul uses up to this point in the letter, Paul has been relating to them as a father, one who's correcting them and disciplining them. But now he speaks to them as a spiritual mother.

[34 : 10] He tells them that he is again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in them. Notice that although Paul talks about the anguish of childbirth, he's not talking about him giving birth to anything, but he's talking about the Galatians giving birth to something.

He says he wants to see Christ formed in them. And here again, he's recognizing that Christ is conceived in them, that Christ needs to be fully formed in them.

He is praying and he is in anguish to see fruit, to see the evidence that they have been truly converted. And part of the Christ being formed in them would be them trusting in Christ and not in keeping the law and trying to be justified by the law.

Paul wanted to see some real evidence come out of them that they had truly been converted. He wanted to see gospel fruit. He wanted to see a transformed life.

And this is why he anguished over them so much. He wants to see Christ formed in them.

[35 : 36] John Stott writes concerning the Christian minister, he writes, he should be preoccupied with the people's spiritual progress and care nothing for his own prestige.

He should not exploit them for his advantage. He should seek to serve them for theirs. He should not use them for his own pleasure, but be willing on their behalf to endure pain.

He longs for Christ to be formed in the people. And to this end, he's ready to agonize even to travail in birth.

Again, brothers and sisters, these are high, lofty ideals for God's ministers. And truly, they're only possible with divine help. There's nothing innate in any human being that would cause them to gravitate towards this.

It is only through God's help and God's enablement that this is possible. In addition to having an attitude of spiritual concern for the Galatians, it's also clear that Paul had an attitude of godly patience.

[36 : 58] He was patient for the Galatians. And his patience is expressed throughout this letter, especially in this section where he is now entreating them and appealing to them as his little children over whom he anguishes as a mother in childbirth.

And this must be the attitude of pastors to those who go astray. We must be patient with them.

but this must not only be my attitude, it must be our attitude. As we live in community and as we watch brothers and sisters sometimes fall in sin, and Paul is going to address this over in chapter 6.

Sometimes the sin may be doctrinal error, sometimes the sin may be moral, but this call to be patient, this example of patience that we see with the Apostle Paul is what we should all strive for.

And it doesn't mean that there's never a time or a place for church discipline. Sometimes when calls to repent are not heeded, then church discipline takes place.

[38 : 19] And we should not miss the fact that even in the appeals, that's church discipline. in the warnings, that's church discipline. Church discipline is not only when an ultimate act of removal takes place, the entire process of concern and patience, all of that is church discipline.

But we see this attitude of amazing patience the Apostle Paul expresses over the Galatian churches.

God's love. But despite his tender affection for them, as expressed in these verses, the Apostle Paul is still concerned. Look at what he says in verse 20.

He says, I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. If Paul were present with them, perhaps he could have seen some evidence that may have removed some of his concern, but he's not present, so he doesn't see, and so he is perplexed.

I love the way that John Stott summarizes the attitude of the people that they should have towards their pastors and the attitude of the pastors towards their people.

[39 : 52] Listen to what he writes. He writes, What should matter to the people is not the pastor's appearance, but whether Christ is speaking through him.

And what should matter to the pastor is not the people's favor, but whether Christ is formed in them. We read that again.

And what should matter to the pastor is not the people's favor, but whether Christ is formed in them. The church needs people who, in listening to their pastor, listen for the message of Christ.

And pastors who, in laboring among their people, look for the image of Christ. Only when pastor and people thus keep their eyes on Christ, will their mutual relations keep healthy, profitable, and pleasing to Almighty God.

brothers and sisters, as we consider Paul's appeal to the Galatians in these nine verses, it should be very clear to us that Paul is doing more than trying to win an argument.

[41 : 04] Paul is doing more than trying to persuade the Galatians to agree with him. There's so much more at stake. What is at stake is the very souls of the Galatians.

the Galatians have abandoned the only message whereby sinners may be made right with God and saved from the wrath of his final judgment.

And that's what Paul has in view. Paul is not interested in just winning an argument with them. He's not interested in a tug of war with the Judaizers. But he recognizes that the souls of the Galatians hang in the balance.

and he is appealing to them. He is agonizing over them. He's calling them back to fidelity in the gospel. And this is the issue.

This is always the issue. And if you hear this one and you don't know Jesus Christ, this is the issue. Don't lose sight of this issue.

[42 : 13] The issue is the salvation of your soul. the issue is where you're going to spend eternity. Every single one of us in this room deserves the wrath of God for our sins.

We've rebelled against God, we've turned our backs on God, and we deserve his wrath. But God in his great mercy sent his son who lived a perfect life, kept the law, did what we could never do, and then he took our place on the cross, became our substitute, and bore our sins, and died our death.

And then on the third day he arose from the grave, and God demonstrated that he was pleased with his sacrifice, so that all who put their trust in Jesus may be forgiven, and may be adopted as God's sons and daughters.

And this is what was at stake for the Galatians, and this is why for Paul it was important for him to reach out to them.

And this is why it's important for you this morning if you're hearing the gospel and you don't know Christ, that you turn to him, and that you believe and obey the gospel.

[43 : 39] And Jesus makes this promise to every single person who would do that, he makes the promise, I will receive you. And not only that, I will never, ever turn you away.

And so my prayer for you this morning is that if you don't know Jesus Christ, turn to him today, put your trust in him today, it will never turn you away.

Let's pray.