

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: September 30, 2018
Lesson Title: "True Freedom"
Lesson Passage: Galatians 4:8-20

ABOUT THIS LESSON

After devoting the first two chapters of Galatians to a strong defense of his commission as an apostle and his proclamation of the gospel to the Galatian churches, he argues in chapter 3 that the real descendants of Abraham are not those who meticulously obey all the commandments in the Torah, but those who believe God and trust in His redeeming grace. In our lesson passage, he appeals to the Galatians not to return to a slavery like that which held them in bondage before they experienced true freedom by hearing and accepting the Christian gospel. In Gal. 4:12-20 Paul adds to his theological arguments a very personal appeal, recalling his past experiences with the Galatians, reflecting on their loving care of him and their acceptance of his message at a time when he was very ill.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain Paul's interpretation of the function of the Law.
- (2) Describe the nature of the freedom to which Christ calls His own.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

*Refer to the Magna Carta ("Great Charter"), the most famous document in British constitutional history. Issued in 1215 at Runnymede by King John under compulsion by English barons, this document guaranteed freedom of the church, implied laws protecting the rights of subjects and communities and laid the foundation for such constitutional guarantees as trial by jury and *habeus corpus* (a safe-guard against illegal imprisonment). Then relate this to Galatians: This epistle has often been called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty" because it magnifies the concept of freedom in Christ more than any other writing in the New Testament. This emphasis on freedom in Christ is caught up succinctly in the climactic cry of Gal. 5:1: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (RSV). This week's lesson passage elaborates on that theme.*

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. To introduce the lesson passage (Gal. 4:8-20), observe that Paul has just finished a long theological argument (3:1-4:7) in which he has shown quite clearly that it is those who receive God's blessings as promised to Abraham, and not those who obey what the Law requires, who have now received the gift of sonship from God through Christ. Now he appeals to them not to accept a slavery like that which held them in bondage before they heard and responded to the Christian message. *Read the follow-*

ing paraphrase of Paul's appeal in 4:12: "Brethren, I beseech you, set yourselves free, as I am free, from this miserable slavery. I, too, was a Jew and became free, as I would have you become free."

2. *Go back to Gal. 4:8-9, where Paul begins this discussion: (1) Formerly, since they did not know God, they were "slaves of beings who were not gods." COMMENT: If Paul had in mind primarily the non-Jews among the Galatian Christians, he was thinking of idols and pagan worship rites; but he might have been thinking also of former Jews and their subservience to the Law as a form of ignorance of God. In either case, there was a vast difference in "knowing God" and "knowing about God." (2) The word for "know" in v. 9 is different from the word translated "know" in v. 8. The word for "know" in v. 8 denotes knowledge of facts, but the word in v. 9 refers to personal knowledge, like the relationship between a husband and wife. So, Paul is saying, "now that you are personally acquainted with God, why would you want to become slaves to those weak and worthless ruling spirits again?"*

3. *Comment on Paul's PERSONAL APPEAL in 4:12-20: (1) "You have not injured me at all" ("you did me no wrong") in v. 12 is an abrupt transition in thought. The meaning is something like, "I cannot say that I had reason to complain of you, when I was with you before." (2) Ask someone to read vv. 13-14 from a modern translation (like the NIV.) Then comment: Perhaps Paul's "infirmity of the flesh" resulted from the hostile treatment he had experienced at Iconium and Lystra (refer to Acts 14:19 and 2 Tim. 3:11) which made it necessary for him to recuperate somewhere else in the province of Galatia. During this time, they received him as though he were an angel from heaven, or even as though he had been Christ himself (Gal. 4:14). (3) They had felt blessed by his presence and had been ready to make any sacrifice to show their love for him (4:15). If they did not consider him their enemy then, why should they do so now? (v. 16). (4) Paul answers his own question in v. 17. Their changed attitude was attributable to the influence of the false teachers, not to anything he had done. These heretical teachers had made a great show of their zeal, but they really were zealous only for themselves (v. 17). FOR DISCUSSION: Verse 18 suggests an important principle. Religious zeal is not always a good thing; it depends upon what motivates it. APPLICATION: Today, some religionists make a great show of zeal; but their underlying motive is to promote themselves. (5) Refer to the affectionate "my little children" in GAL. 4:19. Paul's anxiety for them in their present condition is like the birth pains he felt when he first led them to Christ. He longs to be there to talk with them face-to-face once again (v. 20).*

CLOSING THE LESSON

Ask someone to read Gal. 5:1 again. Use this illustration: A herd of cattle will stay inside an enclosure surrounded by a single strand of electrified wire, even after the electricity has been turned off. Actually, they are free to roam anywhere they wish; but they don't know it. They won't use their freedom. The Galatian Christians were a little like that. In Christ, they had been set free from the law; but they still let

themselves be confined by the requirements of the law. QUESTION: In what ways do contemporary Christians "submit again to the yoke of bondage?"

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