A 30 something man from our church told me he would never forget the morning when his wife called him at work and said, “Honey, I think we’re pregnant.” I believe the phone call was 10 years ago, and it was their first pregnancy. I suppose the speculation was confirmed either by a pregnancy test, or by the natural process of the formation of the embryo within his wife’s womb. Within a few weeks all doubts were set aside for them, and within a few months it became hard to keep it a secret. They were pregnant.

This is how it goes in the realm of human pregnancy and birth. But our topic for this message is spiritual pregnancy. Is there a foolproof spiritual pregnancy test? Is there a need for such a test? Some would answer with a resounding “YES!” In his book, Gospel Powered Parenting, William Farley wants to help parents discern whether or not their compliant, well-behaved children are Christians. Farley writes about teen age youth in the church who believe, and I quote, “in a combination of works-righteousness, religion as psychological well-being, and a distant, non-interfering god.” He also says, “Many ‘nice’ people are not Christians, Being ‘nice’ has little to do with Christianity.” Is there a foolproof spiritual pregnancy test? How can we know if a person is just acting like a Christian or has truly experienced a new birth?

**Sermon in a Sentence:** If your claim to be a Christian is genuine it will be authenticated by the formation of Christ within you.

New birth in Christ involves a radical change of heart that brings in new desires, new affections, and a new life direction. A.W. Pink said, “The new birth is no mere turning over of a new leaf, but is the inception and reception of a new life. It is no mere reformation but a complete transformation. In short, the new birth is a miracle, the result of the supernatural operation of God. It is radical, revolutionary, lasting.”

**Introduction:** Thus far in our study of Galatians the Apostle Paul has been arguing vigorously against the legalists by using all the biblical and theological arguments at his disposal. We see a change in tone in this passage, and hear the parental concern in Paul’s words. Was all his labor and travail over them in vain? Was Christ being formed in them? Were these Galatian Gentiles true believers? Please turn in your Bibles to Galatians 4, and I will begin reading with verse 11-

“I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.” (The ESV translates it this way, “I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”) I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

“Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so
always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!”  This is the Word of the Lord.

To understand this paragraph we need to turn the clock of history back a few years. The apostle Paul was raised in an orthodox Jewish home by parents who dreamed of him becoming a Rabbi. He excelled in his learning and achieved high marks in Torah school. He gives us a summary of his official standing in Judaism in this passage from Philippians 3:1-9

For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: (here are his credentials) circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.

But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. Philippians 3:1-9

Realizing his right standing with God was a gift that he could not earn by keeping the Mosaic Law or by being circumcised, Paul was free to be all things to all people. Here is how he states it in I Corinthians 9:19-22:

“For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews.

To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some.” I Corinthians 9:19-22

So when circumstances placed Paul in Galatia among the Gentiles, he became like them so that he could share the good news of freedom in Christ.

It was perplexing to Paul that after he, a Jew, had become a Gentile, as it were, to win the Galatians, they were now trying to become Jews in order to win God’s favor. He says to them, “I threw off my Jewish shackles and became like a Gentile. Now you should not try to become like Jews!”

We hear the emotion of Paul’s heart for his readers in verse 19, "My little children with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!" This sentence is pregnant with meaning, pun intended.

Paul’s likened his ministry to a mother in labor pains—"My little children, with whom I am in travail again until Christ be formed in you."
The Galatians who were described as being formed in the spiritual womb of the apostle Paul, are also expectant mothers who themselves must wait for an embryonic Christ to be formed within them. In the original language the term we translate *formed* is *morphoo*, a medical term for the growth of the fetus into an infant.

This rather shocking maternal image captures the extent of Paul’s identification with his spiritual children. He went through “labor pains” the first time when he preached the gospel to them and they by faith received new life.

Now he is in “labor” again for them as he seeks to bring them back to the true gospel. This is above and beyond the call of motherhood. Paul says he is willing to endure “labor pains” for them not just once, but again and again until Christ is formed in them.

Paul is perplexed over them. “Is Christ being formed in you or not?” Either they are spiritually pregnant or they aren’t.

Sermon in a Sentence: If your claim to be a Christian is genuine it will be authenticated by the formation of Christ within you. New birth in Christ involves a radical change of heart that brings in new desires, new affections, and a new life direction. From our text we see several indicators of a genuine new birth:

- They treated Paul with **Love and acceptance**—“You have done me no wrong…. You did not treat me with scorn or contempt. You welcomed me….”

When Paul set up the itinerary for his first missionary journey, it didn’t include Galatia. He says in verse 13, “As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you.”

The Galatians loved on Paul, and showed him great kindness during his extended stay with them. He said, “You have done me no wrong.” During his time in Galatia they had met his needs, they had heard his message of the good news of Jesus, and they had responded in faith to the Gospel.

Although the nature of Paul’s illness is unknown, some believe the illness caused his appearance to be repulsive, and as a result he would have been treated with “contempt or scorn”.

John Piper brings Paul’s words into the 21st century in this paraphrase:

“You had every reason to switch channels and watch a more attractive preacher. My disease was a trial to you. My message did not come well-packaged. But you did me no wrong; you didn't despise me; you received me like an angel; you saw Christ in me.” John Piper

Whatever his illness was, and however thorny it was to care for him, the Galatians did not let Paul’s illness become a reason to reject him or his message of freedom in Christ. In fact they welcomed him as if he was an angel, as if he was Jesus Christ himself.

I’ve never had anyone mistake me for an angel, or Jesus for that matter, but I have had people whom I have either led to Christ or cared for in difficult times show me their gratitude in such generous ways that it was almost embarrassing. Paul was overwhelmed by the love and kindness he had received.
While living on earth Jesus showed love and acceptance to others, whether it was the greedy tax collector, the harlot, the woman caught in adultery, or just common pagans like you and me. He was known as the “friend of sinners”. He reached out to the lepers, the lame, the sick, the blind, and the people without value, the children. Does compassion for the unlovely mark your life and ministry? If so, Christ is being formed in you.

- They demonstrated **Self-sacrifice** – “you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me”

Actually, there may be more here than meets the eye (if you'll pardon another pun). Many NT scholars believe the Apostle Paul suffered from severe eye trouble. One of the hints comes from Galatians 6:11 where he says, “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.” Normally he wrote his letters by dictation to a secretary. But when possible he would write the final paragraph by himself, although he was forced to write large.

As evidence of their love, and the extent to which they would have gone for him, they would have given Paul their eyes. Obviously a “plucked-out” eye would be a gift nobody could actually use, but the point is that the new believers were ready to do anything for him in those early days. They were committed to Paul.

What is the difference between being involved and being committed? In a bacon and egg breakfast, the chicken was involved, the pig was committed.

I renewed my KS driver’s license last month and I said “yes” to the examiner when she asked if I wanted to be an organ donor. Since September I have a new appreciation for the organ donor program in KS.

I was fortunate to be the recipient of a donor cornea from the KS Eye Bank for use in the surgery that was done to correct the vision in my right eye. The surgeon removed the diseased part of my cornea and replaced with a healthy part from the donor cornea. The plan is to repeat this surgery on my left eye in January. I do not know the individual who donated his eyes, but I am thankful every day for the improvement it has brought to my vision.

**Are you a generous person, someone who gives sacrificially from what God has given you to benefit another? Jesus said,**

“Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends.” Such self-sacrificing bigheartedness is an indication that Christ is being formed in you.

- Paul remembers the Galatians as having **Joy** – but no longer. “What happened to your joy?”

There’s nothing like the joy of first realizing one’s sins are forgiven. I have been with numerous adults at the moment of conversion and witnessed the joy they have. Paul hints that the believers in Galatia experienced that joy when he first shared the Gospel with them. That’s behind the question he asks, “What has happened to all your joy?”

What about you? If you once had joy and lost it, it’s time to ask, “What happened to it?” Where did it come from in the first place?
In Galatians 5:22 we read these familiar words: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” I understand this verse to mean that when the Holy Spirit is allowed to control a person’s life, all these qualities, including joy, will be evident. By the same token, if the Spirit is not in charge, joy will be absent. God doesn’t take it away. Age doesn’t deplete it. Circumstances don’t destroy it. But wrong beliefs do. Wrong beliefs, specifically legalism, robbed the Galatians of the joy they once had.

It is true confession time. I have strong legalistic tendencies, or you can call it “control issues”; I want to manage everything myself so life goes along in an orderly, predictable manner.

In the early years of our marriage these legalistic tendencies could be seen on family vacation trips. I was totally focused on the journey, getting from point A to point B in the best possible time and with the least possible interruptions. I obsessed over the schedule, the route we would take, how the luggage was put in the trunk or in the car top carrier so we could derive the maximum benefit from the space.

Once the trip began my objective was to maintain optimum speed so as to arrive at our destination in the best possible time, making only the urgently needed stops. Woe to the person who would suggest pulling over at a roadside fruit stand, or at a scenic overlook, or just to stop and stretch for a bit.

I had no joy, no freedom, no sense of adventure, and no ability to stop along the way to smell the flowers or have a picnic. If we made good time, or if we made better time than last year, if we had good gas mileage, then I would have a sense of being approved, of earning a “well done”. Did I have joy? No. Did any of the family experience joy on the trip? No again.

Joy is absent for the Christian who sees life as a contest in which the best score wins. The legalists in Galatia welcomed these new Christians and let them in on something Paul had failed to tell them. If you really want to get a good grade with God it takes additional effort. Being approved by God only happens when you are circumcised and when you live according to the Law of Moses.

As these new believers bought in to the lie, they began to lose the joy of the Spirit.

Joy, friends, is the fruit of the Spirit, and God intended for every believer to be full of it. The presence of joy is proof that Christ is being formed in us.

- Paul saw an absence of Humility – have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

When Christ is being formed in us a spirit of humility should be visible. One aspect of humility is being able to receive constructive criticism about oneself, even it is hurtful.

On the other hand, a proud person will see criticism as a personal attack and will treat the caring confronter as they would treat an enemy.

The Galatians had accepted Paul initially and humbly received the truth that they were sinners in need of a Savior. When Paul became aware of the danger his friends were in he spoke the truth to them again, but this time they reacted differently; they were closed to the truth and rejected both the message and the messenger.

His frankness in telling them the truth had not changed his attitude toward them. In fact, just the opposite was the case; because he loved and cared for them he had to confront them.
How do you handle constructive criticism? If you base your sense of acceptance upon the approval of men, you won’t handle it well. However, if you live in the freedom of grace, grace not earned but freely bestowed on you by God, then you will have an easier time humbly accepting constructive criticism. If Christ is being formed in you, humility will mark your life and character.

- In their present condition the Galatians also lacked Discernment – the Legalists are zealous to win you over, but for no good. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good.

Paul’s prayer for the Christians in Philippi was “that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:9-11).

Here is what wise King Solomon said about discernment:

Proverbs 19:25 Rebuke the discerning, and they will gain knowledge.

Proverbs 17:10 A rebuke impression a discerning person more than a hundred lashes a fool.

The undiscerning Galatians were still basking in all of the attention and genial warmth of the Judaizers who were offering something that seemed too good to be true. Paul knew that what appeared good to these young Christians would end up being very bad for them.

In his commentary on Galatians, Traveling Light, Eugene Peterson says, “They are flattering you, but they have no interest in leading you into deeper freedom; they are only interested in what they can get from you. When they get it you are not going to see them anymore or hear from them again. They only want to use you. If you permit yourself to be used, you are back in the same old life again, the life of slavery. They do not want you to get to the place where you are complete and whole, but to the place where you will spend your money and play the part that lines their pockets, feeds their egos, and promotes their causes.” Eugene Peterson in Traveling Light

It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you.” Paul’s first acquaintance with these folks showed him their ability to be zealous for good purpose when they extended hospitality and welcome to him in his state of repulsive illness. But where was their zeal now? It was about to be wasted on a cause that would enslave them.

Discernment is a gift of the Holy Spirit, but it is also a quality that should mark us as those who are being formed into the image of Christ.

Our lives are to exhibit discernment in recognizing false teaching, in how we use our time, our talents, and our resources. We are to be wise as serpents, but harmless as doves.

We are not that dissimilar from the Gentile believers in Galatia. Christ has set us free, but modern-day legalists are on the prowl enticing us to return to slavery, rule keeping, and people pleasing, thus making a mockery of the freedom we have in Christ. In this text Paul calls us to live a life of uninhibited trust, of reckless faith in God, but he also warns us against believing the lies of persons who promise much but give little, who will, as soon as they get us to join their cause, disappear and shut us out of their lives. This is what the legalists had done to the Galatians.
Our loving Heavenly Father accepts us just as we are and by his Spirit will transform us into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Is Christ being formed in you? Or has someone labored and travailed over you in vain?

**Conclusion/Application section**

How is Christ formed in you? Under what conditions does it come about? The answer is found in three verses in Galatians.

First, 4:19 says Christ should be formed in us. We know it is God’s will and purpose to form the image of his son in our lives.

In Galatians 4:6 we read that the way Christ comes to us is by his Spirit: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts.”

Finally Galatians 3:5, “Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you because you observe the law, or because you believe what you heard?” I like how The Message translates this verse – “Answer this question: Does the God who lavishly provides you with his own presence, his Holy Spirit, working things in your lives you could never do for yourselves, does he do these things because of your strenuous moral striving or because you trust him to do them in you?”

The obvious answer is “because you trust him to do them in you.” Look also to Galatians 2:20:

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me (is being formed in me). The life I live in the body, **I live by faith** in the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me.

So the answer to the question, “How is Christ formed in you?” is by your faith. We are not self-made youth, self-made adults. It's really quite simple: the Son of God comes and shapes us from within if we rely on him. Christ takes shape in a life that is willing to become putty in God's hands.

John Piper said, “Christ presses the shape of his own face into the clay of our soul when we cease to be hard and resistant, and when we take our own amateur hands off and admit that we are not such good artists as he is.”

It should be obvious to us that Paul's message and the Judaizers' message are opposed to each other. Their message caters to our human pride—our desire to be "self-made" people, eager to please others, to compete for the grade to achieve glory for ourselves.

Paul's message robs us of all such pride by saying we should be "Christ-made" people who get glory for God by trusting him to shape us every day.

For some of you who are new believers in Christ, the gospel of grace is beginning to shine on the landscape of your soul. Christ is being quietly but powerfully formed in you.

But others of you look back months or years or decades, to a now forgotten day of faith when Christ was powerfully taking shape in your life. But something changed. You have settled into the world, and the fresh awareness of being an alien and a stranger in the world has faded. Today the powerful
shaping forces in your life are not coming from Christ within but from the world without. Join me in prayer.

Our gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we confess our need of your touch in our lives. We believe the Spirit of the living Christ can begin to work again in us today. Paul would not have written this letter of warning if there was no hope for the Galatians. We believe there is hope for us as well. Therefore, we take our unqualified hands off the clay of our lives and yield ourselves into your sovereign hands. We refuse to seek the praise of men and relinquish our efforts to achieve it. We turn our hearts to you O Christ and say: I am not my own; you have bought me; forgive me; be formed within me. Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. Amen.