

# Explore the Bible: True Freedom

September 10, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 30 focuses on Galatians 4:8-20.*

Since the Apostle Paul will be speaking rather bluntly with the church at Galatia, it might help us to recall one of the significant themes from the previous lesson. He emphasized the beauty of “adoption” as going from being a pauper to becoming a prince (or heir).

*What is the anticipated response of a person who has moved from a “slave” to an “heir?”* We picture celebrations and singing, along with jubilant social media posts and homemade videos. The “new normal” is something worthy of note. A former slave who is now free would have little problem announcing his or her freedom to any and all who would listen.

*Ask: What is an example you know of where someone gained some sort of freedom? How did that person respond?* Celebrating freedom is significant, as is sharing freedom. But even more important, we always need to recognize the source of true freedom: Jesus Christ.

## **The Problem (Galatians 4:8-11)**

*How is it that a person could experience God in such a real way, and then turn away from him?* This might seem ridiculous to the most devoted Christian, yet to an “outsider” or non-Christian, it may be less surprising. To Paul, the problem is seemingly ridiculous.

Notice the contrast between God and “less-than-God.” A person who is a

child of God was formerly a slave to someone less than God. *Does it make sense to go from knowing God to trying to better know someone else?* The issue is that denying freedom is linked to denying God, and this borders on blasphemy.

There is a clear element of exasperation from Paul when he said that he felt he had wasted his efforts on the Galatians (see verse 11). The problem for Paul did not seem to be such a problem to the people, however. *How do we respond to people who don't see the same problems we do?*

## **The Plea (Galatians 4:12-14)**

There always is a strategy behind the writings of Paul. From the shortest to the longest of his letters, one may recognize the shaping of the writer's argument, and this portion is no different. The apostle's "plea" is his sales' pitch, but it is an interesting one that could be misconstrued.

As a teacher, asking students to emulate one's self is not out of the ordinary. The plea itself in verse 12 is not pompous, nor self-focused. In fact, he uses his own humble circumstances to prove the point. Consider asking: *How would you respond to Paul's plea?*

We have no way of knowing the exact circumstance of their past interaction, but Paul does bring us in close enough to see the contrast of then and the current issue. The people once had seen Paul as an "angel of God" instead of him now being a convicting apostle (L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians*, 118).

## **The Passion (Galatians 4:15-20)**

Even Paul was passionately perplexed about this entire situation. Be sure not to move too fast beyond the initial question: "What has happened to all

your joy?” A friend once told about his experience walking into a church office that had lost its fervor, asking the same question. A lack of joy is closely connected to a lack of knowing and living in the freedom of God.

There is a fatherly concern in the apostle that is noticeable even when reading the ink on the page. The uttering of “my dear children” and the words following show the mixture of emotions Paul experienced knowing that his former positive reception was now given to the Judaizers.

Consider the idea that the Galatians had once had a passion for the freedom found in Christ, but refocused that passion on their new interest. Misplaced passion does not lack passion, but it does lack the right direction. *How have we been guilty in other ways of misdirected passion, and how has that resulted for us?*

## Conclusion

There is no doubting that the message of true freedom in Christ is worth telling and retelling. However, we have seen clearly Paul delivered this message at significant cost; relationships were now in turmoil. *Why was his confrontation worth the cost?*

The message of freedom and cost is consistently stated in a culture such as that of the United States. For example, Memorial Day emphasizes the cost of life to preserve freedom, and this takes root in the example of Jesus’s dying sacrifice to make freedom possible. It seems this message of freedom is retold willingly, because the freedom was worth the cost.

*How much more is eternal freedom worth sharing? Is it necessary to be so forward about the reality that true freedom is only through Christ?* Paul certainly believed so, and rightfully so, because anything else is less than true freedom. Those adopted by God are given a real freedom. They must be reminded—and remind others—about the source of this true freedom.

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