

## 9. Paul's Pastoral Appeal (3Q 2017—Galatians)

**Biblical material:** Gal. 4:12–20, 1 Cor. 11:1, Phil. 3:17, 1 Cor. 9:19–23, 2 Cor. 4:7–12.

### Quotes

- “Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend / With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just. / Why do sinners’ ways prosper? and why must / Disappointment all I endeavour end? *Gerard Manley Hopkins*
- Because an appeal makes logical sense is no guarantee that it will work. *William Bernbach*
- I reject any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality. *Mahatma Gandhi*
- No one can persuade another to change. Each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another, either by argument or emotional appeal. *Marilyn Ferguson*
- The goal of the pastor is not to get people to show up but to get people to grow up. *John Maxwell*

### Questions

What does Paul plead his readers to be free from? What appeal do we want to make to those around us? How do we see ourselves? What is the danger of religiosity? Why do we as a faith community so often fall into the trap of legalistic observance? How can we distinguish external aspects from the inner truth?

### Bible summary

Paul has already spelled out in Galatians 4 the problems he sees the church in Galatia experiencing. Then (Gal. 4:12-20) he appeals to them to be free from such things. His call to liberation from the “rules of ritual” reveals that he is looking for a true experience of God, not simply a form of religiosity. Paul references the kind and generous way the Galatians treated him personally, and applies that to their experience of God. He agonizes over the false teachers who are trying to enslave the Galatians once more. He even wonders whether his work has been in vain, as he sees these dear friends falling back into the false concept of salvation by works...

Paul links the message to himself (1 Cor. 11:1)—indicating that there is a close relationship between the messenger and the message! He even tells believers to pattern their lives after his (Phil. 3:17). In 1 Cor. 9:19-23 he references the law, and says that he lives apart from the law even though he obeys it! In other words the law is good but not the source of goodness! He also mentions that he seeks common ground with everyone to help them understand the truth—a useful concept for us today.

In 2 Cor. 4:7–12 Paul shares the great truth that we are simply vessels for the glorious treasure of God’s truth. In and of ourselves we are not the treasure, we are receptacles for it. So despite the suffering that comes, we celebrate the privilege of revealing Jesus through us. This is our ongoing role: to be a spectacle before the universe, to angels and to human beings. In this way the glorious treasure of the truth of God is revealed...

## Comment

Paul speaks with great anguish since he sees the freedom of the gospel being lost as these false teachers gain control, requiring believers to obey the requirements of a system that Jesus has annulled—think of the tearing of the Temple veil, the sacrificial lamb escaping. This is not the way—though throughout history (including our own) the temptation to follow a rule-based religion as a means of making ourselves right has continued to tempt...

Paul talks about slavery and freedom—and this is the truth. Jesus came to free us to make the right choices. This is Paul's appeal—to remember the joy of liberation!

This gospel treasure is put in as unlikely a place as clay pots. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God." 2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV.

Before we get proud, we see that we are just the containers. What's valuable is not the pot, but that it contains the treasure. In ancient times, the practical equivalent of plastic bags were clay pots. Made from a commonly-available raw material, clay pots were the standard 'packaging,' which explains why archaeologists find so many pieces of broken pottery. The clay pot was like the plastic bag—disposable, thrown away when no longer needed (or more likely, when it was broken).

So to update the image: "we have this treasure in plastic bags." Amazing. Unbelievable. Apparently foolish, even. That the glorious gospel should be bagged up in plastic, that trivial and common item we all take for granted. For the divine treasure given to human plastic bags is "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV.

To stretch the image: plastic bags vary. Some are self-advertizing, proclaiming one product or another. Is this the way to contain the divine treasure? Hardly.

Plastic trash bags are black, opaque. You can't see what's inside—and with trash that's just as well! But with the treasure of God's glorious gospel?—absolutely not. Totally inappropriate.

To show the treasure, we plastic bags must be transparent. For what matters is not the bag, but the treasure, and that others can see it.

## Ellen White Comments

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves." 2 Cor. 4:7, R. V. This is why the preaching of the gospel was committed to erring men rather than to the angels. It is manifest that the power which works through the weakness of humanity is the power of God; and thus we are encouraged to believe that the power which can help others as weak as ourselves can help us. And those who are themselves "compassed with infirmity" should be able to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." Heb. 5:2. Having been in peril themselves, they are acquainted with the dangers and difficulties of the way, and for this reason are called to reach out for others in like peril. There are souls perplexed with doubt, burdened with infirmities, weak in faith, and unable to grasp the Unseen; but a friend whom they can see, coming to them in Christ's stead, can be a connecting link to fasten their trembling faith upon Christ. {DA 297}