

#10 Galatians

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Verse 12: 'Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all.'

Paul is writing to Gentiles who'd had no Law of Moses; they knew nothing of it but Paul certainly had used the Old Testament Scriptures as he explained the Gospel to them. He would have shown how they all pointed to the Lord Jesus Christ and the complete salvation He had provided in His life, death and resurrection. As he explained the Gospel to them, he became as one of them; without the bondage of the Law; he explained the Life, the freedom and the liberty of the sons of God. Paul had gone to where they were; remember how, in Acts 17, he went to Mars Hill, an important religious and legislative location.

To the Gentiles, he came as one without the Law but when he brought the Gospel to Jews, he came as one of them, embracing and using the Law, along with all the Old Testament Scriptures to explain how Jesus Christ was, in truth, their long awaited Messiah.

He wrote: 'For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those *who are* under the law, as under the law, that I might win those *who are* under the law;²¹ to those *who are* without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those *who are* without law;²² to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some.²³ Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with *you*.' 1 Cor 9:19

Here, to the Galatians, Paul is telling them that he was once in bondage to all the Law, that he carefully kept all of it but it never made him righteous because rather than doing those things by faith in God, he had worked to be righteous by the works of the Law, which by, no one was ever made righteous. He is calling them to return to the freedom of his Gospel of Grace and Salvation, the liberty which is in Jesus Christ; he is urging them to reject the yoke of bondage with which the Judaizers were working to enslave them, telling them they must, in addition to faith, add circumcision along with all the requirements of the Law, the feasts, the diet and every one of the 613 laws of Moses. The Judaizers wanted to yoke the Galatians with this burden which none of them had ever accomplished and which no one ever had save the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself.

Verse 13: 'You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.¹⁴ And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus.'

This is interesting in that Paul says, **because** of some sickness or disability he preached the Gospel to them. We can see that, to which he refers, if we go back to 2 Cor 12. He wrote, 'It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord:² I know a man in Christ (*he means himself*) who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven. (Paul was taken up all the way to the top)³ And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (*just imagine the things he must have seen and heard, which he was then forbidden to repeat; then, after having been all the way up to the 3rd Heaven, he had to return to this dusty, filthy world. No wonder he said, in Philippians 1:* For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor (eternal rewards); yet what I shall choose I cannot tell.²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better. He goes on to the Corinthians:⁵ Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast, **except in my infirmities**.⁶ For though I might desire to boast, I will not be a fool; for I will speak the truth. *But I refrain, lest anyone should think of me above what he sees me to be or hears from me.*⁷ And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, **a thorn in the flesh was given to me**, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. (*3 times Paul asked for healing... even the Apostle Paul was not healed*)⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly **I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.**

¹⁰ ***Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities***, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. ***For when I am weak, then I am strong.***¹

You will never hear a '*health and wealth wolf*' preach on this passage, at least not honestly, because this is the proof that God's will is not that all Christians are always to be healthy and rich; in fact, the only ones who ever become wealthy from that kind of false teaching are the false teachers who falsely teach it, who're willing to fleece their flocks for every cent they have. Their hearts are as black as any drug dealer; truly, they will be among those to whom Jesus will say, 'Depart from Me, I ***never*** knew you!'

Paul was not supported richly by begging for bigger and bigger offerings. In fact, he made a point of not taking up offerings for himself from anyone who were, themselves, in need: 'And when I was present with you, and in need, I was a burden to no one, for what I lacked the brethren who came from Macedonia supplied. And in everything I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and so I will keep *myself*.¹⁰ As the truth of Christ is in me, no one shall stop me from this boasting in the regions of Achaia.¹¹ Why? Because I do not love you? God knows!¹² But what I do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the things of which they boast.¹³ For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ.¹⁴ And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.¹⁵ Therefore *it is* no great thing if *his* ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.' 2 Cor 11:9

When Paul needed money, he worked with his hands. We see in Acts 18 that, when necessary, he worked as a tentmaker and here we see that Paul had a physical ailment which God would not heal. Paul understood that because he was human, he could've easily fallen into terrible pride over his calling and teaching by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, that he had actually been taken up to Heaven. None of the other Apostles had ever seen such things; the closest would have been Peter, James and John when they were taken up on the Mount of Transfiguration, but that didn't compare to Paul's experience. He might have boasted and risen to be the head of the Church but God had a different plan. Paul's weakness actually drove him to preach and witness whenever he had the chance. He experienced the fact that in his weakness, when he preached, he knew that the power of God rested upon and within him; he recognized how God worked powerfully through him. In himself, he was a weak little man with nothing to draw anyone to him but when God led him to preach, teach and write, the power of God could do anything! In fact, this also might explain his fearlessness in the face of persecution and possible death, that since he had already been there, to Heaven; he had seen what was coming in the future so he might have felt like death would be a very welcome friend but God protected and kept him alive, and preaching, until God's work in him, and through his ministry, was completed.

His infirmity drove him to preach in the same way we see some others today, Joni Erickson Tada for example. If, as a teenager, she had not broken her neck while diving into a lake, she might have simply settled into a normal and invisible life but God had a different plan.

Another one is Nick Vujcic; he's a handsome young man who happened to be born without arms or legs. He's a husband and father as well as a successful evangelist but many people would have thought that he should have been aborted; after all, he could never live a meaningful life, they would say. But when he sits up on a table and hops around while preaching the Gospel, he has a powerful impact. He could have been born with a fully formed body and lived a simple and invisible life but God had a different plan.

Fanny Crosby, who wrote more than 8000 hymns, such as, 'Blessed Assurance,' was blinded, as a baby, by an incompetent doctor; she remained blind all her Earthly life. The first thing she ever saw was the face of the Lord Jesus Christ... imagines her reaction. She might have retained eyesight for all her life but God had a different plan. Of her blindness, she said: '*It seemed intended by the blessed providence of God that I should be blind all my life, and I thank him for the dispensation. If perfect earthly sight were offered me tomorrow I would not accept it. I might not have sung hymns to the praise of God if I had been distracted by the beautiful and interesting things about me.*'

The same is true for all of us; we could all have lived a perfect life, in a wonderful nurturing environment, with no trials at all but God always has a different plan. If we will recognize where we are weak, by the World's

standards, while acknowledging that God's plan is always perfect and that His power and ability are always more than sufficient, then we are on our way to allowing Him to be strong and powerful in us and we can actually, like Paul, glory in our weaknesses and infirmities as we see Him working in us and through us.

Never allow any false teacher of the 'health and wealth to convince you that Paul is speaking of anything other than an ongoing physical ailment he had to endure. The proof is in the next few verses:

Verse 14: '(repeating vs 13: 'You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.') ¹⁴ And **my trial which was in my flesh** you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus.

He's reminding the Galatians of their love for him, at the first. 'I told you the truth; I bore witness, in my own body, to the sufferings of Christ, we rejoiced together when you were saved and found the freedom and liberty in Jesus Christ. Why do you, so easily, turn away to embrace the bondage and lies of the Judaizers!'

He is striving to draw these Galatians back to the simplicity of the Gospel and away from the trap of the demon inspired false teaching Judaizers; he reminds them of when he had first come to Galatia and the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. He's saying, 'Remember how it was when I first came to you, how you joyously received the Gospel of your Salvation, how you put all your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work through His life, death and resurrection.' He reminds them of their love for him, even though he was not a handsome, flashy, TV evangelist with rings and necklaces, cars and homes.

It becomes more evident that Paul's infirmity was something visible, something on the outside which would turn people off toward him and again, it was given to him, by God, to keep him humble. It wasn't something invisible like stomach problems or heart ailment; they could see it and they could have been repulsed by it; it was given, by God, to humble him, not to slow him down. He goes on...

Verse 15: 'What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, ***if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes*** and given them to me.'

There it is! Paul had a physical ailment and it was a problem with his eyes so that it caused people to want to turn away from him, to despise and reject him but, he says, 'You, my precious Galatians, did not turn away.'

We can better understand how this may have begun if we go back to Acts chapter 9.

Acts 9:1: 'Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were *of the Way*, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads." (to reject My calling and plan for you!) So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." ⁷ And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one. ⁸ Then Saul arose from the ground, and ***when his eyes were opened he saw no one***. (he was blinded) But they led him by the hand and brought *him* into Damascus. ⁹ ***And he was three days without sight***, and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." ¹¹ So the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake." And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ***Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales***, and he received his sight at once; and

he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.'

When the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to Saul, who became Paul, on the road to Damascus, Paul was blinded and something like scales covered his eyes; he was blinded. When Ananias came, the scales fell off but now, as he writes to the Galatians, we are to infer that Paul, thereafter, suffered from some eye ailment.

The reason I'm going into such detail, here, is because the preaching, today, of prosperity and constant health for Christians is such a pervasive perversion of God's Word and with these ever expanding lockdowns and 'quarantines,' more and more people are getting their weekly doses of 'churchiness' from these heretics who fill the TV airwaves. In spite of the health/wealth lying apostates, obviously many, many Christians, fine and faithful Children of God, suffer physical problems and never accumulate wealth. In fact, the only ones who have ever become wealthy from prosperity preaching are those doing the preaching and fleecing of their flocks; one day, soon, they will answer for it to the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, the Head Shepherd Who allowed them to have flocks which they were expected them to faithfully serve... servants! not masters!

Paul, on the other hand, faithfully fulfilled his ministry and calling, even though he was not in perfect health and never got rich doing so; he never does tell us, in any of his letters, so it's safe to assume that he never was healed, this side of Heaven, or he would have written so; if health and wealth heresy were true, God would not have left this hanging for us; he would have made it plain.

Verse 16: 'Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?'

Those caught in the bondage of sin, or the Law, do not want to hear the Truth of the Gospel because it flies in the face of their desires to remain in the comfort of sin or in keeping the Law. A person caught up in sin desires to cloak himself in the familiarity of darkness, deceit and the warm comfort of self-deception. One caught up in the need to follow the Law cloaks himself in the self-righteous belief that he is successfully working his way to Heaven, helping God by doing his part in the work of salvation.

More often than not, if we were to shine the light of the Gospel on another person's sin, even if our motivation is completely righteous and without self-pride, we become that person's enemy; he will believe that his own self-justification is sufficient and will not allow any suggestion to the contrary.

Only when the Holy Spirit is the One shining that light and **granting, to that person, true repentance**, will they, in humility, leave their sin or leave the false security of the Law.

Paul makes this clear as he's writing to Timothy: 'And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient,²⁵ in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if **God perhaps will grant them repentance**, so that they may know the truth,²⁶ and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.' 2 Tim 2:24

He is writing about correcting believers; in this case it has to do with their opposition to Timothy in his position as Pastor in Ephesus but the same is true regarding those in Galatia under the deception of the Judaizers or any other believer caught in a snare of the devil.

To the Galatians, Paul is saying, 'I am telling you the truth because I love you; don't turn away from the freedom of the Gospel; I am your friend; I am your brother; I am your spiritual father; wake up and deliver yourself from the snare. 'Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of *the hunter*, and like a bird from the hand of the fowler.' Prov 6:5 Here, Solomon is writing in reference to one becoming surety for another's debt but the principle is always the same for every snare; we must, by God's Grace, wake up and take ourselves away from the danger of sin or the bondage of the Law's self-righteousness.

Verse 17: 'They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.¹⁸ But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.'

The Judaizers of Paul's day were no different than false teachers and false *christian cults* today. They zealously court you, they draw you in with comforting words: 'Join us, you can know that you're doing your part in salvation. We have the real truth, join our group, we are the true children of God.' They are children of Satan.