

Galatians 4:8-20 | Jeffrey Smith

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[0 : 00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, knowing Jesus, making Jesus known. All right, good morning. We'll be in Galatians 4 if you want to turn there.

KJ, thank you for the clicker. I'm going to set it here. I'm going to have you just click through it if you don't mind. I do have just a short PowerPoint to kind of go with the message this morning.

Part of it is because I do have one picture I'm really excited to show you guys. But we'll get to it here in a second. So, I do love starting a message with a story. I think a story kind of draws people in and gets some engagement.

And I was thinking about this past week I had a couple friends or colleagues, I should say, come into St. Louis. And one of them is a friend of mine from Detroit.

And he's a Muslim guy. And I've been at this company for about 10 months. So, you know, trying to meet people and make new friends. And he's probably one of these guys that I've gotten to know. One of the closest guys that I've gotten to know.

[1 : 15] And the timing of his visit was interesting because this past Wednesday at sunset was the start of Ramadan.

And Ramadan is this Muslim holy month, which many of you guys have probably heard of. If you're like me, it's not something you knew much about. So, I was asking him, Khalil, what is Ramadan?

Like, what do you guys do? What does that all entail? So, and essentially it is a month of fasting from a few different things.

But like the main thing is you're fasting from food and drink from sunrise to sunset. And there's a few other things in there as well. But even the drinking includes water.

Which I was like, wow, that is pretty remarkable. And you start to think about like there's professional athletes that are Muslim that are not drinking any water during the day.

[2 : 15] You know, practice, games, all kinds of stuff. So, very interesting. I was probing a bit further into, you know, some of the other details. Like, well, when can you eat?

What can you eat? What can you drink? What can't you drink? All these different things. And, you know, he kind of talked about how, well, you know, obviously when the sun goes down, you're eating a big meal. And there's even some restaurants that will have, you know, almost 24-hour service or nightly service where you're having a big meal at 2 in the morning.

You're waking up in the middle of the night to eat again. You ask about alcohol and you kind of get into a little bit of this gray area, you know, which is kind of interesting. And you'll see where I'm going with this.

Because I was probing into some other things. Well, what about this or that? And you could quickly tell that as I was inquiring more and he was trying to verbalize the rationale, it was getting a little bit shakier and shakier with everything that he was saying.

Because, again, like, there's a lot of interpretation there. And it really kind of boiled down to this is a man-made rule. This is just classic religion.

[3 : 24] And follow these rules. And it's not a guaranteed outcome. Because I was asking, well, what if you don't do this? Or what if you do it really well? Like, and it's all like, well, I hope this.

Or I think this happens. Or if I don't do it perfectly, I think I've got to add some time on the end. And it's just purely man-made, works-based. Nothing is really certain.

There's a bunch of gray area. And it's interesting because you see that a lot, actually. Catholics are in this Lent season right now where they're abstaining from, you know, meat on Fridays.

But if it's fish, you can have fish, right? And you're typically giving out something else for a sacrifice. Maybe it's sugar.

Maybe it's alcohol. I don't know if Catholics do that. They've got to keep that part. But maybe it's sugar. Maybe it's coffee. Maybe it's, you know, watching TV. I don't know what it may be. Present-day Jews actually have a period of 25 hours during Yom Kippur where they are fasting.

[4 : 34] Buddhists will fast for self-control. Hindus will fast for various festivals for a spiritual discipline. The bottom line is we all just love religion, don't we?

We love adding rules and coming up with different things that we think is going to help us out. And by we, I mean just the world in general. Well, this passage this morning is not much different.

The church in Galatia is in trouble. And the Lord is using Paul through this letter to address this waywardness, this pursuit that they have kind of going back to a religious law.

So let's pray and we'll get into it. Lord, thank you again for the message, for the passage, for your word. For the lessons that you've given. I really appreciate, Lord, that you did not use just perfect churches and perfect people throughout the word, but just a lot of brokenness and messed up folks.

And that is relatable. And so I pray that we just learn from the church here in Galatia and what Paul's message to them was. Help us apply that to our own lives in a variety of different ways.

[5 : 46] Thank you again. Amen. Amen. So this morning we're going to look at Galatians 4. And as you've kind of heard, you know, through the last few weeks, we're in the midst of this crisis in the church.

I would call it a crisis. And the believers in Galatia were beginning to turn from what they were taught, the true gospel, to something else. In the very beginning of the letter, Paul mentions that they have turned to a different gospel.

And this is just a clear example of apostasy. Paul has spent the first few chapters, just to give a little bit of reference here, he spent the first few chapters of this letter just laying out the basis for our faith.

We're justified by faith in Jesus, not by works. Just as Abraham believed God, it was counted to him as righteousness. And then he gets into this really interesting topic that Tom hit on last week, which is the topic of, like, sonship.

This concept that, as believers, we are in this relationship with God as a child, as a son, as a daughter. This isn't a merit-based transaction or a merit-based relationship.

[7 : 04] This is, we have put our trust in Jesus and we are a child of his. We can call him Abba Father. You know, a very intimate name. This is the topic or it's this idea of sonship.

So here we are. We're picking it up in Galatians 4 and we're going to go verses 8 through 20. And so if you want to go to the outline here, we're going to do this.

We're going to split the passage into two chunks. We're going to read them, kind of talk about them. I want to give just a big picture of what each of them says. We're going to look at a parallel passage in Colossians 2.

Just briefly. We're going to look at some application to our own lives. And then ultimately, I would like to learn from Paul's approach. It's one thing. We're going to look at application for ourselves as far as just how do we act?

Are we pursuing? Do we have this tendency to go to the law ourselves? But then what happens when you're with someone or you know someone or you're friends with someone or you're in a church that is starting to kind of take that approach or is fully going in that direction?

[8 : 14] Like, how do you handle that? That's a really tough situation. So, let's just read Galatians 4, 8 through 11.

Go to the perfect. Okay. It says, To put it simply, Paul is telling the church, and this applies to us as well, Before you were saved, you were enslaved to some form of religion.

Your standing was based on some kind of performance. Did you, in this case, did you eat the right food?

Did you celebrate the right holidays? Did you follow every detail to what the calendar says? Are you circumcised? All these different things were part of what was then kind of the religion of the day.

In other cases, like I had mentioned before, are you following all of the human laws that have been made? And created by a religious establishment. Before putting our trust in Christ, we had our faith in something else.

[10 : 00] There was something else there. Whether we acknowledge it or not, I had a conversation with a buddy the other day, and he's like, I just can't put my faith in the gospel. I'm like, you're putting your faith in something else. Like, don't get me wrong. It's in something else.

Whether it is a structured religion or it is kind of your own hodgepodge made up idea, it's in something. And typically, that is a performance-based thing.

It's a performance-based model, and it requires perfection according to what we know of what the Lord requires. And so let me just, again, pause here for a minute, give big picture.

The Galatian church was ministered to in Paul's missionary journeys. So think of cities like Lystra, Antioch, Derby. But the problem was, and we've heard this many times over the last few weeks, the church was falling away from this true gospel.

This message that Paul came and delivered, they were starting to sway from. He says, you're turning to a different gospel. That's apostasy. He says, you're going back to the elementary principles, which is the worthless religion that you were slaves to in the beginning, trying to follow every rule, and that is where you were basing your salvation.

[11 : 18] So going back to the observation of days, that's an interesting comment up there. You know, it talks about you're observing the days and the months and the seasons and the years and all these things, and it's like, well, what does that mean?

And that obviously is a reference back to Levitical law. Leviticus says, The Lord's Passover begins at twilight on the 14th day of the first month. On the 15th day of the month, the Lord's festival of unleavened bread begins.

On the seven days, you must eat bread without yeast. On the first day, hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. For seven days, present a food offering to the Lord. And on the seventh day, hold a sacred assembly and do not work regularly.

I mean, that's just straight from the book of Leviticus. You know, I'm not adding or removing anything. And so there's a lot of instruction there. You know, especially as it kind of pertains to these holidays, these festivals.

And all of this was instructed by the Lord. But the intention was not to create this merit-based system that you're only saved if you follow this all perfectly.

[12 : 22] I thought Tom did a really good job last week explaining this concept of sonship. You know, where Christians become heirs of the one true God through faith.

And our inheritance is this future eternal salvation. In this relationship, we call God, Abba, Father.

So that's where we are. The church is being drawn away from this true gospel by a group of rule-following Judaizers, which we're going to touch on here in a minute. It's a very interesting group.

So let's read the rest of the passage. Going to verse 12. Brothers, I entreat you. Become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

You did me no wrong. You thought 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.

[13 : 22] You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. 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.

Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them.

It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you. 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 by you. So part one, the church wants to go back to the law.

Part two, I'm just imagining Paul saying, what are you doing? What are you doing? I kind of equate it to, think about someone you've known, someone that you're close with, and maybe they have moved away, or you haven't seen them in some time.

[14 : 31] Maybe it's been years. And you guys are finally reunited, and you see this person, and maybe initially, physically, you're like, this person looks different in a worse way.

And you start to talk to them, and you realize their personality has completely changed. It is maybe extremely negative, or self-absorbed, or whatever it may be, and you're like, this person is not who I knew before, and I knew that person really well before.

What happened to you? Maybe you don't say that out loud, but maybe in your head you're thinking, what happened? And I can just picture Paul saying that. He was just there. He was just in Galatia.

Not that long ago, like a year or two before this. What happened to you? Paul couldn't believe it. This is the body of believers that helped him when he was in a physical pain, a physical ailment.

And we don't know what that was, but they received him. They took him in. They cared for him. He said, what happened to your blessedness? What happened to that joy that you had when you first believed?

[15 : 48] And obviously we know that life has its ups and downs. That joy that you had when you first believed, like, I'm not expecting that emotion to carry on for the rest of your life, but when you believe, and you are indwelt with the Holy Spirit, there is a change in who you are.

It was gone. These people were different now. Not the Holy Spirit gone, but just the state, the outward perception of who these people were was just far different.

Paul says, have I become your enemy now? And that question, this is an interesting one. This question was really a personal one coming from Paul.

And here's why I say this. The group that was influencing this church was a very law-heavy Jewish group.

And the reason why I think this is important, if you look at Acts 14, if you want to just jump over to Acts 14 real quick, this is a glimpse into Paul's first missionary journey.

[17 : 03] And I think it even goes, you know, earlier to chapter 13, but if you look at Acts 14 verse 2, okay?

So again, just think, this is a couple years before this letter was written to Galatia. This is his first missionary journey to them. And it says, but the unbelievers, in verse 2, chapter 14, but the unbelievers, unbelieving Jews, stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers.

And so, they're in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas, and they're boldly preaching the gospel. And obviously, not everyone is going to receive that and believe in that.

There is going to be some pushback. And so, that's what you're seeing here. There's this group of unbelieving Jews, and not only are they, like, rejecting it, but they're starting to, like, stir things up amongst the believers and amongst other people.

But then, this is where it gets interesting. So then, they go to Lystra, and they go to Lystra because if you look at 14, verses, verse 5, these people begin to mistreat them, Paul and Barnabas, and they're looking to stone them.

[18 : 27] Okay? So, not only is, like, hey, you're rejecting this, like, message that I'm giving, and not only are you rejecting it personally, but it's like, hey, you're going to then other people to, like, help them reject it. You're now, like, wanting to physically harm me, like, physically kill me.

This is really kind of escalating quickly. And so, it says, they continue to preach the gospel, but then they flee to Lystra. And they continue to preach the gospel.

There's miracles performed. But this is where it gets really interesting. If you look at chapter 14, verse 19, but Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, so likely that first group that was rejecting and trying to poison the minds of those around them, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city supposing he was dead.

And so, here's a group that not only was rejecting and opposing, but, like, trying to kill Paul. I can't guarantee this, but there's a high likelihood there's a strong connection with this group that is now infiltrating the Galatian church.

Maybe it's a direct connection, maybe it's the same folks, or maybe it's, you know, through a couple, you know, connections, but when Paul is saying, are you now my enemy?

[19 : 50] It's like, are you now part of this group that was trying to kill me? And that is just a, that's a really powerful question. That's a, that's a, you know, he is really laying almost a guilt trip on them.

Like, do you understand understand what you're doing? Paul is writing this letter, like I said, only a year or so since his visit.

So when he asked them, am I your enemy for telling you the truth? He meant it. He meant it. Are you now siding with this group that rejected the gospel, stoned me, and left me for dead?

In just a minute, I do want to talk about how Paul approached these backsliding believers. You know, like I said, we come across these situations amongst fellow believers who are either not walking with the Lord or maybe they're starting to entertain ideas that, that don't jive with the truth of God's word.

But before we do get to that, I do want to ask the question, why, why do people and like myself and why do all of us, why do we like to go back to the law?

[21 : 10] What is the draw there? You know, like there's always certain things that we are kind of drawn into. Chapter 5, verse 1 of Galatians says, it is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Stand firm then and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. It's mentioned also in Acts 15, this yoke of slavery. Christ has set us free from the weight of the law, but we love going back.

We love going back. There was a good point brought up last week about how it's in our nature to expect this cause and effect relationship.

You know, you work 40 hours at your job, you expect, you know, your pay. You are on a sports team and you are playing really well, like you expect more playing time.

If you're in sales and you sell something, you are expecting an appropriate level of commission return. And we're wired to expect these consequences.

[22 : 13] Like, it's not really, in some ways, it's not a bad thing. Like, in a lot of ways, it's a biblical concept. He who does not work does not what? Eat.

Right? On the other side of that, there's the proverb that talks about a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty will come upon you like a robber.

Right? But in terms of salvation, the gospel is clear that it's faith alone without works. Another quote from last week, it said, Tom said, grace contradicts the thought of getting what you deserve.

And this is hard. You know, we all feel this temptation of going back to the structure of the law. I doubt anyone remembers this, but five years ago, I barely even remember what I spoke on five years ago, but it did click in my mind.

I had a passage on Colossians 2. If you want to go to that next slide. And 12 years or so after this letter to the Galatian church, Paul is addressing a very similar thing to the Colossian church.

[23 : 27] And he says in 2.20 through 23, if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, notice that word elemental, elementary, very similar, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations?

Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch, all referring to the things that all perish as they are used. according to human precepts and teachings, these have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Like I said, even in similar terminology, the elemental spirits, the elementary principles, as it's mentioned in Galatians, these are the things that, think of elementary, elementary school, the first things, these are the things you believed before you were saved.

These people are going back to that. The picture that I was really excited to show, if you go, I don't know if you guys remember this story. This is a very interesting one because it came out like the week that I was like speaking and so again, this is five years ago and this is a story about a guy named Paul Baroni and it's now 44 years ago, he killed this girl, he went to Bishop to Berg, he killed this girl and he was in prison for 39 years and after he was released, 26 days later, he went and robbed a bar in Clayton with the full intention of getting caught and going back to jail and when he was interviewed about it, bottom line is he just couldn't handle the newfound freedom.

He was just so used to this like provided structure. This is when you wake up, this is when you eat, this is when you shower, this is when you have this time or that time.

[25 : 30] Everything was laid out. There was no freedom and for 39 years he was so used to that structure, that bondage, that he just couldn't go, he just couldn't get accustomed to life in the free world.

So he committed a crime to go back to jail. But we can be like that at times, like Christians. We, you know, we're really good at adding rules and things that we think we should be doing.

I know more and more Christians that are like giving things up for Lent and, you know, creating hard rules about what you can and can't do on the Sabbath, frankly.

I mean, I'm sorry if it's offending anyone here. You know, I'm hearing more and more about, hey, these are the strict rules we're following in the Advent season leading up to Christmas.

We love adding rules. We do. The cancel culture game has like really gotten hard to follow sometimes. I'm like, you know, as a believer, should I be shopping at Target?

[26 : 41] No, I don't think so. Is Amazon allowed? Can we go to Walmart? Like, where can I or can't I go? You know, we have a Disney Plus subscription. Should I be canceling that? Should we go to Netflix?

Is that any better? Like, what am I supposed to be doing here? There's so many rules. And that's not even going back to the classics of you can't smoke and you can't drink and you can't dance. Like, these are just, these are the new examples of legalism.

We love adding rules. The bottom line is we must walk with the Lord. It is a walk with Him by keeping our focus on Christ.

It is remembering daily the gospel. We're sinners. He paid for that on the cross. And we can be really thankful for that. And we can live in that.

So the last, the last point I wanted to make was just looking at Paul's approach to addressing a wayward brother or sister. You can click it one more time.

[27 : 45] So just three things that I, I saw here. The musicians want to come on up. The first is Paul's direct.

He's direct. He's just calling it for what it is. Let's just call a spade a spade. We're not beating around the bush here. You have turned away from the gospel and now you are trusting the law. You've lost this blessedness of when you were first saved.

He's just saying, this is what I'm observing and I'm going to tell you. The second thing is he's encouraging while also direct and a bit blunt.

He's encouraging them. He's saying, you treated me really well. Like, I was not a burden to you and I came to you with this physical ailment.

You received me and you took care of me. I was in physical pain. You were sacrificial. Like, you were, you would have given up your own eyesight for me.

[28 : 44] So when you're thinking about how are you, how do you handle these kind of situations, like, take those two points. Be direct.

Call it for what it is. But be really loving and encouraging as well. You know, point back to, this is, this is what I saw in you that was so great initially.

But you've turned. And the last point is just to make it personal. This, this one really just hits home. When Paul says, have I become an enemy to you by telling the truth?

Have I, have I wasted my time in laboring over you? I'm someone personally that like, I do not want to disappoint people that I especially respect. And if I, if I'm on the recipient side of Paul saying, did I just waste my time with you?

I would have been like, oh man, that, that hurts. That hurts. But Paul was expressing how he felt. At the very end of this passage when he says, 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 and change my tone for I am perplexed about you.

[30 : 02] You can almost like feel Paul writing this. You can only, you know, when you put something on paper here and you're reading it, sometimes you're not getting the full like emphasis of what he's trying to say but it's like, hey, if I was with you in person, like, I'd be probably raising my voice a little bit.

This is like just perplexing to me. He wishes he were, he were present so that he could deliver this full message. So be direct, be encouraging, don't shy away from letting the recipient know how you feel.

Galatians 2, we'll read this verse later, but it says, bear one another's burdens. Christ has set us free to walk with him, to call him Abba Father, to come directly to him in prayer.

We all mess up and will continue to do so. I pray that everyone in this room, first of all, that our faith is in Christ alone. It's faith alone, Christ alone.

And as believers that our focus will never waver from that good news. That is what saved us. It's not the things we believed before. It's not some new idea.

[31 : 24] It is the gospel. We can continue to walk in that. Remember that. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for, again, your word this morning and just how you use this church in Galatia to teach us a lesson here in 2023.

That's an amazing thing that those things can translate. And they do. And we often are like this where we, you know, have the gospel, the good news.

We have put our trust in that, Father. And it is just easy to be swayed elsewhere. It's easy to become prideful in the things that we're doing and to start to kind of add things to what we think it takes to have a right relationship with you.

So I just want to say thank you for the gospel. Thank you for the simplicity of your son paying for our sins on the cross. And not only just the value that that brings in the moment of salvation, but also in that sanctification process as well as we continue to pursue you and walk with you.

In your son's name. Amen. Amen.