

## Galatians 4:12-14: Why Turn Back 2

I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 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.

### Introduction

After stating that he didn't want to have labored in vain because the Galatians believers had strayed from the gospel Paul's plea changes to remind them of the situation that lead them to respond to the gospel in the first place. Paul has already brought the reader through the general testimony of his apostleship in Galatians 1:13-2:21 and now he is referencing the very specific relationship that God gave him with the body to whom he was writing specifically in 4:11-20.

### Questions for Consideration in this Study

How should the believer prepare for evangelism?

How have false teachers impacted the reception of 'religion' in cultures across the world? How have they impacted evangelism?

How should the believer respond to outward appearances?

What is the clear motivation for Paul's ministry to the Galatians even if the apparent cause was health related?

### Exposition

#### Verse 12

Paul begins this stretch of his letter with a begging of the Galatians to see his life's presentation of Christ as an example to be followed. He had come to them and become like them so that they would listen to the message of the gospel. This required observational skills, but also a heart to love the people in a biblical, yet culturally relevant way.

*Evangelistic Principles from Paul's Life:* observe, interpret, and live. Different from the modern trend of 'cultural relevance'<sup>1</sup> Paul would come into a region and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (and by first reaching out to the Jews) he would then reach out to the citizens there in a way that they would understand. The classic example of this is the account of his interactions in Athens in Acts 17. In verse 16 Paul is specifically recorded as observing the culture of the people around him: Idols

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<sup>1</sup> Many church movements start with one of two ideas: 1) Going back to biblical/orthodox/better doctrine or 2) being culturally relevant. Some in the modern 'cultural relevance' movement have embraced relativism and distanced themselves from the inerrancy of the scriptures.

and a penchant for new things. He then engaged the people there (verse 17) and was then brought him to a prominent public place to teach the new things that he was proclaiming (verse 19).

Paul wrote, "You have done me no wrong," to restate that he was not physically harmed by the Galatians (even though other people had most definitely physically harmed him, see 2 Corinthians 11:23-33). But instead he will continue on in the coming verses to outline how a physical ailment caused him to need at least some relief on his missionary journey.

### **Verse 13**

While the account Paul references in this section is not recorded in Acts (from the time that Paul would have been in the Galatian region in Luke's telling of the events), it appears that at least some physical problem took place with Paul's eyes (vs. 15). Some have posited that this affliction was with his eyes only and started with the road to Damascus, but we don't have any specific proof of this in the text of the New Testament. The people in Galatia may have received him after having been stoned and left for dead in Acts 14:19. No matter the cause Paul was physically ill when he arrived there. Paul's crediting the illness for leading him to preach the gospel there is an interesting one. He sees God's hand in using the illness to bring him to the Galatian believers. Why did Paul see value in pain and suffering? Because pain and suffering were catalysts of God's growth in Paul's life (2 Cor. 12:2-10). This leads to several growth principles:

1. The process of growth necessitates a starting point of immaturity in a place that God wants us to grow in - in love and grace and relationship
2. Trials viewed from a heavenly perspective (Col. 3:1-3) are trials that become interesting and engaging and not just distressing. Keep looking down.
3. We can pray for the removal of a trial, but we embrace God's response of, "No, because I love you," knowing that He has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His son (Romans 8:29)

### **Verse 14**

Tying into the idea that Paul may have just come from a stoning as recorded in Acts 14:19 Galatians 4:14 indicates that he probably didn't come looking glorious, well, or impressive, but instead came physically in need and weak. The believers there in Galatia received Paul as a messenger (here translated as angel, which means messenger), and Paul says even as though he were Christ Jesus. This personal revelation points to some of Paul's shock to discover that this body in Galatia had reverted to legalistic ways. There is an intimacy in the relationship starting back with the nursing of Paul to health that appears to be violated by the shock of theological abandonment. Furthermore to be acknowledged as a messenger of God and to have your message received only to have it shunned for bondage to the Law would be painful.

*We'll continue next week looking at the Paul as an enemy of the Galatians.*