



Remember When...

Sunday 10th March 2024

GALATIANS 4:12-16

If someone wrote you a letter to encourage you to get back to your faith as it was at the beginning, would they try to avoid offending you? Would they miss out the truths you find difficult to deal with? Would it be emotional? Would it be logical? Would the language be strong or gentle?

Paul has spoken the truth about the gospel and the Galatians' standing in Christ. He has highlighted the inconsistencies in their behaviour - to have started with salvation by grace and then living it out through religious effort by adopting rules and regulations. He has appealed to their minds using logic. He has appealed to their hearts reminding them of the power of God's grace and powerlessness of the law. And now he turns to his own weaknesses, physical limitations and he is putting their relationship on the line. Not because he thinks the gospel is a small matter but because he knows it impacts *everything* in this life *and* the next. Let's pick up again from verse 12

Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.

Paul had walked away from the Jewish law as something he knew never had the power to save or sanctify – despite his upbringing. He now urges them to do the same, to walk away from the things that had no power to save or sanctify. His cultural upbringing would not be offended by them walking away from the things, he grew up in as a child and young man.

You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

He reminds him that he first stopped in Galatia simply for reason of illness, probably his thorn in the flesh mentioned in 2 Corinthians 12:7,

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.'

and in that moment, he didn't see weakness as a reason to be downhearted as a Christian missionary but rather an opportunity for the gospel to be placed in the hands of those who otherwise might not have heard it.

And now through what are unusually strong emotional reminders, Paul urges the Galatian Christians to turn once again to the gospel,

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 had caused the Galatians to first turn to Christ was not Paul's winsome ways or smooth persuasive words, for he did not carry the gospel in such ways as he confirmed in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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. ²For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. ³I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

And he recalls in Galatians 4:15 the response they once gave in his presence as he opened up the gospel before them

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.

It is true that the gospel when first received brings about the most profound changes in anyone who receives Christ as their own. Do you remember? Do you recall the passion? Do you remember looking around at the reaction to your salvation and you weren't surprised by the celebration but perhaps by the lack of celebration from some parts of the church, which is not the 'heaven on earth' experience Jesus taught you to pray for.

Listen to words Jesus used when He gave us a window in on the celebrations of heaven in Luke 15:7,

I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

And again in Luke 15:10,

Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Paul now lays everything on the line with a question not designed to provoke their anger or division, but to re-ignite their joy, their passion, their single-minded pursuit of the gospel,

Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

It is a great question to add to your conversations when sharing the gospel. When you have shared Jesus with a friend, bring your friendship into it. Get them to think, if their friendship means so much they would never say something to wreck it. It is simple but it is powerful.

What shall we do?

- Have you repented, have you turned to Christ alone for salvation? Will you today?
- Allow the challenge of the gospel to do its very best at every point – be a humble carrier
- Rely on the gospel (Christ and Him crucified, buried and resurrected) to challenge those around you – ditch long words, clever logic, and evangelism ‘methods’
- Always put yourself in a church that keeps the gospel as the gospel and keeps the gospel at the centre of everything
- Allow God to use your weak days and your strong days; your illnesses and 2 Cor. 4:7, ‘But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.’
- Celebrate like it’s day one!