

Galatians 4:8-20

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

⁹ But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!

¹¹ I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

12 I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.

¹³ As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you,

14 and even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.

¹⁵ Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

¹⁷ Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.

18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.

¹⁹ My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Good Morning First Baptist Members and Friends. I am happy you decided to spend a portion of your worship time with us this morning. We are an American Baptist Church of Metro Chicago striving to live out the Great Commission:

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and
of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching
them to obey everything I have commanded you... (Matthew 28:19-20)*

This month we are studying Paul's letter to the church at Galatia. On last Sunday, I said: This letter has a single purpose: **to explain that Gentiles who wished to become Christians did not need to become Jews first they did not need to be circumcised.** But like many parents, when Paul finishes with the primary topic he moves into another topic that causes him concern. As I understand it the Galatians are trying to be all things to all people. They want to call themselves Christians but they want to hold on to some of the old ways, the Jewish ways. Now that is bad enough, but they also want to fit in with the people around them, so they are celebrating events that should not have any meaning for them, now that they are Christian. In an effort, to explain their actions Paul parallels what they are doing, as being a return to slavery after being set free. Again, speaking as a parent might, Paul says you need to be more like me. But Paul does not leave them with an open-ended statement instead he goes on to tell them what he means by restating some of their actions toward him. I believe there is a message for us in what Paul says to them.

I want to build on last Sunday where I asked **“How Are You Living?” and ask another question “How Are You Loving?”** In keeping with this Valentine season in which we celebrate love in all of its presentations: child/parent, siblings, friends, wife/husband, teacher/student, boyfriend/girlfriend I would like to submit to you that regardless of whom you love, love, true love has some similar characteristics.

SHALL WE PRAY!

God of heaven and earth thank you for loving us so much that you provide for us even before we can ask. Thank you for the gift of your Son Jesus the Christ. Now I ask on our collective behalf that you show us how to love in a way that is pleasing to you and gives you all the glory. Abba, let the words that I speak be what you desire your people to hear. Open their hearts, heads, and hands to receive what you have prepared for them from the foundations of the earth. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen and Amen.

“How Are You Loving?”

If you are a consistent note taker you are aware that most my sermons have three major points, followed by a restatement, and challenge.

Today there will be **seven points/questions**. (I acknowledge the writing of C. Phillip Green of Faith Bible Church for his contribution to this sermon.)

I have presented our theme this morning as a question and in order to answer the question you should do a self-inventory, that is answer some questions before you get to the overall question.

Question #1 Are you **adjusting** to those you wish to love or are you expecting them to adjust to you?

¹² I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.

Illustrations

Corporate Teaching

Teach as we learn – so I had **to learn to learn** in various ways in order to teach in various way

Personal Relationships

We say we love him/her but when we talk to our friends we share the habits we are planning to change.

Love of God

We say we love God, but we want to love God on our terms.

Attend worship when we want, give when we want, serve when we want – we let others turn us away from the love we say we have because they don't love us the way we want to be love

Question #2 Are you accepting those you wish to love

Illustration –

Wedding of an older couple

love can't just be about the way they look for looks will soon fade
love must be about something you see on the inside

Paul is consistent in his teaching

¹⁹Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

Love of God

Have you forgotten how God accepted you, just as you were, in order to bring you to where you needed to be. How can you do any less?

Question #3 Are you sacrificing for those you wish to love

Illustration –

Family buying Christmas presents for the kids and nothing for themselves
Because kids come first

Jesus gave up heaven for us

What are you willing to give up?

Question #4 Are you speaking the truth to those you wish to love?

Illustration –

Saying what we think others wish to hear

One reason we end up with so many clergy going from church to church is because when we call for references the former church does not speak the truth is love and so allow someone who is unfit to pastor to move into another pulpit.

Are we afraid to tell our family that the words you use and the tone you use hurts my feelings to the point that I avoid you rather than engage with you. In so doing we miss the benefit of the knowledge we each bring to the table.

Question #5 Are you freeing those you seek to love?

Illustration –

allow those you love to say “no” w/o pouting, withholding affection, shouting or other ways of persuading.

Chuck Swindoll put it well in his book *Grace Awakening*. Here is what he wrote: “We tend to clutch, not release...to put people in our frame and not allow them any breathing holes unless and until they accept the shape of our molds. Grace [on the other hand] means we allow others the freedom to choose, regardless. Grace means I will not force or manipulate or judge or attempt to control you, nor should you do those things to me” (p.146).

The freedom you have in Christ allows you to make bad decisions – drink too much, smoke the wrong substances, have sex outside of marriage, lie, cheat and steal.

But the LOVE God has for you allows you to seek forgiveness and return to the family.

Question #6 Are you willing to suffer for those you seek to love?

19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Illustration -

Often I have been asked what is the hardest part of being a pastor. At the beginning of my time with you I answered it is the writing of the sermon. But after 14 years, I now know the hardest part is journeying with you when you are suffering – suffering with illness, with pain, with broken hearts, with job frustration, with crazy children and grandchildren, with disappointment. Loving you means hearing you and caring about what you care about.

Question #7 Are you willing to spend time with those we seek to love

20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Illustration –

When you first met, him you thought about him all the time – you arranged your time to make time to just sit with him – you listened and smiled and nodded in agreement – you did not need to spend money – you were content to just be in his presence

Now, I am willing to bet, if I were a betting woman, that as I spoke you thought about your first love.

Allow me to read it again

When you first met him you thought about him all the time – you arranged your time to make time to just sit with him – you listened and smiled and nodded in agreement – you did not need to spend money – you were content to just be in his presence

Does that also apply to how you love God?

Does it also apply to how we are called to love each other?

Restatement

Question #7 Are you willing to spend time with those we seek to love

Question #6 Are you willing to suffer for those you seek to love?

Question #5 Are you freeing those you seek to love?

Question #4 Are you speaking the truth to those you wish to love?

Question #3 Are you sacrificing for those you wish to love?

Question #2 Are you accepting those you wish to love?

Question #1 Are you adjusting to those you wish to love or are you expecting them to adjust to you?

My challenge to you this week is to take this self-assessment and then answer the question

“How Are You Loving?”

Amen and Amen.