

Galatians

NEW BIRTH BRINGS FREEDOM

Focal Verses • GALATIANS 4:8-20

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson we will: CLASSIFY religious expectations and practices that diminish Christian freedom; EMPATHIZE with those who have been harmed by narrow religiosity; and CHALLENGE unhealthy attitudes toward religious practices or traditions.

In Focus

Every week the preacher would ask if anyone needed to come down the aisle to receive Christ. Every week, Tamika would walk down the aisle like it was her first time. She would pray the sinner's prayer fervently. Since it was a large church, no one noticed that she had come up multiple times. Tamika had been raised in a church that had a lot of rules and regulations. Many of them had no biblical basis and were based on tradition more than the Word of God. Whenever she violated any of these traditions, Tamika began to feel guilty. She knew the Gospel. She knew that Jesus died for her to have a relationship with God, but she still trusted in her behavior to make her right with God.

One day, as she was talking to her friend Regina about what happened over the weekend, Regina noticed a flaw in Tamika's thinking. "Tamika, you don't have to keep going to the altar and getting saved all over again," Regina said. Tamika looked at her like a deer in headlights, and with her head tilted to the side she said, "Word?!" Regina added, "All that means nothing if you don't trust Christ." It was a moment of epiphany, as deep inside of her, something clicked for Tamika. It was the start of being free from man-made rules and entering into a deeper relationship with Christ.

In today's lesson, we will explore the religious practices and traditions that can hinder our freedom in Christ. What are some of the unhealthy attitudes and traditions that can distract us from salvation in Christ?



Keep in Mind

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?"
(Galatians 4:9, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Galatians 4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

9 But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

10 Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

11 I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

12 Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.

13 Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first.

14 And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

15 Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.

16 Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?

17 They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

18 But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.

19 My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you,

20 I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

The People, Places, and Times

Judaizers. Throughout the book of Galatians, Paul mounts an unrelenting argument against the Judaizers' beliefs and activities. They were teachers who believed that the way for Gentiles to be right with God was to obey the Law of Moses, including the rite of circumcision. We do not know who the Judaizers were by name, but we do know that they argued and debated with Paul at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The council ruled in favor of Paul and Barnabas and accepted the Gentiles as part of God's people on the basis of their belief in Christ, not circumcision.

Elemental Spirits. In ancient times, many believed in spirits that moved and operated the sun, moon, planets, and stars. These were worshiped as deities and believed to control the fate of individuals. This type of belief system is the origin of astrology, or knowledge of the stars. The astral spirits were associated with special days and rituals. Paul seems to believe

that through customs and rituals involving calendar and dates, the Galatians were still in bondage to spiritual powers.

Background

Paul's thoughts in Galatians focus on the truth of the Gospel and the means of justification: Jesus Christ. Throughout the book, he denounces any attempt to justify ourselves through any other means but faith in Jesus. The Judaizers' work had undermined this belief in the Galatian church. Paul lets the Galatians know that what the Judaizers preach is not the Gospel, but in fact anti-gospel leading them back into the same bondage they were in before they believed in Christ. Putting their trust in religion or the Law is just as detrimental as putting their trust in a false deity. They both are idols that cannot save.

For Paul, this matter is of the utmost importance, and he minces no words. He pulls the curtain back and shows how he withstood Peter

to his face for behavior in direct opposition to the Gospel (Galatians 2:11–16). In the beginning of the letter, he lets them know that even if an angel from heaven preached another Gospel, let them be accursed. For Paul, the truth of the Gospel is of utmost importance. We can only be justified through our faith in Christ, and can accept no substitutes. Anything less will put us in bondage.

At-A-Glance

1. The Galatians' Deception (Galatians 4:8–11)
2. The Gospel's Reception (vv. 12–15)
3. Paul's Expression (vv. 16–20)

In Depth

1. The Galatians' Deception (Galatians 4:8–11)

Paul lets the Galatians know that they had been set free from serving and worshiping idols. He then presents a rhetorical question to them, asking why they would return to bondage to the “weak and beggarly elements.” The Galatians were concerned about special religious days, times, and years. They had been deceived into thinking this was the way to be right with God. These things only served to put them into bondage, while Christ came to set them free.

Paul says that observing these things was expected when they did not know God. However, now that they have heard the Gospel and known God, it is foolish to return to these things. The Galatians were released from the bondage of pagan idolatry, but now the Judaizers were seeking to bring them into religious idolatry. They were using the Jewish religion as a mediator and not trusting in Christ to be their mediator. Paul laments that if this is the case, then he has labored in vain by preaching and teaching them the Gospel.

2. The Gospel's Reception (vv. 12–15)

Next, the apostle appeals to them to become like him. He asks them to do this as a reciprocal action to his becoming like them (i.e., as a Gentile not under the Law). Paul exercised his freedom from the Law in order to contextualize the Gospel message for his Gentile audience in Galatia.

Next, he launches into his past history with the Galatians. He speaks of how he labored and preached the Gospel to them while suffering. Paul speaks of an infirmity of the flesh. We do not know exactly what this infirmity is, but we do know that the Galatians knew about it and Paul endured the pain of it while preaching to them. He also steers the letter toward the Galatians' reception of the Gospel and himself. While he was preaching and suffering, they received him as an angel of God and as Christ Himself. He recalls that if they could have, they would have plucked out their own eyes and given them to him. Paul states this to remind them of the truth they had committed themselves to previously. Prior to their turning to religion to make themselves righteous, they had received the Gospel that he preached and believed in the sufficiency of Christ and His righteousness. Paul speaks to them to remind them and alert them to the empty path that they are now on.

3. Paul's Expression (vv. 16–20)

Paul is doubtlessly grieved as he asks if he is their enemy for speaking the truth. The Judaizers had influenced the Galatians with false teaching and effectively shut down Paul's influence on the young church. They wanted the Galatians to solely pay attention to them, not Paul. Paul says it is good to go after the right thing. The Judaizers were after the Galatians but for the wrong reasons: to preach strict Torah observance that they claimed would result in exclusion from the faith if transgressed.

Paul ends this section with a metaphor that reveals his true feelings and desire. He says that he travails like a woman in labor until Christ is formed in them. The metaphor here cannot be missed. His emotional state for them is likened to a woman in labor pains. This is how badly he wants to see the Galatians transformed into the image of Christ. This turn toward a false gospel of religion is a move away from that goal. Paul's grief is intense. He states his desire that he would like to be present with the Galatians and change his tone, because now he doubts the authenticity of their faith.

justification through Christ. Religion and going to church can be used to substitute for the place of Jesus Christ. These things cannot make us right with God or justified in His sight. None of these things can save you or died for you. To turn to these things is to turn toward religious bondage.

Search the Scriptures

- 1. How will the “weak and beggarly elements” lead the Galatians into bondage (Galatians 4:8)?
- 2. How would you evaluate whether a preacher should be received “as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (v. 14)?

Application for Activation

As a believer, you cannot afford to be led into bondage. Here are a few things you can do to help yourself and others to maintain your freedom through the Gospels:

- Take a minute to write down all of the potential “weak and beggarly” things that personally distract you from the Gospel.
- Pray for new believers that Christ would be formed in them and that they would not be led into bondage.
- Write out a definition of the Gospel and share with three people.

Discuss the Meaning

- 1. The Galatians turned to the weak and beggarly elements that led them into bondage again. As followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century, what “weak and beggarly elements” can potentially lead us into bondage?
- 2. Paul says that he travails until Christ is formed in the Galatians. How can we develop the same passion to see people transformed into the image of Christ?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Liberating Lesson

Many people in our society do not know what the Gospel is. They might say it is a style of music or going to church and getting yourself together. These things are not the same as the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We might not have to deal with the “weak and beggarly elements” the Galatians dealt with, but many things can trip us up and distract us from the true Gospel that sets us free. Wealth, power, relationships, and status can be used as a substitute for

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

Say It Correctly

Judaizer. ju-de-IZ-er.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 267

Obadiah-Jonah

DAY 268

Micah 1-7

DAY 269

Nahum 1-3

DAY 270

Habakkuk-Zephaniah

DAY 271

Haggai 1-2

DAY 272

Zechariah 1-7

DAY 273

Zechariah 8-14

Notes
