

Live in Gospel Freedom! Don't Go Back!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 November 2023

Preacher: Jim Masters

[0 : 00] Take your Bibles, please, and go to Galatians.

Galatians chapter 4. Galatians chapter 4. And that black Bible in the chair in front of you, you can also go to the back, find page 149.

Page 149. Galatians chapter 4, 8 through 20. I'm going to look at verses 8 through 20 of chapter 4 this morning.

Still in my boot, so sorry about that. Supposed to get it off, not this Wednesday, the next Wednesday. God willing, we'll see.

The doctor says, looks good. I looked at the x-ray, like, it doesn't look any different. He's like, no, no, there's like this bone in there. I'm like, okay. And he's like, what do you do?

[1 : 08] And I was like, well, I pastor church. So I'm sitting down. He's like, oh, you should be fine. He said, well, I play basketball in this thing. He looks at me and he's like, are you serious? I said, yeah, you told me I can be active. He's like, well, okay, well, more power to you.

I'm like, cool. Well, my wife said I couldn't play basketball. Are you supposed to be doing that? That's fine. Yeah, right.

Hey, who said that? Anyways. Who said that? Galatians chapter 4, 8 through 20. Let's read. And then we'll dive in. However, at that time when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

But now that you've come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?

You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you that perhaps I've labored over you in vain. I beg of you, brethren, become as I, for I also as you.

[2 : 18] You've done me no wrong, but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time, and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ, Jesus.

Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth?

They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out in order that you may seek them. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you, my children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.

But I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. Benedict Arnold.

A name that doesn't bring warm feelings, fuzzy feelings to you, does it? You know, it actually brings dishonor things, dishonorable things to your mind, horror, disbelief even.

[3 : 47] Since he, during the Revolutionary War, began to work for the British, even while serving as a general in the Continental Army. One website said this, he, quote, gained command at West Point where he entered into secret negotiations with the British.

He transferred money to British forces and passed on information that would aid the British in capturing West Point while weakening the fort's defenses and thinning out its supplies.

He betrayed the Continental Army. And he was paid 10,000 pounds to do it. Yet it's quite astonishing that he was willing to give up colleagues and his own comrades for, dare I say, money and a position in the British Army, although after his betrayal, the British didn't even trust him.

He was once brothers in arms with George Washington. Now they became, they had become bitter enemies. You just shake your head, you go, how could he do that?

And yeah, that's what Paul was doing with these Galatian churches. He's just shaking his head, like, in disbelief. How could you guys do this? That they were willing to sacrifice so much to go back to living in bondage.

[5 : 25] To living life without the gospel. It's like, what are you thinking? What are you doing? Galatians is about living in gospel freedom.

Live in gospel freedom. And today, this news of the gospel is vital. So don't go back. Don't go back. This news is vital.

So don't go back to law. Don't go back to works. Don't go back to your former way of living. Don't go back. What do you want to do that for? Why do you want to live under law?

Why do you want to live under works? And not under grace? Paul was shaking his head in disbelief that they were doing this.

Why are you going back? Don't go back. This news is vital. It's so significant. It's so important. And remember the news.

[6 : 33] We're justified by grace alone, through faith alone, and Christ alone. Jesus Christ alone. So live in this gospel freedom. That's the news. Don't go back. Live in this gospel freedom.

That's why Paul was questioning them. How is it possible? We're going to the end of verse 20. I am so perplexed.

You have the assurance of redemption in Christ. You have the assurance of sonship. You have the indwelling spirit. You have access to the father and call him daddy.

Nothing at all. Like Old Testament believers, they couldn't call him daddy. You can do that. You're not just a son. You're an heir. And you're willing to sacrifice all this to go back to works, to go back to law.

This portion of the letter, verses 8 through 20, has strong personal feelings. You see Paul's tenderness, his urgency, his love, his imploring them.

[7 : 44] Even agonizing over them. It's probably one of the most gripping parts of his letters, aside from 2 Corinthians. And for them, these Galatians.

And for them, these Galatian churches, reverting back to legalism, was really returning to idolatry. That's what they were doing.

They began to adopt the Jewish calendar. They began to adopt the Jewish calendar. Circumcision. To try and attain a right standing with God. You can't be made right with God by your works, by law.

You can't. It's impossible. And if you think that, you're abandoning the gospel. So walking through the text, there's going to be five questions we're going to bring up.

Okay? Five questions. Question number one that Paul brings up. Why are you going back? Why are you going back, verses 8 through 11? And notice how he first begins.

- [8 : 41] Why are you going back? Because you were ignorant. Look at verse 8. However, at that time, when you did not know God. Why are you going back?
- Remember, you used to be ignorant. You were ignorant. They didn't have a saving relation with God. They did not know him personally through faith in Jesus. They were ignorant of the truth of the gospel. Until he preached it to them.
- Why are you going back? You were ignorant. You were enslaved. Again, verse 8. You were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. The pagan gods they would worship were mute gods.
- They didn't really exist. To these things, you were enslaved. You were slaves to them. You were slaves to these idols. Why are you going back?
- You were ignorant. You were enslaved. But now you know, verse 9. But now that you have come to know God. They embraced the news of Jesus.
- [9 : 47] They came to know God through Jesus by trusting in Jesus alone. Now they have such joy in knowing who the one true God is. Jesus our Lord.
- There's salvation in Him by grace alone. Now you know. Now you know. Or rather. Now you are known. Verse 9.
- Or rather. To be known by God. See, the real issue. Is that. Is not that. We know God.
- But that God knows us. They did not obtain this. Salvation by their own exertion or effort. God graciously interposed on their behalf.
- With His mercy. They were chosen by God. Which brought about their belief. The bond that united them to God.
- [10 : 47] As sons and daughters. Was not of their own doing. But by God Himself. By God Himself. God had set. His love upon them.
- And chosen them for eternal life. God knows them. He knew them. God initiated salvation on them. This is the teaching of unconditional election.
- Whereby God before time began. Chose individuals for Himself. Then in time. By the power of the Holy Spirit. They're quickened. And they trust in Christ. They're acknowledged by God.
- To be His sons. Heirs of the promised inheritance. They now have a flow. A relationship with God. A full relationship with God. Through Christ. There's communion.
- There's love. There's mercy. There's grace. Why are you going back? You didn't know. You weren't a slave.
- [11 : 48] Now you know. Or rather. Now you are known. Why are you going back? That was the first question. Second question. Why go back to slavery?
- Why go back to idolatry? 9, 10, 11. Because He asked the question. Excuse me. How is it that you turn back.
- Again to the weak and worthless elemental things. To which you desire to be enslaved all over again. How could you turn back. To your old way of living life.
- They're letting themselves be. Tyrannized. Enslaved. All over again. Notice He calls them. Weak. Worthless. Elemental things. It reminds us of what He brings up in chapter 4 verse 3.
- Where He says. We also. We were children. We're held in bondage. Under the elemental things of the world. All the things in which people place their trust.
- [12 : 54] Apart from the God who's revealed in Christ Jesus. These things are feeble. They're impotent. Powerless to set you free.

Why do you want to go back to idolatry? Why do you want to go back to slavery? These things do not impart a true knowledge of God.

Only God's grace in the news of the gospel can free hearts to obey Him. He says you've been enslaved all over again.

Paul cautioned. Warned them. That as they turned toward legalism. It's not something new really. But they're just reverting to their previous life of idolatry.

They exchanged one bondage for another. One writer puts it like this. It's either quote. Judaism with its autosoteriological legalistic scheme of redemption.

[13 : 51] Or the gospel free grace. It's legalism. Or grace. These two are irreconcilable.

It's like mixing oil and water. Doesn't go together. Look at what he says in verse 10. You observe days and months and seasons and years. Feasts.

Fast days. New moons observations. Festivals. Seasons. Sabbatical celebrations. New year celebrations. They have nothing to do with securing God's favor. Nothing to do with grace.

Another writer says this. Quote. Adopting legalism with the bondage of the Jewish calendar in place of the gospel. Is a practical denial of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. Which and of course circumcision right?

They are putting that upon. These Judaizers. We're putting that upon these Gentile Christians. Christians. And see. They were not simply adding to the gospel.

[14 : 57] They were flat out denying it and its power. To keep the Torah to be justified. Really it's paganism.

You're trying to gain additional merit before God. By doing these things. Which is a good question for us to ask ourselves. Are we trying to gain merit before God?

Do we preach the good news of the gospel to ourselves each day? Reminding ourselves of God's grace? You can't gain any merit before God.

There's nothing you can do. To get God's approval. You trust in the grace that's found in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ alone.

And that's why he says verse 11. I fear for you. That perhaps I've labored over you in vain. God. Is this hopeless?

[16 : 03] This is what he's asking the question. A fear that they denied the faith that they had once held so dear. And yet in the midst of this.

He called them to respond to the news of the gospel. The way they did before. He was calling them. Remember the gospel. That's the next question. Don't you remember? Perhaps I've labored in vain.

So it's not definitively decided that all his efforts were wasted. That all his efforts were in vain. The door of Opa not totally shut. That's good.

He's appealing to them. Why go back? Why do you want to go back? Why do you want to be enslaved all over again? Why do you want this? So why are you going back?

Why do you want to be enslaved all over again with idolatry? Third question. Don't you remember? I asked my wife that.

[17 : 07] She asked me, don't you remember? She's like, no, I don't remember. That's why I'm asking you. She remembers. I don't. She remembers good. Remember that we do? Oh, yeah, that's right. She's good at that.

That's what Paul's doing. He's good at that. He's saying, don't you remember? Don't you remember? You did not reject me. Look at verse 12.

He says, I beg your brother, become as I. Well, look at that. Look at the next part, the end of verse 12. You've done me no wrong. Remember the blessing of my proclaiming the gospel to you?

Remember that love? You did not do me wrong then. What are you doing wrong to me now?

You're doing wrong to the gospel now. Verse 13. But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time.

[18 : 05] When Paul had originally preached the gospel of freedom to them, he was sick from some ailment amidst this bodily weakness, so he preached.

Now, the exact circumstances and the nature of this, we just don't know exactly. But look at what Paul says here in verse 14. And that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition, you did not despise or loathe.

What's he saying here? There's two ideas inherent from what he says in this statement here in verse 14. He says, first, they were tempted. It says trial here. A better translation is to be tempted.

They were tempted to despise or loathe him. Look at that word in just a second. Because of that physical condition, they had this physical ailment. But they didn't yield to that temptation.

So they were tempted to do that. They were tempted to despise him or loathe. The word means to spit out. This was the ancient gesture by those of paganism regarding someone who was sick.

[19 : 13] They thought, when you got sick, the gods were against you. They were mad at you. Jews, but even more Gentiles, believed that sickness spelled opposition from God or the gods.

But he's saying, don't you remember? You didn't reject me. I had this bodily ailment, sickness, whatever it was, we don't know. You didn't reject me, but notice, but you received me.

You received me. You received me. Look at verse 14. But you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. Rather than despising him or loathing him or spitting him out, they resisted that temptation.

Instead, they received him as if he was an angel of God. Even Jesus himself. Wow! They had such esteem for him that they received this good news of the gospel as truly from God.

Similar to what happens with the Thessalonian church. 1 Thessalonians 2, verse 13. Paul says, and for this reason, we also constantly thank God that when you receive from us the word of God's message, excuse me, you received it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.

[20 : 47] That's what the Thessalonians did. And that's what the church of Galatia did. These people, these mostly Gentile people who came to Christ, they were like, oh, this message is from God.

They received Paul. You didn't reject me, but you received me. And you loved me.

Look at verse 15. Where then is that sense of blessing you had? Where is your happiness? The feeling you felt due to my presence with you.

Remember that? Am I preaching this news of freedom? You're enjoying this news? Even though I was as sick as a dog. For I bear you witness, he says, that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

Doesn't have to do with Paul having problems with his eyes. Maybe. But get the point of what he's saying here. You loved me. They had such glowing love for Paul, and they were bonded to him in the gospel, that they would have given their most precious possession.

[22 : 08] That's how much they loved Paul. Do you remember that? Do you remember we had that relationship? We were like that.

Had this all changed? Now we're like that? What happened? Verse 16.

Have I therefore become your enemy by telling you the truth? They didn't want to hear the truth from Paul anymore. Oh, so now I'm your enemy. Really? They were so fickle.

Turning against the Lord, the news of the gospel, and the one who preached to them this gospel freedom news. Just like the Corinthians, they did the same thing.

Read 2 Corinthians. They did the same thing. Because Paul was really out for himself. He was going to gain a lot from this. Really? He proved himself to be their true friend.

[23 : 16] The mark of a true friend is when she or he tells those whom she or he loves the truth, even though it hurts. It's said in grace and love. They look at their own sin. They say these things. That's what Paul's saying.

That's what he's doing. But he didn't simply give them truth with no love for them. He loved them so much. Had they become a, had they become like a foolish woman who breaks her mirror because it reveals her wrinkles and her true age?

I don't want to look at my eyes. So, why go back? Why be enslaved all over again? Don't you remember? Fourth question. Why can't you see?

See what? First, their motivations. And their, if you're taking notes, put false teachers. Or you can even put Judaizers.

Their motivations. Can't you see their motivations? Can't you see what they're trying to do? Verse 17. They eagerly seek you.

[24 : 25] Oh, they're going after you. Oh yeah, at this point. Paul began to bring up the evil motives of the false teachers. These Judaizers wanted to make much of them, but not for a good purpose.

Oh, they seek you, but not commendably. But they wish to shut you out, nor that you may seek them. They, the Judaizers, these false teachers, wanted to shut the people out, so that the people would make much of them the Judaizers.

Don't you see their motivations? Can't you see this? These Galatian Christians were so blind that they could not discern between a true friend and false friends.

I'm going to shut you out to substitute the true gospel for their false gospel. They wanted to isolate these Galatian believers from other churches and influences that were contrary to the false teachers.

They were trying to win them over for their own ends. And they were trying to, really, separate them from Paul. Oh, he's, ah, he's, ah, that's what they were trying to do.

[25 : 51] So you will seek them. You will make, they want to make themselves the focal point. They wanted their favorable attention so that after a while, these Judaizers would lord it over these duped believers.

These Judaizers, man, they were so deceitful. So deceitful. So why can't you see? See what? See their motivations and my motivations.

Verse 18. But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner and not only when I'm present with you. What's he saying here?

Paul was not opposed to zeal towards good relationships. They have motivations that are good and true gospel centered. Zeal for genuine love and community with faithfulness to the gospel is a good thing, not a bad thing.

It's good if it's connected with a commendable cause and Paul's saying to them, my friends, I have that commendable cause. I have that commendable cause.

[27 : 00] I have nothing to gain from this. I'm in this because I love you. These are my motivations. Very similar to what he says to the Corinthians. A couple pages over in your Bible, 2 Corinthians 12, verse 15.

Paul says, the Corinthian church, I most gladly spend and be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, I might be loved the less. But be that as it may, I did not burden you myself.

Nevertheless, crafty fellow that I am, I took you in my deceit. I have not taken advantage of you through any of those with whom I have sent to you, have I? Paul's like, I'm not here to take advantage of you.

I'm not here for my own gain. I'm not here for my own gain. He says, not only when I'm present with you, well, everything was fine as long as Paul was there, but when the cat's away, the mice will play.

Once he's gone and the Judea has arrived, oh, Paul, who's that? That guy's a jerk. We don't like him. The non-affection just, the affection for him just blew away.

[28 : 16] Verse 19. Again, my motivation, still under my motivation, verse 19. My children, you see, Paul's yearning heart for them as a mother towards her children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you.

His heart for them as a mother towards her children, giving birth to a child. It's like he had to go through birth pains twice. He had adored the pain of labor all over again.

How would you, so many ladies had children. How would you like to do that again for the child? Wow. He'd probably do anything for the child, but this is what he's talking about. I have to go through labor again, all over again with you?

Paul painfully longed for them to know Jesus, this gospel news, and be transformed into the image of Jesus.

That's why he says, until Christ is formed in you. He wanted Jesus to be seen in their lives, in the sense that their lives are ruled by Christ, driven by Christ, loved for Christ, committed to Christ.

[29 : 41] This is what they truly needed. This is our greatest need, is it not? See, long for them to know Jesus, long for them to be in this news of the gospel, long for them to be transformed into Christ's image, that their whole person would proclaim Jesus and His ways, that they would trust fully in His sufficiency, and they'd be like Him in their thoughts, wishes, aspirations, words, and actions.

That's what Paul wanted to see in these Galatian churches, with these Galatian believers. That's what he wanted. He had nothing to gain from telling them this.

That's why he continues to bring this up. Why do you want to go back? Why go back? Why be enslaved all over again?

Don't you remember? Can't you see their motivations, my motivations, and can't you see my love?

Verse 20. But I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone for I am perplexed about you. This pen, this letter, Paul saying, was second best as compared to his personal presence.

[31 : 13] He wanted to be with them. His presence was not possible, so this letter must suffice. He longed for them to heed this letter.

Longed for them to know his love for them. My dear children, I so desire for you to return home from which you've wandered. His love for them and his hope for them, it remained, it was there.

And yet he says, I'm perplexed about you. I'm at my wit's end with you guys. What should I do with you?

They were not competing against him. And he knew that. They were competing against Christ. They were competing against this news of gospel freedom.

Why go back? Why be enslaved? Don't you remember? Can't you see? Fifth question. So what's the solution?

[32 : 28] We looked at don't go back and the question, why are you going back? Why are you enslaved? Don't you remember? Can't you see? So what's the solution to this problem?

Verse 12, the very first part, I beg you, brethren, become as I, for I also as you. What's he saying?

It's his personal, loving appeal. I beg you, come back. What's the solution? Come back to the heart of this news of Jesus, the heart of gospel freedom.

How? Become like me, he says. Wow, that's pretty, wow. In other words, just as Paul was freed in Jesus Christ to live in Christ, even as they say, as a Gentile, so in the same way, he's calling the Galatians to follow his example.

Follow my example. And live in gospel freedom. That's why we read from 1 Corinthians. Because Paul says that.

[33 : 44] 1 Corinthians chapter 4. 1 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 15, he says the same thing to the Corinthian church.

For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, you would not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore, I exhort you, be imitators of me.

And then he says the same thing there in chapter 10 but into chapter 11, verse 1. Be imitators of me just as I also am of Christ.

What's the solution? Come back to the heart of the gospel. How? Become like me as I'm trying to become like Christ. Follow my example.

Live in gospel freedom. Live in this freedom apart from the law's enslavement. Identify with me because I identify with Jesus. But if you deny this news, then you're not like Paul.

[34 : 54] they place themselves under law after their conversion and Paul's saying, what are you doing? What are you doing?

Interesting here, throughout this section of Galatians, Paul was inextricably linked to the ministry of the gospel.

Do you see that? He was linked inextricably to the ministry of the gospel. Be like Paul because he was committed to the gospel.

And in a sense, a pastor elder is linked to the gospel as well. A pastor elder is linked to the gospel ministry as well. When the people embrace God's message, they embrace God's minister.

When the people reject God's message, they reject God's minister. And for me, on my end, personally, the issue is not you being faithful to what I say or even to me.

[35 : 57] That's not the issue. The issue is you being faithful to the gospel. And the day that I stop pointing to the gospel to Christ, that's when the church should close.

That's when a church should no longer be in existence. It's when there's no longer a focus upon Christ. This news is vital. This news is vital.

Don't go back to law. Don't go back to works. Don't go back to your former way of living. Live in gospel freedom. Live in it. And let's ask God to help us do this.

And so we ask you, Father, it's so easy for us to go back to enslavement, to forget what you've done, to forget the truth, and to listen to lies.

Help us to cling to Christ, to trust in Christ, to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ.

[37 : 14] In this gospel, this one gospel, may we stand on this gospel. Help us because the evil one definitely does not want that to happen.

So I encourage you, take a few moments between you and the Lord to ponder what we've seen in His word this morning and reflect upon the freedom that we have in the gospel.

Free grace given to you. Ponder, let your mind be filled with gospel truth. Speak gospel truth to yourself.

and you can have an opportunity this week to express your thanks for God's grace to you.

So do that now if you would, please. Thank you.