



## Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM LABOR PAINS GALATIANS 4:12-20 •

### MAIN POINT

Through Christ, we live under the gospel, not the law.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What is the best compliment you have ever received?**

**Have you ever heard a back-handed compliment?**

**What is the proper way to give a compliment? What is the wrong way to give a compliment?**

Compliments can be given for good reasons and bad reasons. Some people use compliments to further their own purposes and for personal gain. Paul said this about the Judaizers in Galatians 4 who were trying to use complimentary language to entrench false teaching and keep people in bondage to the law.

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 4:12-14.

**How would you describe Paul's relationship with the Galatians?**

**What does Paul mean when he asks the Galatians to "become like me," and how does this relate to his statement that he "became like" them?**

**How does Paul describe the way the Galatians treated him when he first preached to them, despite his bodily illness?**

**Why does Paul mention his physical condition, and what does this reveal about the Galatians' attitude toward him at the time?**

The people Paul addresses here were the Judaizers, a group of false teachers who claimed that keeping parts of the law were necessary for salvation. Paul had an established relationship with the Galatian church. They had taken care of him during an ailment. Paul did not want the Galatians to be fooled into believing a false gospel by Judaizers who were complimenting them.

The Judaizers were making much of the Galatians to get them to follow their teachings. Paul felt a deep pain seeing his friends get mixed up in false teachings. Paul would not let this happen.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 4:15-20.

**How had false teachings influenced the Galatians? Describe Paul's response to this turn of events.**

**Why did Paul ask in verse 16 whether he was now an enemy of the Galatian believers? What concern did he express in regard to their relationship with the legalistic Judaizers? How was this more than mere partisan rivalry and jealousy?**

**In verses 17-20, who are "they"? What did Paul mean when he said they "make much of you"? What were these false teachers saying to the Galatians?**

**Why was Paul upset with the Judaizers complimenting the Galatians? What was their motive?**

**What was the end goal of the Judaizers?**

"They" in verse 17 refers to the Judaizers who were trying to convince the Galatians that Paul was a liar and their enemy. The Judaizers wanted to drive a wedge between these believers and Paul. They wanted to win the believers' allegiance to themselves and to their belief of works-righteousness. Paul's concern for the Galatian believers would continue until Christ was "formed in them (v. 19)." As we mature in our faith, we are transformed as

the nature and character of Jesus are developed in us. The Judaizers' legalistic teaching threatened to stunt that development.

**How does a relationship with God based on performance and keeping the rules take the joy out of the Christian life? How can we cultivate an ongoing enthusiasm for godliness and the things of God?**

We can progressively become more like Jesus, but only as we continue to grow in our faith. Christian growth begins with our relationship with Jesus. When we place our faith in Him for salvation, we become members of His family. He has set us free from the sins and laws that formerly kept us in bondage. We grow if we do not fall back into slavery to these things. As we grow in faith, we will become more and more like Jesus in our attitudes and character.

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are ways that Christians are tempted to still live under the law?**

**How can our church teach grace in a way that seeks out the good of others?**

**What might happen if we taught the gospel for our own gain?**

**How might we as a group help each other to stay focused on the gospel? How might we help each other live according to the grace we have received in Christ?**

## PRAYER

Close your time in prayer, thanking God for making us children of the free woman, children of the promise. Pray that your group would encourage one another for their good. Pray that the gospel would permeate everything that you do.

## COMMENTARY

| GALATIANS 4:12-20

4:12. This passage opens a window for us into Paul's pastoral heart. When the apostle pleaded with the Galatians to become like him, he was referring to his life of faith as opposed to their observance of Jewish rituals and regulations (see Gal. 2:20). Paul wanted

the Galatians to experience the same kind of freedom in Christ that he knew. From the time Paul had met Christ, he had realized that rabbinic traditions and ceremonial law were not necessary steps to knowing God.

Paul became like his audience in order to win them to Christ. Through such cultural accommodations, however, Paul never compromised his convictions. This behavior on Paul's part was not an inconsistency but an intentional strategy to reach others for Christ.

4:13. Paul had made his first visit to Galatia because of some physical "illness." Various suggestions regarding the nature of this illness include malaria, epilepsy, or some type of eye disorder. Whatever the nature of the illness, Paul's Galatian readers could recall what had occurred ("as you know"). In any case, this verse points out God's overriding providence. Paul recognized God at work in leading him to proclaim the gospel to the Galatians.

4:14. In this verse the KJV uses a literal translation, "my temptation which was in my flesh," while the NIV has a literary translation, "my illness." Sicknesses and weaknesses commonly were viewed as forms of divine judgment in that time and culture. Instead of rejecting Paul because of his illness, however, the Galatians had warmly welcomed him. They had sacrificially accepted the trial or unpleasant symptoms resulting from Paul's illness. Instead of kicking Paul out, the Galatians had received both the messenger and the message. They had welcomed him as if he were an angel of God or Christ Jesus Himself. The Galatians previously had recognized and received Paul as a genuine apostle of the Lord. Why were they currently turning against Paul after all they and the apostle had been through together?

4:15. The Galatians had expressed profound joy over Paul's presence with them and his spiritual message. This Greek word translated joy is related closely to the word translated "blessed" in the Beatitudes (see Matt. 5:3-11). The term conveys a state of well-being that comes from a right relationship with God. As a result of receiving Paul's message of freedom in Christ, the Galatian believers had experienced spiritual blessings and inner joy. When they turned to legalism, however, their joy was gone. Living by the law (rules and regulations) meant a loss of spiritual blessings for the Galatians and a loss of the blessings of Christian fellowship for both them and Paul.

The Galatians' previous joy had generated a spirit of sacrifice to the point that they would have torn out their eyes and given them to Paul. Some Bible scholars suggest that Paul's reference to eyes indicates that his physical affliction involved some form of eye disorder.

On the other hand, Paul may have been using a proverbial phrase that implied great sacrifice.

4:16. In any case, Paul pointed out that the Galatians had been ready to do whatever they possibly could to help him. Now, however, they had turned against him as if he were their enemy. Moreover, they were not only rejecting Paul, who was telling them the truth, but also believing the false teachers who were telling them lies.

4:17. The Judaizers (“those people”) showed great interest in the Galatians by demonstrating the kind of devotion a man might show toward a woman while courting her (“are zealous to win you over”). The false teachers showed special concern for the Galatians’ welfare, became their best friends, and served as ready counselors to give advice. The only problem was the Judaizers’ motive—it was wrong and self-centered (“for no good”). What did the false teachers hope to accomplish by the attention they focused on the Galatians? They wanted to alienate (literally, “to shut out”) the Galatians. From what did the Judaizers wish to alienate the Galatians? By supplying the words “from us,” translators suggest that the false teachers wanted to alienate the Galatians from Paul and his companions. Other interpreters suggest the Judaizers wanted to alienate the Galatians from their freedom in Christ or from Christ Himself.

False teachers are usually quite good at winning converts. They speak persuasively, convincingly, and powerfully. Immature Christians, often looking for the newest twist in spiritual teaching, can easily be deceived. The best protection against false teachers is not only to expose the false teaching but also to help believers mature in Christ so that they are not so easily distracted as were the Galatians.

4:18. Paul had nothing at all against spiritual zeal, as long as it was for righteous purposes. Indeed, zeal can be evidence of a thriving, growing faith. Therefore, Paul wanted the Galatians to grow in zeal for Christ, whether in the apostle’s presence or in his absence. The problem was that in Paul’s absence, the Galatians’ zeal had taken a direction inconsistent with the truth. The fact that such defection had occurred demonstrated just how immature the Galatians were in their faith.

Paul probably was giving his readers a subtle reminder that they needed to grow up as Christians. In their immaturity the Galatian believers’ zeal for Christ had not only faded when Paul was absent but even worse it had been easily swayed to embrace a radically different set of beliefs.

4:19. In spite of all these concerns, Paul still addressed the Galatians as “dear children,” evidence that he was not questioning their salvation. Their tendency to turn to false teaching had caused Paul agony. Previously, when he had labored so hard among them presenting the gospel and yearning for them to become Christians, he was like a mother experiencing the pains of childbirth. At the present time he again found himself in similar agony because the apostle wanted them to mature in Christ. Paul identified the process of Christian maturity as Christ being formed in them.

4:20. Paul concluded this part of his letter by expressing his longing to be with the Galatians. He was deeply concerned about his children in Christ and wanted to help them through the crisis they were facing.