

# WEDNESDAY 28 September 2022 "Drifting Back?" (Gal. 4:8-20)

Good morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

*I wonder if you've ever found yourself discouraged because a person you were helping to grow and develop in their maturity has stumbled and retreated back into some former ways of life which are self-destructive?* Perhaps you were helping someone kick the smoking habit, or get off alcohol or drugs, or maybe break their gambling habit? It's so hard to watch them fall back into the chains of their past when they were making such good progress, would you agree?

So come, join me again in the town of Syrian Antioch, about 48ad, and we're with the apostle Paul as he is writing his first letter to the people in the towns of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, where Paul and Barnabas had first taken the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many people in those four towns had believed their message and trusted in Jesus. But after Paul and Barnabas had returned home to Syrian Antioch, word came to them that other teachers had visited those cities and their teaching had confused the new believers and *some were turning back to their old ways*. Therefore, Paul has taken up parchment and stylus and is writing this letter to these Galatian Christians in hopes his words will get them back on track. Let's join Paul again as he writes...

***"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 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 principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?"*** (Gal. 4:8-11) We don't have a clear explanation of exactly what the false teachers had said to those new Christians in Galatia, or what exactly they were turning back to that concerned Paul so greatly, but it appears the reports Paul had received seemed to evidence that the people *were turning away from their faith in Jesus Christ and turning back to pagan rituals and perhaps even some idols and certainly some behaviors that had held them in bondage before they had found freedom in Jesus*.

It's important we ask ourselves... *do we find ourselves sometimes wavering in our understanding of God's TRUTH or our faith in God or our commitment to live God honoring lives?* Do we sometimes feel ourselves drawn back to old ways of thinking or old attitudes or old behaviors which were part of our lives BEFORE we trusted in Jesus and experienced the life transforming work of the Holy Spirit in our lives? If so, what have we seen naturally occurs in our hearts, our minds, our attitudes, our words, our choices when we are drifting spiritually away from Jesus?

Paul asked a pointed, powerful question as he wrote to these Galatian friends: ***"What has happened to all your joy?"***

*Have you noticed that one of the trademarks of an authentic Christian is that they have a genuine joy and even contentment in life, regardless of their life situation?* That is an evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit, for as our minds and hearts are more and more overwhelmed by the wonder, the power, the majesty of God and His love for us; and then as we grasp the magnitude of Jesus and His dying to pay for our sins and God declaring us forgiven and adopted as His sons or daughters; and as the Holy Spirit does His cleansing work in us, then YES, there should be a dramatic change in our life attitudes and JOY should become a consistent state of our lives, even in the face of difficulty or problems. Why? *Because we never face any situation in life alone as a Christian, for the Holy Spirit of God living in us enables us to face every situation confident Jesus is with us in it and therefore NOTHING is too big or too troublesome for Jesus, nothing!* Do you believe that my friends? So, do you live with the Joy of Jesus overflowing from your life?

As Paul writes to these Gentile new Christians, *Paul seems discouraged*. Perhaps he felt maybe he had left these new believers too quickly, perhaps he should have stayed longer in their towns to teach them more deeply the life changing truths about Jesus. I'm sure we've all dealt with regret in life. *We've looked back thinking things in the present might be different if we had done things differently in the past.* Here Paul also gives us some insight into a health problem he must have had during his first missionary trip, but I think Paul is reminding them that his illness actually provided his opportunity to speak the Gospel to them. Paul writes: ***"As you know it was because of an illness that I first preached the Gospel to you. Even though my illness was a burden 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!... I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. How have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"*** (Gal. 4:13-16)

My friends, may I ask, do you need to wear glasses to see clearly? Have you noticed how many people you know who wear glasses? In Paul's day there were neither prescription glasses nor the means of eye evaluations which would diagnose various eye diseases. At the conclusion of some of Paul's letters I notice he gives us some perspective of an eyesight problem he evidently had. 2 Thessalonians 3:17 says: ***"I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters."*** We have no definitive explanation of the illness Paul mentions here, as he writes to the Galatians, but clearly it became an important part of the relationship that Paul had with these Gentiles as he visited their part of the world for the first time. It appears he felt they had genuinely cared for Paul and been generous and compassionate to him in his illness, whatever that illness was.

But did you notice that last phrase: ***"Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?"*** Have you ever had that experience, my friends? By telling someone the truth, which you believed they needed to hear, did you notice a change in your relationship as they began to pull back, maybe even changed their attitude toward you, perhaps even opposed you? That is what Paul is feeling here.

Word has come to Paul that not only are some of those new Christians, in those four towns, drifting back into behaviors they lived in before they trusted Jesus, but now also Paul perceived their attitudes toward Paul were dramatically changing so that he even used the word **'enemy'**! Wow, that's powerful.

Paul had set down his stylus from his writing, had opened the door again to look out at the busy street. Seems that street reminded him of what life was like in those four towns that he had visited. Now with a fresh perspective, he returns to the parchment and writes. He speaks each word as he carefully writes some very strong words: ***"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 be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you."*** (Gal. 4:17,18)

Paul understood all about being zealous. He had described himself as ***'extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.'*** (Gal. 1:14) Paul knew that his zealousness for those religious traditions had turned him into a fanatic, an angry fanatic, who had called for Jesus' death, and later had led Paul to persecute those first Jesus followers in Jerusalem. Paul was delighted to have seen some zealous courage in these Gentile Galatian Christians, but now, as they were turning away from the truth, Paul was concerned they might fall into the same trap that he had been in... ***zealousness without wisdom and truth. Would you agree, that is a dangerous place to be, and as we look around our world, a great many people live in that dangerous place, and they become a frightening threat to the people around them!***

We need to ask ourselves an important question... could that be a description of me? Zealousness without wisdom or truth? Am I vulnerable to public opinion or media or social media or political persuasion so that I might sometimes do what Paul is so concerned about? ***Might I drift away from God's truth and become dangerous because my zealousness is rooted in wrong ideas?*** Let's pause right here and ponder that... it's really important isn't it my friends? And here's a song to help us. . .

**Today's Scripture is Galatians 4:8-20.**