

## Galatians 4:8-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well I have a thesis for you. I want you to see if you agree with my thesis. It's a bold statement so see if you agree. My thesis is this. Every one of us in our hearts loves rules. We all love rules. Let me give you some evidence to try and back it down.

When we first had a child seven and a half years ago, we suddenly discovered that everyone around us had different baby books. These are books that tell you what routine to follow, how often to feed them, when to put them down for a nap, what to do, what not to do, how dark in the room must be, etc.

And everybody craved these books with their newborn children because they all followed them religiously like a manual of instructions because the baby, unlike the new TV, doesn't come with a manual.

And so people love these rules so they have some idea what to do. And we get very... they make these rules and make them feel secure. Let me give you another example.

Exercise books and magazines that tell you how to get fit. Or what goes with them, the Fitbits and apps on your smartphone that measure how far you've run, how many calories you've burned off, how high your heart rate has been.

[ 1 : 18 ] Why do people spend a huge amount of money on these things? Because they like the rules, they like the targets. We want to know how we've done. See, it's not that actually we like rules in themselves.

Probably most of us have some rules we don't like. The stink limits or rules that come from the government somewhere. But actually in our hearts, we all want the security of rules, of black and white, of being able to measure ourselves like these apps on our smartphones and Fitbits and things like that do.

To tell us how we're doing. To make us feel like we're making progress. We all love rules. Isn't that right? And not only do we love rules, we love the praise of other people.

We love other people telling us we're doing a great job or we're good folks. Now that's understandable because we're human beings, we've been made for relationships, made to live in community. So it's understandable we should want the praise of others.

In fact, Jesus in some of his parables uses the thought of getting praise from him on the last day as an incentive for obedience now. So there's nothing wrong with wanting to be praised by others.

[ 2 : 29 ] There isn't necessarily wrong with some rules in themselves. But the danger with rules, with loving rules and loving the praise of others, is we can become slaves to them.

If we find our security in keeping certain rules or in being affirmed by other people, then we'll end up being slaves to those rules or slaves to those other people.

And that is what was happening to these young Christians in Galatia, what is now modern Turkey, 2,000 years ago. And there's a danger for every one of us today who professes to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

There's very much a danger for those who do not yet know Jesus Christ. So what's going on here? Well, Paul has been writing to these Galatians to not be slaves but to retain the freedom they have in Jesus Christ.

But these false teachers have come in who are very sincere, very plausible, very polite. And they said, no, you need to follow these rules.

[ 3 : 32 ] If you want to be truly secure as part of God's people, you need to follow these Old Testament rules over here, like we do. Then you'll know you're really part of God's people. So Paul is warning them against that slavery.

He starts to go before and after contrast to remind them. Look at verse 8. Formally, he said, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.

In those days, these people would have followed the gods of the Roman world or the Greek world or the local cults in Asia Minor. But all those religions were basically the same as every religion is across the world.

All based on the basic principle, the elementary principle, as Paul puts it in verse 10. If you do enough good stuff, God will accept you. That's what drives, in a sense, the new mother looking at those baby manuals.

If I do this, it will all be alright. What drives the devout Muslim keeping the fast of Ramadan in the hope that if he keeps these rules, Allah will be merciful to him on Judgment Day.

[ 4 : 36 ] See, those things are essentially fear-driven. Keeping the rules to hope you'll be alright. And that means they're always self-centered, actually.

So we're always consumed with our own performance. Have I done enough? And when we're consumed with rules or wanting to please others, it either goes one of two ways, doesn't it? Our self-centeredness, it either leads to pride, we look down on other people who don't do it as well as we do, or despair, if you're another type of person, where you think, I have never matched up. And so instead of freedom and joy, we end up with slavery, self-centeredness, pride and despair. Paul's saying that formally. You follow those rules, but you shouldn't anymore.

Look at verse 15. Remember what happened after you first believed the Gospel. What then has become of your blessedness, your happiness, we could say? For I testify to you that if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me.

[ 5 : 38 ] See, Paul had only ended up in Galatia preaching the Gospel because of some illness. It seems probably connected with his eyes. He said, you are so happy, the joy you experienced in knowing the living God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Made you generous. You are saved from despair and pride and slavery. To be generous, has God been generous to you? Now how would that happen?

It's because in the good news of Jesus Christ, this Gospel that Paul preached, people could discover they could be accepted by God, not because of what they had done, but because of what Jesus has done.

When they had this blessedness, as Paul puts it in verse 15, it's because they could say what Paul said back in chapter 2, verse 20. The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

They knew they'd be loved by the living God, loved by the Son of God who had given himself for them. So they were set free from the religious rules, set free from pride and despair, set free from the self-centeredness of performance.

[ 6 : 47 ] To be generous, to be joyful, to be blessed. A joy-driven, self-giving life. Paul says that's what you experience. So why, why are you heading back to the slavery?

Well of course the reason they're heading back to slavery, the same reason you and I will head back to the slavery of rules, is we like rules because we feel we're achieving, we feel we're secure. We like the praise of other people because it is tangible, it is there for us. We're just like them, aren't we? So what does Paul do to win these people back? How can we be kept living by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us?

Well as we look through these verses we'll see Paul is reminding them of the joy and delight they had by faith in Christ. He's reminding them two things of that. First of all, he's calling them to enjoy the security they had with God by faith in Christ.

Enjoy the security of your relationship with God, he says. Now you see they weren't enjoying that security if you look at verse 10. What were they doing in their slavery? You observed days and months and seasons and years.

[ 7 : 58 ] These were all Jewish practices, mainly from the Old Testament but then embellished by Jewish tradition. Because the false teachers were telling them if you kept these rules you'll really be part of God's people.

You'll really know you're secure and loved. But actually those rules were no longer relevant. Those things all pointed forward to the coming of Jesus Christ the true rescuer.

They were the school teachers Paul put in the last chapter of the Guardian who was to point them to Christ. They were now redundant. They served their purposes. They served their purposes.

So they were not rules to keep anymore. because they served their purpose. Yet you see the temptation? They felt if they were doing something. They felt if they could measure their performance against a rule then actually that would mean they're okay.

Now I don't imagine you or I are very tempted to observe Jewish customs of months and seasons and years. But I bet there are rules we all like to follow.

[ 9 : 00 ] And I know that from my own experience. I mentioned earlier my daughter being born seven and a half years ago. When she was about three months old when she'd wake up in the morning I'd go and take her out for a little walk around where we lived so my wife could have a little bit of extra sleep having been up in the middle of the night feeding her.

Now my practice has always been for years and years and years first thing in the morning to have that as my time of reading the Bible and praying. That was my time for God as far as I was concerned.

And so I used to get really frustrated on those days where I'd sit down and I'd finally get a Bible open and then Zoe would start crying. And I'd get really angry with my three year old daughter. Why? Because I felt she was interfering with the thing that maintained my relationship with God. So in my mind it was like a rule I had to follow. I had to have that time of the morning of reading and praying otherwise I wasn't a good Christian.

What was I doing? I was doing exactly the same as these Galatians. And I was thinking that somehow my relationship with God depended on what I was doing not on what Christ had done.

[ 10 : 10 ] And so that's why I was angry. That's why I was angry. Now what's the cure for thinking we can get right with God by rules or by our own performance?

Well let me tell you what the cure is. The cure is not don't make rules because that's just another rule isn't it? That doesn't help. The cure is to enjoy the security we have with our Father in Heaven. That's what Paul reminds me of in verse 9 here of chapter 4. Now you've come to know God or rather be known by God. Do you know how he puts it both ways? I think he puts it both ways for this reason.

Often our feelings tell us that we don't really know God or God doesn't really know me. That's how feelings go up and down don't they? I feel terrible unless I've had some food. Some of you are probably feeling quite sleepy and need to have some more coffee.

Our feelings change with what we've eaten with the time of day with the weather. Guess from America British weather really affects us. You've seen the rain clouds the last few days you'll know why. Our feelings go up and down.

[ 11 : 16 ] What does not change is God's truth. That's why Paul says you've come to be known by God. And that word known in the Bible is a very personal word. It's not like saying I know Canberra is the capital of Australia.

That's just intellectual knowledge. Know here is a personal word. It's like me saying I know my wife. So Paul is reminding them of this security they have in Christ.

By faith in Christ they are known by God. They're included in the Lord Jesus. Included in God's family. In the verses before he's told them how God has given them his spirit.

So by the spirit they can cry out Abba, Father. They are children of the living God simply by trusting in Jesus Christ. Not by what they do.

So when we're tempted to think we need to follow rules to be accepted by God or when we're tempted in society to think that our worth our identity is found in what we do what we've achieved.

[ 12 : 23 ] We need to come back and remember and enjoy the security we can only have through faith in Jesus Christ. The security of being known and loved by our Father in Heaven.

That does not come by going to Mass every week. It does not come by heading to church every so often. It does not come through being a nice person. It comes only through faith in Christ.

Here's the first point Paul is making. Enjoy the security of God's relationship with you. Flee the slavery. Flee thinking you need to have that 20 minutes in the morning.

But your relationship with God depends on that. It does not. It depends on Christ who died for you. There's another reason that Galatians have been tempted to turn back to slavery.

Not just the attraction of rules so they can feel they can measure their progress but also the attraction of praise from others. Look down to verse 17 for a moment. Paul talks about these false teachers.

[13:26] He says, they make much of you. Now we all like being made much of, don't we? We all have people packing us in the back saying, you're great, well done. Notice what Paul does here to woo these young Christians back to the truth of Jesus Christ.

He doesn't give them, he doesn't flatter them. Rather, he compares his ministry and the ministry of these false teachers. He compares his motives, his methods, his goals and his results and their methods.

Motives, methods, goals and results. So let's quickly look at that contrast. First of all, what is Paul's motive? What is Paul's motive in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with them? Well back in chapter 1 verse 10 he said, I'm not out to please people.

If I was, I wouldn't be preaching the gospel message. But those verses I quoted earlier from chapter 2 verse 20, turn back over the page if you like. He tells us his motivation for everything.

Chapter 2 verse 20 The end of the verse, the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[14:39] See, Paul's motivation is love for Christ, love because Christ has loved him. So that's his motivation. Love for Christ. What's his method? We'll turn back to chapter 4 and look at verse 12.

Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am for I also became as you are. What was his method in sharing this good news with other people? It wasn't to stand in the street corner shouting at them. It wasn't even just to give them a little look. It was to identify with them, to live with them in their community, to live their way of life with them. He tells us elsewhere in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verses 20 and 22 that this was his method.

He would identify with people in order to get away all the barriers that could prevent them hearing the good news of Jesus. And the reason he puts it like this here is he wants the Galatians to stop identifying with those false teachers saying you need to do these rules but instead to identify with him and being motivated to live their life by love for the saviour who first loved them.

Well that's Paul's motive and method. What's the false teacher's method? Oh he spells it out in verse 17. They make much of you. They were flattering with Galatians. They say you guys are really special and you can be even more special if you're doing this or you're following our rules.

[16:03] That's just like the TV evangelists we see today who will tell you you will be blessed if you donate money and give you some credit card details now. Or like the false teachers who will tell you God has a perfect plan for your life.

God has your best life now. If only you'll put your if only you'll come and read my book follow my way. Or like the others who say if you really want your prayers heard and you're good enough to come on my special retreat over here learn this meditative technique then then you'll really get free to God.

These teachers were making much of them they were flattering them. And what's their motive for doing it? Now look at the rest of verse 17. They make much of you but for no good purpose they want to shut you out.

In other words these teachers could see the Galatians going off following the true gospel and they didn't want that because they wanted to crowd for themselves they said come over here wonderful special blessed people God has a perfect plan for you.

So flattering them so they could gain the following. They wanted to have more Facebook friends they wanted to have more people following their tweets they wanted to have more hits on their blog and on their websites more donations in their accounts.

[17:24] So their goal was to shut these young Christians out of the kingdom of God. what was at the bottom of all that? It's pride isn't it?

Pride it's pride that makes us want to follow rules it's pride that makes us want the praise of other people it's pride that made these false teachers want to have their rules want to have their following. In contrast what's the goal of Paul's ministry?

He tells us in verse 18 isn't he? It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose not only when I am present with you in other words he's saying I don't mind other people encouraging you and affirming you if they're doing it for a good reason I'm not trying to control you I'm not hung up about the number of people following my tweets I don't care about that so I don't mind if they're encouraging you for a good purpose rather than drag you away but here's Paul's goal verse 19 my little children for you am I again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you see what's Paul's goal?

it's not that he'll have lots of followers it's not that people will like him his goal is that the lives of these believers will be transformed so that Christ is formed in them that instead of being insecure feeling they're not good enough they may know the power and presence of the Lord Jesus Christ instead of fighting and squabbling and being proud they may know the humility and wholeness of Christ he wants to see Christ's character developed in them you'll see that more and more when we get to chapter 5 and do you know just how passionate he feels about this again he is in anguish as in the pains of childbirth it's the expression of his heart's desire for him not only his heart's desire but his work for him in writing this letter it's a pained letter it's the expression of his prayers for him the anguish that he has as he prays for them day by day now wouldn't it be wonderful if it was our desire for Christ to be formed in us not our desire to be approved of by others or to feel good about ourselves from following rules our desire to be transformed to reflect instead of our brokenness and confusedness and muddledness the beauty and wholeness of the Lord Jesus you see that is the gospel promise that is what

God is doing at the end of this letter Paul will talk about the new creation is all that matters that is the new creation God is bringing about by the work of the risen Jesus in the hearts of all who trust in him so you see how the Galatians are supposed to respond to this contrast remember your form of slavery you fled that and you had that blessedness when you first trusted in Christ the blessedness that comes because you knew you were declared right with God you knew you received the Holy Spirit by faith by which you call out Abba Father no the fatherhood of God you've been included in God's people you're heirs of God's promises adopted as God's children all of that encompassed by Christ is being formed in you you're being made into new people he's wooing them back isn't he he wants them to see the blessedness the happiness the goodness they once had the happiness of knowing they're truly loved that their failings and rebellions would not be held against them the happiness of knowing they're secure before the Holy God and that only comes by trusting in Jesus Christ now what are a couple of practical consequences of longing for that blessedness what Paul spells out too briefly tells us what we should listen for we should listen for the truth don't just listen to people who will make much of you as these false teachers were doing if we only listen to people who agree with us and who at the end of the day we're actually submitting to if we only listen to things that make us feel better then how is Christ going to be formed in us we will not change we'll just end up in slavery we also need to listen for the whole truth we need to listen to the truth we need to long for Christ to be formed in us that should be our aspiration that should be our prayer often our prayers we long for little things don't we for someone to feel a bit better for someone to do well in exams for someone to have a refreshing holiday they're not bad things to pray for but isn't there something deeper and better that Christ may be formed in us because that is the work God is doing he's forming the character of his son in us who believe remaking all our brokenness remoulding all our wonkiness and forming even in us the beauty and fullness of Jesus now how's that going to come about not by following rules not by longing for praise of others but by trusting in the Lord

[ 22 : 46 ] Jesus Christ the son of God who loved us and gave himself for us let's enjoy the security we have with God because of him let's enjoy the blessing of God's work in us because of Christ let's pray together God