

Paul's Plea as a Pastor



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 19

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 4:12–20; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 1 Corinthians 9:19–23; 2 Corinthians 4:7–12.

MEMORY VERSE: “I make my appeal to you, brothers and sisters. I’m [I am] asking you to become like me. After all, I became like you” (Galatians 4:12, NIV).

AS WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR, PAUL USES STRONG LANGUAGE IN HIS LETTER TO THE GALATIANS. But it just shows the deep emotion (strong feeling) Paul feels about the spiritual welfare of the church that he started. Paul discusses several religious issues. But his letter also shows just how important correct doctrine (church beliefs) is. Suppose what we believe is not that important. Then why would Paul have been so emotional (full of strong feeling) in his letter? Of course, the truth is that what we believe is very important, especially in the whole question of the gospel.

In Galatians 4:12–20, Paul continues his subject. But he changes his approach, at least a bit. Paul has made several intelligent (smart) arguments to let the Galatians know of their errors. And now he makes a more personal, pastoral appeal. False teachers would have no true interest in the Galatians. But Paul shows the true concern, worry, hope, and love of a good shepherd for his backsliding flock. Paul is not just teaching correct doctrine. He is trying to minister (give help) to those whom he loves.

SUNDAY—NOVEMBER 20**THE HEART OF PAUL
(Galatians 4:12–20)**

What is the main point of Paul's message in Galatians 4:12–20?

The first example of the concern that weighs heavily on Paul's heart (mind) is his personal appeal (plea) in verse 12. The appeal comes right after Paul has encouraged the Galatians to "become as I am" (ESV). The meaning of the word *entreat* or *beseech* is not fully explained in some translations. The word in Greek is *deomai*. It can be translated "to urge" (NKJV) or "to plead" (NIV). But the Greek word is stronger (read 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Corinthians 8:4; and 2 Corinthians 10:2). Paul is really saying, "I'm begging you!"

Paul's concern was not just about doctrinal¹ ideas. His heart was tied up with the lives of the people who were brought to Christ through his ministry (work). Paul thought of himself as more than just a friend to these people. He was their spiritual father. And they were his children. But even more than that, Paul felt that his concern for the Galatians was the same as the worry and concern that a mother feels in childbirth (Galatians 4:19). Paul had thought that his past work with them had been enough for their "safe birth" when he started the church. But the Galatians had wandered from the truth. So Paul was experiencing those

"labor pains" all over again in order to make sure that the Galatians' spiritual health was good and safe.

According to Galatians 4:19, what goal did Paul have in mind for the Galatians? What result did he want from all his hard work for them?



Paul uses the example of an unborn child to describe what it means to grow up into the likeness of Christ.

Paul first describes the Galatians as being formed (made) in the womb.² He then speaks of the Galatians as if they are expectant mothers themselves. The word translated as "formed" is used by doctors to explain the growth of an embryo.³ Through this example, Paul describes what it means to be a Christian in a church. To be a follower of Christ is more than just the announcement of faith. It involves a great change into the likeness of Christ. Paul was "not looking for a few small changes in the

1. doctrinal—having to do with church beliefs.

2. womb—the part of the body in a woman in which babies grow before birth.

3. embryo—a baby growing in the womb of a mother in the very early stages of development.

Galatians. Instead, he expected the change to be so great that they would be the same as Christ in character.”⁴ —Adapted from Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1996), page 142.

In what ways has the character of Christ been shown in your life? In what areas do you still have a lot of growing to do?

MONDAY—NOVEMBER 21

THE CHALLENGE TO BECOME (1 Corinthians 11:1)

What is Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9; and Acts 26:28, 29 that is also found in Galatians 4:12? How are we to understand Paul's point?

Several times throughout Paul's letters, he encourages Christians to copy his character. In each situation, Paul gives himself as a good example that believers should follow. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9, Paul offers himself as an example of how the believers in Thessalonica should work to earn their own living and not be a burden on others. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul calls upon the Corinthians to follow his example of putting the welfare of others first. But Paul's concern in Galatians appears to be different.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul does not ask the Galatians to copy him instead.

He asks that they “become as” he is. He is talking about being, not acting. Why? The trouble in Galatia is not an ungodly lifestyle, as in the church in Corinth. The issue in Galatia is rooted in the basis of Christianity itself. It is more about “being” than “behavior [action].” Paul was not saying *act like me*, but *be what I am*. The exact wording in Galatians 4:12 appears in Paul's appeal (plea) to Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:29. Paul writes, “I pray to God for you and all who are listening to me today. I pray that you may *become like me*, except for these chains” (NIV, emphasis given). In other words, Paul is talking about his experience as a Christian. It is a foundation that depends on Christ alone. It is a faith that trusts in what Christ has done for him and not in his works of the law. The Galatians are making their behavior (actions) more important than their being Christians.

Paul does not say how he wants the Galatians to become like him. His letter does not suggest that he wants them to know and copy every part of his life. Paul's concern is with the law-centered religion of the Galatians. So, he has in mind the wonderful love, joy, freedom, and salvation he has found in Jesus Christ. Paul wants to show that Christ is so great, wonderful, and important that everything else is garbage (Philippians 3:5–9). And he wants the Galatians to have that same experience for themselves.

Is there someone you know (other than Jesus) who gives you a

4. character—the way someone thinks, feels, and acts; who someone is.

good example? If so, what are the qualities of that person that you admire? And how can you better imitate (show) those qualities in your life?



Paul's appeal (plea) to King Herod was for Herod to become like Paul, except for the chains.

TUESDAY—NOVEMBER 22

I HAVE BECOME AS YOU ARE (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)

What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 that can help us understand better his point in the latter part of Galatians 4:12? (Read also Acts 17:16–34; 1 Corinthians 8:8–13; and Galatians 2:11–14.)

Galatians 4:12 can seem a little confusing. Why should the Galatians have become like Paul if he had already become like them?

As we learned in yesterday's lesson, Paul wanted the Galatians to

become like him in his complete faith in Christ for salvation. Paul was a Jew. But he spoke about having become like the Galatians. This was a reminder of how he had become a Gentile (non-Jew) "without the law" so that he might reach the Gentiles with the gospel. As the great missionary to the Gentile world, Paul had learned how to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. The gospel remained the same. But Paul's method often changed, depending on the people he was trying to reach.

"Paul was one of the first preachers to communicate the gospel in such a way that it spoke to the people according to their experiences and culture."—Adapted from Timothy George, *The New American Commentary [Explanation]: Galatians* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), page 321.

Paul's own comments in 1 Corinthians 9:21 show that he believed there were limits to how far someone should go in fitting the gospel to people's experiences and needs. For example, Paul says that a person is free to reach out in different ways to Jews and Gentiles. But this freedom does not include the right to live a lawless lifestyle. This is because Christians are under the "law of Christ" (ESV).

Trying to fit the gospel to people's lives is not always easy. "But we always need to stick to the gospel's basic truths without making compromises.⁵ To do this we should follow Paul's style of

5. compromises—the willingness of a person to give up his or her beliefs or principles (important rules) to reach an agreement.

preaching the gospel.”—Adapted from Timothy George, *Galatians*, pages 321, 322.

It is so easy to compromise, is it not? Sometimes the longer that a person is a Christian, the easier it is for him or her to make compromises too. Why might that be so? Search your heart honestly. How much compromise has crept into your life? And what have been the excuses you have made for it? How can you turn this around in areas where you need to?

WEDNESDAY—NOVEMBER 23

THEN AND NOW (Galatians 4:13)

Paul's relationship with the Galatian believers has not always been as difficult and cold as it has now become. Paul remembers the time when he first preached the gospel in Galatia. He gives praises for how well the Galatians treated him. What happened?

According to Galatians 4:13, what event seems to have led to Paul's decision to preach the gospel in Galatia?

It seems clear that Paul at first had not planned to preach the gospel in Galatia. But some kind of illness probably caught up with him on his journey. This disease forced him either to stay longer in Galatia than expected or to travel to Galatia for his recovery. The exact nature of Paul's malady (illness) is a mystery. Some have suggested

that he caught malaria. But Paul spoke about the Galatians' willingness to take out their eyes and give them to him. For this reason, others suggest that it was perhaps an eye disease. Paul's illness may also have been connected to the "thorn in the flesh" he speaks about in 2 Corinthians 12:7–9.

We do not know what Paul was suffering from. But he does tell us it was so unpleasant that it became a hardship for the Galatians. In Bible times illness was often seen as a sign of God's anger and punishment (John 9:1, 2; Luke 13:1–4). Paul's illness easily could have given the Galatians an excuse to turn down both him and his message. But they welcomed Paul wholeheartedly. Why? Because their hearts had been warmed by the preaching of the Cross (Galatians 3:1). And the Holy Spirit led them to accept the gospel. So, what reason could the Galatians give now for their change of attitude?

According to Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 4:7–12; and 2 Corinthians 12:7–10, what might have been God's reasons for letting Paul suffer? How could Paul minister to others when he was struggling with his own problems?

We do not know what Paul's illness was. But it certainly was serious. And it easily could have given him an excuse to blame God for his problems or to just give up on preaching the gospel. But Paul did not do either of these things. Instead of letting his situation get the best of him, Paul

used it as an opportunity to depend more fully on God's grace. "Time and again God has used the hardships of life—sickness, persecution,⁶ poverty,⁷ and natural disasters as opportunities to show His mercy and grace⁸ and as a way of pushing the gospel forward."—Adapted from Timothy George, *Galatians*, pages 323, 324.

How can you learn to let your trials and suffering make you depend more upon the Lord? (What other choices do you have?)



Paul used his sickness to depend more fully on God's grace.

THURSDAY—NOVEMBER 24

SPEAKING THE TRUTH (Galatians 4:16)

What powerful point is Paul making in Galatians 4:16? What experiences have you had that are almost the same? (Read also John 3:19;

Matthew 26:64, 65; and Jeremiah 36:17–23.)

The saying "to speak the truth" often is a negative one, especially in our day and age. It can mean a hard-hitting way of telling someone the facts. It does not matter how unpleasant or unwanted the facts may be. Paul had mentioned his loving concern for the believers in Galatians 4:12–20 and a few other comments throughout his letter (read Galatians 6:9, 10). If it were not for that, we might think that Paul was more interested in the truth of the gospel than love. But we know that Paul was concerned about the Galatians knowing the "truth of the gospel" (read Galatians 2:5, 14) because of his love for them. Who has not experienced in person just how painful it can be to have to scold or punish? For example, parents scold or punish children they love for their own good. We do it because we care about the other person. We do not do it because we want to cause hurt, even though the other person may become hurt or angry at us. We do it because we know it is what the person needs to hear for his or her own good.

In Galatians 4:17–20, what is Paul saying about those whom he is opposing? What else is he challenging besides their knowledge of the gospel?

Paul's gospel was bold and honest.

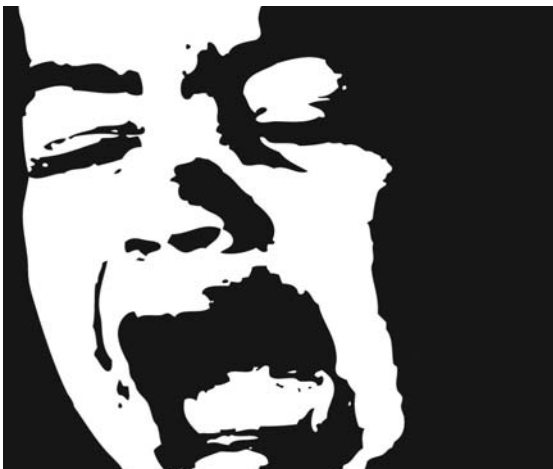
6. persecution—attacks against God's people for their religious beliefs.

7. poverty—without riches; poorness.

8. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

He could make the Galatians very angry. But Paul's enemies were busy courting the favor of the Galatians. They were not doing it out of love for the Galatians but because of their own selfish reasons. It is unclear exactly what Paul means when he says that his enemies "want to shut you out" (ESV) or "take you away" (NIRV). This perhaps shows that his enemies tried to shut the Gentile believers out of the blessings of the gospel until they first were willing to be circumcised.⁹

Think of some time in your life when your words caused someone to be angry with you. What did you learn from the experience that could help you next time you need to tell someone the truth?



Parents scold their children not to cause hurt but because they love them.

FRIDAY—NOVEMBER 25

ADDITIONAL STUDY: "In the Galatian churches, open error was taking over the gospel message. Christ,

the true foundation of the faith, was replaced with the old-time ceremonies of Judaism. Paul saw that if the believers in Galatia were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, he must give the sharpest warnings possible.

"An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn is fitting his work to the condition [way of being] of those whom he tries to help. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are needed. But these are to be used with good judgment. To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under different conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment with the Holy Spirit's leading. . . .

"Paul pleaded with those who had once known the power of God in their lives to return to their first love of gospel truth. With hard-to-beat arguments he offered to them their blessing of becoming free men and women in Christ. Through Christ's forgiving grace, all who make full surrender are clothed with the robe of His righteousness [holiness]. Paul took the position that every soul who would be saved must have a true, personal experience in the things of God.

"Paul's plea was not without fruit. The Holy Spirit did His work with mighty power. Many whose feet had wandered into strange paths returned to their former faith in the gospel. Afterwards they were steadfast in the freedom that Christ had given to them."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles [Teachers]*, pages 385, 386, 388.

9. circumcised—having had the skin (called the foreskin) at the end of the penis of a man or boy cut off.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more deeply about the whole question of suffering and how God can use it. How do we deal with situations in which nothing good seems to have come from suffering?
- ② Think about the idea of Christ being formed (made) in us. What does this mean? How can we know that this is happening to us? How do we keep from being discouraged if it is not happening to us as quickly as we think it should?