

The Gospel's Defense: A Personal Plea

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[0 : 00] Galatians chapter 4, we're going to cover this morning from verse 8 through verse 31, but I just want to read verse 8 and 9 to begin with this morning. Galatians chapter 4, verse 8 and 9.

Verse 8 reads this way, 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 have 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?

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word. We long to know and understand what it says. We pray that you would give us clarity about the gospel. You would give us clarity about who you are.

You would give us clarity about how we ought to live before you. We need your help. Illuminate our minds.

[1 : 23] Convict us. Empower us. That we might work heartily as unto the Lord. We pray in Christ's name.

Amen. All ready. He had waited years for the promise to be fulfilled.

Seems as though he had waited and waited and waited and waited. And once God fulfilled that promise, God commanded him to sacrifice his son.

And we can look at that and we think about the turmoil that God placed Abraham through. And I can just imagine the massive dread, the massive weight of dread down in the pit of his stomach that made every step up Mount Moriah just that much harder.

And it's in a moment like that that many people will turn back away from God. It's a moment that many people begin to give up believing in God because living the Christian life is just too hard.

[2 : 50] It's just too difficult. It's just too difficult. And it's not as though Abraham needs to be congratulated for being some sort of super Christian without failings.

Now, Abraham, he was weak like us. The only reason he was able to fulfill that was not because of him, but because of God who sustains him.

He trusted and believed and followed because God sustained him. What we've been looking at in this book of Galatians, Paul has been arguing that the gospel once for all delivered to the saints is not what the Galatians are being taught currently.

And he's been defending the true gospel. And this is his last statement about this. In chapter 4, he ends this whole defense of the gospel with a personal plea.

He's actually going to visceral arguments, arguments that you can sort of see and feel and taste and touch, things that feel real because it's things that you've been through.

[4 : 03] And he's making this personal appeal, this personal plea with them to say the gospel needs to be clung to because of what you've been through, because of what I've seen in you, because of the illustration we have from God's word.

When we get to chapter 5, he's going to begin to apply these things. And how do we live these out in a daily way? But for now, the idea is that we need to cling to the one true gospel.

And I'm going to lay this out with two reasons, two big reasons. And the first is the pattern of salvation. And the second one is the weakness of our former lives.

So let's take a look at these two reasons. Two reasons we need to cling to the true gospel. And that is, first of all, the pattern of salvation that we see in verse 8 and 9.

Go back and let's read verse 8 and 9. Verse 8 says, However, at that time when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.

[5 : 09] This is Paul telling the Galatians, this is what your life was like. This is who you were. And he lays out for us the pattern of salvation, verse 8 and verse 9.

And verse 8 is the first part of it. And it's that we are sinners that are enslaved and we don't know God. That is the state of every single human being. And I'm going to challenge you that as we go through this, as you think about your own testimony, and you think about how you came to Christ, and you think about when you trusted Christ, if your life, if you can't match it up to what we're seeing here in this passage, then something's wrong.

Because here's the truth of the matter. The truth of the matter is that I can tell you what your testimony is. Maybe not all the particulars, but your testimony is exactly what this passage says it is. I know that sounds so contrary because we're all so experience-based. But what rules as the ultimate infallible authority in life is the word of God and not my experience.

And so what that means then is I have to see what God says I was and what happened to me for me then to take my testimony and line it up with that.

[6 : 30] It doesn't mean that we were all saved in the same way. It doesn't mean that God dealt with us in exactly the same way. But it does mean that there's a pattern that every person follows when they come to Christ.

This first verse then, verse 8, talks about when we were dead in our sins, when we were sinners, enslaved, and we did not know God. Think about the Galatian church for a second.

He says that you did not know God. What does he mean by that, that they did not know God? Well, they're Gentiles. So on one hand, they didn't have the written law.

So they didn't know all the commandments and all the rules and all the truth about who God was and his word. And so that's a part of that. But I think the bigger part of it is he's just saying that they did not have any saving relationship with God at all.

They had no saving knowledge of God. He goes on from there and says that they were slaves to those which were by nature no gods. How were they enslaved to these no gods, right?

[7 : 35] Well, if you'll remember, the Galatians form up this area in south sort of Turkey of about four or five cities. Paul goes through there on his first missionary journey, and many of them still worshiped Zeus.

They still worshiped Zeus. So Paul's going into Zeus' territory and taking the gospel. You can read that in Acts chapter 14.

Matter of fact, there was a temple in one of the cities, and Paul and Barnabas are actually mistaken for Zeus and Hermes. Paul did all the talking, so they thought that he was Hermes, and Barnabas was quiet, so they thought he was Zeus.

Paul and Barnabas told them, no, no, no, we're just men like you. But the Galatians, they worshiped this god, this idol. They sought to please their god.

They sought to honor this god. They sought to get peace from this god. They sought daily blessings from this god. They just wanted to get through the day and hoped that their god would help them do that.

[8 : 40] And to do so, they had their rituals. They had their rules. They had their standards and regulations that they tried to live by, and they tried to do what they needed to do to try to please Zeus.

And at the end of the day, they had no idea whether they had done so or not. And the truth is, is that all humans are just like that. Without Christ, every human being is just like this.

There are some humans who actually believe that there are divine beings. There are some humans that believe there's nothing but just spiritual force out there, no divine being to speak of, but something is out there.

And then you have some people who don't believe that there's a divine being. There's no spiritual force. There's just the physical world that we see in front of us. But all three of those, whether it's the pagan, whether it's the spiritualist, or whether it's the atheist, all of us fall into one of those categories, and every one of them have a sense of morality.

Put for them, in front of them, news story after news story of how people are ugly to each other and how people do terrible things, and they are shocked. They're upset.

[9 : 56] They feel a sense of injustice at these things that are done. So they all have some sort of standard of morality, and they try to live their life in such a way as to hope that they end their life in some sort of peace, in some sort of being satisfied with life.

Even the atheist does that. The problem is they never know if they've achieved this peace. This is how deep it can go.

This is probably one of the most extreme examples, but it's a good illustration for us to understand where we were when the explorers found in Central America the Mayan civilization.

They were sacrificing one person a day to just make sure that the sun would come up tomorrow.

We look at that, and we can see that, and we can sort of feel that, that that's a terrible sort of thing, but the truth of the matter is that that's exactly how you and I lived before we became Christians.

We had a rule and a law all of our own seeking to find some sort of happiness and peace and satisfaction in life. Even if we were a small kid and we didn't really understand it all, we were there.

[11:09] But that's just the first part of this pattern of salvation is our total lostness. The second part of this pattern of salvation is that salvation is about God knowing us.

God knowing us. Listen to verse 9. Verse 9, he says, But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God.

What a fabulous statement. Paul is saying it's not just about you knowing God. It's not just about you coming to know God, but it's about God knowing you.

It's very similar to what he says in 1 John 4, verse 10. It's not that we loved God, but it's that he first loved us.

What does it mean that we're known by God? I think it means two things. I think, number one, it means that God always, always takes the initiative in saving people.

[12:11] He is the initiator of salvation. And so no one can be saved apart from God. No one will be saved apart from God unless he initiates that saving knowledge with them.

But I think it means a second thing. And I think that second thing means this, that God's knowledge of a person means God's saving of that person.

God's knowledge of a person means his saving of that person. Look at this verse, Psalm 1, verse 6. For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Why is it that more symmetrical? You know, that's what I always used to think. It's like, why doesn't it say that more symmetrically? Right? The Lord knows the way of the righteous, the Lord knows the way of the wicked.

Why is it that he knows one and the other he doesn't? It's because his knowing of them is a salvation knowledge of them. Look at 1 Corinthians 8, verse 3.

[13:20] Now, the translation we have up there doesn't clearly give us this, but here's what it should say, okay? If anyone continually loves God in their present life, that's a present tense right there, so it's continually love, then it says he is already known by God.

In other words, it's not if you love God, therefore you're known by God as though the knowledge of God comes after your love. It is that here's a person that they love God because God knew them first.

Or Romans chapter 8, verse 29 through 30. For those whom he foreknew, those he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his son so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers.

Now, just skip that part. Those whom he foreknew, he predestined. And those whom he predestined, he called. And those he called, he justified. And those he justified, he glorified. Their salvation starts with his knowledge of them.

If he knows us, then that means that he saves us. His knowledge of us is our salvation. So how do we apply this? Here's how we apply this.

[14:36] You as a Christian, your salvation story should follow this pattern as well, that you were lost and God saved you. That's the pattern of your testimony. You were lost and God saved you.

The Bible describes our life before Christ, that we were enslaved and we did not know God. It describes us as being dead in our trespasses and sins.

It describes us as following the ways of this world, of being allied with the prince of the power of the air. It describes us as being sons of disobedience, living in the lust of our flesh.

It describes us as indulging in the desires of the mind and the body. It says that we were darkened in our understanding. It says that we suppressed the truth of God and his existence.

It says we traded the worship of God for the worship of created things. This is who we were if we were in Christ.

[15 : 36] Now, I know there are some people who they are converted and saved at a very young age, and for them to feel the weight of all of these descriptions, they just don't seem to be able to think that.

It's like, well, you know, I don't have a lot of sin, right? You know, the first time I was baptized when I wasn't saved, I was eight years of age, and by eight years of age, I had really not done a whole lot of overt sin that I could have pointed to and felt really bad about, you know?

I mean, I felt bad about disobeying my parents, but that didn't seem like a very big deal at the time. And so I understand that we don't feel it, but here's the thing. You don't have to feel it to know that it's true. You look back at your life, and the way you need to understand yourself before Christ is that you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

You were born a God-hater, and until you can see yourself as that way, you will never appreciate the salvation you have. Because the only way to cling to the gospel, the true gospel, and to not get hoodwinked by some other false gospel out there that wants to lead us astray is to understand who we were before he saved us.

That's why Paul is making this plea with them. Getting our testimony right means we need to know that we were lost.

[16 : 54] But it also means we need to understand how we were saved, and that is that God is the one who initiated our salvation. We didn't go looking for him. He came looking for us.

And even if you think to yourself, well, no, I was looking for God, it's because God was at work in you. The Bible tells us that he initiates salvation. And if you at all came to him and trusted him, it's because he first knew you.

So when was that day for you, Christian? See, here's the thing I think. I really do think this. I think that one of the best ways for us to hold on to the true gospel is to understand how the gospel has impacted us, to remember our sin, to remember our lostness, and to remember how Jesus saved us.

The more that you rehearse that story in your mind, the more that you share that story with one another, the more that you look back and see what God has done, the more that when someone tells you, oh, no, actually the gospel is this, you can kind of go like, no, that doesn't sound right. That doesn't pass the theological smell test. You know what I'm talking about, right? Sometimes people say things theologically, and you may not be able to pick out exactly why it's wrong, but it just doesn't smell right.

[18 : 12] Something's wrong with this. Trust that. Trust that little feeling and think about it. Don't just adopt it. So for Christians, we need to take a look at our own testimony and say, where are we?

But there are some who are not Christians, and maybe there are some here today who are not believers, and I just want to talk to you for a second, because what you have to understand is that if you're not a Christian, you're still in the state of being dead in your trespasses and sins.

You're still in the state of being under the wrath of God. You're still in the state of being guilty before God, and if you were to stand before God on judgment day, right this second, the sword of his justice would be swinging over your head.

And your only hope of escaping that is to acknowledge your sin, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, confess him as Lord.

So would you today turn to him? Would you today say, you know, enough, enough of being my own boss. I'm turning away from being the boss of my own life, and I want Christ to be the boss of my life.

[19 : 27] If you're not a Christian, then we would invite you to come. We would invite you and say, we would beg you and say, come to Christ. The second reason, then, that we need to hold on and cling to the gospel is because of the weakness of our former life.

And it's going to sound like I'm repeating myself, but I'm not. This is very different. So hang on. Look at verse nine. This sort of sets up what's about to happen in the rest of the chapter.

He says, 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?

Their life was committed to elemental things. Zeus. They worshiped Zeus. I mean, I hope that none of you here believe that Zeus exists.

It's a figment of men's imagination. It's a creation of men. And yet they were committed to this creation. This was the elemental things they were committed to.

[20 : 42] And he says to them, listen to the shock in his voice. How is it that you turn back again? How could you go back?

Now, what he does in verse 10 is he shows us how they're going back. Listen to what it says in verse 10. You observe days and months and seasons and years.

That's Jewish. That's a Jewish old covenant that there were days. There were days. Sabbath days. There were months. There were seasons.

There were years. All the festivals. In other words, the Judaizers who have been there in Galatia teaching them, the Galatians have been committed to Zeus.

Paul preached. And they were saved. And now that the Judaizers have come, they're returning to elemental things. But now, instead of to Zeus, they're turning to the Jewish law, the ceremonial law, and the festival days in order to now get something from God.

[21 : 48] So they ran from slavery to freedom and from freedom back to slavery. That's why Paul's voice is shocked in this. How are you going back?

Why would you go back? As a matter of fact, let's read verse 11 through 20. 11 through 20. I just want you to hear Paul's emotion about this whole thing.

Verse 11 says, I fear for you that perhaps I've labored over you in vain. I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.

You have 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 Jesus Christ himself.

Some commentators say that Paul had some sort of physical ailment. We can see that clearly. And some of them say that it was eyesight. Some say it was maybe leprosy.

[22 : 59] Some say it was some other thing. The point is, is that in the culture of Galatia, if you walked past somebody on the street who had a physical ailment out on the street that you could see, you shamed them by spitting at them.

Paul is saying, you did not despise or loathe me. As he went to preach to these people, they didn't spit at him, and instead they treated him as an angel. They treated him as Jesus Christ himself.

Verse 15, where then is that sense of blessing that you had? For I bear witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

This sense of blessing, this is the idea of the Beatitudes. It's this happy state, if you will. It's this divine favor.

It's this well-wishing. It is this joy and this calm that comes for people of God. And he's saying, listen, you felt divine favor because I was preaching to you.

[24 : 05] Where'd that go? You felt that divine favor so much you were willing to give me your eyes. Now that's just creepy. I don't know exactly what's going on there, but if he had an eye ailment, then that makes a little bit more sense.

Verse 16, so have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? They, the Judaizers, eagerly seek you, not commendably.

They wish to shut you out away from Christ. That's the way I would understand that so that you will seek them. In other words, they don't want you to go to the gospel. They want you to come to them.

So that's what they're doing.

Verse 18, Paul, Paul's point is that he's perplexed.

He knows the struggle it was to preach the gospel to them. He knows about their turning from sin and from Zeus and such that they did such a turn.

[25 : 20] The conversion was no small thing that happened. And yet now they want to abandon the faith and put themselves under more law. Here's the point for us as we go to live our lives.

We have to give up being quid quo pro Christians. I just thought I would throw that in there for you. Some of you know that.

Quid quo pro as Latin. Do you know what it means? Something for something.

Something for something. It's used to talk about an exchange or a transaction. It's a bargain that you strike. If you do this, I will do this.

It's contractual. The problem for the Judaizers is that they wanted to be sons of Abraham. They wanted the Galatians to be sons of Abraham so they wanted them to be circumcised.

[26 : 25] Even though Christ had come, they wanted to do circumcision. They wanted to follow the ceremonial law so that they could go further and deeper and better into the blessings of God. They

were making a quid quo pro transaction with God.

And I'm saying that you and I must not be quid quo pro Christians. I'm saying it slow because otherwise you'll never understand me.

I will mess that up. We cannot be that kind of a Christian, but we tend to be that kind of a Christian when you and I as Christians start to make our obedience to God a reason for why God ought to act, answer our prayer, or give us what we want, then we're living quid quo pro.

Let me say that again. When you and I as Christians start to make our obedience to God a reason for why God ought to act and answer our prayer or give us what we want, then we're living like the Galatians.

I had friends long ago. This happened so long ago. It's so strange to me that it was so long ago and I remember it to this very day because it jumped out at me so, so much.

[27 : 46] They were struggling with their finances. They were struggling with family troubles. They were struggling with work. And here's the statement that they made.

I don't understand why God is allowing all of these trials. We've been tithing, praying, reading our Bibles. We're doing everything we're supposed to do.

Why are we still suffering? That's quid quo pro. That's something for something.

That's a transactional relationship with God. And my question to you, is that your obedience to God? Do you do the things that you do so that you can get the blessings of God?

Or do you recognize, do you recognize that you deserve nothing but death and hell and he saved you and because of your thankfulness you obey him?

[28 : 51] There's a vast difference. Paul gives us his own illustration. Forget my illustration for a second. His illustration comes in verse 21. Let's read verse 21 through 31 together and listen to Paul's illustration.

He says, tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? In other words, have you not read it? Do you not understand what this all means? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.

But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking for these women are two covenants.

One proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves. She is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem for she is in slavery with her children.

But the Jerusalem above is free and she is our mother for it is written rejoice barren woman who does not bear. Break forth and shout you who are not in labor for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.

[30 : 07] And you brethren like Isaac are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the spirit so it is now also.

But what does the scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman. So then brethren we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free woman.

Paul his illustration is comparing Ishmael to Isaac and in comparing these two he is comparing Hagar with Sarah and in comparing these they represent two groups.

One group their birth is that of the flesh that of the flesh of the arm or the work of man. You remember that Abraham tried to fulfill the promise that God gave him by going into Hagar and he had Ishmael.

That was the work of the flesh trying to accomplish what God's promised in your own power. The other is born of the spirit and of promise therefore one is born a slave and the other is a free man.

[31 : 23] They're different in their relationship to each other because Ishmael mocks and persecutes Isaac even as Hagar mocked Sarah Genesis 16 and Genesis 21 and their rights to the inheritance is different because Ishmael had no rights to the inheritance.

Listen to me Ishmael had no rights to the inheritance because he was not the child of promise. He was not born of the free woman he was born of the slave woman.

It was Isaac the child of promise of the free woman of the heavenly city who is blessed by God. So the Judaizers they come and they want to be children of Abraham and so they tell the Galatians you need circumcision and you need the ceremonial law and therefore we will be children of Abraham and they're correct.

They're just going to be Ishmael and not Isaac. The only way to be Isaac is to push off the transactional way that we deal with God and recognize that he knows us and we should trust him. You and I must obey God because he is God but we must do so out of love and thankfulness and gratitude because we once were lost and now we're found.

[32 : 52] We once were slaves but now we're free. We once were dead but we're now alive and because he has done this to us and for us and in us we obey but we do not obey to try to get more from him.

He's given us everything we need. This brings up one last sort of application point that I want to hit and I want you to listen carefully. What Paul is doing in Galatians is what you and I need to do and that is we need to help rescue those who are walking away from Christ.

There are many who go through the church when they're kids, they hear stories, they pray a prayer, they get baptized and when they're older, if we're blessed, they might still be Christians in the church pursuing God but there are times when they stop attending, they stop really talking about, they may be friendly to church and they may even be friendly to you but Christ doesn't mean much to them in their lives and I would say they've been duped.

They have believed that the Christian life has nothing for them. They believe that the gospel is not real. Though they're not following the Galatians and into law, they're certainly following the Galatians and walking away from the gospel.

They believe they can find peace on their own but what they do not understand is that there's a way that seems right unto a man but the end therein is death. Beloved, there is not a false teaching.

[34 : 38] There is not an attack on the scriptures. There is not a challenge to the existence of God. There is not a challenge to the truthfulness of Christianity properly interpreted that has ever successfully destroyed Christianity.

And your loved ones who have walked away and have walked away from the gospel, they may think to themselves that these challenges that come up to the gospel and challenges that come up to the scripture make it so that they feel like, well, I don't need to believe that anymore but you need to understand that the greatest and smartest minds in history, Marcus Aurelius, Emmanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, David Hume, Frederick Nietzsche, Russell Bertrand, not a single one of them in all of their assails against the gospel and scripture and God have succeeded.

My point is this. Paul loves the Galatians. He bears with the Galatians. He begs them. He confronts them.

He labors for them until Christ is formed in them. And many of you have children and grandchildren and your intuition says they're not Christians, but your tradition says but I saw them get baptized.

And in your heart you struggle over that. And I say to you, do not let them go. Do not let them go quietly into the night unchallenged, unprayed for, unbegged that they would return to Christ.

[36 : 19] Do not while you have breath. Do not while you have energy. Do not cease to pray for their salvation. Do not cease to pray that they would come to Christ.

Do not cease to tell them the truth. Do not cease to tell them that you were once lost but now you're saved. Do not cease to tell them of the good things of God and what He has done in the gospel for us.

as a mother Paul says as a mother experiencing labor pains you would never let someone come in and take that child from you that you have just birthed all of that energy and all of that pain.

And here is that child for you. You would never let someone take them from you. And I'm saying to you, your friends, your family, your cousins, your aunts, your uncles, your children, your grandchildren, your neighbor, your classmate, do not let them go.

But rescue them. Pray for them. Run after them. Do not be fooled by tradition that says, well, they were baptized.

[37 : 28] Your intuition knows better. They don't attend church. They don't go to church. There's probably something wrong.

Don't just sit quietly by. But first and foremost, beseech the Lord in prayer. You may not see the results of your prayer, but pray.

We watched a lady that we knew for years. Her husband lost.

She prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed. About two years ago, she passed away without seeing the answer to that prayer.

she never gave up. That is all I'm saying. Paul ends this defense of the gospel with this impassioned plea.

[38 : 37] I wish that I could see you so I could change my tone. your children of Isaac. Stop acting like children of Ishmael. Let's pray.

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