

Galatians 4:12-16 “Truth in Action”

GAL 4:12-16 “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?”

In this section of our text Paul appeals to the past relationship he had with the Galatians and reminds them of how much he first loved them and how that love has not changed, though their attitude and perspective on Christ’s redemptive work has changed to the degree that they have been bewitched by the false teachings of the Judaizers’ false gospel.

Like a father might appeal to a wayward son Paul moves past the mere facts of the case to the tenderness and compassion he has for these people. He only wants their good. And we clearly see this as Paul now goes back in time to remind them of their mutual love for each other, and how he wants this restored around the truth of who Christ is and what He did on their behalf.

GAL 4:12 “I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.”

Paul begins with a plea, or as some of your translations put it, I beg of you, or I urge you. You get the feeling that Paul has reached the end in terms of trying to reason with them. But he uses this plea to get their attention and to take them back to a time in which they were receptive to both Paul and the message of hope he brought them in Christ.

Verse 12 “..... Become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.”

Commentators are not sure exactly what Paul means by this phrase, but there does seem to be a general consensus that he is meeting them on neutral ground. He’s extending to them a hand of friendship in light of his previous rebuke, and that he has no ill feelings toward them or a secret desire to entrap them.

His intentions are honorable and he desires that they respond in kind. R. Alan Cole in his commentary on Galatians says of this passage, it “literally means, ‘Be like me, as I too (have become) like you.’ The NEB is probably right in turning it, ‘Put yourselves in my place for I have put myself in yours.’”

Cole concedes that Paul may simply mean, ‘Be as frank and loving with me as I have always been with you.’ Either way, it is clearly a personal appeal to the Galatians to resume their old friendly relations with Paul which have apparently been ruptured by the work of the Judaizers.”

And this is the way the enemy has always worked; divide and conquer. The Judaizers, who are certainly influenced by the enemy, are trying to influence the Galatians in rejecting the teachings of Paul on the subjects of justification and sanctification. They are trying to put Paul in a bad light, particularly as it relates to the law, probably accusing him of denying any importance of the law.

Of course that isn't the case as Paul has already pointed out. He understands the importance of the law leading us to Christ. But when it comes to adding the law to the gospel as a means of attaining righteousness, the word of God is clear. It then becomes a different gospel, which is no gospel at all.

But the enemy has always used this tactic of trying to confuse the truth among God's people. In fact, the most classic case of this is found back in Genesis where Satan tried, and was successful, in pitting God's word against his own; in bringing confusion regarding the promises of God and the desires and wishes of Adam and Eve.

GEN 3:2-3 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

That's the truth which Eve obviously understood. She also reasoned the consequences of eating the fruit. "You will die."

But here is where the desire of Eve becomes apparent and evidently only needed a nudge over the abyss. As Satan then says, "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (GEN 3:4-5)

Satan held out the hope that there would be a favorable result from disobeying God, or worse that God was simply wrong in the first place and that to deny yourself would withhold something good from you.

In a similar way, these Judaizers were playing the role of Satan in this case where they were saying that what Paul wants to deny you, the observance of the law, is in fact the very thing that will set you free; the very thing which will help you soar in your holiness and relationship with the living God.

Now, I don't mean to suggest that the Judaizers believed that what they were doing and saying was an outright lie, like Satan did with Eve. They too, were deceived in believing that the law could and should be used to contribute to our righteousness. But that doesn't change the outcome.

And for us today to use the excuse that we were deceived in believing any bad teachings which ultimately always result in bad behavior, is to misunderstand our responsibility to study God's word individually so that we might be built up and equipped to be servants of our God, who are not lead astray by every wind of doctrine that comes down the pike.

More leaders in the church-at-large need to stand up for the truth and confront some of these bad teachings which are being propagated in the name of fresh a move of the Spirit in our day.

The only fresh move of the Spirit of God today is the same move of the Spirit in Paul's day. The Spirit who inspired the word of God is the same Spirit who commands us to use His word to know God's will as it relates to salvation and our holiness found in Christ as Lord and Savior.

And if Christians would be willing to stay with the word as we study the whole counsel of God's word, not just picking and choosing passages which promote their pet doctrines, they would be so much further down the road in their walk with Christ.

But instead we have Christians today who are looking for their next spiritual fix as they travel from one camp meeting or revival to the next hoping the Holy Spirit will somehow motivate them to pursue the things of God, as though the only real manifestation of holiness is some euphoric feeling they think they should have.

Now, I'm not against wonderful feelings as they relate to my relationship with my Lord and Savior, but they are not the measure

of our status with God, or the measure by which we think we are close with the Lord in our walk. Some of David's most intimate and meaningful times with the Lord is when he was at the lowest points of his life.

PSA 59:1-2;16-17 "Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men. But I will sing of your strength, in the morning I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress, my refuge in times of trouble. O my Strength, I sing praise to you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God.

David's ability to praise God was not dependent on him being on some mountain top experience, but rather his knowledge and trust in the God who was truly his deliverer.

In the Galatians' case they were running on pure emotion as the Judaizers were stirring them up and it has now effected their relationship with both Paul and God, and Paul simply wants them to step back from the turmoil and get on the common ground of God's word and reciprocate the respect Paul has for them.

He wants them to know that he has no ill feelings toward them, he only wants to solve this problem, which is what he means when he says at the end of verse 12, 'you have done me no wrong.' In other words, whatever you have done in rejecting the truth I am not taking it personally.

And this is the mark of a spiritual leader who can get past the hurts and think clearly as the Spirit gives him wisdom and knowledge. In fact, this is similar to the way Paul approached the Corinthians who had a problem adhering to the truth of God's word, where Paul also had to rebuke them for their disobedience.

2CO 6:11-13 "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange - I speak as to my children -open wide your hearts also."

Paul wants the Galatians to open wide their hearts to him and the message he brings them from God. He wants them to return to the love they once had for him and the way in which they responded to the truth he brought them.

GAL 4:13-14 "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.”

Paul takes them back to the first time they met. He takes them back to a time in which their love for him was real and apparent as they treated him with affection. And notice, too, the circumstances under which they came to know each other.

Evidently, Paul had become sick during his journey and ended up staying in Galatia. And yet, even in his sickness he managed to continue to do the work of an evangelist as he brought the gospel to these pagan Gentiles.

By the way, this does raise an interesting dilemma. I’ve touched on this before but it’s worth noting again. How is it that the apostle to the Gentiles who was most certainly a man after God’s own heart, a man who was doing the work of the Lord, and a man who certainly had all of the gifts of the Spirit, together with a full measure of faith, find himself sick?

If we believe many of our Pentecostal brethren, no Christian should be getting sick unless of course they have fallen into some sort of sin or they have a lack of faith that God can heal them. And yet, here is Paul, with a physical infirmity of some sort which, according to verse 14, was a trial to these Galatians.

In other words, this was no mere head cold. Whatever this illness was it was debilitating for Paul to some degree. The question has to be raised then, how is it possible for Paul to be sick like this if he is God’s man and servant?

The answer is quite simple. God is sovereign. God can and does use whatever means He deems necessary to accomplish His will even if it means allowing Paul to become sick so that he might minister to these Galatians.

And so, it wasn’t because there was some sin in Paul’s life, or that he didn’t have enough faith to get over this illness, it was simply because God decided to use this particular means in Paul’s life. We see this same thing being taught by Jesus as He instructed His disciples.

JOH 9:1-3 “As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents,

that he was born blind?" "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

For us to assume that sickness is the result of individual sin or lack of faith is not to understand that God has the prerogative to work in any way which will accomplish His will to His glory.

In any event Paul ended up in Galatia because he got sick and is recuperating in Galatia. In the midst of his illness he is still carrying on the ministry he was given by God. And the love he showed these people was such that they responded in faith to his message of hope found in Christ.

Now, we're told that this particular illness was a trial in the lives of these Galatians. The Greek word for trial in our text could also be translated test. And so the inference is that God was using this illness in Paul's life to not only bring the gospel to these Galatians, but to also use it to test and strengthen their love for Paul and others, and most importantly for God Himself.

And evidently they passed the test. Paul says, "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."

I've contended that part of the trial these Galatians endured was to see Paul having to suffer while the ministry of Paul was active and working in their midst, as God was continuing to use him, and I think verse 14 alludes to that when he makes mention of the way they treated him.

They treated him with great respect and awe as though he were an angel of God, or Jesus Christ Himself. Now, Paul doesn't mean to suggest that they believed he was an actual angel or that he was the actual Christ in their midst, but that they saw in him the embodiment of who Christ is and the power he possesses in the Spirit that they couldn't help but honor him and love him as they gave glory to God.

I tend to believe that God was continuing to heal people through Paul in Galatia, and that quite possibly the Lord was working miraculously through Paul in their midst. As they saw Paul labor among them in the midst of his illness I'm sure part of their test was to have to accept the fact that though he might heal others, he couldn't heal himself and yet he never stopped loving them.

Now this is conjecture on my part, but we know that as an apostle the Lord did work miracles and wonders through him, and so we can assume to some degree that He continued to do this among the Gentiles.

In fact, we know this to be the case as both Paul and Barnabas were used by God in this region of Galatia. On one occasion as they were passing through Iconium, which is in the region of Southern Galatia, we have this recorded for us.

ACT 14:1-2 “At Iconium Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue. There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed. But the Jews who refused to believe stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So Paul and Barnabas spent considerable time there, speaking boldly for the Lord, who confirmed the message of his grace by enabling them to do miraculous signs and wonders.”

Imagine Paul being used by God in this capacity and yet when the Galatians pleaded to God on his behalf to be healed and they didn't see it, it must have caused them to wonder why. It must have pained them to see Paul suffer when they were being blessed. And I'm sure Paul assured them that God was in control and that this test was for them and him, and not to lose heart.

And evidently they didn't as they now had to minister to Paul with the means available in those days for trying to cure or treat certain illnesses. God didn't forget Paul and now Paul reminds these Galatians of the way they loved him and he's wondering where that love went.

GAL 4:15-16 “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?”

We need to be careful here not to arrive at the conclusion that Paul's illness had to do with his eyesight. It could have, but this expression in those days is not unlike the expression we use today when we might say, 'I'd give my right arm for you.'

We don't mean that the person we're ministering to has tennis elbow or arthritis in their arm joints. We mean that we'd do anything to help them. And this is what Paul means here.

But the bigger point he is trying to make is to show the contrast that at one time they would have done anything for him and yet

now, instead of loving Paul as an angel sent from God, or Christ Himself, they are perceived as treating Paul as an enemy.

What happened to their joy Paul asks? What happened to their trust that what Paul had shared with them from God's word was true? What happened to their love for Paul who was pouring out his life for them?

The truth that Paul shared with them when he was originally with them is the same truth he is now sharing with them as it pertains to Christ and their salvation. And yet, now they don't seem as willing to accept it.

What has changed? Well, one thing that has changed is that Paul is no longer with them in Galatia and the Judaizers are attempting to change their minds with their false teaching.

But I believe there is another reason. I've often wondered over the years what it is that causes people to flip flop like this. I've known people who have been so excited about this ministry and so excited about the approach to teaching the word of God who all of a sudden do a 180 turn. And yet, the teaching hasn't changed. The goal of this ministry hasn't changed.

I believe part of the reason has to do with perseverance under trial. It's easy to be a Christian when everything is going our way. It's easy to be excited when all is apparently successful and everyone else is excited. And I'm sure there was a great deal of excitement when Paul was with the Galatians as the Spirit was using Paul in miraculous and wondrous ways as people were being saved.

But now Paul is gone and what has taken his place is destructive as the Judaizers move in to fill a void. But we can't blame Paul for leaving because God moved him on. So, what should the Galatians have done?

Well, they certainly knew the truth as Paul had taught it. But what I have found, and I'm sure what happened in part to the Galatians, is that they were not putting the truth into practice as they persevered under trial without the aid of Paul in their midst. They were now forced to trust God alone with the truth they had.

If people will not trust God and His truth then the chances of them following through with God's truth are nil. And once we stop practicing the truth as we trust God we are much more prone to error as were the Galatians.

This is precisely what James tells us.

JAM 1:22 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

I believe the Galatians, and in great part, many Christians today, have not heeded God’s word at this point. Lots of Christians are learning God’s word in the world today. And the opportunity for gaining knowledge of God’s word has never been greater.

I mean look at all the tools we have at our disposal. Books on the bible, commentaries galore, teaching tapes, bible schools and seminaries, the Internet, radio and television. I mean it’s unbelievable the amount of information there is out there to learn about the word of God.

But that’s different from doing what it says. And as James points out under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit if we are only hearing the word and not doing what it says we deceive ourselves.

The Greek word for deceive means to reckon wrong, miscount, along with being deceived. In other words, our approach to the Christian life has been hamstrung and in fact becomes a delusion because we are operating under false pretense.

We seem to know the truth, but until we put that truth into practice in the power of the Spirit we have a religion which on the surface looks correct, but we deny the power; the power to live it.

The power comes from trusting God as we do what He desires. But if we won’t do what He desires then little by little we get further and further from the will of God and the heart of God. And our love for Him grows cold and eventually our love for one another grows cold.

It’s the doing, not just hearing that Paul is concerned with in Galatia. They’ve already heard the truth. But by not doing what they heard they are open to be deceived with a message which denies Christ as being all sufficient.

And once Christ is no longer all sufficient then we are left with ourselves as solving our problems, be that how we are saved or how we grow in our faith.

The Galatians gravitated toward the Judaizers because they lost hope in a simple message of faith. They lost hope in the one who gave them life. This doesn’t mean they lost their salvation only that they lost their way on the original path they were on.

Paul is trying to get them back on that path by helping them to see what they once used to practice their faith as they trusted God. Instead, now they are leaning on men for understanding, in particular these Jews who have come along-side them with a message that tickles their ears.

Paul was not their enemy. But they had become deceived as they had forgotten the truth once delivered to them by Paul, and had not put that truth into everyday practice. They put it on a shelf until which time they felt they needed it. The fact is they, and us, need it everyday. And we need to put it into practice everyday.

We cannot afford to become complacent. The enemy is out there roaring like a lion looking for someone to devour. And in a sense he has eaten the Galatian's lunch, and is now looking for the main course, their ability to love and serve God.

Because if he can deceive God's people he can dishonor Christ with the very people our Lord came to die for. And that is Satan's delight. Let's not allow him to eat our lunch or anything else of ours which Christ has given us.

May we trust the Lord and be doers of His word in the power of His Spirit, as we know that if we would just continue to love Him above all, no matter what is happening around us, He will work all things out to our good and His glory.

Let's be found faithful and not allow the Judaizers of this world, who have their own enticing message, to influence us to not walk after the ways of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.

PHI 4:8-9 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you."