

Life Lessons from Paul
Galatians 4:8-20
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6/25/22

Have you ever had a friendship change?

You thought you were close and then...cold shoulder, doesn't return texts, avoids normal places of contact.

Last week Deborah shared with the ladies about the friendship of Jonathan with David.

Saul become jealous of David and their relationship changed.

I remember in high school there were guys that I had grown up with but we started playing different sports...and things changed.

Or maybe, you had to speak some hard truth, and it was not received...
Paul is navigating relational change.

This sort of thing happens to most of us one way or another.

We really do want to have real and right relationship with God and others...
...and so we will point out a 10 elements of a real and right relationship with God and others along the way.

Last week we discussed being confined and under guard by the law like Alcatraz AND our adoption now crying out Abba Father!

Paul gets more personal...we will learn more about him.

I will also reference a few of the Scriptures in the NLT.
More modern thought for though translation...

8 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.

Bob Dylan famously said-You're gonna to serve somebody!
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

One way or another, you will serve someone or something.
Humans always worship.
They **devote** their time or attention or affections **somewhere**.

You may serve the Lord or you will serve “other gods”.
This phrase was often used in the Old Testament for local idols.
Baal, Molech, Ashteroth...

When we don't know God, of course we don't serve God.

We serve ourselves, our own interests, and “other gods”.

The idols of ancient times were not so different than many things people worship today they have just been “rebranded”.

Power, sex, and riches continue to be things we serve.

...Before you knew God, this is how you lived.

It should not be a shock to us that those who don't believe in God, don't serve God.

1. We serve God.

9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

But now...there is a change.
The change is we know God...
We don't just know about Him.
We have a relationship with Him.

And we don't just know Him...He knows us!
How does God know us?
...He knows us because we do His will.

Matthew 7:**21** “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, **but he who does the will of My Father** in heaven. **22** Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ **23** And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

2. We do the will of God.

Paul is saying, “You have a real relationship with God, and instead you want to go back to a weak and beggarly status of being in bondage under the Law?!?! Are you crazy?!?”

You are out of jail and you want to go back to incarceration?
You are free and adopted and you want to go back to foster care?

NLT says “Why do you want to go back again and become slaves once more to the weak and useless spiritual principles of this world?”

- They followed a standard that offered no strength... it just showed them their weakness.
- They followed a righteousness they couldn't reach.

What were they doing?

10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.

They were trying to keep the holy days as a means of salvation and as a burden of being right with God.

You can celebrate special days, just don't think it is going to get you right with God.

*They thought you had to celebrate **Passover** and keep the **Sabbath** and observe **Yom Kippur** etc.*

Today, maybe it would be **fasting** or taking part in **Lent** or even coming to **church** on Sunday.

3. We make choices to grow not be accepted.

Ok, so what does that look like?

- We fast so we can focus on the Lord, not so we can make God do what we want.
- We may choose to take part in Lent to strengthen our self control or self denial not to get brownie points from God.
- We come to church to hear God's word, fellowship and stir each other up to love and good works, not so that when we die, God will “let us in.”

Paul is getting a little more vulnerable sharing his fears...

11 I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

He fears his work was wasted —“labor to the point of exhaustion”

Why share the gospel if people don't need the gospel?

Why plant churches if they are just going to go back to Judaism?

Why teach about Jesus if they're just going to go back to Moses?

Have you ever worked so hard for something, and it just washes away?

We were at the beach this week, and this family made a huge sand castle...the tide was coming up, it won't be there today.

They may have enjoyed building it, but it isn't going to last.

...Maybe that is how Paul is feeling.

But thankfully, Paul didn't build with hay and stubble.

He was building with the gold of the gospel and the precious stones of Christ.

4. We labor for the gospel.

What we do for Christ will last, either in the fruit of people's lives in eternity or in our sacrificial obedience to the Lord.

I don't work to be accepted, I work because I am accepted.

I work because I want others to know Christ.

I don't force or manipulate or shame- I love, convince & pray.

12 Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I *became* like you. You have not injured me at all.

Try this

v 12 NLT: Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do in freedom from these things, for I have become like you Gentiles—free from those laws.

What Paul is saying is that they switched roles.

Paul is now free from the Law just like the Gentiles have been.

But these Gentiles are becoming like Jews, bound by the law.

He says you were free, now I am, come back where you belong.

The 2nd part is more personal and may belong to the next verse

You did not mistreat me when I first preached to you.

13 You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. **14** And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, *even* as Christ Jesus.

Evidently, Paul had some physical problem that led him to share the gospel with them.

People tried to kill Paul in Lystra and left him for dead after stoning him.

This would no doubt create some physical problems for anyone!

But in spite of Paul's infirmity, whatever it was, they received him.

They treated him like an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.

It is easy at times for us to look at the messenger when considering the message.

Studies have showed the people naturally think **taller people** are better leaders.

Appearance often influences people's opinions re: **politicians**.

Paul says, they didn't do that.

5. We treat people as divinely important.

Honestly, isn't that how we should treat everyone?

It doesn't matter if they are sickly or strong.
Handsome or homely.
Young or old.
Cool or clueless.

We should treat every person like they are divinely important.

They are created in the image of God and Christ died for every single one.

15 What then was the blessing you *enjoyed*? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. **16** Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

NLT 15 Where is that joyful and grateful spirit you felt then? I am sure you would have taken out your own eyes and given them to me if it had been possible. **16** Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?

This is where some think Paul had a problem with his eyes.

(I think he was injured in the stoning and it effected his vision.)

He had problems with his eyes, and as we will see later had to write in big letters! I totally can feel that!!

...Without reading glasses, I would be in a pretty sorry state!

Paul is saying when I was sick, you were ready to pluck out your eyes for me!

You would do anything for me!

6. We do whatever we can for others.

BUT...Now, where is the love?

Am I now your enemy because I told you the truth?

...Ooh. That might hit too close to home, right?

Have you ever told someone the truth in love, but they couldn't receive it and they turned on you like an enemy?!

So painful. Especially in ministry or family.

We must weigh the consequences and the outcome...

And if necessary, speak truth in love.

7. We don't protect others from helpful truth.

Now Paul is going to get up in the Judaizers business.

...Paul doesn't shy away from conflict.

...He gives names and he speaks truth for their benefit.

17 They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. **18** But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you.

“They act like they want you but they just want something from you.”

They don't really love you.
They don't really care for you.
They just want another notch in their belt.
They want another convert on their list.

This is such a good reminder for our motives.

Do we share the gospel because we love people and love God?
Or do we share the gospel because we want to feel good about ourselves? Or it is our duty? Or ?

Do we use people to accomplish our ministry?

Have you ever thought someone cared for you and then realized they just wanted something from you?

8. We keep our motives pure.

Paul is pointing out the impurity of their motives as proof of the impurity of their message.

...This is something people do today.

I will not attend that church, I don't trust their motives.
I will not talk to those christians, I am just their project.
I will not listen to that message, they just want my money.

We must be careful with our motives, so no one questions the purity of our message.

We will close here...

19 My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, **20** I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

NLT: **19** Oh, my dear children! I feel as if I'm going through labor pains for you again, and they will continue until Christ is fully developed in your lives. **20** I wish I were with you right now so I could change my tone. But at this distance I don't know how else to help you.

Watching someone go through the painful process of becoming Christ-like is hard.

9. We know sanctification hurts.

Watching our kids or our friends or our small group or whoever navigate the walk of faith is hard.

There are times when you just feel like you need to practice breathing and you want an epidural!

People fail, they falter, they go down the wrong path, they misinterpret Scripture, they doubt God, they rebel, they grow cold

Paul is struggling because they are struggling because he loves them.
This is the heart of a shepherd.

- There are times when we can get up close and personal.
- Other times we need to OR have to keep our distance.

Either way, we have to trust that God will do the work.

10. We trust God does the work.

We pray, we convince, we rebuke, we confront, we stay silent.
But God does the work...

Whether it is family or friends, church or work...

We want to see Christ formed in Christians.

We want to see people grow.

We desire maturity and freedom and strength.

...In the end, we all make choices and God keeps working.