

**Galatians:
Commentary
Galatians 4:12-20**

Until this point, Paul has been arguing for the heart of the Gospel. Now, he begins to instruct them to behave in alignment with those beliefs.

12

Brothers,

While in earlier passages Paul gently-but-firmly chastised the Galatians by describing them as "foolish," here he is deliberate to again use this term of inclusion so they would appreciate the co-identification. What will follow is not merely a prescriptive remedy provided from an objective consultant, but a heartfelt exhortation from who leads from a position of family.

I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

Paul's appeal is in fact a plea, given in the voice of a command. The command is for the Galatians to imitate him, an exhortation that he consistently gave to new believers (cf. [1 Cor. 11:1](#); [Phil. 3:17](#); [1 Thess. 1:6](#)). However, here, Paul's plea is not Christ-centric, but interestingly self-centric. He is emphasizing his willingness to completely embrace the Galatians for the cause of Christ. He exemplified the missionary principle of contextualization to "become one" with the people to be able to identify with them experientially. In so doing, he is able to authentically and authoritatively present his appeal to accordingly embrace the freedom in Christ that he himself enjoys and is available to them through God's grace.

You did me no wrong.

This simple statement of fact is widely discussed, with some suggesting Paul is offering forgiveness for the Galatians' offense of pursuing the law in the face of grace, while others argue that Paul's quill dripped with the ink of sarcasm. Yet, the following two verses argue for a straightforward interpretation that Paul is merely reflecting to the sincerity and kindness of the Galatians' reception of the missionary upon his arrival.

13-14

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.

As contentious as the previous sentence is the dispute regarding Paul's "bodily ailment." Scholars have opined that Paul's plight could have been sexual temptation, physical consequences resulting from his missionary zeal (and its subsequent persecutions), malaria, epilepsy, or ophthalmia (suggested by the author's ocular metaphor in the next verse).

While the diagnosis is undetermined, the details remain significant. Paul's condition was serious enough that it unavoidably inconvenienced those with whom he interacted. Isolation or castigation would have been predictable and even culturally acceptable, especially given the prevalence of religious practices and societal norms that typically considered affliction as evidence of wrongdoing and just cause for quarantine or segregation.

Yet this was not the Galatians' response. They judged him not by his outward appearance, but instead received him in kind to the content of his message. To him (and theologically, to also God Himself), in welcoming him and God's gospel of grace, they welcomed Jesus into their company.

15

What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

Yet, this original hospitality has "gone missing." Originally, their receptivity was much greater than merely accommodating Paul, but so generous that Paul describes it in magnificently generous terms (and leading some scholars to reason that Paul's off-putting condition was vision-related).

"Blessedness" is alternatively translated "happiness" or "joy" in other versions. The significance for Paul is that their original response to him (and the gospel) was not coincidental, nor was it attributable to the hospitable nature of the Galatians. Rather, Paul was demonstrating that the expected response to those who receive the gospel is abiding joy - a restful, peace-filled, state of being that reflected having reconciliation with God and therefore able to overlook, overcome, or intentionally disregard the relatively unimportant matters of life that before had been cause for division or even derision.

16

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Now, though, the relational climate has apparently cooled, and the cause for the change is Paul's unwillingness to compromise the truth of grace. Paul's rhetoric brings to attention the timeless tension that people have constructed between love and truth. Man has constructed a false dichotomy that one must always defer to the other. Paul argues otherwise. Love is fully realized in the proclamation of truth and truth can only be accurately presented in the context of love. Love without truth is not love at all, no more than truth without love is at all true. Paul's grasp of this has put him at odds with those who originally received him with warmth and even sacrificial goodness. His response is to re-engage rather than flee, and make every effort to bring clarity to what has confused them.

17

They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

"They" is Paul's redirected attention back to the Judaizers responsible for the Galatians' calamities. Paul's assessment of the Judaizers is offered in the context of his rhetorical question regarding his commitment of truth expressed in the context of love. The unfiltered truth was that the attention given to the Galatians by the Judaizers, while impressive, was neither selfless nor benevolent, despite appearances. Rather, their desire was to "steal" the Galatians from the fellowship of Christians so the Judaizers could control them with their insistence upon traditional and legal burdens. The former community worshipped Jesus and responded to God's Holy Spirit. The latter worshipped the law as salvific and responded to carnal authorities.

18

It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you,

Paul offers himself as a counter-consideration against the Judaizers, explaining that like they, he "made much" of them. Unlike the legalists, though, Paul contends that his motive is good. Whereas the Judaizers sought to manipulate the Galatians to subdue the Believers under their legal and traditional oppression, Paul sought to draw them in to the community of grace-based faith. The goodness of Paul's efforts is intrinsic, independent of his ongoing presence; whereas the Judaizers' malicious intent is evidenced by their need to remain present to enforce their control.

19 - 20

my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul culminates this section of his appeal by embellishing his relational emphasis with the Galatians. Not only are they "brothers" in a shared faith, he continues to consider them his children in this shared faith. He maintains a paternal sense of stewardship over them, with a fatherly interest in seeing their spiritual development come to fulness. Interestingly, though, Paul uses a maternal analogy to convey the extent to which he personally identifies with the controversy overwhelming the Galatians. Paul compares his original evangelism of his audience to childbirth - the labor and delivery to see these "spiritual children" come to new life in Christ. Now, he has re-entered this laborious effort to preserve what had been accomplished in his original effort.

Profoundly, Paul projects his metaphor upon the Galatians themselves, declaring that his labor only ends when the indwelling presence of Jesus is found in them. It is not enough for him to merely have communicated the gospel, but that to those who receive Jesus, he desires to see the marks of Jesus which always faithfully accompany true conversion.

Paul makes clear his desire is to be present with the Galatians. If he were able to be with them, he could show them that his intent is not merely to rebuke or chastise, but to lovingly shepherd them to truth away from the harmful doctrines of the wolves seeking to lure them into spiritual oppression. Clearly, his concern for them matches the depth of the troubles in which they find themselves.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 4:12-20 - When Love Hurts

Small Group Member Guide

Start the conversation

When in your past have you heard a "tough love" message from someone you trusted and respected? Who was the person? Did you take the message well, or poorly? Why did they tell you? What was the outcome of this conversation?

First Meeting (Galatians 4:12-14)

What do you think Paul meant for the Galatians to become like him because he had become like them? How had he done this? Why do you think he had done this?

What do you think might have been Paul's original "condition"? What is significant to you about the Galatians' original reception of Paul? Why did they receive him this way?

What can you apply from this original meeting to your own efforts of starting intentional, gospel-driven relationships?

Tough Love (Galatians 4:15-17)

What does Paul say here that shows he's not coddling them any further?

Why do you think people sometimes "turn" on the same people they adored in the past, once this person confronts them with a "tough love" message of truth?

How does what Paul says in verse 17 give the Galatians a corrected, but accurate view of the Judaizers?

What are some examples of "modern Judaizers"? Why do you think people this way continue to have success? How is what they do a sad contradiction to Paul's "tough love"?

Parental Instincts (Read Galatians 4:18-20)

How do you see Paul's goodness expressed to the Galatians by what he reminds them of in verse 18?

How is Paul's revisitation to the Galatians through this letter like a mother's return to childbirth?

To Paul, what is the marker of authenticity that he seeks in them? What does verse 20 show us about his motives?

What are some principles we can employ in our own efforts to "gestate" relationships that will result in people being born again with a saving faith in Jesus?

Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 4:12-20 in the Week ahead

Day 1

Thank God for the person who shared with you the "tough love" message that apart from Jesus, you were lost. Ask God to bless that person and also to increase in you the same faith that boldly and lovingly takes the Gospel to others.

Day 2

What are the things in your life that you are quick to use as your excuses for not sharing your life in faith with others? What are your insecurities or your shortcomings that isolate or inhibit you? Ask God's Spirit to encourage you to reject a spirit of fear, and to empower you to imitate Paul who by faith shared Christ unhindered by his own limitations.

Day 3

Who has God put in your life who needs to hear a "tough love" message? Who do you know that is stumbling through life without the saving grace of Jesus? Which Christ-followers in your life aren't living consistently? Pray for them today. Before you speak in humility with them, ask God to reveal sin in you that compromises your own consistency. Commit today to talk with your friends humbly but confidently so that Christ may be glorified.

Day 4

Scottsdale Bible offers numerous age-graded ministry that is led by people who are selflessly giving their time and wisdom to the generation that follows. Ask God to continue to bless these efforts, and to multiply our reach to the emerging generations who are not yet part of the family of God through Jesus.

Day 5

As missionaries to our communities, we contend for souls against a variety of forces and influences that, like the Judaizers, offer false hope of righteousness through a strict code of behavior or adhering to vain traditions. Pray for God's Spirit to move strongly against false gods, and to reveal to the people we strive to reach the powerlessness of these enemies of grace. Seek to speak wisely with your loved ones, that God will supernaturally grace your words to influence their understanding.

Day 6

Scottsdale Bible is entering its season of opportunities to invite others to a range of different events that will introduce people to the community of faith and the grace of Jesus. Commit today to participate and to bring others. Share what was freely shared with you. Ask God to go before you and give you favor with your friends, and that the bridge being built will eventually bear the weight of the gospel.

Family Talk

Gather the family around the table and explain "tough love" as the brave willingness of a person to communicate a message that may be awkward or uncomfortable so that the person being addressed can ultimately benefit from what is being discussed.

Ask

When have you had a "tough love" conversation?

Who was involved?

What was discussed?

What was the result?

How could the outcome have been different? Why didn't this different outcome happen?

Read Galatians 4:16-20. Explain the "they" as the Judaizers and their false gospel.

Say Paul had to have a "tough love" conversation with the Galatians.

Discuss the passage to show Paul's loving concern for his "spiritual children," and how we must sometimes speak against real enemies to show our loving concern to our friends.

Ask

Who has God put into our lives who we can love and share with?

Close by giving each person a chance to mention someone by name. Pray for those mentioned and over the specific challenges they are facing. Ask God to grace each of you with humility and insight that God may use you to draw others to Himself.

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 4:12-20 - When Love Hurts

Small Group Leader Guide

Prepare: Things to do before your small group convenes

- **Think** back to people who courageously but lovingly had a "tough love" conversation with you. Maybe it was a parent who talked with you about choices you were making. Perhaps it was a teacher or a coach who talked with your about study or practice habits. Maybe it was a friend who called you out to help make an important correction at that moment in your life. **Open your preparation time in prayer**, thanking God for putting people in your life who cared for you enough to lovingly speak truth into your life without compromise.
- **Review** Galatians 4:12-20 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to open your eyes to see opportunity to share His love and truth with others, that you might also live by faith. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Read** the provided [commentary on Galatians](#) 4:12-20. **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point - What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? (Galatians 4:16, ESV)

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Consider the context that brought Paul to the Galatians, and the way in which he was received.

Identify how the Galatians were changed by the influence of the Galatians.

Apply the principles found in this passage to life, both as an audience of truth and as tellers of truth.

Leader Guide Key:

Blue - hyperlinks to other resources

Red - Reading prompts

Green - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Start the conversation

When in your past have you heard a "tough love" message from someone you trusted and respected? Who was the person? Did you take the message well, or poorly? Why did they tell you? What was the outcome of this conversation?

After group participants have had an opportunity to share their experiences,

Say

These "tough love" conversations are necessary from time to time. And this is where we find Paul in his address to the Galatians. Beginning with this passage, Paul now instructs these new believers in regard to their conduct, and offers himself as an identifiable example for them to imitate.

Open in prayer for your time together.

First Meeting (Galatians 4:12-14)

Ask

What do you think Paul meant for the Galatians to become like him because he had become like them? How had he done this? Why do you think he had done this?

Paul wanted the Galatians to experience the same freedom in Jesus he enjoyed through grace. He had never presented himself in the way the Judaizers had presented themselves...as "religious authorities" who had come in to fix them. Rather, he de-emphasized his differences and instead emphasized his similarities to the people to whom he was evangelizing. In this deliberate contextualization, the Galatians had been able to focus on the grace of Jesus rather than be distracted by Paul or to wrongly revere him.

What do you think might have been Paul's original "condition"? What is significant to you about the Galatians' original reception of Paul? Why did they receive him this way?

Refer to the commentary for considerations of Paul's original "condition." The significance was that Paul didn't arrive to them as a powerful figure full of charisma. In fact, there was every excuse to reject or dismiss Paul. Yet, they received him as a messenger of God, or even as though they were receiving Jesus Himself. They received him in this manner because he was empty of himself, instead glorifying Jesus.

What can you apply from this original meeting to your own efforts of starting intentional, gospel-driven relationships?

We should not be overly concerned about our own shortcomings or limitations. While we may have several imperfections, infirmities, or impediments that might tempt us to withdraw or feel unusable, God's grace is greater and His plan includes you. Our mindset should be devoid of self, and full of confidence that we have sufficient points of commonality with those with whom we are given to share God's love in Christ.

Tough Love (Galatians 4:15-17)

Say

Because the Galatians are so able to identify with Paul, he has earned the ability to speak a message of "tough love" to them.

Ask

What does Paul say here that shows he's not coddling them any further?

Paul clearly declares that things have changed. He states they used to be full of "blessedness" or "joy," insinuating that their attitude or expression toward him is markedly different. He states that originally, they responded in a way that was consistent with the Spirit of God - self-sacrificially. Now, though, he must rhetorically ask if he suddenly is their enemy because he unwaveringly confronts them in truth.

Why do you think people sometimes "turn" on the same people they adored in the past, once this

person confronts them with a "tough love" message of truth?

While answers will vary, it is worth reminding that our flesh always resists the Spirit of God. The natural response to truth (and there is no truth apart from God's truth) is to proudly defend self, and an anticipatable way this happens is for the person to make an enemy out of the one who confronts, rather than to continue to receive this person as God's messenger.

How does what Paul says in verse 17 give the Galatians a corrected, but accurate view of the Judaizers?

Paul explains that he understands the temptation to be in awe of the impressive authority of the Judaizers. Yet, he clarifies that their intent is not to draw them closer to God, but to withdraw them from the community of Christ-followers and instead gather them to themselves into a return to subservience and legalism. The Judaizers' aim is to strengthen their grip upon the spiritual allegiance of the Galatians. Paul, on the other hand, seeks to empower the Galatians to live in spiritual freedom.

What are some examples of "modern Judaizers" Why do you think people this way continue to have success? How is what they do a sad contradiction to Paul's "tough love"?

While there are no shortage of examples of modern Judaizers, they continue to see success in their divisive efforts because people by nature seek answers apart from God's grace. They desire anything that self-justifies or doesn't require full surrender to Jesus. These legalistic systems are the opposite of "tough love" because they are not "tough" even though their standards may be difficult, nor is it love. It is a system unable to save or succeed, and only leads to destruction, even though it deceptively lures people toward an illusory oasis of righteousness that will never be realized.

Parental Instincts (Read Galatians 4:18-20)

Say

Paul rounds out this passage by talking to the Galatian believers like the spiritual children that to him they are.

Ask

How do you see Paul's goodness expressed to the Galatians by what he reminds them of in verse 18?

Paul reminds them that he, like the Galatians, doted on them attentively while he was with them. Yet, his care for them continues even though he is no longer with them and he has nothing to personally gain from their continued fidelity to the Gospel he extended to them. This is vastly different from the Judaizers, who had maintained a presence among the Galatians, in order to maintain their power and control over them.

Ask

How is Paul's revisitation to the Galatians through this letter like a mother's return to childbirth?

Paul's original effort to evangelize Galatia was like a spiritual gestation that resulted in the birth of new believers. Like a mother, Paul willingly returned to that arduous work in order to see his spiritual progeny not be derailed by the Judaizers' false gospel.

To Paul, what is the marker of authenticity that he seeks in them? What does verse 20 show us about his motives?

Paul seeks the marker of an authentic faith in Jesus alone as the evidence of their safety. Verse 20 makes clear his motives are love and concern.

What are some principles we can employ in our own efforts to "gestate" relationships that will result in people being born again with a saving faith in Jesus?

Like Paul, we should not compromise the truth of God's love in Jesus. We should make every effort to keep Jesus central to our effort, and to not gather people to become enamored with our knowledge or to develop a misdirected reverence for us as a spiritual authority. Our relationships should be marked by love and concern, efforts that continue even when the others have nothing to offer us personally.

Say

There are people all around you who have many ways to "identify with you." Maybe you share a family name. Maybe you share a workplace. Perhaps you share an interest. Maybe you have similar backgrounds. But because of Jesus, you are different. God desires that you use what you have in common, in the context of love and concern, so that they may join you in being a child of God through faith, in the grace of Jesus.

Let's close in prayer:

Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important.

Encourage your group to use the "Continue in grace" resources (below and on the Group Members Page) on their own or with their family, to extend the small group experience into the week. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!

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