

Galatians 4:8-31

“Reversing Course”

1. Begin with prayer and read Galatians 4:8-31 [5 minutes].

2. Review briefly the previous lesson on Galatians 3:23—4:7 [5 minutes].

3. Discuss how Paul details his continuing concern for his Galatian brothers and sisters in Galatians 4:8-12a [15 minutes].

- A. Paul describes how Galatians once lived: as slaves to “so-called gods that do not even exist” and to “the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world” (4:8-9 NLT)
- B. Note Paul states in verse 9a that while the Galatians “know” God, truth is more that God “knows” them (very Reformed!): word “know” often used to express relations much deeper than intellectual (example: Genesis often uses “know” for sexual relations contributing to “one flesh,” like Adam and Eve, Genesis 4)
- C. Two ways to understand “spiritual principles”: 1) actual deities like Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, and the like; 2) basic principles common to all religions founded by humans, often very transactional (worship this particular God, and you have rain for crops); ultimately either 1) or 2) leads to some form of self-salvation
- D. Paul’s fear: by putting their trust in Jewish practices encouraged by the false teachers (see v. 10), they are no longer living in the freedom Jesus gives
- E. “The false teachers were not encouraging the Gentile Christians to ignore God’s law, as they had in their pagan days. Rather, they were urging them to adopt *all* the Old Testament Mosaic law, in order to be justified and pleasing to God. Therefore, Paul is saying that earning one’s own salvation through scrupulous biblical morality and religion is just as much enslavement to idols as outright paganism and all its immoral practices!” (Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*, 103-104)
 - *Presbyterians really like what Paul says in 4:9a (NLT), “So now that you know God (or should I say, now that God knows you).” What does this parenthetical comment by Paul reveal about what’s most important in a relationship with God? What does the word “know” bring to the table in this context?*
 - *Discuss the Tim Keller quotation above in point F. How do we fall into the trap of trying to earn God’s favor through our religious, family, and church activities? How do we counter and get out of this trap?*

4. Discuss how Paul shares the depth of his previous relationship with the Galatian Christians in Galatians 4:12b-20 [10 minutes].

- A. Paul recounts relationship with Galatian Christians from when he first arrived: they listened, took care of him, and showed great “gospel hospitality” when he was ill with unknown malady (conjecture about eye disease based on 4:15)

- B. Relational bond strong between Paul and Galatian Christians: important key to planting and growing churches in any location and age
- C. False teachers present themselves well, but “their intentions are not good” (4:17 NLT); their desire is to separate Paul from the congregations he planted
- D. Depth of feeling from Paul toward Galatian Christians evident in 4:19-20
 - *Define gospel hospitality based on Galatians 4:12b-20. How is gospel hospitality central to Paul’s relationship with the Galatians from the start? In what ways can gospel hospitality be central in how we serve at MDPC?*
 - *A long-time development officer once told this writer, “All you need to be a good fund raiser is sincerity. If you can fake that, you’ve got it made.” How does this quote shed light on the false teachers with the Galatians? On how we can be discerning with others we encounter today?*

5. Discuss how Paul illustrates and explains his teaching with the examples of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis in Galatians 4:21-31 [10 minutes].

- A. Paul often seeks to make clear his perspective through illustrations, but installation in verses 21-31, however, has caused much confusion: flips the usual expectation that Sarah represents the Jews and Hagar the Gentiles, so Hagar is “Mount Sinai” and Law, while Sarah is “heavenly Jerusalem” and freedom
- B. Verse 23 essential for correct understanding of illustration: “The son of the slave wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God’s promise. But the son of the freeborn wife was born as God’s own fulfillment of his promise” (NLT); thus Hagar’s story is one of self-salvation, and Sarah’s story is one of divine salvation
- C. Review Genesis 16 on how Sarah and Abraham together concoct a way to bring about a son Ishmael and attempt to fulfill the covenant on their own; then review Genesis 18 and 21 for how God fulfills his promise to Abraham and Sarah with Isaac
- D. Paul’s application point? “And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac. But now you are being persecuted by those who want you to keep the law...” (4:28-29a NLT)
 - *The Bible is filled with stories of people doing what they think is God’s will, but it’s not in accordance with God’s plan, timing, or way. Like Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 16. What are other examples in Scripture that may help us as we come to forks in the road and we’re deciding on the right path to take?*
 - *The temptation for us as “children of the promise” (4:28 NLT)? We think that the gospel saves us, but then we put it aside and live daily by other things. In reality, the gospel is not just the ABC of salvation, but the A to Z of Christian living. So talk about one way the gospel doesn’t just save you for eternal life, but guides and directs you in everyday, ordinary life.*

6. Close in prayer.