

FREE INDEED? **Galatians 4:8-31**

(Read Galatians 4:8-31)

Intro: What would you do with \$1.6 billion? Apparently, there was one winning ticket in the Mega Millions drawing last Tuesday. One person or one couple or one family is suddenly able to draw almost \$20 million per year for the rest of their life and never run out. Imagine the freedom they now have. Think about the freedom you'd have if you had that kind of money. And just think of what your tithe to ABC would be – we would have \$2 million added to our budget in perpetuity. Just think the freedom we would have here at ABC.

NOT!!!!

No matter how amazing that would seem, suddenly being fabulously and wildly wealthy would not bring freedom – it would bring quite the opposite. You would suddenly be mobbed with friends you never knew. You would become well acquainted with the IRS. What seems wonderful would soon seem terrible. It would not be free. One piece I read online in MarketWatch said that *“that the average person in their 20s, 30s and 40s who was given an inheritance or large financial gift quickly lost half the money through spending or poor investments.”* And went on to say that *“other studies found that winning the lottery generally didn't help financially distressed people escape their troubles and instead only postponed the inevitable bankruptcy. One found that a third of lottery winners go bankrupt.”*

The truth is, what the world sees as freedom is slavery. In fact, if freedom is based in human wisdom or effort, you can count on it being bondage.

That is why Paul is incredulous that the Galatians are turning to something other than the free grace he had taught about when he was living with them. And really, it is a puzzle that still has us scratching our heads 2000 years later: When you have it so good . . .

Why go back?

- Paul's point is, how can you know God and go back? And it is difficult to believe, until we realize how often we relapse. At least I do. I have struggled with weight all my life. I do not understand skinny people – especially those who seemingly eat anything that's not nailed down. Me? I look at food and gain weight. And when I'm really careless I can pack it on. And as you know, every few years I get frustrated enough with myself to do something about it. And I go on a diet and I lose lots of weight and feel great and I know I'm much healthier and I think – “How could I ever go back to being fat?” But I do. Why go back?
- It's what happens anytime anyone tries filling a God-shaped void in their life with a man-made solution. I just talked about Overcomers who help men overcome their chemical addictions, which is a picture of what happens when you have a gap in your life and you try to fill it with anything other than Jesus Christ. Paul is heading his dear friends in Galatia off at the pass before they really fall back too far. He is presenting them with grace over works.
- He does it by pointing out that the mature person is the one who takes their stand on grace and find that there is freedom there. This is because the true heirs of Christ are not those under bondage to the law, but under the freedom of Christ. And truthfully, it is totally irrational to go back. And in their case, they had not even been Jewish, but because of false teaching had reverted to Jewish practices. Along with those practices had come the special days of the year that people did by rote and with very little feeling. His word to them was . . .

Don't get caught up in worthless observances

- They were Gentiles, so there were pagan rituals that die hard. Now the Judiazers were bringing in even more confusion. One of the features of Jewish law was its observance of special times. To this Barclay says, *“The failure of a religion which is dependent on special occasions is that almost inevitably it divides days into sacred and secular; and the further, almost inevitable step, is that when a man has meticulously observed the sacred days he is liable to think that he has discharged his duty to God.”*
- This is a big temptation. It is the folly of the C&E crowd who think that as long as they get to church at Christmas and Easter they've done their part with the big man upstairs. It's a danger for the person who comes to church on Sunday and thinks that enough to cover for the fact that they live like the devil the other 166 hours of the week. What happens here on Sunday morning is what gives us the fuel to live for Jesus between Sundays.

- Another commentator said, "*Jesus Christ did not say, 'I am come that they may have religion,' but, 'I am come that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'*" To make religion a thing of special times is to make it an external thing. For the real Christian every day is God's day.
- Experience the freedom of following Jesus and as F. B. Meyer wrote, "*Don't exchange the beauty of walking with Jesus for peripheral nonsense.*" In fact, make it easy on yourself and . . .

Stick to the simplicity of faith

- I recently finished a short writing assignment for the Brethren in Christ Historical Society on what it was like to grow up Brethren in Christ. One of the things I recalled and put into words was how I inherited my father's simple faith. When Daddy finished eighth grade his education was complete. It was during the depths of the Great Depression and he was needed to provide for his family. He was not an educated man by any stretch, and yet he was called into BIC ministry at age ten years later at age 24. He was not a theologian but he had a theology. He believed Jesus died for his sins and had a plan for his life and his eternal life. And he took Jesus at his word. What he knew was good enough. And it IS good enough. I am so grateful for that simple faith that has served me in good stead.
- Too many make Christianity far too difficult. They debate things that will never amount to anything other than maybe enough frustration to make them give up. You can't get all the answers – only God has them. What is good enough is a simple faith in the finished work of Jesus.
- Paul then softens. He begins, in an almost maudlin and, certainly, affectionate way, to remind his readers of how they cared for him when he was with them. Most scholars think he was suffering from malaria and came to the highlands where Galatia was situated, to recover. He remembers how they would go to great sacrifice for him and, actually, did. Nevertheless, his integrity and his passion for the way of grace meant that he needed to speak forcefully because...

Sometimes the truth hurts

- But even so, he scolded, but it was not with nasty words. He was longed for his spiritual children to return to the fold. Barclay shared about a famous missionary and teacher of his time, "that if she had cause to rebuke any of her students she did so, as it were, with her arm around them." Then he adds this priceless truth about speaking the truth in love: "The accent of love will penetrate where the tones of anger will never find a way."
- A week ago, one of my favorite people passed away. Eugene Peterson was the author of many books and the translator of the paraphrase of the Bible that I often use entitled THE MESSAGE. In an interview a little over two years ago he discussed the power of words and how they can cause the hearer to soar or sink into despair. He was reminded at that time how he had once written, "*We cannot be too careful about the words we use; we start out using them and they end up using us.*" Let's watch our words, even as we always stand for the truth.
- In Paul's thinking, as he corrects the Galatians, love is always more powerful than law. And then, for my final thought . . .

Being zealous is good – for the right things

- Paul uses an allegory comparing the two sons of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was the child of a slave girl with whom Abraham had slept when he tried to take his legacy into his own control. The law is humanity trying to control their destiny and it does not work. Isaac was the child of a promise we read about in Genesis 15 a week or so ago. The way of grace is the way of promise. And we can trust the promise.
- Paul adroitly points out that we can get so wrapped up in religion that we end up in bondage. Let's stay away from religion and take hold of the promise of grace, and then it's no question, we WILL be free indeed. Amen.