

The Heart of Paul



SABBATH—AUGUST 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 [request] to you, brothers and sisters. [I am] asking you to become like me. After all, I became like you” (Galatians 4:12, NIV).



Paul shows the true concern, worry, hope, and love for the Galatians that a good shepherd shows for his flock.

SO FAR, we have seen how Paul uses very strong words to deal with the Galatians. But his strong words point to how deeply he feels about the spiritual well-being of the church he started. Paul's letter to the Galatians shows just how important the correct teachings are. Suppose for a moment that right beliefs and right actions were not important. Then why would Paul have cared so much about these things in his letter? The truth is that, yes, what we believe and what we do matter greatly. And that is especially true of the gospel.

In Galatians 4:12–20, Paul continues his discussion. But now he changes his approach to the topic. Paul has made many arguments to win over the Galatians to his way of thinking. But now he makes a more personal appeal or request. Paul is not like the false teachers who have no true interest in the Galatians. Instead, he shows true concern, worry, hope, and love for them in the way a good shepherd does for his flock. Paul is not just correcting their wrong beliefs. He is serving the people he loves.

THE HEART OF PAUL (Galatians 4:12–20)

Read Galatians 4:12–20. What is the main point of Paul’s message in these verses?

Paul “ask[s]” the Galatians to “become like me [Paul]” (NirV). This appeal shows the concern Paul has for the Galatians. Paul’s concern weighs heavy on his heart. Many translations of this verse do not quite capture the importance and full meaning of the word “ask.” That is too bad, because the meaning of the word is rich. The word in Greek is *deomai*. It can be translated to mean “asking” (NirV). But the Greek word has a stronger meaning. It can contain the meaning of feeling desperate or hopeless. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:20; 2 Corinthians 8:4; and 2 Corinthians 10:2.) So, Paul really is saying, “I am begging you!”

Yet, Paul is concerned about more than correct teachings. His heart is connected deeply to the Galatians. After all, he brought them to Christ. He was their spiritual father. Paul feels that his concern for the Galatians is the same as the worry and pain a mother feels when she gives birth (Galatians 4:19). Paul thought that what he had done already to “give birth” to the Galatians spiritually had been enough. But now they have left the truth. And Paul works hard to make sure they are reborn safely in Christ. So, he experiences “birth pains” for them all over again.

Read Galatians 4:19. What result does Paul want to see from all his “birth pains” in their behalf?

First, Paul describes the Galatians as unborn babies inside their mother. Then he speaks of them as if they were mothers about to give birth. The word “formed” (NKJV), in Galatians 4:19, was used to describe the growth of the unborn child inside its mother. Paul uses this word picture to describe what it means to be Christian. He is saying that it is about more than belief. It involves a complete change. Paul was “not looking for small changes in the Galatians. He wanted changes so big that to see the Galatians would be to see Christ.”—Adapted, Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1966), page 142.

In what ways have you seen Christ shining through your life? In what parts of your life do you still have a lot of growing to do?



Paul uses the word picture of a mother about to give birth to show what it means to be a Christian. It is about more than belief. It is about complete change and a new life.

PAUL'S EXAMPLE (1 Corinthians 11:1)

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

Paul encourages Christians several times in his letters to follow his example. Each time, Paul offers himself as an example of how to live as a Christian. He has the right to point to his own life as an example. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9, Paul tells believers in Thessalonica how they should work. They should earn their own living. They should not be a heavy burden to others. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul asks the Corinthians to follow him in putting God's wishes first. But Paul seems to have a slightly different concern in his letter to the Galatians.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul does not ask the Galatians to *do* what he does. Instead, he asks them to “become like [to be as]” (NIRV) he is. Paul is talking about how to be, not what to do. Why? The trouble in Galatia was not about doing wrong things. (These things were a problem in the church in Corinth.) But in Galatia the problem was about what it meant to be a Christian. It was more about “being” than “doing.” So, Paul is not saying *do what I do*. He is saying *be what I am*. The exact wording Paul uses in Galatians 4:12 also is found in Paul's request to Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:29. There, Paul writes, “I [do not] care if it takes a short time or a long time. 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” (NIRV). Paul's faith and experience rest on what Christ has done for him, not in his own works. So, the Galatians were placing greater value on works than on who they were in Christ.

Paul does not say exactly how he wants the Galatians to copy him. But the situation in his letter shows us Paul did not mean the Galatians were to copy him in every part of his life. What Paul meant was the Galatians should copy his love, joy, freedom, and trust in Jesus to save. To know Jesus is more important than anything (Philippians 3:5–9).

Who else do you know (other than Jesus) who is a good example? What makes this person such a good example? Is it kindness? Joy? Being ready to help others? How can you show more of these good characteristics in your life?



To know Jesus is more important than anything.

“I BECAME LIKE YOU” (Galatians 4:12, NIV)

Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23. What does Paul say in these verses that helps us understand what he means in 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. For example, Paul tells the Galatians to become like him. But why should the Galatians become like Paul when Paul has already become like them?

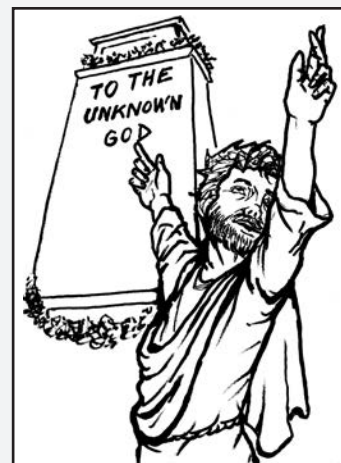
Yesterday, we learned that Paul wanted the Galatians to be like him in his faith and trust in Christ to save. Paul told the Galatians he had become like them. His becoming like them was meant to remind them of how he became a Gentile. Gentiles are non-Jews. And Paul acted as a Gentile, even though he was a Jew. Indeed, he “became” a Gentile so that he could reach the Gentiles with the gospel. Paul was the great missionary to the Gentiles. He had learned to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, 1 Corinthians 9:19–23 tells us that the gospel Paul preached always remained the same. But he used different methods to reach different people.

“Paul was a pioneer. He felt the need to communicate the gospel to others so that it seemed to fit all parts of their lives.”—Adapted, Timothy George, *The New American Commentary [Explanation]: Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), page 321.

Paul’s own words in 1 Corinthians 9:21 show that he believed there were limits to how far someone should go in making the gospel seem to fit all parts of life. For example, a person is free to reach out in different ways to Jews and Gentiles. But this freedom does not include the right to break the law of God. Why? Because Christians are under the “law of Christ” (NLT).

Showing how important the gospel is to every part of life is not always easy. But “we should do what Paul did to show others how the gospel fits all parts of their lives.”—Adapted, Timothy George, *Galatians*, pages 321, 322.

It often is easy to compromise. To compromise means to give in part way to what is wrong and to go against what is right. How have you compromised in your life? What excuses have you made for compromising? And what can you do to change?



Paul used different methods to reach different people.

THEN AND NOW (Galatians 4:13)

Paul's relationship with the Galatians was not always difficult. In his letter, Paul thinks back to the time when he first preached the gospel in Galatia. And he praises the Galatians for how well they treated him. So what happened?

Read Galatians 4:13. What seems to have led Paul to preach the gospel in Galatia?

At first, Paul did not plan to preach the gospel in Galatia at all. But then he got sick. It forced him to stay longer in Galatia. Or maybe he traveled there to get better. We are not sure. Nor do we know what kind of sickness Paul had. Some think Paul had malaria. Malaria is a serious disease that causes fever. The disease is passed from one person to another by mosquito bites. Others think Paul had an eye disease. (They base this idea on the fact that the Galatians offered to pluck out their eyes to give to Paul.) Others believe Paul's sickness may have been connected to the "problem" that "caused pain" in his body (2 Corinthians 12:7, NIV).

Paul's sickness made life difficult for the Galatians. Paul lived in a world where sickness often was thought to be a sign of God's anger (John 9:1, 2; Luke 13:1–4). Paul's sickness could have given the Galatians an excuse to turn away from him and his message. Instead, they welcomed Paul. Why? Because their hearts had been warmed by Paul's preaching of the Cross (Galatians 3:1). So, what reason could they give now for their change of heart?



“God uses the troubles of life to show us His mercy.”

Read Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 4:7–12; and 2 Corinthians 12:7–10. What might have been God's reasons for allowing Paul to suffer? How could Paul help others when he was struggling with his own problems?

Paul's illness was serious. He could have used it as an excuse to blame God. Or he could have given up preaching. But Paul did neither. Instead, he trusted more in God's mercy. “God often uses the troubles of life to show us His mercy. He shows it to us to help spread the gospel.” —Adapted, Timothy George, *Galatians*, pages 323, 324.

How can the troubles in your life and your suffering help you trust more in the Lord?

SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE (Galatians 4:16)

Read Galatians 4:16. What powerful point is Paul making in this verse? How might you have experienced the same thing Paul did? (Read also John 3:19; Matthew 26:64, 65; and Jeremiah 36:17–23.)

The saying “speaking the truth” often has a negative meaning, especially in our time. It can describe someone who speaks the truth, even when it is difficult to do. One might make the mistake of thinking Paul’s interest in the truth of the gospel was the only thing he cared about. Some even might believe Paul did not feel he needed to speak in love. But what Paul says in Galatians 4:12–20 and Galatians 6:9, 10 shows how wrong this thinking is. Yes, Paul wanted the Galatians to know the gospel. But he wanted them to learn about it because he loved them. Have you ever felt pain because you had to punish someone or say something he or she did not want to hear? But you spoke the truth or punished him or her anyway. You did it because you loved the person, not because you wanted to cause pain. At the time we say them, our words may seem to hurt the ones we love. They may be angry at us. But we know they need to hear the truth, even if they do not want to.

Read Galatians 4:17–20. What does Paul say in these verses about the ones he stands up against? He is against their false teachings. What else is he against?

Paul’s attackers tried to turn the Galatians against Paul. These false teachers pretended to be friends with the Galatians. But they did not love them. It is unclear exactly what Paul means when he says his attackers “want to take you away from us” (Galatians 4:17, NIV). Perhaps, Paul meant the attackers wanted to take away the blessings of the truth of the gospel from the Galatian believers.

Think of a time when you spoke the truth and your words caused someone to be angry with you. What did you learn from that experience that could help you the next time you need to speak the truth in love to someone?



Sometimes a person needs to hear the truth, even if he or she seems not to want to listen to it.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “In the Galatian churches, false teachings took the place of the gospel. Christ was the true foundation of the faith. But the Galatians were giving Him up to follow old Jewish traditions. Paul saw that the only way to save the Galatians was to warn them with sharp words.

“Every worker for Christ needs to learn how to meet people right where they are. Paul used this method. Each worker will need to be tender, patient, and firm. But he or she needs to work carefully. It takes great wisdom to know how to deal well with different kinds of people. . . .

“Paul begged the Galatians to return to the gospel truth. Once, it had been their first love. And they had known the power of God in their lives. Paul set before them the blessing of becoming free men and women in Christ through His mercy. Paul believed that all who would be saved must have a true and personal experience with God.

“Paul’s heartfelt words caused many who had wandered away from God to turn back to Him. The Holy Spirit worked in their lives with great power. Then those who once turned away from Christ became loyal to the One who set them free.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White, “Chosen in Christ,” *The Acts of the Apostles [Leaders and Teachers]*, pages 385, 386, 388.



“Every worker for Christ needs to learn how to meet people right where they are.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Think more about the idea of suffering. How do we deal with situations where it seems that nothing good comes from suffering?
- ② What does it mean that Christ is formed, or lives, within us? How can we know if it is happening to us? How do we remain hopeful when it does not seem to happen as quickly as we want?

SUMMARY: Paul made several very strong and powerful arguments for the truth. But now Paul makes a more personal request from the heart. He begs the Galatians to listen to his words of wisdom. He reminds them of the positive relationship they once shared with him. And he reminds them of the deep love and concern he has for them as their spiritual parent.