

**Galatians 4: 12-18; “Preaching Through Infirmary”, Message # 26 in the series –
“Christ Has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul
Rendall on the evening of June 11th, 2014, at the church.**

The Apostle Paul wants the believers in the churches of Galatia to become like him, for he became like them. What does he mean by this? Well, if we think of the context in which Paul is speaking, he is saying that he, through Christ, had become free of Judaism. He was free from the condemnation of the moral law, and free from having to keep any further observance of the ceremonial law's days, months, and years. He wanted them to become like him in that he wanted them to leave off all Judaizing tendencies. He became like them, in the sense which he speaks about in 1st Corinthians Chapter 9, verses 19-23. “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; 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; 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.” “Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you.” This was how Paul attempted to win both Jews and Greeks to Christ. He became like a Jew in that He would not cause them to stumble over their seriousness in observing the law. He would show those who were under the law that he too was serious about the law, even though no longer under it. It was not as though he was under the law, but he rather was now under law toward Christ. He went about to keep the moral law of God realizing that Christ had fulfilled it all. And he was sensible of the consciences of those Jews who still felt that the ceremonial law still needed to be observed. But he would win them if he could.

In these verses Paul was trying to win these confused believers back to a right view of the law and the gospel. He wants them to become like him in their attitude toward him and the gospel. If they were weak in their doctrinal understanding, he would try to get them to think back to how they had first accepted him as the preacher, when he first preached the gospel to them. He had first preached to them because of physical infirmity, he says. And even though he was weak, they had received him, and had also received the gospel which he preached to them. If they received him then, Paul is reasoning with them, they should also receive his words of wisdom now. So, tonight we want to look 1st - at what Paul's attitude toward his own infirmity. (Verses 12 and 13) Then 2nd – We want to look at the Galatian's attitude towards Paul's infirmity. And then 3rd – We want to look at Paul's attitude towards zeal. (Verses 16-18)

1st – Let look at Paul's attitude toward his own infirmity.

Verse 12b says – “You have not injured me at all.” “You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.” Paul is reminding the Galatian believers of how God providentially ordered the circumstances of his life so that he preached the gospel to them at the first. It was because of a physical infirmity. (ασθενειαν τες σαρκος) In verse 14 he calls it, “my trial which was in my flesh”. It appears to have been some trouble with his eyes, of which he does not go into the particulars. In verse 15 he says, “For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.” I do not think that this was simply a proverbial saying, which Paul was relating to them; it was the truth of the matter. The man who had the greatest spiritual discernment among all the disciples had a physical eye infirmity. We need to understand Paul's attitude towards this infirmity. So let's turn over to 2nd Corinthians chapter 10, verses 8-11. “For even if I should boast somewhat more about our authority, which the Lord gave us for edification and not for your destruction, I shall not be ashamed—lest I seem to terrify you by letters.” “For his letters,’ they say, ‘are weighty and

powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” “Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when we are absent, such we will also be in deed when we are present.”

We see here from these words that some of the people at Corinth did not consider the Apostle Paul as impressive in his speech, when he preached to them; in fact they thought his speech “contemptible”. Neither did they think that his bodily presence conveyed to anyone that he was a man of strength, as he preached. They thought him “weak”. But Paul’s attitude toward himself was that he did have great grace which had been given to him. He knew that he was an Apostle of Christ. He knew that he had been given great gifts and a high and holy calling, to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. And so he asserted to the Corinthian church the fact that he did have the spiritual strength and knowledge and wisdom which they sensed, when they read his letters. That strength and wisdom was not anything in him; it was from the Lord. Paul’s boast was in the Lord, not in himself. Let us remember this as we listen to a man preach. Let us not think that just because a man is not physically handsome or physically strong, that he does not have many things which the Lord might want to teach us through Him. Let’s not look at things outwardly. Let’s look further at 1st Corinthians 2, verses 1-5. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.” “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” “I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” “And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Let us understand that there is a wisdom which some unbelieving men have, which is human and worldly, but it is not from God. It is the earthly wisdom of their own human thoughts and opinions, which they may have studiously cultivated in order to win people over to their way of looking at things; but again, this is not what God is looking for in a preacher of His word, and it is not what Christians should be looking for or listening to, when they want to grow in Christ. Now look with me over to 2nd Corinthians 12, verses 1-10. “It is doubtless not profitable for me to boast.” “I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord: I know a man in Christ 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.” “And I know such a man—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” “Of such a one I will boast; yet of myself I will not boast except in my infirmities.” “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.” “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.” “Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.” 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.” “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.”

Now, notice that Paul uses the same word – infirmities- here, that he used in verse 13 of our text in Galatians 4, the Greek word *ασθενειαις*. I believe that he is relating to us the same physical infirmity, here in this passage, as he is mentioning in Galatians 4, verse 13. It was probably some eye problem which was constantly with him, and the badness of his condition may have varied from time to time, but the condition itself never completely left him. It was always “a thorn in his flesh”. It was something that he thought put him at a decided

disadvantage when he was preaching and up in front of people. It was something that he, three times, had asked the Lord to remove from him. But the Lord's answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Did this answer bring Paul to the place of discouragement? No, he says: "I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." This was Paul's attitude toward his own weakness, to boast in it, remembering that the power of Christ would rest upon him, and be seen by others, working in him. Let me ask you now whether this is your attitude toward difficulties? Paul says that he took pleasure in them. He says, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in distresses, for Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then I am strong." This is not an easy concept to learn, but once you embrace the principle by faith, then you will truly begin to learn God's way of accomplishing and doing things to His glory through your weakness. How does God get glory from your life if you are wise enough and strong enough in yourself, to cope with all that comes to you. Why you would be boasting in yourself continually. "This is what I am able to do". "This is what I have attained to" "This is what I have accomplished". How much better to learn things in your weakness and have Christ's grace make you strong and wise. Then the glory all goes to God.

2nd - We want to look at the Galatian's attitude towards Paul's infirmity.

Verses 14-16 say –"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." "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." "Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" The attitude of the Galatians was very good toward Paul when he first came and preached the gospel to them. They did not despise him or reject him, but they received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Himself. They would have done anything that could have to help him. They admired his courage in going on to preach even though he had this weakness. They admired his fortitude of spirit. They did not evaluate him according to how worldly people might have; as weak and incapable of exercising authority in the church. Let us understand that it is not a man's own sense of his authority, or his ability to wield it, that establishes the authority of Christ in any church, or in any personal situation where he is trying to convince others of the truth of the word of God or the gospel. It is the power of God which truly establishes any authority which has been given to him by Christ. If he is a pastor, it is particularly important, not only that he himself understand this important principle, but it is also important that all of the flock over which he has been placed as a shepherd, understand it as well. The man's authority comes from Christ Himself; but often the way that it is established in the hearts and minds of the flock, is by the people seeing not his physical strength and abilities, but rather what he does when he and they know of his physical weakness. The attitude of the Galatian believers was very good initially, but then the false Judaizers had come and by their persuasive words they had turned the heads of the Galatian believers to consider a false gospel. Perhaps they pointed to Paul's physical weakness as supposed proof that his gospel of faith in Christ's sacrifice for sins and faith in his power to change and transform the soul, had not been enough to bring healing to his body. But this was the very thing that Paul gloried in; knowing Christ's power in the midst of his weakness. The Galatians had not fully learned this way of God's doing things yet. Paul says that he was not hurt by them at all; that even these difficulties of false teachers were not enough to discourage him. How is it with you? You have received Christ, and in receiving Him will you continue to receive the truth from God's true servants? Or will something turn you away from the plain and simple truth of the Bible? Will you adopt a sacramental view of salvation or a watered down gospel? Or will you have a good attitude towards those who faithfully are proclaiming the truth of the Word of God?

Then 3rd - We want to look at Paul's attitude towards zeal. (Verses 16-18)

“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” “They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.” “But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.” It seems that these Christians in the churches of Galatia had fallen into the error of listening to all spiritual teachers as though there was no difference between them and Paul’s teaching. When these false teachers came to them, they found a listening ear in the believers there. And they began to zealously court these believers to believe in something which was false; that is, that circumcision and observing the ceremonial law must be added to faith in Christ. They told them that they must continue to observe, or to learn to observe the Mosaic law as a means of their truly concluding that they would be saved from their sins and be righteous before God. But this was a lie. No lie is of the truth, but the worst is when people come telling you that you need something more than Christ and faith in His gospel and His word to be saved. Let it not happen to you. It is always good to be zealous in a good thing. Paul meant here, to be zealous in listening to Apostolic preaching and teaching. For us, who no longer have an Apostle with us in his physical presence, it means that we would be zealous in the good thing of regularly listening the word of God as it is preached by those who are called, and faithful to it.