

True Freedom
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Galatians 4:8-20

A class member shared their excitement about Jeremy Morton's passionate preaching style (similar to Johnny's): "*We certainly didn't want a seminary professor.*" When it comes to proclaiming the truth of the gospel, passion is important. No one could ever accuse the Apostle Paul of lacking passion!

- Now I'm going to run the risk of sounding "professorial" for a minute.
- The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle outlined several methods a speaker could use to persuade an audience. The big three are: "[1] those grounded in credibility (*ethos*), [2] in the emotions and psychology of the audience (*pathos*), and [3] in patterns of reasoning (*logos*)."ⁱ
- In our first four lessons in Galatians Paul has been using "ethos" as he talked about his authority and the credibility of the gospel. He's used "logos" to make a logical case using Old Testament scripture.
- Now Paul shifts to "pathos." Always passionate, now he gets personal.
- Up to this point Paul has been heavy on doctrine and authority.
- In the middle of chapter four his tone shifts from astonished apostle to pleading pastor; from a reprimanding scholar to a reminiscing friend.

Big Idea: True freedom in life only comes by faith in Christ. We can never earn what Jesus has already purchased. Paul shared that good news with both passion and compassion.

- Before they heard the gospel, these Gentile converts had formerly worshiped idols. They were in bondage to false gods.
- What did that bondage look like? Think about pagans who worshiped false gods. They went to great lengths to try to appease those false gods.

- Do you know any professing Christians who are really doing the same thing today? If I can just keep God “happy at me” then life will be good.
- Paul begins this section of the letter warning the Galatian Christians that believing in a false gospel (trying to work for salvation by observing Jewish rules and customs) was just like slipping back into that old bondage.
- Listen to his tone. I’m reading from the New Living Translation:

Galatians 4:8–20 (NLT)

Paul’s Concern for the Galatians

⁸ Before you Gentiles knew God, you were slaves to so-called gods that do not even exist. ⁹ So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you), why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world? ¹⁰ You are trying to earn favor with God by observing certain days or months or seasons or years. ¹¹ I fear for you. Perhaps all my hard work with you was for nothing.

- If they knew God and God knew them they had truly been saved.
- It’s important to understand that if these new converts were truly saved when Paul was with them, they had NOT LOST their salvation, but they had been robbed of the JOY and FREEDOM of their salvation.
- Now they were trying to appease God by observing days, months, etc.
- They were missing the whole point of Christ’s free gift of salvation: FREEDOM. In the next chapter Paul writes in Galatians 5:1 (ESV)

5 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

- **What does it mean to have “freedom” in Christ? What did Christ free us from? Why do some in the church think this can be scary or dangerous? What keeps a follower of Christ from running “out of bounds” while living in this freedom?**
- A great article on Christian freedom:
<https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-freedom.html>

Warren Wiersbe put it this way:

“The Christian who lives by faith is not going to become a rebel. Quite the contrary, he is going to experience the inner discipline of God that is far better than the outer discipline of man-made rules. No man could become a rebel who depends on God’s grace, yields to God’s Spirit, lives for others, and seeks to glorify God. The legalist is the one who eventually rebels, because he is living in bondage, depending on the flesh, living for self, and seeking the praise of men and not the glory of God.”ⁱⁱ

Chuck Swindoll writes:

“This freedom offers us a new lifestyle. Now we have the ability to live by the Spirit’s power. We’re free to obey God and do His will joyfully. We can love and serve others. We’re able to enter into the Lord’s presence through prayer, experiencing a close, personal relationship with Him. Before salvation, we couldn’t take advantage of any of these benefits. We were penniless, pathetic slaves to sin. But now, as wealthy freedmen and women, we can enjoy them to the fullest. Christ has set us free so that we may enjoy our freedom.”ⁱⁱⁱ

- True freedom in life only comes by faith in Christ. We can never earn what Jesus has already purchased. Paul shared that good news with both passion and compassion.
- Now Paul’s pathos really kicks in as he gets a little sentimental.

¹² Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles—free from those laws.

You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you. ¹³ Surely you remember that I was sick when I first brought you the Good News.

¹⁴ But even though my condition tempted you to reject me, you did not despise me or turn me away. No, you took me in and cared for me as though I were an angel from God or even Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible. ¹⁶ Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

- We don't know all the details but it's clear that God used an illness to place Paul in Galatia and to preach the gospel there.
- Everyone speculates on what Paul's illness was. No one knows.
- The reference to his eyes here and elsewhere make us think it was some kind eyesight problem. Whatever it was, it sounds like it could have kept the Galatians from listening to Paul's teaching. Instead they showed him love and care. Oh, how things had changed since Paul had been gone.
- He asks if they consider him their enemy instead of their caring pastor.
- **How could such a close relationship between Paul and these people change so dramatically? How can meeting new people change friendships? Why do new people sometimes try to come between good friends?**
- Paul points out how the false teachers are manipulating them.

¹⁷ Those false teachers are so eager to win your favor, but their intentions are not good. They are trying to shut you off from me so that you will pay attention only to them. ¹⁸ If someone is eager to do good things for you, that's all right; but let them do it all the time, not just when I'm with you.

- **How can we discern a true friend as opposed to someone with an agenda to just use us? How does verse 17 help us with that?**
- What about "religious" people who suddenly want to be our "friend?" **How can we spot a possible false teacher trying to manipulate us?**

Wiersbe again with a good rule of thumb:

"A true servant of God does not "use people" to build himself up or his work; he ministers in love to help people know Christ better and glorify Him. Beware of that religious worker who wants your exclusive allegiance because he is the only one who is right. He will use you as long as he can and then drop you for somebody else—and your fall will be a painful one. The task of the spiritual leader is to get people to love and follow Christ, not to promote himself and his ministry."^{iv}

- Listen to the frustration in Paul's words. His passion and care for these Galatian Christians comes through loudly.

¹⁹ Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives. ²⁰ I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don't know how else to help you.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- We said that true freedom in life only comes by faith in Christ. We can never earn what Jesus has already purchased. Paul shared that good news with both passion and compassion.
- He firmly, and lovingly corrected these new converts who had been misled by false teachers. He was living out Proverbs 27:6 (NLT) which says, ⁶ *Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.*
- I have to look in the mirror and ask if Paul was also preaching to me.
- Have I perhaps slipped into the bondage of legalism and trying to work for what Jesus has already purchased?
- Here are some questions to help me examine my life for legalism:
 - Do my spiritual disciplines (prayer, Bible reading, church attendance) come from a joyous desire to grow in grace, or from a prideful belief that I can get "holiness points" from God?
 - Do I hold myself and others to a code of conduct that is not in scripture? Do I beat myself and others up for violating that code?
 - When I sin do I feel like I need to be "re-saved," or do I realize that nothing I do can UNDO what Jesus DID?^v
 - Do I look down on others who mess up, particularly without knowing all the facts, or do I pray for them saying, "but for the grace of God that could be me?"
 - Do I do good deeds motivated by the love of Christ, or to appear holy before other people?
 - Do I know the difference between obligation (I "should" do this) and obedience (I do this because God loves me, not to earn His love.)

- Do I compare my “small sins” to the “big sins” of others to feel better about myself? ^{vi}
 - Paul himself confessed it can be easy to slip into legalistic thinking when he said in Romans 7:24 (NLT)
- ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?
- But then he immediately responded to his own question in the next verse:
- ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Thank God, indeed that we are “...*made right with God...because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.*” ^{vii}

ⁱ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric_\(Aristotle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhetoric_(Aristotle))

ⁱⁱ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 713). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱⁱ Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Galatians, Ephesians (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 8) (p. 113). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.

^{iv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 708). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v <http://radical.net/articles/three-signs-you-might-be-a-covert-legalist/>

^{vi} <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2010/april/legalism.html>

^{vii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ga 2:16). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.