Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Till Christ be Formed in You
Scripture: Galatians 4:12-20
Code: 1663

We come again to our study of the book of Galatians in our lessons on justification by faith as opposed to works. In looking at Galatians, we find ourselves in the middle of the fourth chapter.

Briefly, just to call to your mind, Paul had established, on his very first missionary tour with his friend Barnabas, various churches in an area known as Galatia. In several cities there, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, in the area of Galatian, he had established churches. He established them on the basis of salvation by grace through faith alone. No sooner had he left there than some Jews from Jerusalem arrived and claimed to be Christians, then immediately told everyone that it wasn't enough just to believe to be saved, but you had to get circumcised and keep the law.

Word got back to Paul that these people had been sold this particular lie, and so Paul wrote Galatians as a circular letter, to be passed among these churches, to inform them that these Judaizers (as he calls them), those who want to impose Judaistic ritual and ceremony, were wrong. He told them they needed to cling to the salvation offered through grace in Christ. That is the message of Galatians.

Now, up to this point in Galatians 4:12, Paul has been handling the situation academically. It is very impersonal. He has been handling it like a scholar with a tremendous intellect who is just marshaling his arguments. Or like a lawyer who comes into court and simply defends his case without any real concern for people. Or, perhaps, like a theologian who is just amassing all sorts of Scriptural knowledge to prove his theological point. You might say it this way, so far, it's all head and no heart. He doesn't even bother to say any kind of greeting to the people, he just fires away. It's very much of academics and very absent anything personal.

We've seen tremendous conviction, tremendous intellectual powers, tremendous knowledge of the Old Testament, and exposition of it at the same time. He is battling to preserve a God-authored dogma, or doctrine. He has seemed very detached, he has preferred truth to friendship, fact to fellowship, and he has preferred principles to people up to this point.

Everything changes in 4:12. It even begins with the word 'brethren'. This is the first leak in his academic tank, as it were. This is the first time that anything begins to seep out that even smacks of personal concern as opposed to academics or theology. It seems as though he has just pelted out theological arguments and his fury has run its course in defending his case. By this time, his anger is gone, his frustration is gone, to a point, his rhetoric has all been fired out. Now, he just kind of comes

down and slips from the doctrinal to the personal.

In fact, the words from verse 12 through verse 20 are the strongest words of personal affection that Paul ever uses. There is even one term that he uses for the Galatians that he never uses for anyone else, the term that is included in verse 19. It begins, "My little children." He brings himself down to speaking like a loving mother, "Of whom I have birth pains again until Christ be formed in you." Now we begin to see that the man is not just arguing academics, but he cares about them as people.

You know, the term 'brethren' in verse 12, he kind of slides into it, but by the time we reach verse 19 and he uses the diminutive 'my little children', he is just really pouring out personal love. Latin and Greek languages both use diminutives as terms of very deep affection, and that is what you see here.

I think it's true too that there must be this side to every man of God, there must be, as well as the tremendous strength of conviction, a gentleness. Paul had an experience when he arrived in Thessalonica, which he described in I Thessalonians 2:7. He says, "We were gentle among you as a nursing mother cherishes her children, being affectionately desirous of you." So aside from the strength, conviction, tremendous intellect, and the ability to put together an argument and defend it, there was the warmth and personal character that we have seen in our morning studies in the book of Acts.

Of course, this isn't just Paul, but Paul got this from Jesus, because Jesus was this way. It was the same Jesus who cleansed the temple, who lifted up the children and said, "Suffer the little ones to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven." It is the same Jesus who is described in the book of Revelation as a lion and a lamb. In fact, the Apostle Paul even ascribed his own gentleness to the fact of the example of Christ. In II Corinthians 10:1, "I, Paul, myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." In other words, he had appropriated, as it were, the gentleness of Christ for himself.

At the end of the book of Philippians, in 4:5, he says, "Let your gentleness be known unto all men." He calls upon all Christians to be strong in conviction but also to be gentle. So as we look at these verses, I can relate to this from my standpoint, I'll illustrate it as a pastor. There are times when you're preaching, and I'm sure this happens to everyone, you're firing away and building your rhetoric and logic, and driving to a point. Then, all of a sudden, you've made your point and come off sermonizing, and you say, "Now look, people. I'm talking to you and here's how it is. I care about you." That's Paul. He isn't sermonizing in verses 12-20, he's not really even writing, he's just pouring out his heart.

In verses 12-20, we see four features of his personal word to the Galatians. His appeal to them, his remembrance of them, his warning to them, and his desire for them. All of this is expressed in these

verses. I hasten to add this. Don't look for great doctrinal truths here. There are some that are implied, and I'll show you that when we get to verse 19, but basically, what we have here is not doctrine. It's just plain old personal exhortation. Paul isn't building a case in these verses, he's not showing them great reasons out of the Old Testament why they ought to hang on to grace and believe in Christ and stop there and not try to add works. He's just begging them to do it. He's not giving any more reasons, he just says, "Do this for me!" It's a personal cry.

Let's look first of all at his appeal to them in verse 12. I want you to see the nature of it. "Brethren, I beg you, be as I am, for I am as you are." That's what it says in the authorized version. Paul begs them. Notice the word 'beseech', it's the word for beg. "I beg you, brothers." That's the first time he's bothered to call them that.

"Be as I am, for I am as you are." Now, believe me, commentators have worked that one over, because it really doesn't say a whole lot. You have all of those monosyllabic words. That means one syllable; I just looked it up the other day. But anyway, you have all of those one syllable words there and it seems like it would be very simple. "Be as I am, for I am as you are." But what is he saying?

Well, in the first place, we begin to look at the verbs there and the verb is GENOMY which means 'to become'. So what he's really saying is, "Become as I, for I became as you." You say, "Does that help?" Yes it does. "Become as I, for I became as you." This is his appeal. What does he mean?

Let's take the phrase 'become as I.' To interpret that, all you need to do is acknowledge what Paul is saying throughout Galatians. All throughout Galatians, he's saying, "Look. Be free from the law," isn't he? Look at Galatians 5:1, you'll see it right there. "Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." So he's saying, all the way through, "Don't get hung up on law." By law, we don't mean God's moral law is evil, we mean the ceremonial, ritual law. "Don't get hung up on that, don't look at any kind of law as a way to salvation, but don't get hung up in the ritual. Be free from the law like I am." He's saying, "Become like me, free from the law. You can't be saved by law, there's no point in putting yourself under Jewish ceremonialism, you can't live under that. Be free in Christ like me, live in grace like I do." There's no argument here, he just says, "Do it." This is the emotional appeal.

There is a place for emotion. There is all this academics in here, but right in the middle, he just pours out his heart. He doesn't make any particular doctrinal plea, he just says, "Please do this." It's emotional. "Be free like me; disentangle yourselves from the bondage of the law that the Judaizers have imposed on you and be free." You say, "Why?" Verse 12. "I became like you."

What does that mean? As a Jew, Paul was a legalist. Pharisee of the Pharisees, the whole thing. He had all the legal stuff going for him. He was into the law, deep. He kept all the law and observed it, he was a Pharisee, which means he was hyper-legal. But when Paul came to Christ, he tore away

from legalism, didn't he? He became like a Gentile, out from under Jewish law. He says, "When I came to you in Galatia, I behaved like you. I was as you are. I became like one of you, now I want you to become like me."

He had forsaken the law as a means of salvation, and he'd also forsaken the ritual law, the ceremonial law, as a means of sanctification. He had thrown the whole thing over. When came to Christ, he removed himself from law. He went to Galatia just like a Gentile who was no longer under the pressure of the legal system. He became free from the law, he introduced them to that freedom, then they went back to the law, which they'd never been under. By the law, I mean the ceremonial and ritual law.

So he's saying, "Look, somehow this whole deal got reversed. I got freed from the law, became like one of you, then you became what I used to be when you didn't even used to be that!" Got it? I'm sure you do. So he says, "Look, let's switch it back the way it was. You become like me because I became like you to get you to be like me."

You know, when a Jew would kick over the traces of legalism and put himself out from under all the ceremonial law, he paid a big price. We can't really relate to that; we can't relate to the tremendous pressure of the Jewish mind the threat of living outside the law. That's for an Orthodox Jew. To imagine that is just horrifying to an Orthodox Jew. Not to keep the ceremonies, not to obey all the strictures.

In Genesis 34:17, it says, "If you will not hearken unto us to be circumcised, then will we take our daughter and will be gone." In other words, there will be no connection, no marriage, no nothing unless you're circumcised. Verse 15. "But in this will we consent unto you, if you will be as we, that every male of you be circumcised." Now, the Jews said, "We will not even relate to you in any way," and of course, the ultimate would be marriage, "We won't relate in any way unless you become like we are." Listen, Jews did not become like Gentiles easily. Paul had lived his entire life subscribed to this kind of thing. He threw the whole thing over, expressed his liberty in Christ, communicated the Gospel freely to Gentiles, ate with Gentiles, acted like a Gentile, did what Gentiles do, and now someone came along and dragged the Gentiles right back into what he was freed from that they had never been in bondage to.

So he says, "Be as I am, for I became as you. Don't undo everything that I did." In Acts 21:21, it says, "And there informed of thee that thou teachest all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying, 'They ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.'" They said, "Paul, are you the guy going around telling all these guys not to stay in line with Moses? Are you the one saying a person doesn't need circumcision anymore?" "That's me." He literally became as a Gentile. He had abandoned the ways of his people, he had cut himself adrift from the traditions to which he had been moored, he became what Gentiles are: not living under the

law, not looking for the law to satisfy his righteousness, not looking for the law as the way to live, not subscribing to the ceremony and the ritual. Now, the Galatians, who were never under Jewish law, were being dragged under by the Judaizers. It was a tragic thing.

So he says, "Become like I am, because I became like you. Let's not both go back into this thing." He had learned the great truth that the way to God is to shed all hope of self-righteousness. You must reject the Satanic teaching of salvation by law and return to the simplicity that is in Christ. That's his appeal; it's very, very simple. He just became what they are. But you know, this was his pattern.

In I Corinthians 9:20, it says, and you know the passage, "For though I am free from all," he had perfect liberty in Christ, "Yet I have made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew." You know, when he got in with the Jews and he was with the Jews, he didn't want to offend them, so he did what they did. It didn't matter to him; he was free from everything.

If I was going to go to Israel, and I wanted to minister to some Orthodox Jews, I don't mind going to the synagogue with them. I don't mind doing the things they do, and if they want to have a meeting at a certain time during the week, if they want to have a festival, I'd go along to try to teach them and reach them. That's no problem for me. Why? Because I'm free. I'm free in Christ. I don't have to worry about that.

So Paul says, "If there are Jews around who want to do things a certain way, I'll go along with that. It doesn't bother me a bit. If they don't want to eat certain things, I won't eat them. It doesn't matter to me. I just want to be what they are so that I can minister to them, so that I can reach them." That's true, isn't it, in almost every sense. For us to communicate the Gospel with a certain culture, we have to somehow adapt. That doesn't mean to become a drunk to reach a drunk, it has its bounds within the areas of obvious propriety and Biblical ethics, but at the same time, it means that there must be some sort of adaptation to a certain kind of life, in order that you don't ostracize yourself from people. That's all he's saying.

He says, "If a Jew was around, I became a Jew that might gain the Jews. To them that are under the law, as under the law. To them that are without the law, as without the law." In other words, "If I went to the Gentiles, I did what they do. Not in areas of immorality, but in the general cultural features of life." So he says to the Galatians, "When I was with you, I just was like you. Don't you remember that? I was free. I introduced you to the freedom. Don't go backwards!"

You know, he does build on that appeal. He builds on it by point two, in his remembrance of them. That runs from verses 12-16. He says, "Look, just remember how it was. You remember that I was free. You remember that I came to you, became like you. You believed my message of grace, my message of faith in Christ. Everything was great. Let's remember that." This is really an interesting

thing.

Verse 12. "You have not injured me at all." What that means is, "You did me no wrong." Really, 12b should be connected with verse 13, which should probably start with the words, "You have not injured me at all." You did me no wrong, remember that? This is his remembrance of that.

It's a very abrupt transition, I'll grant you, from verse 11, it's abrupt to verse 12. From the middle of verse 12, it's abrupt to the second part. He says, "Look backwards! You accepted me then; you didn't injure me. You didn't fight me; you didn't accuse me of wrong. You didn't treat me ill." What's he saying? He's saying, "Look, remember how willingly you accepted me? You heard my message, you believed it. You accepted me lovingly, openly, warmly, totally. You didn't injure me. You weren't against me then."

What he's saying is, "How could you turn on me now when you didn't turn on me then when I was there? When I told you then, you didn't turn. What happened? When I lived with you like a Gentile, when I did what you Gentiles do, you didn't hassle me then!" In fact, do you know that when he arrived in Galatia and started preaching, you know who walked out of his services? All the Jews. But the Gentiles said, "Let's do this again next week." He came back and preached to them again, and you know what? He had a Gentile audience who loved and accepted him.

He says, "Hey! What happened? How come, when I was there, acting like a Gentile, you didn't hassle me? But now, you want to impose Judaism on everyone. You loved me then, when I didn't act that way." The Gentiles begged him for more teaching when he arrived.

This is a heartbreak for Paul; he loves these people. And he knows that they don't like him. They simply don't like him; they're turned off to him. They've bought the whole bag that the Judaizers were selling and now he knows what heartbreak is. He's saying, "I introduced freedom to you. I was free among you like a Gentile. I was doing what you did an you loved it; you accepted me. You didn't injure me, you didn't fight me, you didn't hassle me. You accepted me. What happened?"

This is what you call 'spiritual defection', and I suppose this is the greatest grief that a person in the Lord's service knows. I was preparing this and thought to myself, "I know how this affects me and other Christian people, but I wonder how it affects Jesus?" Have you ever thought about what the Lord must think about someone who accepts salvation and then just defects, just drifts away, gets caught up in false teaching.

Well, from an Old Testament view, you get a glimpse of it. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus said, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that kills the prophets and stones them who are sent to thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings and you would not." It was at that occasion, you know, that Jesus wept. He shed tears over Jerusalem. Here

was a case of God giving all that He could possibly give to Israel, His child. God was dispensing all the grace, the information, the blessing and Israel is continuously defecting, defecting, defecting. It grieves the heart of Jesus.

Jesus, since He was the human embodiment of God, shed real tears. But have you ever wondered how God Himself felt, or feels even today over spiritual defection? I think it's clearly illustrated in the book of Hosea, and I want to call your attention to it because I really feel this is a very important passage.

Hosea 11 is one of the most tender insights into the nature of God anywhere in the Scripture. If you want to know what God is like, and does He feel emotion, does He love His children, Hosea 11 really will help you to see that. I always think of the Pulitzer prize-winning play by Connelly called Green Pastureswhere there is a particular character who plays the part of God. He sits at his desk and has a great line. He says, "You know, even being God ain't no bed of roses." There is a sense in which, though that is a very secularized statement, there is a sense in which God's heart is grieved over His children. Here is one of the most beautiful portions to describe the tender love of God. Hosea 11:1.

"When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." You'll remember that Moses came to Pharaoh and God said, through Moses, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn." Yes, it was out of Egypt that He called His son. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt." But all of a sudden, there is grief here. Verse 2. "As they called them, so they went from them. They sacrificed unto Balaam and burned incense unto carved images."

Many of you parents have the suffering of loving a child and rearing that little child in the tender years, then finding that one day, the child became a young man or young lady and defected, walked out of your home and turned his or her back on you and the things of God. We know about that, don't we? We deal with that kind of thing all the time. Well, God knows about that. "When Israel was a child, then I loved him." God means, "I spent myself on him," like a doting father.

Verse 2. "But he sacrificed unto idols." I love verse 3. "I taught Ephraim also to go." You know what that means? "I taught Ephraim how to walk," God says. "When Ephraim was a little child, I taught him how to walk." Listen to the rest of the verse. "Taking them by their arms." Have you ever taught a child how to walk? How do you do it? Grab those little arms, and the little feet begin to kick. We've got one just at that point now, and they take that first wobbly step and their eyes are really bright. That's God. He says, "I loved Israel. I taught Ephraim how to walk; I held his arms." I love this. "But they knew not that I healed them."

What does He mean there? Well, the loving father, God, takes Ephraim by the arms, teaches him how to walk. You know how that works; you teach that little child and pretty soon, you let go. A little wobble, a few steps, a bright grin, then wham! The head in the coffee table. Or bumps on the

linoleum. Then what do you do? Scoop him up in your arms, take him in and do whatever it is that needs to be done to fix the hurt. That's what God says right here. "I taught Ephraim to walk, and every once in a while, I let him take a few steps. Then when he fell over, I healed him." But look. "But they knew not that I healed them." They never looked around to see who it was.

Verse 4. "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love." Long ago, they used to teach the children how to walk and they would guide the child with a cord. Every once in a while, you'll see a kid in a store like that, with some kind of a harness. Poor kid! But they would teach their children in those days, when they were learning to walk, in order to keep them around so they wouldn't run off, they would have a little rope for them and lead them around.

He says, "I lead them with strings [or cords] of a man, with bands of love. And I was to them as they that take the yoke off their jaws, and I laid food before them." He switches metaphor, and says, "I treated them like you would an ox, and after a hard day's work, I took the yoke off." A careful farmer, husbandman, would pull back the cheeks of the oxen and gently lift the yoke off so it would never scrape, never touch. "I provided their food." So, in two very beautiful metaphors, God expresses His tender love toward Israel.

You know, the grief of God was great because of His love. In Hosea 6:4, we look at His grief. This may be the most pensive statement God made, or one of them. Listen to this, can you imagine God saying this? "Oh Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? Oh Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew, it goes away." God looks at His little child that He loved and who grew up and went away, but never turned around to say, "Thanks," so He says, "What do I do with you?" The grief of God, heartbreak in Heaven, over defection.

You know, in chapter 14, you find the love of God that redeems the grieving child. All through this book, God expresses His grief. Listen to Hosea 4:14, here is God's mercy. "I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely, for my anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel. He shall grow like the lily and cast forth his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be like the olive tree, his fragrance like Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return, they shall revive like the grain and grow like the vine. The scent of it shall be like the wine of Lebanon."

The first thought of verse 4, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely." You ask, "Do you think there is heartbreak in Heaven?" Of course I do. And I think it's the heartbreak of the defection of those who know better. Absolute, willful defiance in the face of a loving God. Well, if Jesus wept over spiritual defection and if God's great heart is broken in Heaven over spiritual defection, that only leaves one other member of the Trinity.

We find in Ephesians 4:30 these words, just listen. "And grieve not the Holy Spirit." Did you know the Holy Spirit can be grieved too? How? By sin. Before that verse and after that verse, he talks about sin. Spiritual defection is sinning. So it is God and Christ and the Holy Spirit who are grieved by the spiritual defection of a child.

I don't think this is just historic, I think it's going on today. I think God is still grieved. I know the Spirit is, and He's God. He's God. It's a sad thing to realize, but there is still heartbreak in Heaven over Christians who are wayward, who go into sin. There are still men of God today, like the Apostle Paul, who feel the pain and the grief when that happens. You as parents, some of you have felt that with your own children. As a pastor, as elders, there are times when we feel that pain amidst the flock that God has given us care of, when we see them defect as well.

That's what Paul was feeling in Galatians 4, and you can go back to it. That's where the hurt was. He says, "I don't understand it, because when I was with you, you didn't do this. When I was acting like a Gentile then, you didn't impose legalism. Why the change?" And just notice how he expresses this, it's just so loving in verses 13-15, it just oozes.

He says in verse 13, "You know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first." He says, "Remember when I first came? It was because of [not through, but more likely because of] infirmity of the flesh that I preached the Gospel to you the first time." The use of the word 'first' indicates that it would be the first of two times, the former of two times. "So the first time I came to you, it was because of infirmity of the flesh that I preached." In other words, he's saying, "I admit the first time I came, I hadn't planned to come. I got sick and didn't have a choice." He reminds them that he had preached to them, originally probably not planning to go to Galatia or probably not planning to stay in Galatia. But he got sick and he had to be there.

You say, "Well, what do you mean by that? Why would he have to go there if he was sick." There has been a lot of speculation on that, and I don't really know and don't care a lot about it. But I'll give you some insight in case you want something to fill your brain. If you want options, you can have something.

What was his illness? Everyone wonders about that, "You know how through infirmity of the flesh." What was it? The only possible speculation that seems to have any kind of weight at all is that he probably could have had malaria. You see, when he began his first missionary journey and covered Syria and Cilicia, which is just north of Palestine, he then got on a boat and went to the island of Cypress and ministered there. He left Paphos and went north across a little part of the sea there and came to a place called Pamphylia, a lowland area very much affected with malaria. It is very possible contracted malaria in Pamphylia and immediately then, and we know he didn't stay there any time at all, he went there and was gone fast. He immediately ascended the highlands of Galatia. Some say that he would have contracted malaria in Pamphylia and would have immediately gone to the

highlands to get away from the infection that was prevalent in that area. He wanted to get to higher ground where he would not have to face a continued worsening of that problem by being exposed to it again.

So it is possible that, leaving Pamphylia, he ascended and climbed to that tremendous, rocky area to get to Galatia and stayed there only because he was sick. Now malaria manifests itself sometimes in recurring frequency of pain. In other words, it may not always be present. So it is possible that, in his time there, he would have been able to minister in between the recurring times of pain. Some have said that when malaria does hit, it gives tremendous headaches and pains that are unbearable and torturous, especially with no anti-malarial shots or vaccines or whatever you'd take for that kind of thing. He was completely exposed to it, and when it came, it came. But between attacks of it, which seemed to recur, he would have been able to minister.

Whatever the disease was, it made him stay there. Incidentally, it probably had some very unpleasant symptoms, very unpleasant. I say that because of verse 14, which could be translated this way, "Your trial, not mine, but your trial, which was in my flesh, you despised not nor rejected, but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." What do he mean 'your trial'? Well apparently, it was a very trying situation to deal with Paul, or to be with him because he was so sick. There may have even been a physical disfiguring. But whatever it was, it was a very uncomfortable situation to be with Paul, whether he was outwardly disfigured or whether it was a constant, recurring sickness that made him not desirable to be with.

So he says, "Your trial which was in my flesh." In other words, "My particular illness was such a pain in the neck to you, and I know it was. But even in spite of that," he says, "You didn't despise me. You didn't reject me. You received me like an angel of God, or even like Jesus Himself!"

You see what he's saying here? He's saying, "How can you turn against me? I came before, I lived like a Gentile, you didn't hassle me then. I came before, and I was sick. I didn't even come to stay with you; I came there by an accident, as it were. You weren't even on my plans, and you accepted me. I had a terrible sickness that manifested itself in a very ugly way physically, and it was tough to live with, but you did it. You didn't just bear it, you received me like an angel or like Jesus Himself."

If I know anything about human nature, I'll bet Paul, when he left Galatia the first time, was probably walking down the road saying to Barnabas, "Weren't they something? Weren't those Galatians something wonderful? Barnabas, you know, we were kind of a crummy outfit. Here I am, all messed up with this disease - look at me! And everywhere we went, we brought a whole bunch of persecution. They weren't even in our plans, Barnabas, aren't they something? Look how they loved us." Can't you imagine that lingered in his mind. Love doesn't die easily.

Then one day, someone came along and said, "Hey, Paul, have you heard the word? The Galatians don't like you." What? "What do you mean they don't like me?" Oh, they've gone into circumcision and legalism.

So he sits down to write, and he's mad at the Judaizers and just lets it fly. But in the middle of his anger toward the Judaizers, he stops and says, "Hey people, what happened to our love affair?" It's just emotional here. "I came there and you loved me. What happened? You took me like I was; I lived like you did, as a Gentile. What happened? Why don't you just throw that off and be like I am? I became like you and you accepted me then."

The words 'despised not', see in verse 14? It means to regard as good for nothing. There was something ugly about his disease that would have made some people figure, "Boy, that guy is just good for nothing." But they didn't feel that way. These words, too, 'Nor rejected'. You know what the literal translation is? To spit. "You didn't think me good for nothing and you didn't spit on me."

There were certain diseases in that part of the world that if a person walked by that had that disease, others would spit on the ground. Paul says, "You didn't spit at me." That's an amazing thing. You say, "What's so amazing about that? I can tolerate sick people." Let me give you a little bit of theology.

Illness, physical infirmity, and adversity were always regarded by the Jews as representative of the punishment of God. Did you know that? For example, in John 9, there was a man who was blind. The Jews said, "Who sinned that this man should be born blind? Him or his parents?" You know what their theology was? "If you're sick, then God's doing it to you."

I remember a few guys who told Job that, don't you? That wasn't just Jewish theology, it was Gentile theology. Did you know the Gentiles believed that sickness was the punishment of the gods? Listen to Acts 28:4. "When the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand," remember Paul with the snake on his hand, "They said, 'No doubt this man is a murderer!'" Why would you say he's a murderer because of a snake on his hand? Because the gods are punishing him for crimes. That's the way they looked at everything.

You see, so when those Gentiles in Galatia accepted a sick Paul, whose disease was manifest physically, they were, in effect, jumping the hurdle of their own theology. So were any Jews who would have accepted him. So you see, here's a guy who says, "Look, I didn't behave as a Jew when I was there, I didn't come to you because it was a plan. I was sick the whole time and it was difficult to deal with the kind of sickness that I had. Not only that, you could well have questioned whether I was a legitimate man of God because your theology would have dictated to you that I was being punished by the gods."

I'm sure someone would have said, "If this guy is a miracle worker, why doesn't he fix himself?" I mean, if he's going around preaching and all this, and remember, he did some fantastic miracles, but maintained his malaria all the time. Some would have scratched their heads and said, "There's something up here, and I can't figure out what it is." So he's saying, "Against every adverse thing, you took me in, you loved me. You never yielded to the temptation to look at me from the outward appearance. You received me as if I were an angel of God, or as Jesus Christ Himself."

You know, those dear people in Galatia couldn't have been more gracious. In Acts 13:42, we find the account of his going to Galatia. Just to give you a couple of thoughts, listen. "When they were gone out of the synagogue, they besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath." Verse 44. "The next Sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." Verse 48. "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region."

Listen, the first time the Apostle came there, the people threw their arms open, they had a fantastic response. In fact, they received him like an angel or like the Lord Jesus Christ. They even got it all twisted up.

This is interesting, in 14:8. "And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. The same heard Paul speak. Paul looked at him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed." Paul is in the middle of preaching a sermon and sees a crippled man sitting over here. He says, "Stand up on your feet!" You know what the guy did? Leaped and walked. "When the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, 'The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.'" They couldn't believe it. They called Barnabas Jupiter and Paul Mercury.

They gave him a royal reception, but then he had to straighten them out. But they gave him a reception; they treated him like royalty. The Christian people, to whom he's writing in Galatians, treated him as they would have treated the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But you know what happened? All of a sudden, they didn't like his message.

People are fickle. There are a lot of people who will like you until you say what they don't want to hear. You can't pick and choose, beloved. The Word of God says it all; you can't pick what you like. The Galatians once knew joy unspeakable and full of glory and had loved Paul. What happened?

Verse 15 has a great statement. "Where is then the blessedness you spoke of?" You know, that literally translates, just to give you a paraphrase, "What happened to your satisfaction?" Or, "Where is your joy? Remember how good it was then? I came, you accepted me, you loved me in spite of all

the adverse." I suppose if Paul ever cried, he's crying now as he writes. He's hurt, and not just over the theology of it, he's hurt over the love of it. It's personal grief.

Back in verse 11, he says, "I'm afraid of you, lest I've bestowed upon you labor in vain. I'm just wondering whether everything I did isn't worthless." He says, "What I can't understand is what happened to the satisfaction you had? You weren't looking for anything else the first time I was there. You were satisfied with grace, you were satisfied with faith. You loved me." Look at verse 15. "I bear you witness, if it had been possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me." If they were living in a day of transplants, there would have been some. They would have given up their eyes for him.

The word 'plucked' means 'dug out'. You say, "Why does he say that? Why use a statement like, 'You would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me'?" Well, there may be two reasons. In many languages, the eyes are the most prized possessions; they're irreplaceable. They are the most prized possession. To say, "We would have given our eyes," may be saying, "I would give you that thing which is most precious and irreplaceable to me, that costs me the most, if you needed it. If you needed it, I'd give it to you." Paul is saying, "You were like that. If I had needed it, you would have given it."

In Deuteronomy 32:10, just to give you a comparative passage, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." The prize. They eye is often, in language, associated with a prized thing, a precious thing. Now that's a possibility, that what he's saying here is a very general thing. The other possibility is that Paul needed new eyes. Have you ever heard that? That Paul might have had eye problems, some form of opthalmia.

There are a couple of factors involved here. They didn't have glasses in those days, obviously, and there was probably a high incidence of eye disease. With eye disease prevalent, and no glasses, and in Paul's case, he spent his whole life pouring over Hebrew manuscripts, he could very well have had real eye problems. That's speculation, but it could have some basis. Let me show you a few verses.

II Corinthians 12:7. "The Lord has given me, or allowed me to have, a thorn in the flesh," it was a constant problem. You say, "What is this thorn in the flesh?" Something that bugged him, and he couldn't get rid of it. He prayed about it and the Lord let him keep it. He finally said, "Alright, Lord, if you want me to keep it, I'll keep it." Some say it was eye problems. Why would they say that?

Well, one illustration would be in Acts 23:1-5. Remember the time he was taken before the high priest? The High Priest, Ananias, "Commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth," he told them to smack Paul. Remember what Paul said? "God smite you, you whited wall!"

Those standing there said, "Revilest thou God's high priest?" And he said, "Oh, was that the high priest?" You say, "What does that prove?" It proves that, if he had any sort of eyesight at all, he would have known the high priest by what he wore. If he was right in front of the high priest, close enough to be whacked, he must have been close enough to see if he could see. Some say this is indication that he couldn't see.

There is another possible indication, back in our passage of Galatians 6:11, "You see how large a letter I have written to you in my own hand." That may indicate the possibility of his having to write very large in order to perceive what he was writing. He had the custom of dictating everything. He would dictate to an amanuensis or secretary, then would write the closing words himself, and sign his name for himself. The rest was usually dictated. But here, apparently he was writing, if this is the truth, largely because he was unable to see. So there is that possibility.

If that's true, then back in Galatians 4, when he says, "You would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me," it may have been that he couldn't see very well. You know, I just dug into this a little bit and called my brother-in-law, who is a doctor, and asked him about it. He looked up some information and found that malaria can attack the orbital portion of the optic nerve, so there may be some connection. If it does that, it can affect it in several ways: it can create a loss of color, it can cause atrophy, it can finally render the pupil immobile, and lead to blindness. Malaria and eye disease can be closely connected, so that is a possibility. The disease that he contracted there could have caused problems in his eyes. Again, this is speculation. The point of the whole thing is this: they loved him. They would have torn out their eyes and given them to him.

In verse 16, you can almost sense the pain in his heart. "Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" Isn't it interesting that people like you as long as you tell them what they want to hear?

I remember a prostitute who came by one time and wanted to talk to me. She was up in the front, so I brought her in the office and talked to her about Jesus Christ. She said she was a professional prostitute, she functioned over here somewhere in Sun Valley where she had a house and the whole routine. So I began to talk to her, and she was having all kinds of problems; she was just torn up and ripped up inside. She was a pretty high-class woman, charging a lot, making a lot of money. But she was having tremendous guilt and all kinds of anxiety. She couldn't stay sober, was taking drugs, the whole thing, just a torn-up life. I told her all the things Christ could do in terms of altering her life and giving her purpose, if she'd invite Jesus Christ into her life to forgive all the sin and guilt.

So I went through all of this, and she said, "I think that's what I want. I think so, I really need Christ to change my life." I said, "Good. There's one more thing I'd like you to do." She said, "What is that?" I said, "Give me your little book." She had told me she had a little book with all the customers in it.

She said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I want to have it. I have a match here, I want to burn it, right in front of you." She said, "What?" I said, "I want to burn it. You don't need it." She said, "Do you know what that book is worth? Not only to sell to another prostitute, but in blackmail? Do you know? It's worth thousands and thousands of dollars!" I said, "Good. Let's burn it." I'll never forget what she said to me, she said, "I guess I don't really want Jesus Christ, do I?" She walked out and never came back. I was her friend as long as I was giving her answers to her problems, but when I demanded something, I wasn't her friend.

Paul says, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" That verse indicates that, apparently, on the first trip, everything was great. But the second time he came back, he must have sensed that this was beginning to happen, that the Judaizers were beginning to work there. He comes down hard on the truth, the truth of grace, and that's when they began to turn against him.

The implication of verse 16 is that, probably, on the second trip, he says, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" that implies that, somewhere along the line, he had exposed the Judaizers to them, doesn't it? But they didn't want to hear it anymore. There's something kind of comfortable about legalism because it's so tangible. You can do X number of things and have this feeling that you're super-spiritual. "I told you the truth. Does that make me your enemy?"

Let me tell you something, people, it's the person that tells you the truth that is your friend. Don't forget that, whatever the truth may be. Well, that's Paul's appeal, that's his remembrance. Let's look at his warning very quickly.

He warns them, and it's a straight warning. Verse 17. "They zealously seek you, but not for good. Yea, they would exclude you that you might seek them." That's quite a statement. He says, "They zealously seek you." That translates, "They pay court to you." It's the idea of a lover courting his lady. "Boy, they butter you up, they fawn over you, they make a big fuss over you. They say, 'Oh, you wonderful Galatians, my, it's such a nice thing to be ministering to you.' They just really lay it on thick." 'They zealously seek you' literally translates 'they have a deep concern for you'. They show a very deep concern and care for you. They want to lead you to the truth.

It sounds like every cult, doesn't it? Every one of them is the same deal. They went after the Galatians to win them by flattery, to feign friendship. But look what he says. "But not for good." They never had an honest reason, they never had an honorable reason or commendable purpose. "They were after you in order that they might exclude you from grace, exclude from the blessing that is in grace, and that they might have you in the position of seeking them. They wanted to submerge you in their system, to make you look up to them and obey them." They wanted those Galatians to obey and adopt Jewish ways, so they'd have to pay court to the Judaizers to be allowed into the exclusivism that was Judaism. They wanted control. They hypocritically played up to the Galatians in order to get them under bondage.

The word 'exclude' literally means 'to bar the door'. They wanted to bar the door and lock them out of God's blessing. They wanted to submit the Galatians to their own direction. They didn't care about the Galatians. In 6:12, he says, "They just desire to make a fair show in the flesh. A big display on the outside."

It's the same today. Cults are out after people and boy, they court them. They come on so moral, so ethical, so loveable, so nice. That's what people always say, "Oh, they're so nice. They want to have a Bible study in my house." Satan's angels always come as angels of light. They're not going to come in and say, "I have a new religion. How would you like to ruin your life?" That's not the normal approach.

Paul is not saying it's wrong to be courted; he's saying it's wrong to be courted for a wrong reason. You know, if he would have stopped at verse 17, someone would have said, "Oh, you're just jealous. You came along and were their fair-haired boy, Paul. They loved you and followed you, but now we've come along and you're out, so you're mad. You just don't like anyone moving in on your territory."

So he adds verse 18. "No," he says, "It's good to be zealously sought in a good thing." He says, "I'm not uptight just because you courted them. I'm uptight because you courted them for wrong reasons." Paul's not jealous; that's just not Paul. He doesn't get uptight about that. But he wants to make sure no one thinks he's jealous. He says, "It's a question of purpose. It's good to be zealously sought always, in a good thing. It's good to be courted for a good reason. Why, I courted you myself! I treated you like a lover treats his lady to win her. I did it for a good reason. They don't do it for a good reason."

If you read Philippians 1:15, you'll find that Paul wasn't jealous. He says, "Some are taking over my territory and preaching Christ even of contention. That's alright, I'm just glad Christ is being preached." He was sitting in jail and other people were taking over for him, so he was no longer the hero. A new generation of preachers is coming along and he's dying in an old jail somewhere. He says, "That's fine, I've done my job. That's OK, if Christ is exalted, that's all I care." He isn't jealous.

I'll tell you something, it almost breaks his heart because he sees that the alienation of affection is based on a wrong purpose. It's at this point that his heart just breaks, and he says in verse 19, "My little children." That's the only time he ever uses that term in all his writings. It's a term of tender love that expresses the fourth and last point, his desire for them. He's made his appeal, his remembrance, and his warning, that they seek for evil purposes, to flatter.

Now he gives his desire, and a beautiful one it is. Verse 19. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you." Now listen. 'My little children' is beautiful. It's not in the

accusative case, it's not a great introductory statement. It flows out of verse 18. "It's good to be zealously sought always in a good thing, not only when I'm present with you." He says, "I'm not just blowing my own horn for when I'm there. Anytime you want to be sought zealously in a good thing, that's fine." But notice, the last word in verse 18 is 'you'. There shouldn't be a period, there should be a comma.

"Not only when I am present with you, my little children." It's not, "With you. My little children..." No. It's, "You, my little children, of whom I travail in birth until Christ be formed in you." That's the language of deep love.

Notice he says, "I travail in birth." That's the term for birth pains, like a mother bringing forth a child. He says, "I'm having birth pains." You know what the problem is? This is ridiculous! "You've already been born! What am I doing having these again?"

You see the word, "Of whom I travail in birth," then what's the next word? "Again." This is abnormal, this is unnatural. He says, "I'm going through the pain that I went through to bring you to Christ, this time to conform you to Christ." You see? That was the pain. These are unnatural, and I'll tell you something, they're more severe. Paul says, "It was a painful thing just to get you to salvation, to win you to Christ, just to get you saved. Now you're making me go through pain all over again to form you into Christ." Were they saved? Yes. The Lord Jesus Christ lived in their hearts. But there was little evidence of His beauty in their lives. He says, "I'm not travailing until Christ lives in you," but until, "Christ be fully formed in you."

What does that mean? It simply means that the goal of every single Christian's life should be to have Christ totally formed in his life. What does that mean? To be Christ-like. That's what it means. That's in Romans 8:28-29. "All things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to his purpose." It goes on to say that, "He desires to conform us to the image of his son." You see? To be conformed to Christ, that is the purpose, to be more like Jesus, more like Christ. That's the objective.

In Romans 13:14, there's a great statement. "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Isn't that simple? What is the goal of the Christian, then? To be like Jesus, to be like Christ. Colossians 2:6. "As you have therefore received Jesus Christ the Lord, so walk in him." Christ-likeness. Beloved, that's the goal. That's the goal, to be like Jesus. That's all he's saying. He's saying, "I just want you to be like Christ, to grow up."

I'll tell you something, let me just stop here and take the role of Paul. That's what I want for you. I have all kinds of thoughts when I'm preaching to you that have nothing to do with the message. It's amazing how the brain works. The first thought I had when I started preaching, just frankly, was, "I wonder if anyone here is tired of hearing me. They must be so tired of hearing me. I am tired of hearing me."

I was praying with the fellows in the room, and just saying, "Lord, somehow get us over the hump of me saying this and them listening to it an nothing ever happening." I mean, I just prayed, "Lord, somehow, touch my mouth and their ears so that something happens when people hear." Because I care that Christ be formed in you, that you be like Him. That's what 'Christian' means: like Christ. God knows, and you know, that most Christians aren't, right? But that's the goal.

He says, "I'm hurting inside until you be Christ-like." It's an emotional appeal. He's saying, "If you care anything about my pain, shape up. Don't do it just for the theology of it, do it for me. Just for me, just because I asked you to do it. Once, you loved me so much. Once, you believed in me."

I'm sure there are probably people sitting in the audience who once listened to what I said, and once, maybe even expressed love toward me. Somewhere along the line, though, I said something that didn't sit quite right or something happened and now you don't hear me anymore. That's bad, but I would say to you what Paul said. "Once, you loved me. Once, you accepted what I said. My only pain is that Christ be formed in you. Not that you like me, but I only care that you hear the truth. It's nice if you love me also; I'll accept that." That's not the goal.

It's interesting to think about. Did you know there's no place I can find in the New Testament anywhere where it says to be like the Holy Spirit? Did you know that? Nowhere does it say that. Yet more Christians are running around, buzzing, talking about the Holy Spirit and what he's doing and so forth and so on, more than they talk about Christ. I think we need to focus on Christ, because it tells us everywhere to be like Him. Paul said, "Be followers of me as I am of Christ," didn't he? We need to focus on Christ.

Let me show you one verse that will help you, then we'll wrap up. II Corinthians 3:18 will show you how to be like Christ, in one verse. "We all, with unveiled faces," in other words, we don't have any veil like the Old Testament, "Beholding, as in a clear glass, the glory of the Lord." Listen, when you came to Jesus Christ, the veil came off. You can see clearly, can't you? You can see! You can see the glory of the Lord, and as you look at it, you are changed into the same image, from glory to glory. In other words, you just keep ascending as you focus on Him, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Isn't that a great verse? If you want to know how to be Christ-like, look at Christ. Look at His glory, and keep looking at His glory. While you're not even watching, the Spirit will be transforming you into His image. Focus on Christ. Just look at Him.

You know one of the reasons God gave us Jesus Christ, other than just to come, die, and leave? He left Him here for 33 years so that we could look at Him, watch Him, see the way He lived, see the way He was, to have a flesh and blood pattern. So he says, "Just look at it. See His glory, focus on it, concentrate on it, and you will be changed from one level of glory to the next, imperceptibly, by the Holy Spirit, behind the scenes. You don't need to worry about what He's doing, you just focus on

Christ." That's the goal. That's what every Christian is to be. So Paul says, "I hurt. I have pains, the most excruciating pains, like a tender, loving mother, until Christ be formed in you."

Dear Paul, there's no question about his love, no question about his motives. He just had one great thing: he wanted people to be like Christ. His last desire is in verse 20. "I desire to be present with you now. I not only desire that you be formed into Christ, into His image, but I desire to be present with you now, and to change my tone." He says, "I don't even like the way I'm talking. It hurts. I wish I didn't have to yell at you, to fire off all this stuff. I wish I didn't have this terrible depression. I'd like to be happy, to come and be with you, to have joy instead of sorrow."

Then he says, "I stand in doubt of you." You know what that means? "I don't know what to do with you. I wish I could come and be with you," but he can't because of pressing obligations where he is, but he says, "I wish I could come and be with you and change my demeanor and tone. I wish I didn't feel like this, but I don't know what to do about you!"

I'm so glad Paul felt that way, you know why? Because I feel that way all the time. You know, there are some people, and you give them all the answers and go over and over it. Finally, you just say, "I don't know what to do with you!" You have company. The Apostle Paul says, "I don't know what to do with you either."

If you go back to Hosea, you'll find God saying, "Oh Ephraim, what am I going to do with you?" There comes a point where your human resources are gone, right? Everything you can do, you've done, and what are you going to do? He says, "I wish I could come and call you 'beloved' instead of 'foolish'. I wish I didn't have to call you 'blockheads'," like he did in chapter 3. But he says, "I am perplexed. I don't know what to do with you; I am puzzled over you. I don't know how to get an entrance to your hearts."

It's a common grief I feel, that I have said many times. You look at a person, you love them, you do everything you can to nurture them. There are even people I've introduced to Christ, but after a period of time, they begin to defect. All you can say is, "I've done everything, tried everything, given you every resource I know. I've spent myself on you." There has been many a day that, in my own mind, I've prayed. In my own heart, I've had terrible anguish over someone that I introduced to Christ and something happened, but I didn't know what to do. I had spent myself in every possible avenue to reach them, but nothing happened. I just throw up my hands and say, "I don't know what to do."

Well, this is Paul, this is his heart. I trust this is something of what I feel and something of what you feel toward those who have defected in your life. If you're a defecting Christian tonight, I don't want to argue with you doctrinally. Let me just tell you this: if you're a defecting Christian, I pain. There are others around you who know and love you who hurt too because they want to see Christ magnified in you. We can only do what Paul did, we can only beg you to come back. Remember our love and

your love for us when it all began? Remember you loved the truth so much? Maybe someone led you astray, like the Judaizers, I don't know, people who would only make merchandise of you. Do this: focus on Christ. Spend yourself looking at His glory and let the Spirit transform you. That's really all we can do, is beg you. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for the time together, sharing tonight. Father, we know there are some people here tonight who have drifted spiritually from the warmth of that fresh commitment to You that they once knew. Lord, it's not a question of giving them all the information; they have that. All we can really do now is beg them in love to open their hearts with a sensitivity to You, so that You can draw them back to You. Father, we pray that somehow, Your Spirit would break through the barriers that exist where there is backsliding, to have that person's will broken and submitted to You.

We thank You for the great heart of the Apostle Paul, which is so open to us. In it, we see the tender love of a man who had committed himself not only to the love of his Christ, but to the love of the people he served. Father, give us a passion, a great care and concern for those Christians who drift, that we might draw them with all the love we have. Even though sometimes, we have to throw up our hands and say, "I don't know how to gain entrance into your heart anymore, I don't know what to do." Father, even in the desperation of saying that, there may be, in that, some kind of wooing love that will draw them to Yourself. Father, we grieve if God is grieved. We grieve if the Spirit is grieved. We weep if Jesus is weeping over some child that is drifting.

Father, we pray that all gathered at this place may be drawn tightly. All those who God Himself taught to walk, whose arms He held, whose hurts He mended, may they not grow up to walk away. Father, we thank you for drawing us with the cords of love. We pray that there might be repentance, a turning away from that sin which caused the drift, and a drawing to Your side. For that, we will give You praise. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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