



## Who Is Discipling Who?

Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> March 2024

GALATIANS 4:17-20

1 As a young boy I believed the world was a kind place full of kind people and I had nothing to fear. As I got older I came to realise this was simply not true. My first racer bike was my pride and joy and I had great plans to go anywhere, and fast. Until one day a blonde-haired boy from down the hill stopped me and asked me how much I wanted for my bike. I told him it was not for sale but he insisted, so I turned around and rode back home whilst he shouted out promises to himself that this bike would become his.

One winters day not long after, I had finished my shift in the local chemist and walked out the back door to deliver prescriptions to the folk of Abbots Langley and discovered my bike was gone and two tyre tracks in the snow were all that was left.

My mind went back to the threats of the blonde-haired boy and I knew then this world also had people in it who would befriend me only for what I could do for them or give them and their concern was not for who I was or what mattered to me.

2 In today's segment of Paul's letter to the Galatians, we see there are two kinds of people in verses 17-20,

They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup>But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. <sup>19</sup>My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup>I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

3 Paul's point is this: **If you follow those who passionately follow Jesus Christ then Christ will be formed in you.**

In verse 17 Paul describes the ones we should not trust our spiritual growth to.

They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.

Notice Paul does not describe the outward appearance of those who will harm your faith. As Jesus warned in Matthew 10:16,

4

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.”

Imagine if I grew up believing that blonde-haired men could not be trusted – I would end up trusting people who should not be trusted and not trusting people who could be trusted. In Galatians 4:17 Paul describes the actions and the motives that we need to watch out for. He was warning them of a group known as the Judaizers (a sect who wanted to add the law to salvation by grace alone). The problem is, wolves, of any description do not always look like wolves as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 7:15,

5

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.”

That word beware tells us to watch out, to look carefully at the lives of others. Do not just wander towards every warm smile or kind word, or innocent offer because under the outward passion towards you could be a desire to separate you from the truth and make you a *disciple of the world*.

6

Paul is careful in what he says next, having warned them away from passionate people he says in verse 18,

7

But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

Just because some people with bad and evil intentions are passionate does not mean we should avoid being passionate about Jesus Christ, about our Saviour, about His death burial and resurrection, about His Spirit in us, about, His power to save to the uttermost, about His coming again! If we are not passionate about such things, who will be?!

8

Now let’s hear Paul’s heartbeat – his passion – for the Galatians in verse 19,

9

My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you

Referring to them as little children is a reminder they have much growing to do. Then Paul uses a jolting metaphor to reveal his passion. Someone who is in labour is not going to be focused on anything else – every sinew in Paul’s body,

every thought of his mind, every decision he makes, all his emotional energy is directed towards the formation of Christ in their hearts and minds.

10 Paul here is talking not of their salvation because no one can be saved through the efforts of a believer but only by believing in the crucified and resurrected Jesus for themselves. He is talking of their sanctification – the development and growth of their faith in Jesus Christ.

11 In verse 20, Paul mentions something we should take care to notice,

I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

We do not think of Paul as a man of doubt. When it came to the certainty of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and his own faith, Paul was not a doubter. But whether true faith in Jesus Christ had been formed in these Galatians, he had doubts.

12 Perhaps what he had seen when he was with them was not real. Perhaps they had not truly believed and only adopted some Christian behaviours. Perhaps there was just an outward cultural shift but no real lasting heart change.

13 In all these verse Paul was reflecting his words of 1 Corinthians 11:1,

Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

14 Other translations use the word follow, instead of imitate, and again in Ephesians 5:1-2

Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. <sup>2</sup>And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

15 Both these verses and the segment we have looked at echo the simplest words of Christ that today still have the most profound effect of this world.

“Follow me.”

As Jesus spoke those words to an apparently random bunch of ‘undiscipulables’ (people you would never imagine could be disciplined to become passionate followers of Jesus Christ), His was calling them to follow Him everywhere, including His death on the cross.

16 I said at the beginning there are two kinds of people in today’s segment from Galatians.

1. Those who will disciple you according to personalities, the ways and the purposes of this world, and,
2. Those who will disciple you according the person, ways, and purposes of Jesus Christ.

17 My point is this: **If you follow those who passionately follow Jesus Christ then Christ will be formed in you.**

18 So how can we ensure we do this?

1. If you know you are not a follower of Jesus, then call on His name today and be born again
2. Perhaps some of you have adopted a cultural Christianity, an outward faith created by your own feelings/efforts – you too must come to Christ to be truly born again
3. Some of you have hearts where thorns and thistles have grown and have choked your faith, like the seed from the parable in Mark 4, and that is why you see no fruit in your life. In short, the world is discipling you and you need to put to death your mortal members; your earthly passions (Colossians 3:5) with the sword of the Spirit and prayer.
4. And yes some of you are flourishing and you want to become more like Jesus and see others born again of His Spirit. You must surround yourself with other passionate followers.
5. As you follow Jesus, reach out and disciple others too.
6. All this can only happen if we do as God's word says in Hebrews 10:25, 'not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching' – when we are together exhort (from the Greek parakaleo) which is to 'call others from being up-close and personal'. Speak words of encouragement to others around you.

If you follow those who passionately follow Jesus Christ then Christ will be formed in you.