

# Galatians 4:17-20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-4/galatians-417-20/>

*Paul tells the Galatians that the false teachers are leading them astray. These teachers are excluding them in order to get them to want to belong to their “club.” Paul considers the Galatians as his children who he is trying to mature in their faith to God. He is perplexed and worried for their spiritual growth.*

*They eagerly seek you*, Paul writes, referring to the competing Jewish “authorities” who are leading the Galatians to follow the Jewish Law, instead of living as freed sons of God through Jesus Christ. Since we are justified in the sight of God by believing in Christ, it does not in any way appease God to follow religious rituals and rules. We are made righteous in God’s sight through faith in Jesus. And God is pleased when we live by faith. We can’t make Him accept us through following Jewish law, or any law. *They*, the competing Jewish “authorities,” *seek* the Galatians; they seek to control them and lead them astray.

Paul warns his readers that *they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them*. The competing Jewish “authorities” are behaving manipulatively, excluding or shunning the Galatians from fellowship to shame the Galatians. This rejection puts social pressure on the Galatians to conform to their teaching of law-following. The competing Jewish “authorities” are also trying to shut out Paul’s teaching. Paul contrasts their pursuit of the Galatians as done *not commendably*, while his own pursuit to teach the Galatians is *in a commendable manner, and not only when Paul is with them in person*. He is telling them that he still wants them to follow his teaching when he is away, and that this is a good thing. He wants what is best for them.

Paul calls the Galatians his *children*, because he preached the gospel to them and saw them believe in Jesus. He acts as a spiritual father, someone who helped start them in the faith. Paul appeals to them as his children, telling them he is *again in labor until Christ is formed in you*, which means he is still working to teach them the truth they are wandering from. The Galatians already believe in Jesus, but Paul is working so that Christ would be formed in them. *Formed* is a translation of the Greek word “morphoo,” the verb form of the noun “morphe.” Mark 16:12 says the resurrected Jesus appears to the women in a *different form* – the word “form” being a translation of “morphe.” Paul’s desire for his children is that as Jesus lives through us, our form becomes His form. We live as Jesus lives. As we learn to walk in the obedience of faith, our lives come to take the shape of Jesus.

By following the competing Jewish “authorities” and legalistic law-following, the Galatians are preventing their own growth as believers. They are not allowing Christ to take form in them. Paul phrased their behavior in 1:6 as *quickly deserting Him who called you*. They are giving up living the resurrection life of Christ in order to follow religious rules. Christ didn’t die for us to follow a set of rules or laws. He died to free us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13).

Paul adds that he wishes he could *be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you*. If he were there in person, perhaps he could speak differently, but because

he is away from them, he writes urgently and with strong language. The language of a stern father correcting children who have lost their way. He is perplexed, confused by how they are acting. Paul keeps telling them, “This isn’t like you.”

### **Biblical Text**

**17 They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18 But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you— 20 but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.**