

GALATIANS

FREEDOM IN CHRIST

WEEK OF 05/31/26

DON'T TURN BACK

GALATIANS 4:8-20

Silence (1-2 minutes)

Sit silently together for a minute as a way to center your heart and invite the Holy Spirit to help you listen to and receive God's Word.

Opening Prayer (2-3 minutes)

Read: Galatians 4:8-20

Devotional:

Honest letters are a breath of fresh air. Letters that pierce through falsehood and bring truth to the forefront. Letters with some "spice" and that give us a dose of reality. As we reflect on today's passage, we reach the point in Paul's letter to the Galatians where he gets brutally honest. In other words, he stops reasoning with his mind and starts pleading from his heart. In fact, he gets so worked up that he feels the need to apologize at the end for the harshness of his tone (v. 20).

1. What's the most "brutal" message you've ever received? (Ex. harsh feedback from a teacher/professor, a text message from someone with whom you had a fall out, etc.)
2. Read through verses 9, 11, 16, 19, and 20. How might you summarize the tone of Paul's remarks to the Galatian Christians?

Read Galatians 4:8-10 | The question for today's discussion is the question: "Why?" Why is Paul so troubled and perplexed? Why is Paul's tone the way that it is? As we examine Paul's remarks, we discover that one of his main concerns was due to the Galatian Christians "backsliding" in their faith. Backsliding is a season in a professing Christians' life when sin grows stronger and obedience declines. It's when those who once shone brightly for Jesus start to grow dim. This is a normal experience for every Christian. Thankfully, by God's grace, not all backsliding is deadly to the soul. We can turn at any time to Jesus – our great Healer.

3. What is at the heart of Paul's pointed question in verse 9? What do you think he means when he refers to "elementary principles of the world"?
4. Who do you resonate with more closely? Do you resonate with Paul in that you are burdened over the backsliding of others? Or, when you're honest, do you find yourself in a season of "turning back" to things that are harmful to your faith?

Read Galatians 4:17-18 | Paul's second concern was that the Galatian Christians were being spiritually manipulated. The language here suggests that the agitators were sweet talking the Galatian Christians. In fact, the text also suggests that the agitators were searching for admirers who would "make much of them" (v. 17b). In essence, this is what psychologists call "love-bombing" – when someone will give excessive complements, attention, and affection in order to exert control. At the end of the day, it's more about *them* than the religion they claim to care about. For this reason, Paul gets worked up and urges them to see through the façade.

5. Diane Langber writes, "Until the Good Shepherd returns, there will be wolves." This includes even the best and safest of churches. What is your initial response to this quote? What stories come to mind?
6. Rather than being paranoid or distrusting all the time, we are called to find trustworthy people who can speak the truth in love into our lives. What made Paul a trustworthy spiritual leader? (See verses 13-14)
7. Skye Jethani says, "The people who have the **most** influence on our spiritual lives should be people we're in **incarnate** relationship with – spiritual fathers and mothers in our own communities, where we can see the fruit of their lives." To whom may God be calling you (if not already) to open up your life? What might it look like to build trust with that person?

Read Galatians 4:12 | In this verse, we encounter the very first command in the entire book of Galatians. When Paul says, "Become as I am," he is not being egotistical. He's urging the Galatian Christians to follow after him in ABANDONING the laws of Moses (see Gal. 1:13; 2:19). He's saying, "Christ + Anything = Bondage!" And, "Christ + Nothing = Freedom!" Moreover, the Big Idea for today's passage is: **Turn back from turning back, and come home to Jesus.**

8. How does the Big Idea land on your heart today? How might God be calling you to apply this passage? Sometimes the acronym S.P.E.C.K. can help (i.e., a Sin to avoid, Promise to claim, Example to follow, Command to obey, or Knowledge of God).

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank you for the sharpness of your word today. We confess that we often entertain the “elementary principles of the world” far more than we’d ever like to admit. At this time, we ask for your protection against false teachers and spiritual harm. Help us to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. And help us, oh Lord, to follow after Paul in the way that he followed after you – abandoning the law and embracing freedom in Christ. In Jesus’ name we pray – Amen.

Share Prayer Requests (10-15 minutes)