

Paul's Pastoral Appeal



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gal. 4:12–20, 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, 2 Cor. 4:7–12.*

Memory Text: “Friends, I beg you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are” (*Galatians 4:12, NRSV*).

As we've seen so far, Paul did not mince words with the Galatians. His strong language, however, simply reflected the inspired passion he felt concerning the spiritual welfare of the church that he had founded. Besides the crucial theological issue Paul was dealing with, the letter to the Galatians in a broad sense also shows just how important correct doctrine is. If what we believed were not that important, if doctrinal correctness did not matter all that much, then why would Paul have been so fervent, so uncompromising, in his letter? The truth is, of course, that what we believe matters greatly, especially concerning the whole question of the gospel.

In Galatians 4:12–20 Paul continues his discourse, though he changes his approach, at least a bit. Paul has made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments to persuade the Galatians of their errors, and now he makes a more personal, pastoral appeal. Unlike the false teachers who had no true interest in the Galatians, Paul reveals the genuine concern, hope, and love of a good shepherd for his wayward flock. He was not just correcting theology; he was seeking to minister to those whom he loved.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 26.

The Heart of Paul

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

The initial indication of the concern that weighs heavily on Paul’s heart is his personal appeal in verse 12. The appeal follows immediately after Paul’s insistence that the Galatians “become as I am.” The significance of the word *entreat* or *beseech* is, unfortunately, not fully conveyed in some translations. The word in Greek is *deomai*. Although it can be translated “to urge” (*NKJV*) or “to entreat” (*ESV*), the Greek word has a stronger sense of desperation connected to it (*see 2 Cor. 5:20, 8:4, 10:2*). Paul is really saying, “I’m begging you!”

Paul’s concern, therefore, was not simply about theological ideas and doctrinal points of view. His heart was bound up with the lives of the people who were brought to Christ through his ministry. He considered himself more than just a friend; he was their spiritual father, and they were his children. But even more than that, Paul likens his concern for the Galatians to the worry and anguish that accompany a mother in childbirth (*Gal. 4:19*). Paul had thought that his previous “labor” had been sufficient for their “safe delivery” when he founded the church. But now that the Galatians had wandered from the truth, Paul was experiencing those labor pains all over again in order to secure their well-being.

What goal did Paul have in mind for the Galatians? What result did he want to see from all his “labor” in their behalf? *Gal. 4:19*.

Having first described the Galatians as being formed in the womb, Paul now speaks of the Galatians as if they were expectant mothers themselves. The word translated as “formed” is used medically to refer to the development of an embryo. Through this metaphor Paul describes what it means to be Christian, both individually and collectively as a church. To be a follower of Christ is more than just the profession of faith; it involves a radical transformation into the likeness of Christ. Paul was “not looking for a few minor alterations in the Galatians but for such a transformation that to see them would be to see Christ.”—Leon Morris, *Galatians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 142.

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

The Challenge to Become

Read 1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9; and Acts 26:28, 29. What is Paul saying there that is reflected in Galatians 4:12? How are we to understand his point?

Several times throughout his letters, Paul encourages Christians to imitate his behavior. In each situation, Paul presents himself as an authoritative 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 imitate him in placing the welfare of others first. However, Paul’s concern in Galatians appears to be somewhat different.

In Galatians 4:12, Paul does not ask the Galatians to *imitate* him. Instead, he asks that they “become as” he is—he is talking about being, not acting. Why? The trouble in Galatia was not unethical behavior or an ungodly lifestyle as in the church in Corinth. The issue in Galatia was rooted in the essence of Christianity itself. It was more about “being” than “behavior.” Paul was not saying *act* like me, but *be what I am*. The exact terminology in Galatians 4:12 occurs in Paul’s appeal to Herod Agrippa II in Acts 26:29 (*ESV*), where Paul writes, “I would to God that not only you but also all who hear me this day might *become* such as *I am*—except for these chains” (emphasis supplied). In other words, Paul is referring to his experience as a Christian, a foundation that rests on Christ alone, a faith that trusts in what Christ has done for him and not in his works of the law. The Galatians were placing greater value on their behavior than on their identity in Christ.

Although Paul does not specifically say how he wants the Galatians to become like him, the context of the situation in Galatians indicates it was not a blanket statement that covered every aspect and detail of his life. Because his concern was with the law-centered religion of the Galatians, Paul surely had in mind the wonderful love, joy, freedom, and certainty of salvation he had found in Jesus Christ. In light of the surpassing wonder of Christ, Paul had learned to count everything else as rubbish (*Phil.* 3:5–9)—and he longed for the Galatians themselves to have that same experience.

Is there someone you know (other than Jesus) who sets a good example for you? If so, what are the qualities of that person that you find so exemplary, and how can you better reveal those qualities in your life?

I Have Become as You Are

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

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

As we saw in yesterday’s study, Paul wanted the Galatians to become like him in his complete faith and confidence in the all-sufficiency of Christ for salvation. His comment about having become like them was a reminder of how, although he was a Jew, he had become a Gentile “without the law” so that he might reach the Gentiles among them with the gospel. As the great missionary to the Gentile world, Paul had learned how to preach the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In fact, according to 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, though the gospel remained the same, Paul’s method varied depending on the people he was trying to reach.

“Paul was a pioneer in what we call today contextualization, the need to communicate the gospel in such a way that it speaks to the total context of the people to whom it is addressed.”—Timothy George, *The New American Commentary: Galatians* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), p. 321.

Paul’s own comments in 1 Corinthians 9:21 indicate that he believed there were limits to how far someone should go in contextualizing the gospel. He mentions, for example, that while one is free to reach out in different ways to Jews and Gentiles, this freedom does not include the right to live a lawless lifestyle, for Christians are under the “law of Christ.”

Although contextualization is not always easy, “insofar as we are able to separate the heart of the gospel from its cultural cocoon, to contextualize the message of Christ without compromising its content, we too should become imitators of Paul.”—Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 321, 322.

It’s so easy to compromise, isn’t it? Sometimes the longer one is a Christian, the easier compromise gets, too. Why might that be so? Look at yourself, honestly. How much compromise has crept into your life, and what have been the ways you have justified it? How can you turn this around in areas in which you need to do so?

Then and Now

Paul's relationship with the Galatian believers was not always as difficult and frigid as it has now become. In fact, as Paul reflects on the time when he first preached the gospel in Galatia, he speaks in glowing terms of how well they treated him. What happened?

What event seems to have led to Paul's decision to preach the gospel in Galatia? *Gal. 4:13.*

Apparently it had not been Paul's original intention to preach the gospel in Galatia. Some sort of illness, however, overtook him on his journey, forcing him either to stay longer in Galatia than expected or to travel to Galatia for his recovery. Mystery surrounds the exact nature of Paul's malady. Some have suggested that he contracted malaria. Others (on the basis of Paul's reference to the Galatians' willingness to pluck out their eyes and give them to him) suggest that it was perhaps an eye disease. His illness also may have been connected to the "thorn in the flesh" he mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:7–9.

Whatever Paul was suffering from, he does tell us it was so unpleasant that it became a trial to the Galatians. In a world where illness was often seen as a sign of divine displeasure (*John 9:1, 2; Luke 13:1–4*), Paul's illness easily could have provided the Galatians with an excuse to reject both him and his message. But they welcomed Paul wholeheartedly. Why? Because their hearts had been warmed by the preaching of the Cross (*Gal. 3:1*) and the conviction of the Holy Spirit. What reason could they give now for their change of attitude?

What might have been God's reasons for allowing Paul to suffer? How could Paul minister to others when he was struggling with his own problems? *Rom. 8:28, 2 Cor. 4:7–12, 12:7–10.*

Whatever Paul's illness was, it certainly was serious, and it easily could have provided him with an excuse either to blame God for his problems or simply to give up on preaching the gospel. Paul did neither. Instead of letting his situation get the best of him, Paul used it as an opportunity to rely more fully on God's grace. "Time and again God has used the adversities of life—sickness, persecution, poverty, even natural disasters and inexplicable tragedies—as occasions to display [H]is mercy and grace and as a means to advance the gospel."—Timothy George, *Galatians*, pp. 323, 324.

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

Speaking the Truth

Read Galatians 4:16. What powerful point is Paul making here? In what ways might you yourself have experienced something similar? (See also John 3:19; Matt. 26:64, 65; and Jer. 36:17–23.)

The expression “speaking the truth” often has negative connotations, especially in our day and age when it can be viewed as a hard-hitting, no-holds-barred, spare-no-enemies tactic of telling someone the facts, no matter how unpleasant or unwanted they may be. If it were not for Paul’s comments in Galatians 4:12–20 and a few other comments scattered throughout his letter (see Gal. 6:9, 10), one might mistakenly conclude that Paul’s interest in the truth of the gospel outweighed any expression of love. Yet, as we’ve seen, though Paul was concerned about the Galatians knowing the “truth of the gospel” (see Gal. 2:5, 14), that concern arose because of his love for them. Who hasn’t experienced personally just how painful it can be to have to chastise someone or, in plain terms, speak truths to him or her that—for whatever reason—he or she doesn’t want to hear? We do it because we care about the person, not because we want to cause hurt, though at times the immediate effect of our words is hurt or even anger and resentment against us. We do it anyway, because we know it is what the person needs to hear, no matter how much he or she might not want to do so.

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

In contrast to the candor of Paul’s gospel, by which he risked the possible ire of the Galatians, his opponents were actively courting the favor of the Galatians—not out of love for the Galatians but out of their own selfish motives. It is unclear exactly what Paul means when he says that his opponents “want to shut you out,” (Gal. 4:17, *ESV*) though this perhaps refers to an attempt to shut them out of the privileges of the gospel until they first submit to circumcision.

Think of some incident when your words, however truthful and needed, caused someone to be angry with you. What did you learn from the experience that could help you next time you need to do something similar?

Further Thought: “In the Galatian churches, open, unmasked error was supplanting the gospel message. Christ, the true foundation of the faith, was virtually renounced for the obsolete ceremonies of Judaism. The apostle saw that if the believers in Galatia were saved from the dangerous influences which threatened them, the most decisive measures must be taken, the sharpest warnings given.

“An important lesson for every minister of Christ to learn is that of adapting his labors to the condition of those whom he seeks to benefit. Tenderness, patience, decision, and firmness are alike needful; but these are to be exercised with proper discrimination. To deal wisely with different classes of minds, under varied circumstances and conditions, is a work requiring wisdom and judgment enlightened and sanctified by the Spirit of God. . . .

“Paul pleaded with those who had once known in their lives the power of God, to return to their first love of gospel truth. With unanswerable arguments he set before them their privilege of becoming free men and women in Christ, through whose atoning grace all who make full surrender are clothed with the robe of His righteousness. He took the position that every soul who would be saved must have a genuine, personal experience in the things of God.

“The apostle’s earnest words of entreaty were not fruitless. The Holy Spirit wrought with mighty power, and many whose feet had wandered into strange paths, returned to their former faith in the gospel. Henceforth they were steadfast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free.”—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 385, 386, 388.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Dwell more on the whole question of suffering and how God can use it. How do we deal with situations in which nothing good appears to have come from suffering?
- 2 Meditate on the idea of Christ being formed in us. What does this mean in practical terms? How can we know that this is happening to us? How do we keep from being discouraged if it’s not happening as quickly as we think it should?

Summary: Having made a number of detailed and theologically sophisticated arguments, Paul now makes a more personal and emotional appeal to the Galatians. He begs them to listen to his counsel, reminding them of the positive relationship they once shared and of the genuine love and concern he has for them as their spiritual parent.

Innocently Jailed: Part 2

Every day the police questioned Prabha. They beat her hands and woke her in the middle of the night for further interrogations. They questioned Prabha's brothers and mother, trying to find some thread that would incriminate her. How long had she planned this robbery? Where had she hidden the gold and rupees?

Prabha begged her family's gods to help and promised to shave her head if they would free her, but nothing happened. The questioning continued, and Prabha grew more weary.

One night as she slept on the cement floor, she dreamed that a man in white touched her and told her to not be afraid. "I am with you," He promised. "Soon you will be free."

"Who are you?" Prabha asked the man. "I am Jesus," He answered.

The next day the police questioning continued. But this time when they beat her, instead of crying she prayed, "Jesus, if You are the true God, please help me." Two hours later she was released from prison, but she had to return the next day for further questioning.

Every day Prabha went to the police station. If they had a new clue, they questioned her about it. If they caught a thief, they called her to identify him. This continued for more than a year.

Prabha remembered her dream, and she and her family began attending a Christian church. One day a Seventh-day Adventist lay member visited Prabha's home. He offered to teach them more about Jesus. When he told them about the Sabbath, Prabha's brothers challenged him.

"Why do Christians worship on Sunday if the Bible commands them to worship on Sabbath?" The Adventist explained that the Sabbath was established at Creation, affirmed in the Ten Commandments, and honored by Jesus, even after His death.

A few weeks later the Adventist invited Prabha's family to attend evangelistic meetings. They agreed and invited some friends. Following the meetings Prabha and her family were baptized.

Soon after Prabha's baptism the thieves who had killed Ma were arrested. The police asked her to identify them. In an ironic twist, the families of the thieves asked Prabha and her family to pray for their imprisoned husbands. The thieves served only one year in prison. Six of the eight accepted Jesus as their Lord, and one is now a lay preacher. The two thieves who refused to become Christians died violent deaths.

Good came from Prabha's troubles. Her family found Jesus; thieves were converted; and Prabha now serves as a Bible worker.

PRABHA MAMIDI lives in Vizianagaram, India, where she continues to serve God.

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *Galatians 4:12*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Describe how Paul’s letter to the Galatians moved from scriptural argument to one based on personal appeal.

Feel: Appreciate the emotional plea that Paul made as a pastor, sharing his anxieties and reminding the Galatians of their shared experiences.

Do: Resolve to benefit not only from our leaders’ spiritual insights but also from their human love and concern, and support them in turn.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Double Appeal

- Ⓐ Why did Paul make both a theological and a personal appeal?
- Ⓑ Why would sharing his ministerial anxieties help the Galatians realize the seriousness of their crisis?

II. Feel: Pastoral Anxiety

- Ⓐ How did relating their shared history help Paul evoke earlier memories of important lessons?
- Ⓑ Why might Paul’s arguing, pleading, and agonizing awaken a heartfelt revival of relationship, as well as an intellectual assent to truth?
- Ⓒ How did Paul contrast his passionate concern for the church’s well-being with the false teachers’ desires to court favor?

III. Do: Loving, Though Uncomfortable, Truth

- Ⓐ How can we be open to lessons that chide and upbraid us, as well as those that encourage and uplift us?
- Ⓑ How can we, like Paul, use relationships as platforms for sharing truth, even when it is uncomfortable?
- Ⓒ How can we support those who might have gone through spiritual “childbirth” on our behalf?

► **Summary:** After strong spiritual argument, Paul made an emotional appeal to the Galatians to remain in the gospel of grace.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: The gospel we preach should be the gospel we live. There is nothing quite as irresistible as a Christian thoroughly in love with Jesus Christ and committed to the salvation of lost human beings.

Just for Teachers: Discuss the social reality in which much of the world finds itself today, a reality in which words and deeds rarely come together to give a clear picture of who people really are.

Talkers abound. One need only turn on the radio, watch the television, or surf the Internet to discover a retinue of talking heads who are only too happy to opine about the latest hot-button issue. Financial analysts feel qualified to decry the state of the education system. Politicians say one thing when seeking election, then do the opposite once in office, all the while accepting thinly veiled bribes from special interests.

And then there are those who on national airwaves spew up words and antics calculated to breed hatred. The world seems to be awash in a torrent of meaningless blather—people totally out of their depth who nevertheless continue on undaunted.

Like a military commander depositing stealth fighters behind enemy lines, God drops the Christian into the din of empty talk to live and speak the gospel. What amazing love for a fallen world.

Consider This: Ask the class to come up with a list of the “big talkers” who dominate the media. What is it that keeps them in the news? Why do they have an audience? Are their core messages positive or negative? Finally, do they live what they spew?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: As you explore this week’s commentary, the class will take a close look at Paul’s personal obedience to God, his willingness to sacrifice to see Christ formed in believers, and his emotional efforts to get them to choose Christ. Paul’s heart for the lost is positively inspiring.

Bible Commentary

I. Reaching the Heart Through a Living Faith (Read 1 Corinthians 9:19–23, Acts 14:1–26, and Galatians 4:12 with your class.)

Tuesday’s study treats us to an exploration of one of the most important aspects of sharing truth: truth that is contextualized for the people with whom it is shared has the best chance of reaching the heart. Paul’s understanding of this reality led him to “become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (*1 Cor. 9:22, NIV*).

In spite of his noble desire to lead others to Jesus, Paul does not approach his task carelessly, especially as it relates to his understanding of God’s law and civic legal codes. There is a reason for Paul’s strict adherence to a personal code of conduct that is above reproach. While Paul and Barnabas were ministering in Iconium—with great success—“the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren” (*Acts 14:2, NKJV*). The multitude of the city became so divided that “part sided with the Jews, and part with the apostles” (*Acts 14:4, NKJV*).

The apostle Paul could not afford to be reckless in the way he lived his faith. For one, his enemies kept close tabs on him; but more than that, Paul’s desire was to please God first and foremost.

Consider This: Ask someone in the class to read Luke 15:1–10. Note the fact that Jesus faced spurious attacks when attempting to do good to those on the margins of society during His day. Ask: In what ways did Paul’s contextualization of the gospel mirror Christ’s? In what ways did it differ?

II. Whatever It Takes (*Review Galatians 4:19, John 3:3, and Colossians 1:27 with your class.*)

Paul used the metaphor of childbirth to make the point that he had endured, as it were, the pangs of childbirth in order to bring these people to Christ. But as they contemplated returning to a legalistic form of the faith, the process of “birthing” them would have to begin again. Paul is no doubt echoing the language of Jesus as He spoke to Nicodemus (*see John 3*).

The apostle persisted in the Galatian outreach because he wanted Christ to be fully formed in them and reign in their hearts (*Gal. 2:20*). As Wednesday’s study makes clear, Paul presses through personal illness to complete his task. In his letter to the Colossians, he again uses the language and metaphor of maternity to make clear that Christ’s being formed in us represents humanity’s only “hope of glory” (*Col. 1:27*).

Consider This: Explore the concept of spiritual growth with your class. What does the life of a Christian look like once Christ begins to be formed within? What changes? What stays the same? Why was Paul so motivated to help the Galatian believers come to a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ as their only Source of salvation? What did Paul’s

life look like after Christ was “birthed” in his heart? How might this change in his own life, and the corresponding freedom it brought, have been the driving force behind Paul’s desire to see others experience the same?

III. Closing the Deal (*Read Galatians 4:16 and 2 Corinthians 1 and 2 with your class.*)

Emotional appeals are one of the truly distinguishing characteristics of the apostle Paul. At a time when many ministers of the gospel shy away from making sermonic appeals, Paul’s “naked” appeals seem out of step. To be sure, emotions can be played like an instrument, and many religious leaders have mastered the trade, but Paul is not being insincere.

In Galatians 4:16, Paul, a close friend of the Galatian believers, risked that friendship in an effort to help them “see” Christ through the haze of legalism that had enveloped them. “Are you angry at me because I tell you the truth?” he’d say in today’s parlance.

Paul’s appeal to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians 1 and 2 is even more disquieting. His ministerial authority challenged, Paul wrote: “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you” (*2 Cor. 2:4, NKJV*).

Paul’s love for those he wanted to come to know Christ underpinned his appeals and made them effective.

Consider This: Why are some Christians afraid to put their “hearts” on the line as they reach out to others? Some cultures are more reserved than others. What role should cultural norms play in the way we appeal to men and women on behalf of Christ?

► **STEP 3—Apply**

Just for Teachers: Encourage your students to answer the personal inventory questions below. Allow time for those who may wish to share their responses.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ How did you come to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Was it through the encouragement of a friend, a great sermon that convicted your heart, or an appeal that you simply could not resist? What “hooked” you and made you want to give your life to Jesus?
- ❷ Paul often faced rejection in his efforts to win souls to Christ. Does the fear of rejection stop you from sharing your faith? How do you plan to overcome it?

Application Question:

❶ Second Corinthians 5:20 states: “Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (*NKJV*). What specific gifts or talents do you possess that God can use to plead for others through you?

Questions for Witnessing:

❶ It is obvious that a chorus of contradictory voices was confusing the Galatian believers. If not, Paul would not have gone to such great pains to explain the law and the ways in which it complements faith in Jesus Christ. What unique challenges does the “chattering class” of our day present for the Christian attempting to share God’s gospel?

❷ How do we strike the correct balance between building relationships with those we wish to see saved and telling them the truth? What role does the Holy Spirit play in the process?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: Distribute slips of paper to the class, and ask them to write one or two sentences detailing how we should appeal to the people mentioned in the following scenarios:

1. An often-inebriated man wanders by your church each Sabbath because he knows that he’s sure to get a hot meal, and some members will give him money. He never comes to church for any of the services. How should the church respond?

2. Sarah has visited your church several times. She is attentive during the services and has even purchased a Bible for the first time so that she can follow along with the minister. Everyone wonders when she’ll give her heart to Jesus and become baptized, but your minister rarely makes appeals. When he does, he seems uncomfortable and rushes to end it. How would you go about appealing to Sarah?

3. A close friend of yours has been cheating on her taxes for years. She looks for all the loopholes to save money, but she also goes over the line. She sometimes jokes about it with you and justifies her behavior by saying, “It’s my money anyway. All the government does is waste it.” How would you go about helping her to see that this behavior is wrong? Would you bring God into the mix, or just address her from the legal perspective—that she is breaking the law? Explain.