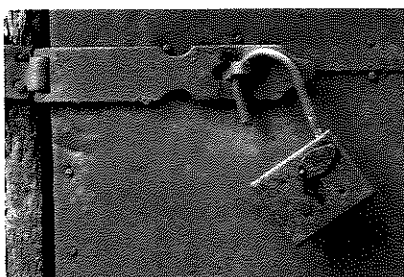


Follow Me to Freedom



Topic

Loyalty to the gospel

Theme

The gospel is worthy of our loyalty because it offers spiritual freedom.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will remain loyal to God and help others renew their loyalty to Him.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 10

Scripture Focus

Galatians 4:8–20

Summary

The Galatians were saved from the bondage of paganism but then returned to bondage by putting themselves under the Mosaic law. Paul recalled how they had loved him at first, when he preached the gospel to them and they became free in Christ. But they listened to the Judaizers, questioned Paul's teaching, and began to treat him like an enemy. Their defection from grace caused Paul grave concern, but he refused to give up on them. He desired for Christ to be formed in them.

Outline

I. Paul's Concern for the Galatians (Gal. 4:8–11)

- Their past bondage (4:8)
- Their return to bondage (4:9, 10)
- Paul's reason for concern (4:11)

II. Paul's Compassion for the Galatians (Gal. 4:12–20)

- The Galatians received Paul (4:12–14)
- The Galatians resisted Paul (4:15–18)
- Paul responded to the Galatians (4:19, 20)

Memory Verse

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

GETTING STARTED

Bad Move

ASK: When have you been delayed or trapped because you thought you were taking the easy way out? (Q1)

ASK: What would you have liked to have known before making your decision? (Q2)

By God's grace the Galatians had come to know God in a personal way through Christ. Because of that relationship, they had left their pagan worship of false gods, which had kept them in spiritual bondage. However, instead of continuing in grace, they had turned aside into trouble. The false teaching of the Judaizers was just another form of bondage for them.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Paul dearly loved the Galatians. He led many of them to the Lord. But after Paul left, their relationship became strained. The Galatians were on the verge of rejecting both Paul and his message. Nevertheless, Paul kept reaching out to them.

I. Paul's Concern for the Galatians (Gal. 4:8–11)

The report from Galatia had greatly concerned Paul. He knew that if the Galatians continued to follow the teaching of the Judaizers, they would compromise the testimony of Christ and weaken their own spiritual lives.

A. Their past bondage (4:8)

READ: Galatians 4:8.

Paul addressed the Galatians pointedly, recalling that before coming to Christ, they had served pagan gods. Because the pagan gods were only projections of human imagination, they were essentially humans but with exaggerated power. The ancient gods had the same vices as humans, such as greed, deceit, ambition, and lust; and they had greater potential for expressing these vices in damaging ways. Therefore, pagan worshipers tried to keep the gods on their side by bribing them. Paganism enslaved the worshipers' minds and controlled their lives.

ASK: Describe what life would be like serving gods who were both powerful and temperamental. (Q3) *There would be a constant uncertainty and a high level of anxiety about every aspect of life.*

Paul recalled that the Galatians had done "service unto them which by nature are no gods" (Gal. 4:8). When the Galatians trusted in Christ as Savior, He released them from the futility of paganism. Worshiping a pagan god was simply bondage to a god that did not exist.

READ: Acts 14:8–15. **ASK:** How did Paul describe God to the pagan worshipers in Galatia on his first missionary journey (v. 15)? (Q4) *As the living God Who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.*

The pagan Galatians served false gods so they might gain the gods' favor and experience good crops and full bellies. But they could not count on their gods to be good to them. They lived in fear of their gods and went to great lengths to appease them.

READ: Acts 14:16, 17. **ASK:** What did God do to show His gracious and loving nature to the Galatians and the rest of the world? (Q5) *He provided rain for bountiful crops so the world might have full and happy hearts.*

The Galatians ignored Paul's description of God's gracious acts. They deeply hoped that Paul and Barnabas were Zeus and Hermes. They burst with excitement over the attention and favor they thought their gods were giving to them. They wondered what favors they might gain from their temperamental gods. But later, the same people who were ready to sacrifice to Paul stoned him nearly to death. Jews from neighboring towns had persuaded the multitudes that Paul was not a god after all.

Some of those fearful, anxiety-ridden Galatians did respond to the gospel. They learned the joys of serving the gracious creator God.

B. Their return to bondage (4:9, 10)

After reminding the Galatian believers about their former slavery in paganism, Paul addressed their current situation. They had turned away from God's grace to spiritual bondage. The Judaizers demanded the Galatians keep laws in order to gain God's favor. Again, they were "jumping through hoops" for a deity in order to sway that deity to bless them.

READ: Galatians 4:9.

In addressing the Galatians' return to bondage, Paul referred to their salvation in two ways: they had come to know God and they were known of God (4:9). By referring to their salvation in these ways, Paul emphasized that God's grace had reached the Galatians and given them the knowledge of God. Such "knowledge" was relational. God initiated a close relationship with the Galatians through their faith in Christ. Paganism provided no opportunity for such a relationship with any god. Zeus and Hermes never appeared to the Galatians or communicated with them. They and the rest of the pagan gods remained lifeless and silent because they were never real.

ASK: How has your personal relationship with God made your life different than those who don't know God? (Q6)

Tragically, the Galatians turned away from their glorious new relationship with God and turned to principles that Paul called "weak and beggarly elements" (4:9). Both Jewish regulations and pagan practices were "weak and beggarly." They were weak because they had no power to give spiritual life. They were beggarly because

they made people shrink away from God in fear, rather than draw near to Him in faith.

In their pagan state the Galatians had been in bondage to false gods. When they chose to submit to the teaching of the Judaizers, they in effect reentered spiritual slavery. Instead of enjoying the freedom Christ had given them, they bound themselves to a rigid routine that forced them to “observe days, and months, and times, and years” (4:10). They were conducting their lives by the Jewish calendar instead of focusing joyfully on Jesus Christ. They observed Sabbath (“days”), monthly recurring events (“months”), feasts (“times”), and perhaps Jubilee or the Sabbatical year (“years”).

C. Paul’s reason for concern (4:11)

In Galatians 2:2, Paul reported that he had consulted with the Jerusalem apostles. He had talked with them about the gospel of Christ and about his ministry to the Gentiles. His purpose was to make sure that his ministry to the Gentiles was not being undermined by those who were working among the Jews. In other words, he did not want his ministry to be “in vain.” As he addressed the Galatians in 4:11, he used similar language to describe his concern for them.

READ: Galatians 4:11.

The Galatians had received the gospel of grace; however, by turning from grace to the Judaizers’ legalism, they were rejecting the message he had preached to them. If they rejected the gospel of grace, the ministry in Galatia would die and Paul’s labor there would have been in vain. That troubled Paul because he cared deeply for the Galatians.

II. Paul’s Compassion for the Galatians (Gal. 4:12–20)

Because Paul cared deeply about the Galatians, his tone of writing turned from logical persuasion to passionate pleading.

A. The Galatians received Paul (4:12–14)

Paul tenderly addressed the Galatians as brothers. He knew they were part of God’s family by faith in Christ. Even though they abandoned the doctrine of grace, he did not abandon them (4:12).

READ: Galatians 4:12.

Paul had grown up in the religious bondage of Judaism, just as the Galatians had experienced the bondage of paganism. But the grace of God had set him free. The Galatians had also received this freedom, but they were sliding toward the same spiritual bondage of Judaism from which Paul had been set free. He charged them, “Be as I am; for I am as ye are” (4:12).

During his appeal in verse 12, Paul abruptly changed the subject, and offered, “Ye have not injured me at all.” He had known the Galatians from their days in paganism, through their salvation, and into their present defection towards the Judaizers. Though they had disappointed Paul, his commitment to them remained strong.

ASK: Why does a legalistic attitude lead to a lack of love toward others? (Q7)

The legalist focuses on judging a person's actions rather than loving the person and offering to help them change.

READ: Galatians 4:13.

In verse 13 Paul reminded the Galatians of the circumstances surrounding his first contact with them. He said that it was “through infirmity of the flesh” that he had gone to them. Likely a physical ailment had caused him to change his original itinerary.

Paul remained loyal to God even though his physical condition was uncomfortable. He was concerned about his testimony before the Galatians.

Paul’s physical ailment had not caused the Galatians to reject him when he first preached the gospel to them (4:14). They had recognized that God sent him to them with the message of the gospel. What a contrast from their eventual rejection of Paul and of his message of grace!

B. The Galatians resisted Paul (4:15–18)

When the Galatians received Paul’s message of the gospel of grace (4:14), they came into fellowship with God. The bitterness of paganism was replaced by the blessedness of joy in Christ. The Galatians overflowed in gratitude to God and to Paul, His messenger. In fact, their affection for Paul was so great that Paul testified, “Ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me” (4:15). Perhaps this offer is a reference to Paul’s presumed eye disorder. Either way, Paul knew the Galatians would stop at nothing to help him.

Paul’s question of Galatians 4:16 stands in stark contrast to the loving relationship that formerly existed between him and the Galatians. “Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?” he demanded. They had come to Christ and rejoiced in the Lord because Paul had told them the truth of the gospel. He was continuing to tell them the truth of the gospel. And he was telling them the truth when he charged the Judaizers with deception. Nevertheless, the Galatians were treating him as an enemy.

ASK: Which is more loving, telling people what they want to hear or telling them the truth about their bad decisions? (Q8) *Telling them the truth.*

ASK: When have you been glad someone told you the truth instead of what you wanted to hear? (Q9)

READ: Galatians 4:17, 18.

Paul described the motives of the Judaizers in unflattering terms (4:17). They had a strong interest in the Galatians, but not for a wholesome reason. The Judaizers were trying to drive a wedge between the Galatians and Paul, to cut them off from the apostle. The Judaizers’ main goal was to control and dominate the Galatians. They did not really care about the Galatians. They simply wanted to use the Galatians to feed their own egos and to further their own selfish ambi-

tions. Paul didn't try to develop a personal loyalty by fighting fire with fire. On the contrary, he reminded the Galatians that the only good interest is interest in what is good (4:18). His only concern was for the Galatians to recommit themselves to the gospel of grace, for only that message was good. Their resistance to Paul was symptomatic of the underlying disease of rejecting the gospel of grace.

C. Paul responded to the Galatians (4:19, 20)

READ: Galatians 4:19.

Paul had already indicated his affection for the Galatians by addressing them as “brethren” (4:12). In verse 19 he went even further in describing his deep concern for them. Even though he was understandably disappointed and upset with the Galatians, he considered them “my little children.”

Paul's depiction of himself as a mother in labor for a second time communicated his deep concern for the Galatians' future. In his previous encounter with the Galatians he had endured much pain in bringing them to Christ. That pain resembled the pain a mother endured in giving birth to her child. Nevertheless, Paul's loving ministry to the Galatians was not over. The Galatians had come to know Christ, but they had not developed to a mature, stable level of Christian experience. The Judaizers were threatening to cut short their spiritual development before they became Christlike believers. Because of this danger, Paul again endured the pain of reaching out to the Galatians on behalf of Christ. Unlike the Judaizers, who tried to use the Galatians for their own ends, Paul sacrificed himself because of his love for the Galatians.

ASK: Compare the Judaizers' motives for the Galatians believers (v. 17) with Paul's motives for them (v. 19). (Q10) *The Judaizers wanted the believers to become loyal to them in order to become like them. Paul wanted the believers to become loyal to God in order to become like Christ.*

ASK: Have you ever wished a person walking away from God would return to Him so you would not have to invest as much time in him or her? Explain. (Q11)

The birthing process is often long, painful, and difficult. But the new life that comes into the world as a result makes the pain and agony of the birth well worth it. That's how Paul felt toward the Galatians. He was ready to go through the labor of bringing them back to God because he wanted them to again walk in the freedom available in Christ.

Paul had to write harshly to the Galatians to deal with their error as quickly as possible. But he knew he needed to get back to Galatia to have his greatest impact (4:20). He believed that if he could talk with them again, he could rekindle their confidence in him and their commitment to the gospel of grace. When that happened, as Paul felt certain it would, he could change his tone of voice toward them. No longer would he have to speak severely to the disobedient Galatians. Instead, he could speak gently, because finally they would concur with him.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Use the following activities to help the learners value the freedom the gospel gives and to accept the responsibility such freedom brings.

Staying Loyal

ASK: What steps will you take to guard your loyalty to God and the gospel?
(Q12) *Examine my service to God for any signs of legalism; stay connected to God through His Word; share the gospel.*

Reaching Out

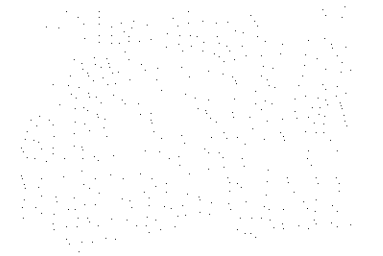
RESOURCE: Display resource 10. Review the ways in which Paul modeled true Christian love toward the erring Galatians.

ASK: How could we reach out in love to believers who seem to have departed from sound doctrine or godly living? (Q13)

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Remain loyal to God and the gospel.

Encourage your learners to memorize John 8:32. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.



True Christian Love
Paul modeled true Christian love with the erring Galatians

Paul's Model

1. Sets an example (4:12)
2. Sacrifices (4:13)
3. Tells the truth (4:16)
4. Commits to help (4:19)
5. Fellowships (4:20)

Our Practice

FAITH & FREEDOM

GALATIANS

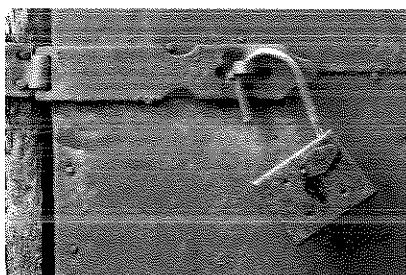
Living by Faith

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2.	9.
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6.	13.
7.	

FAITH & FREEDOM

GALATIANS

Set Free!



Topic

Liberty in Christ

Theme

Christ has set us free from the law.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will live out the freedom of liberty in Christ.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 11
- Heavy box or container with handles
- Cord or strip of material

Scripture Focus

Galatians 4:21—5:1

Summary

Abraham's two sons illustrate the difference between the Judaizers' teaching and the gospel of grace. Abraham's son Ishmael was born "after the flesh" but Abraham's other son, Isaac, was born "by promise." Since spiritual blessings spring from promise and not from the flesh, the Galatians needed to stand in the liberty Christ had given them.

Outline

I. What the Law Said (Gal. 4:21–23)

- A. Paul appealed to the whole law (4:21)
- B. Paul illustrated works and promise (4:22, 23)

II. What the Law Implied (Gal. 4:24–27)

- A. Hagar represented law (4:24, 25)
- B. Sarah represented grace (4:26, 27)

III. How the Law Applied (Gal. 4:28–5:1)

- A. Expect persecution (4:28, 29)
- B. Abandon Judaism (4:30, 31)
- C. Stand in liberty (5:1)

Memory Verse

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).