



*February 9, 2025*

*“Become Fully & Solely Dependent”*

*Sunday school at 9:30, Service at 10:30.*

*News:*

Wednesday Nights at 6:30

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Verse 11 from last week is a rhetorical quotation of Isaiah 49:4.

Paul wasn't speaking literally; he was speaking persuasively.

**GALATIANS 4:12** ~ I beg of you, brothers and sisters, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong...

“Become!” is an imperative command.

There is a modifying condition to Paul's command...

Paul the super-Jew (Philippians 3:5–6), had abandoned the Law as a means of justification and/or sanctification, instead becoming like Gentiles in that sense.

How ironic that in Christ, Paul was set free from bondage to the Law, and they, in Christ, were seeking to enslave themselves to the Law.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the offering plate, or the prayer/suggestion box in the entryway, or with an Elder or Deacon of the church.*

*God Bless You!*

The final phrase of verse 12 serves two purposes:

1) First, it functions as a transition to why his command is valid.

In the Bible we see a constant pattern:

A) A principle is established.

B) A related command is given.

C) Reasons that the command is valid are provided.

D) Exhortation to obey is offered.

2) Second, it eliminates any misunderstanding that Paul was being self-serving.

**GALATIANS 4:13&14** ~ <sup>13</sup>but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; <sup>14</sup>and you did not despise that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, nor express contempt, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself.

“A bodily illness,” is literally a lack of fleshly strength.

Either from an illness or an injury.

Paul’s Conversion (Acts 9), and his “thorn” (II Corinthians 12), or his stoning (Acts 14).

It doesn’t matter... unless we make it matter... and then our interpretation will be tainted.

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Write a brief note – detach and place in the offering, or the prayer box, or give it to a Deacon or Elder.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

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Three points about Bible interpretation related to this example:

1) We hate ambiguity. Do not be dogmatic about things that are not certain.

If it is important, it is clear.

2) Avoid being overly literal.

3) Don't get distracted from the point by getting bogged down in the details.

When Paul preached to them, he was in a weakened state physically. The normal reaction to strangers, especially weakened strangers, was suspicion and rejection.

Add to that, Paul was presenting to them a loving, miracle-working God.  
Why was he weak?

Instead of acting normally, the Galatians received him with affection.

**GALATIANS 4:15-18** ~ <sup>15</sup>Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I testify about you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup>So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup>They eagerly seek you, not in a commendable way, but they want to shut you out so that you will seek them. <sup>18</sup>But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable way, and not only when I am present with you.

Why such a reversal? The Galatians received Paul as a divinely appointed messenger bringing Christ Jesus to them because they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The “blessing” of verse 15 is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

They were overjoyed with the Salvation that they received, and they deeply loved Paul as their spiritual parent in Christ.

The cutting question in verse 16... What happened?!?!?

Paul had the best interests of the Galatians in mind and then along comes some smooth-talking self-promoters and the Galatians are seemingly bewitched, evidently completely unable to discern the difference.

Church is where we are laser-focused on Christ to promote the cause of Christ, which is helping all people to rely ever more on the True Biblical Jesus.

That is sort of a two-part process.

The practical application is to become like Paul as Paul had become free from legalistic means of gaining God's favor.

Our mandate from God is to trust in Jesus fully and solely.

We are to, like Paul, cry out with the Holy Spirit within us, that we are the very children of the Living God!

Where then is boasting (Ephesians 2:9, etc.)? At the same time, my friends, where then is condemnation (Romans 8:1, etc.)?

Can you see that both are the result of pride? Both are the result of focusing on you?

I am a son of God because He has made me His son.

**GALATIANS 4:19-20** ~ <sup>19</sup>My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—<sup>20</sup>but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone of voice, for I am at a loss about you!

Paul would need to continue in his labor until the Galatian churches gained enough maturity to fight off distractions and temptations to abandon Christ on their own.

Last week, we saw Paul conclude his multipronged argument that equated observance of Jewish Law for the purpose of gaining God's favor with pagan idolatry or witchcraft.

Paul then compared his situation to that of the great prophet Isaiah where Isaiah despaired, shaking his head in disbelief and lamenting, that all of his ministry sacrifice was "in vain."

Verse 11 from last week, "I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain." Technically, it is a rhetorical device called an aporia. In quoting Isaiah 49:4, Paul knew the context of that passage. He wasn't actually despairing like the prophet because Paul knew what the prophet came to know... God has a plan.

The statement functions as another attempt to shake the Galatians out of their error by helping them realize that if they embraced Judaism to be justified, or sanctified, Paul's ministry efforts among them and their acceptance of Christ through it would be in vain. Their acceptance of Christ would be empty and worthless.

I bring this up because it demonstrates a way that modern Bible readers misinterpret holy Scripture. So many people, failing to see the rhetorical nature of Paul's argument, assume that what Paul said was literally true.

They then conclude that the Galatians were genuinely Saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, but that they could abandon Christ in favor of submitting to the Law and therefore lose their Salvation... Because Paul just wrote that if they persisted on their present course his sharing of the Gospel would be rendered useless.

Paul wasn't speaking literally; he was speaking rhetorically. He was desperately trying to get Christians to actually live like Christians, not trying to present doctrine. Paul did not think that the genuinely Saved Galatians would lose their Salvation, he was convinced that they wouldn't lose it and part of the proof of that is that fact that verse 11 is a quote. A quote of a situation in which God was Saving His people.

Paul was used by God to bring the Gospel to the Galatians and now God was using Paul to correct

them, and they would be corrected because Paul wrote a masterfully crafted, rhetorically convincing Letter. Continuing in the vein, Paul transitioned from principle to praxis. To give the Galatian's concrete actionable practical application, He wrote in...

Galatians 4:12–20, 12I beg of you, brothers and sisters, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; 13but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; 14and you did not despise that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, nor express contempt, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. 15Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I testify about you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? 17They eagerly seek you, not in a commendable way, but they want to shut you out so that you will seek them. 18But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable way, and not only when I am present with you. 19My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you—20but I could wish to be present with you

now and to change my tone of voice, for I am at a loss about you!

Okay, verse 12, “I beg of you, brothers and sisters, become...” Even in Greek this is the way we would expect the sentence structure to flow. Perhaps we might expect the begging and the address to be swapped as in, “Brothers and sisters, I beg of you, become...” But essentially, the sentence makes sense as it appears.

What no one expects is what Paul actually wrote, “Become! as I am, because I have become as you, brothers and sisters, I beg of you.”

The point is by phrasing it the way he does, Paul is able to put far more attention-getting emphasis on the word “become,” which is an imperative command. It is an order, a charge, a demand, to do something. In this case, to “become.” That command “to act,” is strengthened and stressed by its unnatural, or unexpected, position as the first word in the sentence.

When you combine that with the fact that it is the very first command in this entire Letter it magnifies



the intensity of the command even further and would have been read with a full stop exclamation, just the way I read it... “Become!”

So, this is the very first definitive action demanded by Paul as he was inspired by the Breath of God... “Become!” That’s the practical application that I promised you last week. The thing they were to do is the same thing that we are to do. The command is unchanged, it is still fully applicable to all Christians throughout time, and it is incredibly simple. Simple to grasp, perhaps not so simple to accomplish.

Paul demanded that they become like Paul. That’s interesting. We would conclude that all Christians are to emulate, mimic, become like, Paul. While Paul was a great man to be sure, he was nonetheless, just a man. Become, transform, grow to be like... Paul. You might say, I thought we were to be like Christ, not Paul.

Well, there is a modifying condition to Paul’s command that many people seem to miss. The limiting clause also gives the reason for the command... Become like Paul because Paul has become like you.

Despite what some folks think, Paul wasn't holding himself up as the posterchild for Christianity. His point was that he, "circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless" (Philippians 3:5–6). He, Paul, because he was now in Christ, was no longer under the stewardship of the Law but instead was "like" a Gentile in the sense that he was free of the Law's requirements – he, Paul, the former super Jew was now "like" them.

And his point, was how ironic and foolish, that they, who were never under the Law, but now, like Paul, found in Christ, desperately wanted to put themselves under the Law like Paul used to be. In Christ, Paul was set free from bondage to the Law, and they, in Christ, were seeking to enslave themselves to the Law.

It was stupid. And so instead of ending with, don't be stupid, Paul dramatically softened his approach and allowed his love for the Galatians to come through as he ended it with what is in essence...

“my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, my precious friends, please, I’m down on my hands and knees beseeching you, begging you, please become like me, as I have become like you – free from slavery, from oppression, from bondage to the Law.

Let us instead, all rely solely on the Love and Salvation, the justification and redemption, the reconciliation and adoption as sons of the Heavenly Father found through faith in Jesus Christ as our only Lord and only Savior.

The phrase “You have done me no wrong,” closing out verse 12, seems a bit out of place especially considering that it is part of the verse 12 sentence. Paul adds it here for two reasons. 1) First, it functions as a transition to why his command is valid and 2) second it eliminates any misunderstanding that Paul was being self-serving.

1) Okay, the first reason first... In the Bible we see a constant pattern. A) It starts where a principle is established. In this case, the principle, established over four and a half chapters, is that obedience to the Law, in order to improve your relationship with God, is legalistic blasphemy.

B) Next up in the pattern, is a command to act based upon the principle established. Here it is the command to “become.”

C) After that in the pattern there are reasons given that the command makes sense – that the order is the correct action to take. Just because I correctly establish a principle, it doesn’t follow that my command related to that principle is the right action, let alone the best action, to take. Lots of people can correctly discern a problem and then give bad advice on how to fix it.

So, in the Bible, we usually get reasons that the command is, in fact, the best course of action to take given the principle established. That’s what Paul is doing here. From this final phrase in verse 12 through the end of verse 18, Paul defends his command as being the correct order to follow.

D) Then just to finish the flow of this Biblical pattern thing, the final phase is to encourage and exhort people to actually do what is commanded, we will see that in verses 19 and 20.

2) The second reason that Paul ended verse 12 the way he did was to eliminate the appearance of jealous self-promotion on his part. He was commanding that the Galatians become like Paul instead of like the Judaizers. People could easily say, and I'm sure they did, that Paul was just trying to promote himself and keep his power over the Galatian Christians.

This final phrase of verse 12 ties in with the remainder of this passage to demonstrate that Paul's concern, unlike that of the Judaizers, was for the benefit of the Galatians.

Verses 13 and 14 form a single sentence that has been interpreted in a couple of different ways, mostly due to the different opinions concerning Paul's malady. What the NASB has as a bodily illness is literally a lack of fleshly strength, or a weakness of the flesh, or being without physical energy. It often describes the result of an illness.

A severe cold, or the flu, let alone malaria or typhoid fever, leaves you physically weak. This lack of fleshly strength can also be due to injury, like being stoned by a violent mob. Most scholars prefer an

illness over an injury and then the majority of them extrapolate from the comment about the Galatian's willingness to give Paul their own eyes, if possible, to mean that he had some kind of eye ailment or disease.

They then add to their reasoning Paul's Conversion recorded in Acts chapter 9, where he was temporarily blinded by Christ to confirm their theory about an eye malady. Some even think that this was one and the same as the "thorn" in Paul's flesh that he described in II Corinthians 12.

Others think that Paul's "lack of fleshly strength" was a result of his brutal stoning in Lystra recorded in Acts chapter 14. Honestly, there is no way to be certain and what you know about things like this that are uncertain in the Bible... It doesn't matter... unless we make it matter and then our interpretation will be off.

Here's what I mean... Let me make three quick points about Bible interpretation related to this example. 1) We humans hate ambiguity. We love it when things are certain and when all the individual elements are connected and make sense. We can

then put it all in a nice non-threatening box complete with a lovely bow.

Do not be adamant, or dogmatic, or stubborn, about things that are not certain. We don't know what Paul's specific condition was, or if it was related to any other event in his life that's recorded in Scripture, and that's okay. We then interpret based on what we do know rather than what we think we know – on our conjecture, or speculation, or guesswork, which could taint our interpretation. If it is important God makes it clear.

2) Avoid being overly literal – not everything is literal. The phrase “if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.” Was a figure of speech, a saying, a colloquialism, an idiom, a popular expression that described “going above and beyond” – there's another one for you. It may have absolutely nothing to do with Paul's problem, or Paul may have used it because it did fit his symptoms – we don't know.

3) Notice how much time I've devoted to talking about Paul's weakness. That's typical of anyone who presents this passage, and it has nothing to do

with the point. It is a distraction from what the Holy Spirit wants us to understand. Don't get distracted from the true point of a passage by getting bogged down in the details.

Here's the actual point. When Paul "first" preached to the Galatians (remember he went back through each town strengthening the churches on his return) he was in a compromised and weakened state physically. The normal reaction of people, in that time and place, to strangers who were weak and infirm was an outright rejection. The feeble stranger was an unnecessary burden at best, and a curse at worst.

Why were they weak – was it evil afoot? Were they cursed by the gods and would the gods then curse anyone trying to help them? These were very superstitious people who were naturally suspicious of outsiders.

Back in the day, you walk into any place of business in a small town in eastern Montana and everyone in the place would turn around and stare at you with suspicion. And that's when you were perfectly healthy.



Add to that typical hostility the fact that Paul was presenting to them a new God and Savior. An all-powerful, perfectly loving, and miracle-working God. A God of unimaginable sovereignty, glory, and grace. And here was Paul – this messenger sent by that God to the Galatians and he was weak and compromised. How did that make any sense?

The expected reaction would have been outright rejection and Paul was keenly aware of that, but instead what he received was open-arms and a genuine affection so great that the Galatians were willing to do anything that they could to minister to Paul.

Why? Why such a reversal of societal norms? Verse 15 tells us why the Galatians received Paul as a divinely appointed messenger bringing Christ Jesus to them – receiving Paul warmly as though he himself was Christ because he brought Christ to them. It was because they were affected by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 15, Paul rhetorically asked them “Where then is that sense of blessing you had?” All scholars are

in general agreement that the blessing here is the divine blessing of Salvation, which in context, is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit already mentioned five times in this Letter.

Paul's point was that through the illumination of the Holy Spirit the Galatians had received Paul and his Message even though it didn't make sense to do so and as a result of yielding to the Spirit they had accepted Christ and then they had been filled with the Holy Spirit individually.

They were overjoyed at the Salvation that they received, and they deeply loved Paul as the brother in Christ who had introduced them to Christ. They would have done anything for their brother – for their parent in Christ.

That sets up his cutting question in verse 16... What happened?!?!? Paul had presented Christ, and the Galatians had received Christ through his presentation and now they were abandoning both in order to follow a group of legalistic Jewish teachers who were clearly only in it to promote themselves.

Let me make it personal. I, just like most other pastors, have poured myself into the lives of people with no ulterior motive at all, other than to glorify God by ministering Jesus to them. Many of these people responded with what seemed like sincere friendship, only to be swayed by others, to completely reject me and treat me as the enemy. When it happens, and it happens a lot, it is perplexing.

Paul wasn't trying to get anything from the Galatians for himself or to advance his own interests. Paul was simply fulfilling his commission to connect people to God through Christ as evidenced by the Holy Spirit. He had the best interests of the Galatians in mind and then here comes some smooth-talking self-promoters and the Galatians are seemingly bewitched, evidently completely unable to discern the difference.

Nothing has changed in 20 centuries. I have been, as I said, greatly perplexed by people in our time who cannot seem to discern the difference between a pastor pushing them, through accurate Biblical teaching, to constantly strive to know and trust Christ more and so-called pastors pushing political,

or populist, or legalistic, or self-focused, or non-biblical, or self-reliant agendas.

This is church, where we are laser-focused on Christ, where everything we do is evaluated on how well it promotes, glorifies, and advances the cause of Christ. What is the cause of Christ? It is helping, encouraging, and exhorting, all people to rely ever more, more and more, on the True Biblical Jesus.

That is sort of a two-part process. The first is increasing people's understanding of Who Jesus is and the second flows from that, as it enables people to trust Jesus more.

I said that today we would see the practical application part of Paul's Letter. This is it. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul commanded us to emulate Paul as Paul had become free from legalistic means of gaining God's favor.

Our mandate from God is to trust in Jesus fully and solely for our justification, for our redemption, for our righteousness, for our reconciliation, for our adoption as heirs of the Promise.

We are here commanded to, like Paul, cry out with the Holy Spirit within us that we are the very children of the Living God! Trust Jesus. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, trust God the Father's Love for you, that He poured out upon you in the handing over of Him, Who was most precious to the Father, for your entire, eternal Salvation.

Where then is boasting (Ephesians 2:9, etc.)? At the same time, my friends, where then is condemnation (Romans 8:1, etc.)? Can you see that a sense of superiority, or self-righteousness has the exact same cause as a sense of inferiority, or self-degradation? Can you see that both are the result of pride? Both are the result of focusing on you?

When we focus on anything other than Christ Alone, we cannot possibly help but focus more on our own performance and so, we either become boastful about our level of performance or we feel guilt and condemnation because of our level of performance.

Can you see that it is about us instead of about Jesus? Can you also see that our level of performance is only our own assessment and not God's? If I think my performance is better than most,

that is only my judgment. How can I judge my performance against others when I don't have all the facts about them, about what they endure and what resources they have to work with?

Again, if I judge my performance as inadequate, that is only my assessment, once again, based upon a serious lack of information. Here's what's dumber than either camp... All people who lose focus on Christ actually end up in both camps.

Either bouncing back and forth like a well-abused tennis ball, or more generally existing in both camps simultaneously. No wonder we're neurotic bi-polar Christians. Obey this command and put that nonsense in the trash. It is all about Jesus and when I embrace that Truth, I neither boast, nor do I feel condemned.

I am a son of God because He has made me His son.

Paul finished this section with verses 19&20, which serve as an appeal, as an exhortation, as an urging, in the strongest possible terms, for the audience to obey his command.

What constitutes the strongest possible terms? Paul's supernatural Love for the Galatians. They were his children in Christ. Paul struggled mightily, like a woman giving birth, to bring them the Gospel and now it seemed as though he was going to have to labor to birth them again until Christ was genuinely formed in them as both individuals, but even more as churches.

Paul would need to continue in his labor until the Galatian churches gained enough maturity to fight off distractions and temptations to abandon Christ on their own.

Verse 20 is a personal plea as he laments the inadequacy of writing a letter compared to being with them face-to-face. I'm sure we've all experienced the inadequacy of having to rely on written communication when the subject is complex or emotional.

I love text messages and emails to a point. Sometimes a single conversation on the phone is better than a dozen emails, and sometimes a single face-to-face interaction beats a dozen phone calls.

As is most evident in the two Letters to the Corinthians, communication is extremely difficult via letters. Paul wished that he could be with the Galatians personally, believing that such a meeting would quickly resolve the issues.

Well, fortunately for us, we are face-to-face and what I want you to know today is that it is always all about Jesus. You cannot go far wrong if you keep that focus.

To seek Him is to know Him, to know Him is to trust Him, to trust Him is to obey Him, to obey Him is to Love... To Love Him, to Love His church, to Love enough to allow Him to minister His Love to others through you.

If you can sincerely cry out to Almighty God, “Abba, Father!” together with the Holy Spirit within you... Do that! If you cannot sincerely cry out to Almighty God, “Abba, Father!” together with the Holy Spirit within you, then you must realize the Truth.

You are too focused on yourself and your performance or you are not filled with the Holy Spirit



at all. Those are the only two possibilities. Fortunately, both are easy to fix.

In the first case, pray that God helps you let go of your pride and replace it with humble, grateful, trust in Jesus and His completed work on your behalf. Take it a step further and pray that God helps you live your life, starting with your mindset, as a child of God.

In the second case, pray that God helps you grasp the fact that you already know enough and that all of your excuses are just that... excuses. Throw yourself on the mercy of God because He is merciful as He has already proven by paying your sin debt Himself.

It is all about crying out... Cry out Save me please! I know that I cannot Save myself, "Come now, Save me now, O' Lord." Cry out fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I can trust in You and not in myself or others. Cry out together with the Holy Spirit Papa God, my Father in Heaven thank You for making me your own precious child forever.

Trust that if you fully accept the Sacrifice of Jesus, God will fully accept you. And then live your life like you actually believe that it is true.