

BECOME AS I AM!
PART 2

Text: Galatians 4:12-20

March 27, 2011

INTRODUCTION:

Last time we saw how Paul's language and tone changes in this section from sharp rebuke to affectionate appeal.

Out of fear for the Galatians' standing before God (v. 11), Paul, the perplexed pastor, personally pleads (δέομαι) with the Galatians to become as he is: free from the Mosaic Law (v. 12a, Paul lived in freedom from a "Do this and live" covenant; Note: In the exhortation, "Become as I am," Paul is anticipating his exhortation in 5:1). Paul, a Jew, had figuratively become a "Gentile sinner" as the Galatians (2:15, 17, i.e., free from the curse and bondage of the Mosaic Law).

We saw how Paul roots his personal appeal in the soil of the gospel. In other words, knowing (3:7) the indicatives (what God has done for us in Christ) drives us to obey the imperatives (what God commands us to do). Thus, having explained in depth the gospel and why the Galatians must not submit to the observance of the Mosaic Law, Paul personally appeals to the Galatians to live in freedom rather than under the bondage of the Mosaic Law.

To motivate them to do so, he presents two sets of contrasting attitudes. First, he contrasts the Galatians' previous attitude toward him with their present attitude (vv. 12b-16). Second, he contrasts his Christ-centered attitude with the Judaizers' self-centered attitude toward the Galatians (vv. 17-20).

LESSON:

I. THE GALATIANS' PREVIOUS ATTITUDE TOWARD PAUL SIGNIFIED THEIR ACCEPTANCE OF CHRIST AND THE GOSPEL. VV. 12B-14

When Paul first visited Galatia, the Galatians gave him a warm reception.

During his first visit (Acts 13:42-52), even though many Jews sought to harm Paul and Barnabas, many Gentiles (and Jews) joyfully accepted Paul and Barnabas and their message (13:48-49).

Thus, Paul begins at the end of v. 12 by saying, "You did me no wrong" (ἠδικήσατε means "to do wrong to someone, to mistreat someone by acting unjustly toward them").

At the beginning, the Galatians found no fault with Paul or his gospel of grace and freedom. Instead of treating Paul unjustly, they initially welcomed him despite a debilitating illness he had at the time. In vv. 13-14, Paul explains more fully how the Galatians had done him no wrong.

The occasion of his initial mission to the Galatians was a bodily ailment, “You know it was *because () of a bodily ailment* that I preached the gospel to you at first...(emphasis mine)”

Luke, in Acts 13, does not mention Paul’s specific illness. Various theories have been suggested by scholars (e.g., Malaria, Epilepsy, severe Neuralgia or Ophthalmia). Whatever his sickness may have been doesn’t really matter. The point is that Paul’s illness was a temptation/trial for the Galatians (“and though my condition was a trial to you”).

When Paul arrived in Galatia he was in the grip of a debilitating illness, which evidently left him with unpleasant symptoms. His sickness could have tempted the Galatians to reject him and his preaching of the gospel.

Disease and disability were considered by the Jews and ancient Greeks to be signs of divine displeasure/judgment (e.g., Job’s three friends, 4:7-9; 8:1-6; 11:13-20; the man born blind, John 9:2; the natives of Malta, Acts 28:3-4).

Paul says his physical weakness could have given the Galatians a reason to “scorn” (ἐξουθενήσατε lit. “regard as good for nothing”) or “despise” him and his gospel message (4:14b). The word translated “despise/reject” (ἐξεπτύσατε) literally means, “to spit out saliva as an expression of contempt.” In Paul’s day, pagans would spit at those whom they thought to be disfigured by a demon.

So, the Galatians could have been tempted to perceive Paul’s sickness as a divine sign that His message was not from God. An authentic divine message would be accompanied by strength rather than weakness.

Paul stood in stark contrast to the so-called “superapostles,” who boasted of their strength, oratorical and rhetorical skills and secret knowledge. In 2 Corinthians 10:10, Paul quotes the “superapostles” as saying, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech of no account.”

Unlike the “superapostles” who ridiculed Paul, the Galatians initially received Paul and his gospel. Rather than giving into the temptation to treat Paul as demon-possessed or under divine judgment, Paul says the Galatians welcomed him as a true “messenger of God, as Christ Jesus Himself” (v. 14c).

It is important to understand that Paul is not merely seeking to emphasize the kindness of the Galatians. Rather, he is making a theological point. The Galatians’ initial reception of Paul signified their reception of the gospel and of Christ Himself.

The Galatians recognized and received Paul as an authentic messenger of Jesus Christ. They were right in not mistreating or rejecting Paul but rather receiving him as Christ. Jesus taught that those who welcomed His messengers also welcomed Him (Matt. 10:40, “Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” cf. Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20).

The Galatians’ reception of Paul demonstrates how every true servant of Christ is to be regarded in the church (especially if it was an apostle in the 1st century!). John Calvin writes that just as God employs angels as His divinely commissioned messengers, so too are teachers that He raises up in the church to deliver, “the most excellent of all blessings, the doctrine of eternal salvation (i.e., the gospel!)” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 21, p. 128*). Calvin emphasizes that all who labor at teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5:17) are the “messengers of God, by whose mouth God speaks to us” (Ibid, 128). Further, Paul’s highly commendatory language of the Galatians reveals the “majesty of the gospel, and the honourable character of its ministry” (Ibid, 128).

There is a truth of far-reaching importance embedded in Paul’s statement here in v. 14c. As a pastor faithfully delivers the apostolic message of the gospel, the congregation is hearing Christ (Rom. 10:14-17; Eph. 4:20-21).

In Ephesians 4:21, Paul says the Ephesians heard Christ. Obviously, Paul knew the Ephesians had never personally seen Christ or heard His message from His own lips. They were pagan Gentiles, like the Galatians, who lived far away from Jerusalem and Palestine. What Paul means is that the Ephesians had heard the message of the gospel. Thus, Paul was saying that as Christ’s ambassador (messenger), when you “hear me you are hearing Him.”

As an official messenger of the King, Paul speaks for the King. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul says, “we are ambassadors for Christ, *God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God*” (emphasis mine).

Hearing an apostle was hearing Christ. Receiving an apostle was receiving Christ. Clearly, there are no longer any apostles. So, today in the church, hearing the apostolic message of the gospel faithfully delivered in word and sacrament is hearing Christ.

Bible teachers call this a sacramental word. The preached Word is a means of grace. It is not just the quarry from which we mine our doctrines and moral teachings. Rather, the preached Word of law and gospel is living and active. It is the means God uses to soften hard hearts and to harden hearts, to kill and make alive, to condemn and justify by revealing Christ. When a minister is preaching the gospel, he is preaching life into dead bones (cf. Ezek. 37:1-14)!

The crucial point then is this: hearing the gospel is hearing Christ.

Paul came to the Galatians not representing himself but Christ. The issue for Paul was always the gospel. He said to the Corinthian church, “I do all things for the sake of the

gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it” (1 Cor. 9:23). Paul’s overriding desire was to see the Galatians become a fellow partaker with him in the benefits and blessings (freedom) of the gospel (“Become as I am!”).

He wanted the Galatians (and us!) to live in freedom from the bondage of a “Do this and live” covenantal relationship with God. When you hear the appeal of Paul (or a pastor faithfully proclaiming Christ), you are really hearing the appeal of Christ Himself!

What mattered to Paul was the message not the messenger. This is why he spent 1/5 of his letter from 1:11-2:21 appealing to several carefully selected events from his life to demonstrate the authenticity of his apostleship in order to show that his gospel originated from God and not man.

Unlike the Galatians who received Paul and his gospel as authentic, the Judaizers slanderously taught that Paul’s gospel was inauthentic and lacked authority because his gospel didn’t come from God. Paul’s gospel, they falsely claimed, was his own message designed to win the approval of men (Gal. 1:10).

The Judaizers’ strategy was this: If we can undermine Paul the man, then we can undermine his gospel.

What Paul does then from 1:11-2:21 is layout a defense of the authenticity of his apostleship, not merely to validate himself but in order to show that the gospel is of divine origin. He made autobiographical defense of the gospel.

And so he says the Galatians’ initial attitude toward him signified their acceptance of Christ and the gospel. Instead of rejecting Paul, they received him.

The question is why? Why did the Galatians welcome Paul and his message when most people would have been tempted to spit at him and reject him as a divinely cursed or demon-possessed man?

First, there was nothing particularly impressive about Paul that would have gained him respect and esteem in the eyes of the Galatians. There was nothing that would have predisposed the Galatians to have a favorable reception of Paul or the gospel. In fact, the biblical account suggests quite the opposite.

The Scriptures present Paul as physically unimpressive. While in the Galatian province of Lystra, the residents of the city identified Barnabas with Zeus, the chief of the Olympian gods while they identified Paul with Hermes, the winged messenger of the gods (Acts 14:12). This was most likely because Barnabas was the more imposing physical figure while Paul possessed an inferior physique.

As previously noted, Paul’s unimpressive physical appearance was used against him by the so-called “superapostles” (2 Cor. 10:10). There were two matters in particular that no doubt served to tarnish his physical appearance.

First, we have seen how he suffered from some “bodily ailment” (“a state of debilitating illness, sickness, disease” 4:13). I don’t know about you, but when I am sick, I don’t tend to be overly impressive in my appearance or demeanor! (Note: Some Bible teachers link this bodily ailment to his “thorn in the flesh” to which he refers in 2 Cor. 12:7-10. However, it is impossible to connect these two outright because of the lack of information. But, his ailment here falls into the same time frame of his suffering from the “thorn in the flesh” see Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 208.)

Second, in 6:17, Paul says that he “bears on his body the marks of Jesus.” This no doubt refers to the physical abuse he suffered as a minister of the gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 11:23-28; 12:10), which had to leave him somewhat physically marred.

A Presbyter (elder) in the province of Asia during the 2nd Century described Paul as, “a man little of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting, and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness: for sometimes he appeared like a man, and sometimes he had the face of an angel” (see *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 625).

In addition to Paul’s unimpressive physical stature, was the fact that his oratorical and rhetorical skills were less than others (1 Cor. 2:3-4). In short, there was nothing in Paul that moved the Galatians to give him such a warm welcome.

In addition, there was certainly nothing in the Galatians that naturally predisposed them to be receptive to Paul and his gospel message. The Galatians were pagan idolaters, enslaved to the elementary principles of this world (Gal. 4:8).

The teaching of Scripture leaves nothing to man, not even the smallest part of a good work or predisposition to receiving the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, Paul says that the gospel is veiled to those who are perishing. He writes, “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” In 1 Corinthians 2:14, he writes, “a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him...” In 1 Corinthians 12:3, Paul says, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

What then was it that caused a people group that were totally ignorant of the true God and steeped in idolatrous worship of false gods to warmly receive an unimpressive, supposedly divinely cursed man who was preaching a foolish message?

The answer is the Holy Spirit! Calvin observes, “...for what was there in Paul to awaken their esteem or veneration, but the power of the Holy Spirit alone?” (*Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 21, p. 127).

Paul first came to the Galatians in weakness proclaiming the gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 3:1-5, 14; 4:6). Calvin’s describes the gospel as “the instrument of Christ’s grace,” or “the instrument of regeneration” (see *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 20, “2 Corinthians” pp. 173, 178).

In 2 Corinthians 3:8, Paul calls the gospel the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit exercises His saving power in the gospel! The Holy Spirit makes the presence of Christ and fellowship with Him and the Father a reality through the gospel (Gal. 4:6). Through the announcement of the gospel, the Holy Spirit glorifies Christ (not Himself) and makes Christ known and loved. J.I. Packer commenting on the Holy Spirit's ministry writes,

“The Holy Spirit's distinctive new covenant role, then, is to fulfill what we may call a floodlight ministry in relation to the Lord Jesus Christ. So far as this role was concerned, the Spirit “was not yet” (John 7:39, literal Greek) while Jesus was on earth; only when the Father had glorified him (see John 17:1, 5) could the Spirit's work of making men aware of Jesus' glory begin.

I remember walking to a church one winter evening to preach on the words “he shall glorify me,” seeing the building floodlit as I turned a corner, and realizing that this was exactly the illustration my message needed.

When floodlighting is well done, the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them; you are not in fact supposed to see where the light is coming from; what you are meant to see is just the building on which the floodlights are trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not be seen for the darkness, and to maximize its dignity by throwing all its details into relief so that you see it properly. This perfectly illustrates the Spirit's new covenant role. He is, so to speak, the hidden floodlight shining on the Savior.

Or think of it this way. It is as if the Spirit stands behind us, throwing light over our shoulder, on Jesus, who stands facing us.

The Spirit's message is never,

“Look at Me; listen to Me; come to Me; get to know Me,”

but always

“Look at Him, and see His glory; listen to Him, and hear His word; go to Him, and have life; get to know Him, and taste His gift of joy and peace.”

The Spirit, we might say, is the matchmaker, the celestial marriage broker, whose role it is to bring us and Christ together and ensure that we stay together” (*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, pp. 65-66).

Through the preaching of the gospel the Holy Spirit brings a dead sinner's heart to life. The gospel comes to us just as it came to the Galatians (i.e., when we were ignorant of God and enslaved to the idols of our heart).

Through the preaching of the gospel, the Holy Spirit regenerates our dead heart and enables us by grace to receive Christ and all His saving benefits. The Spirit working

through the gospel illuminates our ignorant mind and makes the message of the cross truly comprehensible to us (cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-16). We come to know and love Christ, trusting in Him alone as the One who presents us righteous before the Father.

Paul makes this point in 2 Corinthians 4:6 where he writes, “For God, who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

Commenting on this passage, Calvin writes,

“For as God, the Creator of the world, pours forth upon us the brightness of the sun, and gives us eyes to receive it, so, as the Redeemer, in the person of his Son, He shines forth, indeed, upon us by His gospel, but, as we are blind, that would be in vain, if He did not at the same time enlighten our understandings by His Spirit. His meaning, therefore, is, that God has, by His Spirit, opened the eyes of our understandings, so as to make them capable of receiving the light of the gospel” (*Calvin’s Commentaries, vol. 20, p. 200*).

And so, Paul is driving home the point that the Galatians’ initial reception of him (i.e., the gospel and Christ) signified the Holy Spirit at work within them. Despite his illness they did not despise or loathe Paul but rather recognized, by the work of the Holy Spirit that it was Christ speaking through him. Yet, because of the Galatians’ abrupt change in their attitude toward Paul, he was fearful that they perhaps had not experienced a genuine work of the Spirit (Gal. 4:11). Thus, he passionately appeals to them, “Become as I am!”

It is by the gracious working of the Spirit that a sinner is led to embrace by faith the good news of Christ crucified (3:1-2). Let us then continually and earnestly pray for the regenerating and illuminating power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:1-8; Acts 16:14; Eph. 1:15-23). For He is He is the hidden floodlight shining on the Savior.

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