

Delivered From Bondage

Gal 4:8-20
SS Lesson for 02/12/2017

Devotional Scripture: Rom 8:1-11

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From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

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Introduction

Overview and Key Verse of the Lesson

The lesson examines our freedom in Jesus and how we have been **Delivered From Bondage**. The **study's aim** is to realize that we can choose to enter into the freedom Jesus has bought for us. The **study's application** is to recognize that when we know, understand, and practice true freedom in Jesus, we will be blessed greatly and also be a blessing to others.

(Adapted from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary)

Key Verse: Gal 4:9

But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage

Commentary from The Bible Knowledge Commentary

4:8-9. Prior to conversion the Galatians, in their ignorance of the one true **God**, were in bondage to false **gods** such as Zeus and Hermes (cf. Acts 14:11-13). But a great change took place and they came to **know God** (salvation from the perspective of man), **or** to be **known by God** (salvation from God's perspective). Yet having come to know (*gnontes*, from *ginōskō*, lit., "to know intimately and on a personal level") the true God, the Galatians were **turning back**. Paul was amazed and dismayed. Did they understand that they would be going back to a state of religious slavery? Was this their desire? If so, why would they be attracted to a system that was **weak** (it could not justify or energize for godly living) **and miserable** (it could not provide an inheritance). The **principles** (*stoicheia*) of that system are "of the world," as Paul had already said in verse 3.

4:10. Under the influence of the Judaizers the Galatians had at least begun to observe the Mosaic calendar. They kept **special days** (weekly sabbaths), **and months** (new moons), **and seasons** (seasonal festivals such as Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), **and years** (sabbatical and jubilee years). (Cf. Col. 2:16.) They observed these special times, thinking that they would thereby gain additional merit before God. But Paul had already made it clear that works could not be added to faith as grounds for either justification or sanctification.

4:11. Reflecting concern for the Galatians, Paul expressed the **fear** that his **efforts** (*kekopiaka*, lit., "I have labored to the point of exhaustion") would be **wasted** (*eikē*, "in vain"; cf. the same word rendered "for nothing" in 3:4, "Have you suffered so much for nothing?") if their attachment to legalistic practices continued. The apostle's words disclosed his strong antipathy toward legalistic religion.

4:12. Intensifying his appeal, Paul challenged the Galatians, **Become like me, for I became like you**, that is, "Become free from the Law as I am, for after my conversion I became like the Gentiles, no longer living under the Law." The irony, however, was that the Galatian Gentiles were putting themselves under the Law *after* their conversions.

4:13-14. The last clause of verse 12 belongs with these and the following verses in which Paul related how he was received by the Galatians on his first visit to them (cf. Acts 13-14). At that time he labored under the handicap of **an illness** but remained until he had **preached the gospel** to them. Whatever his infirmity, the Galatians **did not treat Paul with contempt or scorn** as a weak messenger but rather received him as one would receive **an angel** or even **Christ Jesus Himself**.

4:15-16. They had received Paul with **joy**, congratulating themselves that the apostle had preached in their midst. Their appreciation knew no limits; they would even have made the sacrifice of their **eyes** for Paul. While some think this is an indication that Paul had a disease of the eyes (his "thorn" in his "flesh," 2 Cor. 12:7), the evidence is not conclusive. This may simply be a bold figure of speech to convey the high esteem the Galatians had had for the apostle—they would have **given** him their most precious possession.

But that had all changed. They no longer contemplated his presence among them with "joy." Rather, they now acted as though he had **become** their **enemy**, for the simple reason that he had been **telling them the truth**. How fickle were these Galatians! They were turning against the Lord, the gospel of grace, and the messenger who brought them the news of justification by faith.

4:17-18. While Paul's attitude toward the Galatians was guileless, the legalists had improper motives. The apostle spoke the truth (cf. v. 16); the Judaizers used flattery. They wanted **to alienate** (*ekkleisai*, lit., "to lock out") the Galatians from Paul and his teaching so that they would be shut up instead to the false

teachers and their influence. In an interesting double use of the verb “be zealous” Paul said that the Judaizers were **zealous to win... over** the Galatians so that the latter would **be zealous for** the Judaizers! Acknowledging that it was good for anyone to be sought after, Paul nonetheless insisted that the intention must be honorable, but in the case of the Judaizers it was not.

4:19-20. The apostle, on the other hand, had always had good motives regarding the Galatians. Addressing them tenderly as **my dear children** (*tekna mou*, an expression found only here in Paul’s epistles), Paul compared himself to a mother in the throes of birth pangs. He had experienced this once for their salvation; he was in travail **again** for their deliverance from false teachers.

But a sudden change in metaphors occurred with the expression **until Christ is formed in you**. Paul longed for these believers to be transformed into (*morphōthē*, lit., “take on the form of”; cf. *morphē* in Phil. 2:6-7) the image of Christ. This expression describes the Christian life as a kind of reincarnation of Christ in a believer’s life. This is in fact God’s ideal and purpose—for Christ to live His life in and then through each believer (cf. Gal. 2:20). Yet the apostle was **perplexed about** the Galatians because he felt their spiritual development was being arrested. He had a deep desire to be **with** them so that he could speak gently, though firmly, concerning his grave concerns.

Commentary from The Bible Expositor and Illuminator

The crux of the Galatian problem is revealed in this text. The Galatians started well. They responded to the preaching of the gospel. But starting is one thing; persevering and finishing is another. After they received the pure gospel of grace, they were threatened by teaching that demanded they fulfill the law to be saved. As young believers, they were being influenced to not hold firmly to grace. Two points should be made from this text. First, the Galatians had surely embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first part of Galatians 4:9 is worded in an unusual way. Paul stated that they had come to know God. Then he corrected himself and said that, rather they were known of God. The latter is actually more theologically correct. It is not whether we think we have come to God that makes the difference. It is when God has come to us and secures us in His salvation that things are really settled. God saves us. In this sense the Galatians had truly become God’s children through faith in Christ. The point is that no matter how religious a person thinks he is, a relationship with God is secured by the truth that God knows us as His own children. It is not our subjective feelings, our thoughts, or our opinions that matter, but the objective knowledge that God has saved us. This is an important point because it is always tempting to fall into the trap that some kind of religious action can save us. The Galatian believers were known by God. They were His own children, and for them and us, that is true salvation. A second point to be made from this text is that the Galatians had faltered in their understanding of salvation. They were being lured back to the belief that salvation was based partly in fulfilling the works of the law. This is bondage all over again. Paul called it returning again to the “weak and beggarly elements.” The apostle was referring to the basic elements of human religion, which always involve the bondage of doing good deeds to secure salvation. In the case of the Galatians, they were being told to add Jewish works to salvation. These things are weak and beggarly {powerless and worthless efforts to obtain salvation or growth in holiness}. Such elements are of the world (Gal. 4:3,10) and of the flesh (vs. 23). Religion that is based on works can define sin but cannot forgive it. It can point to righteousness, but it cannot provide it. Works-based religion comes with something in the hand to offer God. True gospel religion comes with nothing; rather, it pleads for grace and mercy. True deliverance is the salvation of God, secured solely by the grace and power of God. By this means we are made free from our bondage to human religion. To be ultimately and truly delivered from bondage, we must come by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone. The Galatians received this at first, but they were in danger of failing to persevere in it. Let us resist anything that would pull us away from depending wholly on Christ.

Lesson Introduction and Background

From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

A country is ruled oppressively. One day its people rise up and overthrow the oppressors. To mark a new beginning of freedom, they give their country a new name, perhaps beginning with something like “Democratic Republic of ...” But in time, oppression returns. The country’s people are as bad off as they were before, if not worse. The country’s new name endures, but only as a mockery of lost ideals. This tragic story has repeated itself too often. Our text tells an even greater tragedy of lost freedom. It is the account of believers who gave up (or were on the verge of giving up) their freedom in Christ to return to the bondage they knew before having received the gospel.

Our study picks up where last week's concluded at Galatians 4:7. The letter's critical tone continues, necessary because of the crisis then at hand. The crisis centered on this question: Should believers in Christ be required to adhere to the requirement of circumcision as set forth in the Law of Moses? Paul's opponents answered this with a yes, to which Paul counterpunched with the emphatic no we saw last week. The stakes were high. If Paul's opponents prevailed on the issue of circumcision, then imposition of other stipulations in the Law of Moses (Sabbath-keeping, dietary restrictions, etc.) would not be far behind, further negating the sufficiency of Christ's work. Judaizers is the term most often used to designate Paul's opponents in this regard. A Judaizer was someone who (1) adhered to the Jewish way of life and (2) intended to require Gentiles to adopt it as well. Judaizers thought it reasonable that the boundaries of the church should be defined by the rite of circumcision as given to Abraham and his descendants (see Genesis 17:9-14). Some students propose that the Judaizers who were creating problems in Galatia were members of the church in Jerusalem, being "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees" (Acts 15:5). Having gone on misguided missions to Christians of Gentile background in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, the Judaizers had disturbed and troubled those believers with false teaching (compare Acts 15:23, 24). They are conjectured to have done the same in Galatia. Also worthy of consideration is the era of growing Jewish nationalism during which Paul ministered. That was a time when it may have been controversial for Jews to associate with non-Jews (Gentiles). Perhaps some Jews encouraged circumcision of Gentile Christians in order to make it easier for Jewish Christians to fellowship with them without being criticized by nationalists. In any case, those who insisted on circumcision also presumed that their authority in the matter was greater than Paul's. This challenge is discerned from the lengthy defense Paul makes for his apostleship in Galatians 1:1-2:10. Paul referred to his opponents as those who "are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ" (1:7).

Major Theme Analysis

(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)

Delivered from the Bondage of Ignorance (Gal 4:8-11)

- 8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.
9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?
10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.
11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Ignorance of God (8-9)

Ignorance because of hardening of the heart (Eph 4:18)

- 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts.

Sometimes God shows mercy because of ignorance (1 Tim 1:13)

- 13 Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

Ignorant people distort things and words about God (2 Peter 3:16)

- 16 He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Immaturity that comes from ignorance (Acts 18:24-26)

- 24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Repent because the times of ignorance has passed (Acts 17:30)

30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.

Ignorance because of traditions (10)

Traditions are temporary therefore focus on the eternal (2 Cor 4:18)

18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Beware of traditions based on principles of the world (Col 2:8)

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

Incorrect tradition is rebellion in God's sight (Titus 1:10-14)

10 For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. 11 They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain. 12 Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." 13 This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith 14 and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth.

All of man's traditions must become obedient to Jesus (2 Cor 10:5)

5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Defilement can come from man's tradition (Mark 7:8)

8 You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

Ignorance causing laboring in vain (11)

Ignorance because of laboring without God (Ps 127:1-2)

1 Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. 2 In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves.

Ignorance because of not continuing in the teachings of Jesus (2 John 8-9)

8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

Ignorance because of sin not being repented of (2 Cor 12:20-21)

20 For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. 21 I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Ignorance because of being deceived (2 Cor 11:2-3)

2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Delivered from the Bondage of Misunderstood Relationships (Gal 4:12-16)

12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.

14 And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

15 What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me.

16 Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

Misunderstood relationships through lack of acceptance (12)

Lack of acceptance through not living in peace with others (Rom 12:18-19)

18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

Lack of acceptance through judging or condemning (Rom 14:3)

3 The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him.

Lack of acceptance through not being in unity (2 Cor 13:11)

11 Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Lack of acceptance through not being in fellowship with the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1-4)

1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Lack of acceptance through not listening to others (James 1:19-20)

19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Misunderstood relationships because of infirmities (13-14)

In infirmities God's power and grace are sufficient (2 Cor 12:7-10)

7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Sometimes infirmities are used so that God might be glorified (John 11:4)

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

Sometimes infirmities are used to help us learn God's Word (Ps 119:71)

71 It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.

Sometimes infirmities are allowed so that the work of God might be displayed (John 9:1-4)

9 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Infirmities are allowed for both the righteous and the wicked (Eccl 9:1-2)

1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. 2 All share a common destiny — the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them.

Misunderstood relationships through lack of trust (15-16)

The lack of trust in God leads to worrying (John 14:1)

1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.

The lack of trust in God leads to fearing man (Ps 56:4)

4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

Trust that must be proved faithful (1 Cor 4:2)

2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.

Trust must rely on God not self (2 Cor 1:9)

9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.

The lack of trust can cause calamities (Acts 27:21-26)

21 After the men had gone a long time without food, Paul stood up before them and said: "Men, you should have taken my advice not to sail from Crete; then you would have spared yourselves this damage and loss. 22 But now I urge you to keep up your courage, because not one of you will be lost; only the ship will be destroyed. 23 Last night an angel of the God whose I am and whom I serve stood beside me 24 and said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul. You must stand trial before Caesar; and God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.' 25 So keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me. 26 Nevertheless, we must run aground on some island."

Delivered From the Bondage of Misplaced Zealousness (Gal 4:17-20)

17 They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. 18 But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, 20 I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

Harmful zealousness (17)

Going overboard in zealousness (Eccl 7:16-17)

16 Do not be over-righteous, neither be over wise — why destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool — why die before your time?

Zealousness not based on knowledge (Rom 10:2)

2 For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

Zealousness against godly practices (Phil 3:6)

6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.

Zealousness in man's traditions (Gal 1:14)

14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

Healthy zealousness (18)

Zeal for the Church (John 2:17)

17 His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Zeal for keeping spiritual fervor and serving God (Rom 12:11)

11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Zeal for the welfare of others (2 Cor 7:7)

7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

Zeal with willingness and a desire to complete (2 Cor 8:10-12)

10 And here is my advice about what is best for you in this matter: Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. 11 Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means. 12 For if the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.

Zealous to be together (19-20)

Together in joy (1 Thess 3:9)

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?

Together to encourage one another (Heb 10:25)

25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Together in the name of Jesus (1 Cor 5:4)

4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present,

Together to pray for one another (Col 4:12)

12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.

Conclusion and Other Thoughts

Commentary Thoughts from Bob Deffinbaugh

This passage provides us with several principles which should guide us in our response to those who, like the Galatians, have chosen to depart from the truth.

(1) Paul's gentleness and graciousness makes it as easy as possible for the Galatians to repent and return to the faith they had once held dear. The gentleness and warmth which Paul manifests in Galatians is consistent with that which he called for in 2 Timothy:

But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:23-26).

By dealing so gently and graciously with these erring brethren, Paul seeks to make their return to the truth as easy as possible.

(2) Being gentle and gracious does not mean being soft on sin. While this particular passage is warm and affectionate, we must remember the context, which includes some very strong words of rebuke (for example, “You foolish Galatians,” in v. 3). Too often, in the name of graciousness, error in the life of another is either minimized or dealt with in a vague and fuzzy way. This was not Paul’s practice. The warmth and tenderness of this section is a kind of compensation for the toughness of the others. **Tough and Tender** is not merely the contemporary title of a book; it is the way Paul dealt with sin in the lives of those he loved.

(3) Paul was tough because he had a deep-seated love for the Galatians. Some Christians seem to think that love should never be tough, but only tender. I understand from our passage that Paul’s deep love for the Galatians provided much of his motivation for writing this epistle and for speaking candidly to the folly of their following the Judaizers. You will remember in the Book of Proverbs that a parent who does not discipline his child is said to “hate” that child (Prov. 13:24). Love disciplines. This is also the point of the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12, where he informs his reader that chastening is an evidence of sonship and of God’s deep and abiding love in the life of His children. The reason the church so often fails to deal with sin is that it lacks the kind of love which acts decisively. The love which motivates discipline also makes chastening more easily received and endured.

(4) This passage reveals to us the power of personal relationships. We expect biblical doctrine to have a significant impact on the lives of those who have departed from the truth of God’s word, and rightly so. Galatians 3 and 4 are heavily doctrinal. Our particular passage serves to remind us of the powerful impact of personal relationships. Personal relationships tend to fragment in the face of serious doctrinal deviation, but Paul uses his personal relationships in seeking to restore wayward saints to the truth.

Our Lord instructed those who were aware of a problem to seek to set the matter straight in Matthew 18. Is it not most likely that those who would first confront the sinner are those who know him best, those whose relationship with him is the strongest? If personal relationships are a powerful force in the lives of other Christians, we can understand why fellowship is such a vital factor in the life of the church. Fellowship is that bond which provides the basis for rebuke and correction. Fellowship is an extremely strong cohesive bond, which makes it hard for the wayward saint to leave those whom he loves and who love him.

As I understand the Scriptures, the bond of fellowship between believers should not be broken unless a brother is guilty of a serious offense, and after having been rebuked, refuses to repent. Only then should we break fellowship with such a one. Church discipline is thus seen to be a very significant action, for it terminates the fellowship of Christians from the one who has chosen to act as an unbeliever.

This also helps me to understand why Paul reacted so strongly to Peter’s hypocrisy in the second chapter of Galatians. Church discipline ultimately results in the withdrawal of fellowship from the wayward saint, including the intimacy of sharing a meal together (cf. 1 Cor. 5:11). When Peter ceased to eat with the Gentiles, he was, in effect, refusing to relate to the Gentile Christians as believers and was thus denying the gospel. Personal relationships are extremely significant in the life of the church.

(5) Fifth, we are reminded of the power of the truth of God’s Word. It was the truth Paul preached which saved the Galatians and which led the Galatians to warmly receive Paul, even though his illness made him repulsive. It was the truth which bound Paul and the Galatians, Jews and Gentiles, into one body. Truth was the basis for real unity. Any unity which closes its eyes to the truth is humanly contrived and not divine.

The truth of the gospel is powerful and able to save men. In Romans 1:16 Paul spoke of the gospel as “the power of God for salvation.” To pervert the truth of the gospel is a most serious offense, and results in dire consequences. No wonder Paul had such strong words to say about the Judaizers (cf. 1:6-10). Men are not saved by a messenger, nor the persuasiveness of his methods but by the truth, the message (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17, 21; 2:3-5; 2 Cor 2:17). Frankly, there is too much emphasis on methods today and not enough on the message. Too much attention is given to the messenger and too little to the message.

What is your excuse for not sharing your faith? Are you, like Moses, excusing yourself because you do not speak powerfully and persuasively? The power is in the message, not the messenger. It is the truth that saves men. If Paul’s gospel could save men, even when Paul’s personal appearance was offensive and repulsive, will the gospel not save men today, in spite of the weaknesses of the messenger? This passage strips away all of our feeble excuses for not sharing our faith, for the power of God is inseparably intertwined with the truth.

The principle of the power of the proclamation of God’s truth applies to more than just evangelism. Unfortunately we have become so conscious of methods and men, we have minimized the power of the message

of God's Word. We have become so mesmerized by the glamour and glitter of television programs and preachers that we find it difficult to accept the message unless the messenger is appealing and glamorous. Let us learn to pay more heed to the message and less to the messenger.

(Adapted from URL:<https://bible.org/seriespage/paul-gets-personal-galatians-412-20>)

Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary

We may look back on the Galatians' situation with bemusement. Why was circumcision so attractive to them? Why would they consider adding such a thing to their faith in Christ? Those questions should make us ponder what we ourselves might add to faith in Christ as we consider what makes us God's people. In every place and age, some have sought to add to the gospel in ways that ultimately result in diminishing the freedom the gospel gives. If we are to be truly free in Christ, then he and he alone must be the object of our trust.

Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary

1. We should give honor and allegiance only to God (Gal. 4:8)
2. Like the prodigal son, we should realize that our Father has all we need (Gal. 4:9; cf. Luke 15:17)
3. There is a tendency in our fallen human nature to return to those things that held us in bondage (Gal. 4:9-12)
4. Even those who know the truth can get off track in their Christian walk (vss. 13-16)
5. Zealousness, though a good quality, can be misdirected to the wrong ends (vss. 17-18)
6. Spiritual oversight can be a challenging and frustrating task for those called to ministry (vss. 19-20)