

Serving God's Purpose in the Galatians

We thank the Lord tonight we can gather with so many of His servants. Some are known as servants, many serve the Lord without fame or acknowledgement. And all we are looking for is the Lord's accommodation and the Lord's pleasure. And so we pray that everyone here desire to be a servant serving God's purpose in this generation. I have been asked to share on this matter from the letter to the Galatians. And we will just concentrate on three little portions in this book.

The first is in Galatians 1:15 – 16. *'But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood.'* This was Paul's testimony as to how the gospel came to him very personally. He saw God's Son revealed in him. And we know when you see the Lord revealed in you, salvation is no longer an impersonal thing. And as with Paul, our lives become a love story. Who can look at the Son of God and not love Him? And so Paul became a servant at that moment on the road to Damascus and served God's will from that day on. We believe Paul probably wanted to immediately go and preach the gospel. He was ready. But God brought the cross of Christ to Paul in a divine veto. Because even as a young Christian there is much in the natural life and in the world's philosophy that have to be renewed and changed by the work of the cross.

And so we come to the second revelation which is in Galatians 2:20. This was something Paul saw and it forever changed his life. *'I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.'* Paul met Christ crucified. And out of this

revelation came a new freedom to live. He was no longer bound by his religious flesh but was able to serve the Lord out of a life – the life of Christ within.

And then we come to the third portion which is in Galatians 4:19 – 20 *'My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you – but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.'* Now this is the third manifestation of the Lord.

Christ was revealed in him. That was a personal revelation. I have been crucified with Christ. This was a personal revelation. But Christ formed in you is not a revelation but a manifestation that others see in you. And so it is here in these verses that we saw the deepest burden that Paul had for the Galatians – that Christ would be fully formed in them. And for this purpose we come tonight with a burden. Since this is such a great matter, let us pray together.

Prayer: Our Father, we come in the name of Jesus Christ. We gather as Christians who are called by Thy name. You have been pleased to pour out Your Spirit upon us and even to see a revelation of Christ dwelling within us. But now we want to seek Your purpose which is for Christ to be formed in us in such a way that He is manifested. And for this we ask that You would help us tonight by the Holy Spirit to understand this burden in Your purpose. We ask that You would, by the power of Your Spirit, quicken our mortal body and our mind to be able to receive Your word tonight. We pray that Your word will go forward and do the work that has to be done. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

There is a hymn titled 'God Works in Mysterious Way, His Wonder to Perform'. Nobody can appreciate this hymn as much as the apostle Paul. We are not reading the words just to gain some understanding of service; we are watching the apostle Paul served the purpose of God. He was

the steward of the mystery. And no one was more surprised by the grace of God than the apostle Paul. He said *'to me the least of the saints; this grace was given to make known the unsearchable richness of Christ'*. God took a persecutor of the church, a zealous Pharisee, a chief of sinners and made him His love slave. Jesus came down and revealed Himself to Paul. He was so surprised. And then God in His wisdom began to open His secrets to the apostle Paul, the least of the saints.

We must never forget that all through Paul's life and ministry, he always loved the Lord Jesus. We have to remember that Paul was always overwhelmed by the signs and glory of His master. Now we have here record of Paul's letter to the Galatian churches.

The Galatian churches

We know that the Galatian churches in a sense were some of the first churches in Paul's first missionary journey where he saw the Lord did wondrous things. We remember Paul's strategy on his first journey. Whenever he came to a new town and there was a synagogue, he would go and preach the gospel. And thank God, every place he preached the gospel, some Jews were saved. But Paul was amazed at how the Lord opened the door to the Gentiles. And especially as he went up to the churches in the region of Galatia, he encountered more Gentiles who lived in the darkness of religious idolatry. You remember how when he went to Lystra and when he was preaching the gospel, the people thought he was a god – the god mercury. But when he preached the gospel, people were saved. He went through the churches of Galatia and as he returned back to those churches, he could see the life of Jesus among the saints. Some brothers had grown in revelation and in character and so they could appoint elders in these young Galatian churches. When Paul set out in the second journey with Silas by his side, once again when he went through the Galatian churches, and he spotted Timothy. There was this young man. He was saved and he

had some gifts. He could preach and the Christ like character was beginning to form in him.

Now it was the life of Jesus Christ among His people who built His church.

An apostle might plant, another apostle might water but only God can raise up the saints. I will build My church, said Jesus. And Paul had to be greatly encouraged to see that the churches in Galatia had been growing by the grace of God as he set out on his second missionary journey. But then we know the Judaizers came along. And they began to preach that even the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and they needed to keep certain matters of the law. On the outset of this letter Paul sent to the Gentiles, he told them to stop listening to these Judaizers and to stand firm in the gospel that they first heard. He subsequently spoke to all the Galatian churches that he had visited and told them they were complete in Christ. He told them to stand in the liberty on which they were called and not to become yoked in bondage. They knew the free grace of God. They received this grace by simple faith. And the Holy Spirit came into their lives as a result of this wonderful grace of God. So Paul told these believers to stand fast because the law could erode the grace of God. Works could erode simple things. And relying on your own flesh for righteousness could erode the power of the Holy Spirit, who alone can sanctify. Now I always seem to have this burden of allowing the life of Jesus Christ to be manifested in our lives and in our assembly. When Paul spoke with the elders in Ephesus, he told them to watch over the flock. What he meant was that they should let the life of Jesus Christ remain in their midst and not to allow wolves from the outside to come in and spoil what God had done among them. It is the life of Christ that built His church. But the truth is that we cannot just let the life grow by itself. Now there are many today who are preaching the grace of God. They said a Christian is saved by grace. It is all grace. Do not bother correcting people. There is no need for discipline. Grace will do all of that. We live for service of God. They can be cross-less servants. We want servants who look handsome, who has the gift of speaking; natural strength, natural gifts, natural

talents. That is what we need, everyone being themselves. It is very interesting and ironic that we are in the Seattle area, where recently a very large well-known church folded up on December 31st, the end of last year. They had the best preacher in the northwest. They did not say the preacher sinned. But because he was so arrogant and proud and because he treated his fellow servants with such angry abuse, they finally had to tell him to stop despite his tremendous speaking gift. The church with thousands of people closed down. It is a shameful condition that the church puts a man up on a pedestal like he is a god. They wanted him to speak words that tickle their ears no matter what his character is like. And we know in many churches today, the most popular gospel is the cross-less gospel. Now my brother do you want to build the wrong kind of church? If you do, then preach prosperity. Tell people how to live a blessed, selfish life. Tell people to serve if they want to. But that was not the gospel that Paul preached.

God must trim and cut us back

Paul said I portrayed Christ crucified before you when I was in your midst. There is no cross-less grace. You said just let the life grow by itself. But Jesus said if you are a vine and if you are not pruned, you will grow wild. The Lord loves us so much that He must trim us and cut us back in order for us to bear fruit. So Paul preached this revelation of Christ crucified. And for those who would serve God's purpose, we must allow God to deal with us and discipline us and bring us to the end of ourselves. He has to remove from within us the hindrances of self, of sin and of the worldly philosophies. We see the way the Lord dealt with the apostle Paul. Paul could not move forward until he counted all that he had done as rubbish. And we see by his testimony throughout his epistles how the Lord caused him to desire just one thing and that was to live for Christ. So we see that there is a secondary and more important reason behind our service. God calls us to be His servants. But it is not because He needs to have work done and He needs some volunteers.

God wants sons. God did not create Adam because He needed a gardener. God did not say on the sixth day these vegetables were growing too fast, I better make a man to cut things back. God had made all the animals to eat the grass and to take care of this. God wants sons. God wanted to talk to man in the garden in the cool of the day. God created man with a great destiny.

Again in travail

And this brings us to the scripture in Galatians chapter 4:19 '*My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you*'. Why was Paul again in labor? This is a term to describe a woman in child birth. Now fortunately a woman does not have to go through labor again when a child is sixteen years old. But Paul said I am again in labor for you. He was burdened when he preached the gospel and he saw souls that were born again by the Spirit of God. That was the original labor in his service. But then he was in labor again as these children need to grow up into sons. Probably every parent here who has teenagers can understand what it is to enter again into travail in labor for their children.

But now in order to understand this we have to look in the context of the Book of Galatians to see what Paul means. As we look in Galatians chapter 3, we see Paul brought up this topic of our adoptions as sons in verses 3:23 – 29. '*But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise*'.

Sonship

And in Galatians 4:4 it says *'But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons'*. Now you see the last phrase 'adoption as sons'. By the grace of God when we were saved, we were also adopted as sons.

Now I need to explain this phrase 'adoption as sons'. Actually the Greek word means the placing of sons. There was the practice in the Roman civilization called the placing of sons. This practice only happened among the rich and the high up in politics. When one was an important person and had a large inheritance, he wanted to pass the inheritance to his sons. But many Roman families looked at their sons and they were spoiled. So the man looked for a child among his relatives or even among the servants – one with an outstanding character. And to protect his inheritance he had to adopt this child at great expense. He had to pay the mother because he had to change the boy's name to the name of the man. Julius Caesar became the first Caesar of Rome. He looked around his family and could not find anyone. He needed to adopt a son so the son could be the next Caesar. He found his nephew. His name was Gaius Octavius Thurinus. And Julius bought this son as his son to be the next Caesar. His name was changed to Caesar Augustus. And he became the second emperor of Rome. So to be placed into the position of a son was an honor and guaranteed an inheritance. Today when we talked about adopted children, in a sense they are not our real children but adopted children. But this adoption as sons in the scripture is to place the sons in the family and to be the same as the rest of the family. This is very important in God's eternal purpose.

We found one of the greatest statements in the New Testament in Hebrews 2: 9 – 10 *'But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste*

death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bring many sons to glory'. Just think about that. Jesus became a man and when He rose again, He rose again as the first man in glory. Paul in I Corinthians called Him the first fruit of the resurrection. But we will rise again as sons of glory. This is a great secret in the heart of God. Not only is His Son, Jesus, glorified but that Jesus might bring many sons into glory – a glorious bride. Other human beings in glory glorified. The gospel that Paul presented to the Galatians was that by the grace of God, you have been adopted as sons. Notice what Galatians 4:6 says *'because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"* Now this is amazing grace.

The Gentiles had a hard time understanding how this could be. Now the Jewish Galatians understood it a little bit because they always thought of themselves as sons of Abraham. They looked at the Gentiles and thought that they did not have that inheritance. Then the Judaizers came. They said you were saved but do you want to be an heir; a son of Abraham? You needed to be circumcised if you want to. That sounded pretty good, right? But Paul said no. You already were made a son; you did not need to be circumcised. Paul's special stewardship was the stewardship to explain to the Gentiles they were heirs through Christ Jesus. Notice in Galatians 3:26 – 27 *'For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*'. They all were in Jesus Christ, in the Messiah through faith, neither Jews nor Greeks; they were all sons together.

In the Book of Ephesians Paul said he had a special revelation for the Gentiles. The Lord Jesus revealed that to him. His special revelation was in Ephesians 3:6 *'that the Gentiles are fellow heirs*'. Were you Jewish? Were you sons of Abraham? I was too. I was an heir of Abraham; by faith just like you; and no more Jews nor Gentiles. Not only that but Gentiles are fellow members of the body of Christ; fellow members in one body. The church is one body, not two bodies; no

Messianic body or Gentile body. You are not a member unnecessary. Gentiles are in the same body of Christ as those Jews who are saved by the Messiah. And then in verse 6 it said 'and fellow partakers'. So Paul would not let the Judaizers get away with this one. By faith in Christ, Gentiles and Jews have the same standing. Now you can imagine the Jews would have problems with this. They thought the Gentiles were stealing some of their inheritance. But there are plenty of inheritance for both Jews and Gentiles, all one in Christ. Now this is wonderful.

Son and Servant

But we stand in a strange position. We are both servants and sons. Now Paul said in Galatians that we are no longer servants but sons. He was speaking in terms of the gospel. Are you a servant? Or are you a son? We thought we are the sons and others should serve me. I am a son. I do not have to serve God. God serves me. A lot of Christians ask God to serve them. But we are servants even though we are sons. There is only one way to explain it. Look at Jesus. Was He a son? He is the perfect Son. Was He a servant? He was a perfect servant. A perfect servant is a perfect Son. And a perfect Son is a perfect servant of the Father.

Now we are not perfect but we are servants. And if we serve well, we are sons. And if we are sons, we serve the more because we love the Father. So here is an important thing to understand.

Suffer with Him

Now because we are servants and because we are sons, we suffer many things. Let us look at Romans 8:16 – 17 *'The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him'*. Sons have to suffer with Him for now. Jesus the Son of God suffered on earth for our sake. Here is something very important to understand. As a child

of God, we have to be continually dealt with in our flesh and for our sins by the Lord. We remembered Paul said because of the revelations he received, he was given a thorn on his side to keep him from boasting. But this suffering Paul had was more than just to keep him from boasting. He was given this thorn in the flesh as the son. Because it was the lesson that he experienced, he was able to help all of the brothers and sisters. He learned that *'my grace is sufficient for thee; for my power is perfected in your weaknesses'*. Now that is a million dollar lesson. And as servants of the Lord, we discovered how His grace always comes through in our weakness. But now we are entering into something of a mystery because we are now no longer suffering just for our own sake and for our own sins; we are suffering for the sake of others. Do you understand that? That is what sons do. Sons have seen the higher purpose of God and are willing to suffer for the sake of something greater. Now this is what Paul means when he said *'I am again in travail until Christ is formed in you'*. He was suffering for the sake of the saints. We can see Paul testified this suffering for the sake of others in many places. You remember what Paul said in Philippians chapter 1, I want to be with the Lord but I have to stay here for your sake. I would rather go home to Jesus, to be present with Him but for your sake I had to stay here, to be present with you and to write this gospel to you. And to the Colossians he said I filled up that which was lacking in the body of Christ. I was here in prison and I was wrestling until you came into perfection. Paul could have an easier life if he did not suffer for the sake of others. He could live in a condominium in Tarsus. He could have written books. He could have led an easy life. He traveled for the sake of others for God's purpose. So we see him burdened so Christ could be formed in the Galatian Christians.

But why was Paul perplexed? You noticed that in Galatians 4:20 he said *'But I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you'*. We have to go back a few verses to understand why he was perplexed. We have looked at the wonderful passage in

4:6 as to how they had become sons and how the Spirit of the sons called Abba and how we are sons through Christ. And then in 4:9 Paul said *'But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...'* It was not only that you came to know God through salvation, but now you had seen Christ within and God came to know you as a son. And Christ was working with you and He was interceding for you. You were led into an upward way. Christ was being formed in you. But now that you had known God or to be known by God, how was it that you turned back to the weak and worthless elemental things of which you desired to be enslaved again. He called that falling from grace.

There is something in the flesh of all of our Christian lives – lives that have grown in the Lord. And then we come to a spiritual midlife crisis. Perhaps we began to say the fun is over, the grace is done and there is no more honeymoon. I have been fellowshiping here for several years and it now begins to get boring. I think I need something more. Many people and even fellowships come to such place. Just when they begin to come into the reality of matured sonship, suddenly carnal dissatisfaction, a sense of dryness, a sense of wanting to try something new enters into their mind. So many times Christians fall from grace and they begin to actively pursue total distractions from their spiritual growth. I know of a lady who loved the Lord and she was growing in the Lord. And then she heard a preacher preached one day about Holy Ghost laughter, where you get drunk in the Holy Spirit and you start giggling and even roaring like a lion. But the tragedy was that she ran after that experience for five years. It totally distracted her from her real and holy walk with God. Some people get distracted with doctrines; end times prophesy is all they think about. Or they started preaching against somebody, some denominations and some experiences. Now the apostle Paul reasoned together with the Galatians. In chapter 4 he said before you were saved, you Gentiles were running after idols, all kinds of religious practices. Did you not realize that falling again into these laws and circumcision was

like going back to idolatry? Once you knew the reality how could you step back into the shadows? And this was why Paul said I am perplexed. You remember in chapter 3 Paul asked who had bewitched you. Paul had publicly portrayed Christ crucified in his own life and in his preaching. And so he said to the Galatians you understood about Christ crucified, but now you changed. Here we find that Paul had also preached being sons in his gospel; having the Spirit in us; walking by the Spirit and not by the deeds of the flesh and growing into mature sons. Paul showed the Galatians their glorious destiny as sons. What a wonderful revelation it was. And even though they were Gentiles, they were still going to be full and glorious sons. And even now the Spirit was working for the good of all things, and working towards conforming them into the image of His Son. So Paul said I am perplexed why you stopped pursuing to be sons and fell back into laws and idolatries.

Enhance the burden

Paul exhorted them in 5:1 *'It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery'*.

But what I want us to see is this. The sign of growing sonship in our lives as servants of the Lord is to have the burden for the body of Christ. For Paul it was not enough that the Galatians were just saved. He wanted the testimony of Christ to be seen in their midst as Christ was seen in him. This is a serious matter for all of us who are serving God. Do you have that wider burden yet? Do you see that God wants all His people to come into that fullness in Christ Jesus? Are we satisfied if we are in an assembly where we can see Christ like character only in two or three or five people and all the rest seem very natural? So I ask a question tonight. Who is carrying that burden? You know your heart has to be enlarged in some measure with the grace of Christ to have such a wider burden beyond yourself. The truth is most of us are very selfish and we are

mostly concerned with our own Christian life and service. It is only when the Holy Spirit works in our inner man and Christ dwells in our hearts that we find a larger burden for our brothers and their particular spiritual conditions. Now we are in the last days. The Lord is preparing his bride. Where is the womb in labor for Christ to be fully formed in His church? Paul did not just lay down his life in order to serve the Lord. Paul began to express the heart of the Lord. I hope none of us are satisfied with our present spiritual conditions. It is not enough for the Lord just to come back. But there are some here who carry this burden for the whole church to become the bride.

I will finish with just a little story. A few years back I read quite a bit about the beginning of the Moravian Brothers' revival. And I read a number of the accounts of the Moravian Brothers at the beginning of the Moravian revival. There was this place in Germany in the eighteenth century. When Count Zinzendorf was twenty years old, he became a Count and they gave him a large tract of property in Germany. He was born in 1700 and he was twenty years old in 1720. And when he was given this large estate, people began to come to him – Christian refugees, fleeing from persecution. And refugees came from Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Germany. Some Anabaptist came from Switzerland. There were some from France. They were running and fleeing from being killed by the Catholic Church. This twenty year old Count loved the Lord and he let them stay. Now let us go forward seven years and he was twenty seven years old. He was young. There were three hundred refugees living on his estates. They were all divided by their beliefs, languages, and race. They fought each other every day. It got so bad that Zinzendorf asked himself what he had done. Where was the Christian unity? Finally they had such a quarrel that Zinzendorf had to intercede. In his heart he was burdened for all these people. He gathered them together in the middle of August, 1727. He talked to all the saints and said there was only one thing that could keep them together. And that was to see the wounds of Jesus who died for everyone there. After speaking a few hours on the wounds of Jesus, Zinzendorf said forgive me

for causing this division and he took a towel and washed 600 feet with his tears. And the Holy Spirit fell down on that community. They called the baptism of the Holy Spirit in their lives on that day One Heart. They were at the point of splitting apart and losing all that they had gained by their being together. But our brother Zinzendorf, just a young man, had such a heart that he washed everyone's feet. And you know it is our brother who wrote that hymn, Christian Hearts in Love United. The next week in August a prayer meeting started 24 hours a day that lasted for 100 years. Is there a young Zinzendorf here? Do you care for God's children as much? Perhaps in some wonderful way you are in travail until Christ is fully formed among us. When that happens to the Lord's satisfaction, then the Lord will come back. May the Lord give us His large heart.

Prayer:

Father, we come and pray before You in the name of our Lord Jesus who now intercedes for each and every one of us. Lord, as servants according to Your purpose, we feel some burden for Your people. Lord, we desire to see Christ formed in the midst of our assemblies and in the lives of young and old. This is something only Your Spirit can do. But we will intercede for this matter. Lord, help us in these last days. Have mercy on us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.