

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Galatians 4

¹²I beg you, brothers and sisters: Become like me, for I also became like you. You have not wronged me; ¹³you know that previously I preached the gospel to you because of a weakness of the flesh. ¹⁴You did not despise or reject me though my physical condition was a trial for you. On the contrary, you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵Where, then, is your blessing? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶So then, have I become your enemy because I told you the truth? ¹⁷They court you eagerly, but not for good. They want to exclude you from me, so that you would pursue them. ¹⁸But it is always good to be pursued in a good manner—and not just when I am with you. ¹⁹My children, I am again suffering labor pains for you until Christ is formed in you. ²⁰I would like to be with you right now and change my tone of voice, because I don't know what to do about you.



Intro. / Children's Message: “If you do that for very long, your eyes will stay that way.” So your mother may have told you when you crossed your eyes. I don't want to encourage you to do that, but I have always found it exciting to wear an eyepatch and pretend I was a pirate searching for hidden treasure.

Today I have something better than a patch, I have something that makes us really cross-eyed, because the Christian congregations in the region of Galatia would have given up their eyes for Paul if they could. Would you give up an eye if you knew it meant you had Jesus? Let's imagine that salvation in Jesus didn't come by believing in Him; but instead it came by poking out your eyeball. Would you do it? Would you do it if it meant heaven forever? (The fun part would be that you get to wear an eyepatch like a pirate ... or like that congressman from Texas.)

These glasses I am showing you have a cross right on the lens, and so they guarantee that we will always see the cross. Christians, or those who believe in Jesus Christ, always want to keep our eyes on the cross; that is, in a way, to be “cross-eyed.”

No matter what happens, I pray that this week you think about the cross no matter where you go or what you do. If a friend argues with you, don't forget to think about the cross of Jesus' forgiveness. If your mom or dad tells you to do something, don't forget to see Jesus' cross of love in that command. If you eat, don't forget that you are allowed to pray to God the Father through the cross of Jesus alone. If you learn one thing today, let it be to view your whole life by the cross.

Then your pastor has certainly done his job. Lord Jesus, help us to keep our eyes on the cross.

THE UNTOLD BENEFITS OF BEING “CROSS-EYED”

I. The Galatians began their lives of faith, immediately hearing the good news. Jesus Christ was formed in them, the eyes of their hearts were enlightened, and they truly kept their focus on the free-for-nothing gospel. Their eyes were on the cross, and in this way we might say they were “cross-eyed.”

So the Galatians used to be entirely committed to the message Paul brought.

The reason Paul showed up among their towns, in higher elevation than, say, the coastal town of Perga, was apparently a physical injury or ailment or condition. Some have speculated that Paul contracted malaria upon disembarking the ship to Galatia. Others suggest this was his thorn in the flesh, or the physical condition Paul was in after the beatings he sustained by those who rejected Jesus and persecuted him. It's possible that it was difficult to look at Paul in his condition and probable that Paul had trouble seeing. We can learn from our text at the very least that a) Paul was stuck with poor eyesight and b) some condition that needed medical attention.

What a pretty picture! Paul probably intended great things among these cities and new congregations. He likely drew up a great mission strategy, checking demographics, following social

cues and norms, studying the writers and celebrities and politicians of that region, up to the point of practicing table manners. Instead he was stuck with poor eyesight and in need of care!

Yet how impactful was the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? How powerful was it with such a weak messenger? The congregations of Galatia saw Paul's need and heard the good news of Jesus and treated him like an angel. You might even say they acted as if Paul was Jesus Christ himself.

This has happened before. I once baptized a little girl when a new family joined our church in Missouri around Christmastime. This little girl called me "baby Jesus," and it even went so far at the time that she called our parsonage "the empty tomb." I haven't received any higher compliments in my life.

- The only way that taking Paul as an angel, as Jesus Christ Himself, is possible, would be if they found joy, confidence, rest, peace, and hope in this new message.
- The only way they would treat Paul so nicely is by recognizing in his weak, sorry sermons a picture of grace and mercy for them.
- The only way they would respond was that they understood their good works were not enough; salvation was by faith alone.

Applica 1: Even today, many new believers start off in a unique relationship with church. They don't fit the boxes or target audiences we try and cram them into. They aren't afraid of the challenges we think might hinder them or frustrate them or bore them. We tend to call certain methods or approaches less useful.

But what do we know of the power of our presentation of the good news of Jesus Christ? What do we really believe? That the message might work if the preacher is impressive or nuanced or clever? Do we really believe that? That the message might take shape in the heart of a listener if they are comfortable or serviced just so?

Let it be known from this lesson that all who truly believe in Jesus do so out of the impact of the message, not the messenger. Let it be understood that faith comes when the messenger, like Paul among the Galatians, is stripped of his impressive stature or character. Let everyone know that God works in spite of our failings and He defies our weakness, because Jesus Christ alone is Savior, not St. Paul.

Transition: So what happened? Abraham in the Old Testament learned the promise and put his faith in it. He was credited as righteous. King David committed many atrocious and egregious sins, but God noted this king especially as a man after God's own heart. The thief on the cross was guilty of something impossibly disgusting to be pinned next to Christ, but still the Savior said he would be in paradise today. The Galatians had been converted to faith in Jesus and set their hearts on Jesus alone. How was it that Paul wasn't happy with the Galatians?

II. The Galatians had allowed themselves to be misled into disregarding salvation by faith. They considered the grace of Christ alone as very imperfect, to say the least. Instead they accepted the false prophets' doctrine of the Law. With great sadness Paul learned that these congregations were being disrupted and devastated by false teachers. He had founded these congregations himself. They had flourished wonderfully. So Paul had to ask questions to remind them about something big.

There was a great change that took place in these believers when Paul preached to them the sweet Gospel of God's mercy. He called to their minds that they had received the Spirit; that is, the spirit of rest, of peace, of faith, of joy. He asks them, "*Where is your blessing?*" He says, "*If it were possible, you would have torn out your own eyes and given them to me.*" At some point, these people had been thoroughly arrested by God's grace. They perceived vividly what a glorious, heavenly, special teaching Paul's was. They were transformed in heart, soul, and mind.

The apostle now wants them to tell him whether they received this new, heavenly peace in their hearts; this spiritual joy, this exceedingly great confidence, through the false teachers who had dragged them back into bondage under the Law. Paul knew that the members of these congregations in Galatia went about sad and depressed, uncertain of their salvation. They were like under a spell, bewitched.

The Galatians imagined, since salvation was such a great treasure, that they must do something great for it. The teachers who had infiltrated their ranks impressed this on them as their duty, their chore. They regarded their misery as something they should blame themselves for. They didn't understand their unfitness for being perfectly good was just false doctrine that false teachers put on their hearts.

Notice how Paul talks to them in this text. If you want to revive your soul with the Spirit of peace, joy, faith, confidence, and rest – the childlike spirit – if you want Him to take up His abode among you, you must, for God's sake, not look to the Law. If you find yourself stuck and helpless in God's commands,

you don't get to postpone the Gospel to a later time. It's just when you find you cannot succeed under God's Law that the Gospel of God is there to replace it.

- Instead of darkness and remorse, gladness and light.
- Instead of decay and despair, life and rescue.
- Instead of guilt for your crimes and debts, the forgiveness of sins.

The Law does its work and shows us our sins. That is important if we want to see our Savior clearly. But as soon as the Law has done its work, the Gospel must take its place.

Does this Gospel take its place in your heart today? God knows what you would like to ask before you ask it, and He knows you have come to seek Him in order to live. Do you fully believe that your sins are taken away? Do you trust with your whole heart that your life of sin is replaced with His life of perfect obedience? Can you wrap your mind and your heart around the cross?

Or do you tend to add your abilities to God's goodness?

This week, cross your eyes or your eyeglasses with two pieces of tape. Or mark a cross on your writing hand. Or get creative. I want you to literally have a cross somewhere reminding you that no matter how bad things get, you have Jesus. No matter how creative the devil's temptations get, you still have a strong man. No matter how deep your sins have cut your friends and your soul, you still have one who would self-sacrifice for your eternal safety. Keeping our focus there brings everlasting benefits.

In Jesus' name, Amen.