

Galatians 4:12–20 — Leader / Learner Guide

A Steel Fist in a Velvet Glove · TheGospelVault.com, @iJohn.316 (Instagram)

Big Idea and Context

Big idea: Gospel confrontation, done rightly, is never cut off from pastoral love. Paul corrects the Galatians like a father and labors over them like a mother until Christ is formed in them.

After two and a half chapters of sharp argument, Paul pauses to plead. We see Paul the pastor, not only Paul the theologian.

- **4:1–11:** you are sons — why go back to slavery?
- **4:12–20:** a personal appeal from the one who brought them the gospel.
- **4:21–31:** one more argument, from the Law itself.

Truth in Love — Three Anchor Verses

Verse	What it says	Teaching point
4:14	You received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus	They welcomed Paul despite his illness because of the message he brought.
4:16	Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?	The facts point one way: truth-telling had turned friends cold.
4:19	My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you	The goal is Christ's inner form (Rom 8:29; 12:2), not filled pews.

Zeal is not the problem: the Judaizers were zealous with a false message and selfish motives. Paul was zealous with the truth and for their good.

Inside out, not outside in: you can't tie apples on a tree. Christlike character grows from within.

Teaching Flow

1. **Paul's Affection (12–16).** His plea: become like me, free from law, as I became like you. His problem: an illness that brought him to Galatia (2 Tim 3:10–11). Their welcome: as an angel, even as Christ. His question: am I now your enemy for telling the truth?
2. **The Judaizers' Artificial Loyalty (17).** They court you to shut you out from Paul and make you zealous for them — the way cults isolate people.
3. **Paul's Authentic Loyalty (18–20).** Its certainty (zeal for a good thing), compassion ("my little children"), check (labor until Christ is formed in you), and character (he longs to be present and change his tone).

Clarify While Teaching

- **"He didn't call them brothers before":** Paul does call them brethren earlier (1:11; 3:15). What is new here is the warmth of "my little children."
- **Paul's illness:** Ramsay's malaria theory and the eyesight theory (4:15; 6:11) are both possibilities. Scripture does not say what the thorn was (2 Cor 12:7).
- **"You have not injured me at all" (v.12):** Sellers reads this with what follows — they did not mistreat him on his first visit. Other readings exist.
- **Making disciples:** Sellers stresses that the Great Commission goes beyond making believers. Keep that tied to free grace: discipleship follows salvation; it is not a condition of it.

Discussion and Close

1. Who in your life has told you a hard truth in love? How did you receive it?
2. Paul says zeal is good when it's for the truth and for the other person's good. Where could your zeal for the gospel grow?
3. What would it look like for Christ to be formed in you this year, from the inside out?

Close: Point ahead to 4:21–31: Paul turns to the Law itself — two sons, two covenants, two Jerusalems. Dare to discipline, and then hold them close.

Full study: [A Steel Fist in a Velvet Glove — Galatians 4:12–20](#) · Source: Dr. C. Norman Sellers, [SellersBibleInstitute.com](#)