

Slaver vs. Promise, Identity vs. Performance

Galatians 4:8-31

Main Idea

You can know the gospel... and still drift back into slavery.

Paul is fighting to remind them:

You are not slaves trying to earn identity.

You are children born from promise.

Section 1: Going Back to Slavery (Galatians 4:8–11)

Paul shifts again here. He's been building this big theological argument, and now he brings it back to something really personal.

He says:

“Before you knew God, you were slaves... but now that you know God, or rather are known by God, how are you turning back?”

That line matters.

Not just “you know God”...
but **you are known by God.**

Teaching Point

Paul is saying:

You didn't just find God.
God found you.

Paul reminds them of their past.

They used to live in a world where people worshiped false gods, systems of power, culture, status. This is the Roman world, where people were enslaved to men who claimed to be divine.

And now Paul says:

If you go back to this system of performance, identity markers, and earning...

you're not moving forward.

You're going backward.

Key Insight

Returning to performance-based religion is not growth.

It is regression into slavery.

Discussion

Ask:

- Why does Paul call this “slavery”?
- What are modern forms of “slavery” people return to?
- Why do people go back to things that once controlled them?

Section 2: “Become Like Me” (Galatians 4:12–16)

Then Paul gets really personal.

“I plead with you... become like me, for I became like you.”

Paul reminds them:

When I came to you, I met you where you were.

I humbled myself.

I entered your world.

And he reminds them of something else.

He came to them because of an illness.

And instead of rejecting him, they welcomed him.

They treated him like family.

Like an angel.

Like Christ Himself.

Teaching Point

This is powerful:

They were already living out the heart of Abraham.

They showed **hospitality, grace, and welcome**.

And now Paul asks:

“What changed?”

Why are you treating me differently now?

I’m not bringing a new message.

I’m reminding you of the same gospel.

Discussion

Ask:

- Why do people sometimes turn against truth when it confronts them?
- Why is it easier to receive truth at one stage but resist it later?

Section 3: Zeal vs. Truth (Galatians 4:17–20)

Paul then talks about the people influencing them.

He says:

“They are zealous to win you over... but not for good.”

This is huge.

Because zeal is not the problem.

Teaching Point

You can be passionate...
and still be wrong.

Paul says:

It's fine to be zealous... if the purpose is good.

The problem is not passion.

The problem is **what you're passionate about**.

Key Insight (from your notes)

The circumcision party was zealous for exclusivity.

But the gospel is about **inclusion into God's promise**.

Discussion

Ask:

- Why can passion sometimes be misleading?
- What are things people are passionate about today that aren't actually aligned with truth?

Section 4: The Heart of the Gospel (Big Teaching Moment)

Paul reminds us of something we cannot miss.

From the beginning of the story, God has been trying to do one thing:

Bless all nations.

This is not new.

This is not Paul being progressive.

This is Genesis.

This is Abraham.

This is the original promise.

Teaching Point

The gospel is not about shrinking the circle.

It's about opening the door.

But we struggle with this.

Just like the Galatians.

We create spiritual checkpoints:

“You have to act like this...”

“Believe like this...”

“Look like this...”

“Clean yourself up first...”

And Paul says:

That's not the gospel.

Discussion

Ask:

- What are modern “spiritual checkpoints” people create?
- Why do we naturally drift toward exclusion?

Section 5: “Tell Me... Do You Even Know the Law?” (Galatians 4:21)

Then Paul goes right at them.

“Tell me, you who want to be under the law... do you even know what the law says?”

That’s a bold move.

Paul is saying:

You’re trying to live under something...
you don’t even fully understand.

Teaching Point

People often run toward systems they don’t actually understand.

Discussion

Ask:

- Why do people sometimes follow systems or beliefs without really understanding them?
- Where do we see that happen today?

Section 6: Hagar and Sarah (Galatians 4:22–26)

Now Paul does something very Jewish.

He tells a story.

But not just a story.

An allegory.

He says Abraham had two sons:

One by Hagar

One by Sarah

One born into slavery

One born through promise

Teaching Point

Paul is using this story to explain two ways of living:

- Slavery (performance, law, pressure)
- Promise (faith, freedom, trust)

Paul connects Hagar to Sinai and the present Jerusalem.

In other words:

The system of law-based identity.

And Sarah represents something greater:

The promise.

The freedom.

The “Jerusalem above.”

Key Insight

This would have been shocking.

Because the people who thought they were “insiders” are being compared to slavery.

And the Gentiles?

They are being called children of promise.

Discussion

Ask:

- Why would this comparison have been so offensive?
- Why do people struggle to let go of identity systems they’ve always trusted?

Section 7: Children of Promise (Galatians 4:27–31)

Paul brings it home.

He calls these Gentile believers:

Brothers.

That matters.

Because earlier they were outsiders.

Now Paul says:

You belong.

You are family.

You are children of promise.

Teaching Point

This is the gospel:

Not that outsiders get close...

But that outsiders become family.

Paul says:

Just like Isaac, you were born by promise.

Not by effort.

Not by identity markers.

Not by performance.

Key Statement

You are not children of slavery.

You are children of freedom.

Discussion

Ask:

- What's the difference between living like a slave and living like a child?
- Why do people who are free still live like they are slaves?

Big Takeaway

Paul is asking one question over and over:

Why would you trade freedom for slavery?

Why would you trade promise for performance?

Why would you trade identity in Christ...
for identity in rules?

Application

Ask:

- Where are you tempted to “go back” to performance?
- What makes you feel like you have to earn your place?
- Do you live more like a child of promise... or a slave to pressure?

Weekly Challenge

Have students:

- Identify one area where they feel like they have to “perform” for God
- Replace that with truth: “I am a child of promise”
- Treat one outsider like family this week
- Read Galatians 3–4 together and track every mention of promise vs law

Closing

You are not what you earn.

You are not what you prove.

You are not what others say you have to become.

You are who God says you are.

And in Jesus...

You are not a slave.

You are a child of promise.