

Introduction

Illustration

Right after college, I played for a small semi-pro football team. All of our games were on Sundays. Thankfully, I went to a large church that had multiple services and our games were not very early. So, I was able to go to the 8 a.m. service and still have time to get ready for games.

Unfortunately, I went to a large church that had multiple services, so I could miss services without anyone really noticing. After all, if anyone did notice, they could assume that I attended a different service. Instead of going to church, I would spend the morning prepping for the football game.

Why did I choose football over attending church? If you asked me at the time, I would probably say that I didn't really have time to attend church **and** get ready for football. It was just a matter of necessity. If you ask me now, I would say it was because I loved football more than I loved God's people. It was a matter of priorities.

Spiritual formation

Do you desire to grow in Christ? If not, then let me be bold and say that you don't have faith in Christ. Those who have a relationship with God **will** desire to grow in Christ.

[Galatians 4:8-20](#) warns us against **hindering our spiritual formation**. The Holy Spirit transforms me into the image of Christ, but I often oppose the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit forms Christ in me, but I resist His work in me when I choose football over assembling with God's church.

If you desire to grow in Christ, these verses warn about two ways that we hinder our own spiritual growth. Therefore, we should **reject anything that does not lead us to Christ**.

Do not turn back

First, we should reject devotion to whatever does not lead us to Christ. [Galatians 4:8-11](#) “8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”

Jews and Gentiles

Galatians is written to churches in multiple cities in the region of Galatia in the first century. These churches included both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). [Gal 3:28-29](#) makes the point that this distinction only exists in their life before Christ; in Christ, that distinction is gone. Verses 8-11 gives examples to both groups of returning to their former life before Christ.

Regarding Gentiles, verse 8 describes being “enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.” Pretty much everyone in the Roman Empire except for the Jews were **polytheists** (belief in multiple gods). Scripture calls this **idolatry**; that is, they worshipped gods they had made, not the God who made them. Created gods are not gods ([Isa 37:19](#); [Jer 16:20](#); [1 Cor 8:4](#); [1 Thess 1:9](#)).

We are a culture enslaved to money, houses, phones, cars, etc. We devote our selves to what we have made. The temptation for Gentiles would be to turn back to those gods and **tell themselves** they could believe in Christ **and** these other gods. You cannot love God and money ([Matt 6:24](#)).

In verse 10, the **Jews** faced the same temptation as the Gentiles in relation to the **Mosaic covenant**. They were tempted to return to Sabbath obedience, Passover observance, temple worship, etc.

Many Christians today insist on faithfulness to the Mosaic covenant. They say we should still submit to the Sabbath, to dietary laws, to OT feasts, etc. It is not **food** that defiles you; it is sin that defiles you. **Rest** does not come from a day; Christ gives you rest for your souls ([Matt 11:28-30](#)). [Colossians 2:16-17](#) “16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a **shadow** of the things to come, but the substance belongs to **Christ**.”

Do not return

[Galatians 4](#) warns us against turning back to our life before Christ. [Galatians 4:9](#) “... how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”

What did Israel say when they left Egypt? God had set them free from 400+ years of slavery. But wandering around the wilderness became difficult. So, they said that life would have been easier in Egypt. They concluded that they would be better off to return to slavery in Egypt than to suffer in the wilderness following God.

Following Christ does not make life easier. Jesus promised persecution and suffering. Many people return to their life before Christ because it was more comfortable. Jesus warned that this was evidence that they had no faith ([Mark 4:1-20](#)). Comfort is an idol that we need to leave behind.

Notice that verse 9 frames our return to our way of life before Christ against knowing God. [Galatians 4:9](#) “9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God ...” Salvation is not **only** about being free from sin and death. Salvation is relational; salvation is knowing God ([John 17:3](#)). In the same way, returning to our way of life before Christ is relational. We cannot love God and the world; that is adultery ([James 4:4](#)).

Summary

How do we hinder our spiritual formation? [Gal 4:8-10](#) says that we hinder our spiritual formation by returning to things that are not gods rather than the true God or returning to ritual and tradition rather than faith. **Reject devotion to whatever does not lead you to Christ.**

Guard your ears

Second, we should reject teaching that does not lead us to Christ. [Galatians 4:12-17](#) “12 Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. 13 You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, 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. 15 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. 16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.”

Accepting Paul

When Paul first came to the cities of Galatia, they accepted him, even in his weakness. Verse 13 says he had a physical illness. Verse 14 says that he was a burden to them. Yet, they accepted him in love and patience.

I think the point here is that they accepted Paul because they recognized that his message was the true gospel. That is the context of his illness in verse 13 - preaching the gospel to them. [Gal 1:6-9](#) says that they believed Paul’s message - God’s grace to them through Jesus. [Gal 2:4-5](#) says that Paul defended the truth of the gospel for their sake.

False teachers

However, now they are being misled by **false teachers** who proclaim a different gospel. [Galatians 4:16](#) “16 Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?” They are not just rejecting Paul; they are **rejecting truth**. They are listening to people who tell them that they **should** return to Sabbaths, circumcision, and a works-based devotion. God’s people **need** truth - even when it is not what we **want**.

Notice the **motive** of these false teachers. [Galatians 4:17](#) “17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may **make much of them**.” The false teachers flatter the Galatian believers. They tell them what they want to hear. But they do not have good motives. They do so “that you may make much of them.” They flatter the Galatian believers and teach them a false gospel that they **want** to hear, so those believers would exalt the false teachers.

The gospel is not about **you**. The gospel is about **Christ**. False gospels often point to **you** rather than **Christ**. And this is often hard to see because false gospels speak of Jesus; however, Jesus is merely a means of exalting you. This is the exact message of the **Prosperity Gospel**. Prosperity Gospel preachers proclaim Christ, but He is merely the means of you becoming healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. Notice that those Prosperity Gospel preachers **always** benefit from their message.

Summary

If you desire to grow in Christ, verses 12-17 shows that we hinder our spiritual formation by giving our attention to false teaching. Guard your ears and your minds. Reject teaching that points you to yourself. Believe only the true gospel which exalts Christ.

Christ formed in you

Paul’s desire was not that they follow his teaching so that he would be exalted. Rather, he desired that they **hold to the true gospel so that Christ would be formed in them**. [Galatians 4:18–20](#) “18 It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, 19 my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! 20 I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.”

The goal

The goal of the Christian life is that “Christ is formed in you.” All people were created in God’s image ([Gen 1:26](#)). All people are born in Adam’s image, corrupted by our sin nature ([1 Cor 15:45-49](#)). By faith in Jesus, we are **born again** in the image of Christ. Spiritual formation is that we **grow** in the image of Christ ([Rom 8:29](#)) - Christ is formed in us.

The Spirit

How is Christ formed in us? Look back to [Galatians 4:6](#) “6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”” Christ is formed in you by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the point of the last half of [Gal 5](#). The Father sends the Spirit of Christ into your heart and **He** transforms you.

How then do we walk in the Spirit (rather than opposing the Spirit)? Look back to [Galatians 3:5](#) “5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—” and [Galatians 3:14](#) “14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” **Christ is formed in us when we walk in the Spirit by living in faith**; that is, rejecting legalism or self-serving messages.

Summary

[Gal 4:19](#) should be the goal of every believer - that Christ would be formed in you. [Gal 4:19](#) should be the goal of every pastor - that Christ would be formed in the church. Too many pastors are concerned with how **comfortable** people are with little concern about the **souls** of the church. [Gal 4:19](#) should be the goal of every church member - that Christ would be formed in your church family. [Gal 4:19](#) should be the goal of every parent - that Christ would be formed in your family. [Gal 4:19](#) should be the goal of every conversation with unbelievers - that Christ would be formed in them as the Holy Spirit leads them to faith in Christ.

Conclusion

Do you desire to grow in Christ? Thankfully, our spiritual formation is a work of God. However, we can oppose the Holy Spirit rather than submit to Him. *What hinders **your** spiritual formation?* I am too old for football to hinder my spiritual formation - my body probably couldn't handle it anymore. But, I would be naive to believe that there are not things in my life that hinder me from growing in Christ.

[Galatians 4:8-20](#) warns us to **reject anything that does not point us to Christ**. Do not return to your life before Christ. Do not listen to self-exalting false gospels. Instead, keep your eyes on Christ and live by faith in the transforming power of the Holy Spirit - that Christ may be formed in you.

Closing Scripture: [Hebrews 12:1-2](#) “1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”