

Galatians 4:12-16

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-4/galatians-412-16/>

Paul urges the Galatians to return to his teaching. He reminds them that they were loving and respectful to him when he met them. Paul was ill when he first met them, but they welcomed him as God's messenger. Now, he wonders if the Galatians think of him as an enemy.

Paul uses strong and urgent language to grab his Galatian audience's attention: *I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.* First Paul begs them, his brothers and sisters in Christ, to follow his teaching, to become as he is, free in Christ. They already were, but are beginning to follow Jewish religious rules. A certain group of Jews (who were likely believers) are competing with Paul to be the Galatians' spiritual authorities. These competing Jewish "authorities" have come to the Galatian church and taught them that righteousness requires following the Jewish law.

Paul wants the Galatians to return to the freedom they have in Christ, which is how Paul lives. He wants them to imitate him. Paul reminds the Galatians, *I also have become as you are.* That likely means that when he was among them, he ate with them and lived peacefully with them, without trying to change their entire culture. In 3:28, Paul reminded the Galatians that there is neither *Jew nor Greek*; we are *all one in Christ Jesus*. This is similar to Paul's description of his ministry in 1 Corinthians 9:22: "To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some." Paul is preaching faith and unity in Christ; he is not trying to convert Gentiles into Jews. The competing Jewish "authorities" are interested in leading the Galatians to practice Jewish law, rather than live under freedom in Christ.

Paul reminds his readers of their shared history together. He assures them, *You have done me no wrong.* They have not hurt Paul. This is an amazing example. Most of us are inclined to be slighted and prioritize defending ourselves. Paul's primary goal is the restoration of his children in the faith. Rather than hurt Paul in the past, they helped him. He recalls how he first met the Galatians. He was in poor health, *it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time.*

Somehow, God worked it that Paul's poor health brought him to the Galatians, where he preached the gospel. Paul admits it was *a trial* to the Galatians in his *bodily condition*, but they *did not despise or loathe* Paul for his illness. Instead, they *received Paul as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.* *Angel* is a translation of a Greek word with the root *angelos*, which simply means "messenger." In this case Paul is a messenger of God, as opposed to a cherub or other heavenly being.

Paul is reminding the Galatians of how kindly and eagerly they welcomed him, as a messenger from God just like they would have welcomed Christ. *Where then is that sense of blessing you had?* Paul asks them. He is essentially saying, "You treated me so well when we first met, even though I was sick and frail. You knew I was a messenger from God. Why are you ignoring my

teaching now? Why are you trusting these competing Jewish ‘authorities’ who teach the wrong thing?”

Paul continues to appeal to their former respect and love for him: *if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me*. This might mean Paul had trouble with his vision. Whatever his illness, the Galatians were so loving to him, that he knows they would have done whatever they could to help him. Now, Paul wonders, *have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?* Paul is asking them bluntly to remember their friendship, their former trust and respect. He wonders why they treat him like an enemy, since they are starting to follow a teaching that contradicts his. His teaching is the truth, after all.

Biblical Text

12 I beg of you, brethren, become as I *am*, for I also *have become* as you *are*. You have done me no wrong; 13 but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14 and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus *Himself*. 15 Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. 16 So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?