

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them, Galatians, chapter 4. It's good to be home for a bit. I'm going to have Lee Lewis come out here and join me, and I'll explain why. About 10 years ago, I sat down with the deacons of Highland Village First Baptist Church, which is this place. Surprise! I had already, you know, had several meetings with the personnel committee (as it was called), and I was sitting down with the deacons of the church. They were kind of wondering where I thought we were going and what my heart was, and so we met at The Village Grill, right across the street here.

If you live in the area, they used to put butcher paper down over their tables, and there were crayons there. I picked up a crayon, and I drew a circle and kind of wrote "HVFBC" on it. I had to get my letters right, and then I drew a bunch of lines out from there and said, "My hope would be God would do something significantly bigger than just this, that we might be used to actually plant a lot of other churches. That really, our heart would be for DFW and not just for ourselves. Our heart would be for the kingdom of God and not ultimately just to build one big church but to build up *the* church in the Metroplex and to the ends of the earth."

It's fun for me. It's a joy for me to look back now, after 10 years, and see how God has answered that prayer with church plants, really, in Coppell, in Fort Worth, in Keller, in Little Elm, in Frisco, and then our campuses in Denton and in Dallas. I mean, God really heard that prayer and answered that prayer, and then per your vote, 2-3 weeks ago now, to the tune of 97 percent to move ahead with the Fort Worth Campus, we'll be adding a Fort Worth Campus with dozens of young men now in the pipeline to plant churches in and around Dallas.

I'm not saying anything of really our work overseas or our work with other churches around the United States. That's just what has flowed distinctively out of The Village Church, and so Lee is up here today because Lee is going to be the campus pastor of our Fort Worth Campus. In our ecclesiology, and how we do church, if you are a campus pastor, you are an elder, not just over that campus but really a part of the elder board that governs the entire Village Church in its different campuses and in its overall direction and care. So per our constitution and bylaws, per our agreement with those of you who are members, I need to present Lee to you and give you 30 days to give me a biblical reason why he's not qualified for the position.

Now I want to be fair and straight and all of that, not what your gut is, not what you think, all right? That's not what I need you to email me. I need you to email me out of 1 Timothy or Titus (which is where the list of

what an elder is), and if you know of something in Lee's life that disqualifies him, we need to know. I've known Lee since college. We went to college together. He is a ferocious man of God, has been on staff with us for quite some time. I've sat in on a lot of very difficult meetings, not with Lee or because of Lee, but with some of you with Lee.

He is one of our best biblical counselors, has responded to crisis in many of your lives, and there is no hitch in my spirit whatsoever that God won't use Lee mightily out in Fort Worth. He loves his wife well. He loves his sons well, loves his baby girl well. I have no hitch in me about whether or not Lee Lewis can do this job, not just out in Fort Worth, but actually sit among the elder room and have a voice and influence and not be afraid to kind of push a little bit and receive a little bit. So I'm grateful to have him.

You are on the clock as of now, 30 days to get back, and now that you know we have known him since college, you're going to have go like high school or something, *When we were in junior high, one time, he...* Maybe you know a dark side of his life we don't know. If you do, that's what this is for. We have tested and vetted and known Lee a long time, think he's a tremendous man of God. So will join me in praying for him? Then we're going to get to work, all right?

Jesus, I thank you for Lee. I thank you that you saved him. I thank you that his daddy loves you and taught him early what it looked like to love you, to be a man after your own heart. I thank you that his dad loved you and modeled for Lee's dad, and so I thank you he comes from a legacy of faith, a legacy he is now laying for his own sons and for his daughter and that he is extending to his wife. I thank you how you've cared for him. I know he has gone through seasons of tremendous suffering, and he has gone through seasons of tremendous blessing. He has been found faithful in both, and so I thank you for that.

I pray for favor with you and with men as he assembles his team. As he prepares to roll out, God, that you might really bless the works of his hands, and you would sovereignly guide decisions that are made and moves that are made, everything from selling of house, to buying new house, to moving family, to identification of schools, and on and on we could go, Jesus. Just pray a prayer blessing over him and his family. We love you. It's for your beautiful name, amen.

In 1998, I don't remember what month it was, but on the cover of *Christianity Today*, there was a picture of the Dallas skyline. We have a bit of a distinct skyline. It's not overly spectacular, but it's distinct. So on the cover of *Christianity Today* was the skyline of DFW, and the title across the skyline was "The Center of the Evangelical World." Now you can Google this and look at the picture. The feature article in the magazine was, statistically, DFW legitimately is the buckle of the Bible Belt in that there are more large churches here; there are more nonprofit, Christian-based ministries based here than really anywhere else in the South.

Although the Bible Belt is extensive, and there are a lot of cities that would love to vie for a church on every corner, when it comes to the actual numerics of it, we dominate. Yet another thing for us to be proud of, all right? Needless to say, when I was getting ready to graduate and figuring out where I wanted to go and what I wanted to do, I wanted to be anywhere except the "center of the evangelical world." Now let me tell you why. Because in my understanding at that time, I wanted to be on the frontlines. My personality is not...*I want to sit in a lawn chair and sip Spurgeon and pray for those who are getting mauled out there.*

I wanted to be in the trenches, wanted to be in the fight. I wanted to go where it might be hostile, people would be antagonistic towards the gospel, it would be secular, and we might see God do something spectacular among a people who are not warm to him or have any real desire to know him. That's where my mind was, and that's where my heart was. This is the last place I wanted to be. It's not that I have a problem with Dallas. Dallas is a weird joint, man, but I didn't have a problem with Dallas per se but more this reality that there are churches everywhere. You don't have to look far to find a place to go to church.

That's not true about a lot of other cities in the U.S., and so that, I kind of wanted to go there because I viewed that as the frontlines, and so a friend of mine who was at this church, a member of this church, asked me to turn in my resume to this church. She was on the board of directors of the nonprofit organization I was running, and so I felt, *Oh, no*, because I didn't really want to come here, but I knew I needed to honor her, and so I started the process with our search team at the time.

It just became evident, after a while, this is where God was leading, and this is where he was taking us as a family because I was trying not to get the job and couldn't figure out how to do it. You know, I was like, "Here's where I am theologically. Here's where I think you're doing church wrong." You don't usually get to tell a First Baptist Church what they're doing wrong and have them go, "Excellent. Why don't you come on board, all right?"

The fact that that kept progressing, despite what I was saying, was a visible sign God was wooing us up here, and so we got here, and there have been some things I've learned since I was 28 and coming into the "center of the evangelical world." I want to show you I honestly believe that what we're doing here is far more frontline ministry than maybe some over-secularized places and...look right at me...you might be in far more danger than they are in more secularized places. I'll let the text preach, man. I don't have to. Let's go.

Galatians 4. We'll pick it up in verse 8: **"Formerly, when you did not know God..."** So this is pre-conversion to Christ, pre-salvation. **"...you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God..."** Now, I have to stop there. We're

going to spend the bulk of our time in these first three or four verses, but notice Paul will not relent for even a second against the notion that we are, in some way, sufficient for our own salvation. He's not even going to give them that you found God. He's like, "Rather, he found you."

So again, he's attacking their self-righteousness subversively, literally, in almost every sentence of this book. He'll concede nothing. He gives no ground for you and me to believe our salvation, our justification, our right standing before God has anything to do with us, but rather has everything to do with him. He does it blatantly, and sometimes he does it subversively. We just watched him do it subversively: "You found God, rather...I don't want you to take that and believe it...he found you."

Now let's look at it again. I need you to see this full sentence: **"Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."**

Now Paul is creating a bit of, really, for me, one of the most terrifying passages of Scripture in the Bible because here's what he just said: The Galatians, before they were converted to Jesus Christ, were enslaved to, what he calls "elementary principles" or "gods who are not gods." Now what we know about the phrase *elementary principles* is it's a reference to demonic spiritual forces. So, in the ancient world, they attributed to the elements of nature (kind of a spiritual force) that needed to be appeased in order to get what you want from that spiritual force.

So if you were a farmer and you needed rain, and you would need to appease the god who controlled the rain in order to make it rain. If you were going to go on a trip via sea, then you wanted to appease Poseidon so you would get there safely. If you wanted to become pregnant, you'd go to the fertility god. If you wanted to get married, you'd go to Aphrodite, and you would make these sacrifices, and you would take part in these kinds of rituals to get from that god whatever you wanted from that god.

Paul is saying, "These gods are not gods. They're elementary principles," which means...now this is important...there are spiritual forces (powerful spiritual forces) behind our idols. Now the reality is (and Paul is pointing this out) these spiritual powers cannot deliver what they promise, and they cannot deliver what they promise because, ultimately, they are not sovereign and all powerful. They can only do what they're allowed to do.

So Hollywood is just absolutely... They find the idea of demonic and haunting and ghosts to be a subject they should just never let go of. I mean it's just like... How many *Friday the 13ths* did they make? Like

seriously, man, literally, I tried to Google it. There were so many. There's not a number, all right? *Friday the 13th* infinity. It's just that little symbol now, right? Then they're starting to do the same with this *Paranormal Activity* deal. It's just one after the other, after the other. It's like the same movie over and over and over again, but romantic comedies have shown us we'll keep going and paying for that.

Now ultimately, what Hollywood likes to do, and what a lot of us like to believe is, when it comes to the demonic versus the things of God, it's dualistic. It's good versus evil. Sometimes good wins, and sometimes evil wins, but biblically, that's simply not the case. Now the demonic, they do have power. They can flex in certain ways, but only in ways in which God allows. At any point, God can cease to allow, and I'll point a couple of biblical examples out. The Bible tells us God is sitting on his throne in heaven when the Accuser (i.e., Satan) comes to present himself before God.

Now my daddy was a military man, and so if you have a background in military, if you're presenting yourself to someone else, you are under their authority. It is an *inspection*. You are standing in front of them in full-on dress garb, and they are inspecting you, and so when the Accuser presents himself to God, even in that opening scene of Job, you have Satan in submission to God. God says to the Accuser, says to Satan, "Have you considered my servant, Job?" Satan says, "Please, of course, he worships you. He's rich. He's powerful. He has a ton of kids. You've blessed everything he has touched. You let me take all of your blessings from him, and he'll curse your name." God says, "Okay, but don't touch him. Touch his stuff, but don't touch him."

So the story of Job goes that Satan does just that. I mean almost everything Job owns is taken from him, destroyed. All of his children die. The only thing Satan leaves is his wife. That was not a gift if you know the story. Her advice, in the middle of all this, was, "Curse God and die, you fool." "Thanks, honey. It's been a great day. I love coming home to that." He leaves the wife, takes everything else, and then the scene shifts. Job, in the middle of all that, falls to the ground and worships. "Naked I've come from my mother's womb. Naked I will return. The Lord has given. The Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

His circumstance did not dictate the affections of his heart towards God. Then Satan comes back in and, once again, is presenting himself, and God kind of goes, "Hey, do you hear that? I think that's Job worshipping me. Yeah, no, that's what that is," and so Satan, once again, is like, "Well, let me touch his health. Let me take his health, and he'll curse your name." God says, "Okay, you can take his health, but don't..." What? "...kill him."

Do you see he is restrained? There's freedom, but there's restraint. If you follow the book of Job...Because for some of you who don't have a lot of biblical background, that might sound horrifically cruel to you, but

ultimately, Job ends up loving God more and living a deeper, more full life than he would've ever lived in had the Lord not allowed Satan to wound him.

In the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), if you've ever read them, I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but when Jesus confronts a demoniac, they don't argue with each other. Do you ever pick up on that? Jesus never goes, "Out of the man." The demon is like, "No, I'm in here like a tick, bro." That never happens. The demonic, even in force, even in bulk, even when they are legion, are terrified of Jesus Christ. In fact, the one throws the man on the ground and speaks, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God. Have you come to destroy us before the appointed time?" That's not dualism. That's not, "I wonder who's going to win." That's Christ as supreme, in authority over the demonic realm.

Now Paul just said to the Galatians before they knew God (or rather were known by God), they were enslaved to those demonic forces by worshipping and sacrificing gods that were not gods. Here's where the text gets unbelievably interesting. Look at 10: **"You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."** Here's why this is stunning. Because he just said, "I fear you're about to go back to enslavement by the worship of demons," except he's now not making reference to paganism, but he's making reference in this "days and weeks and seasons and years" to Judaism, to Jewish practices of holiness.

So now, you can be enslaved to demons not just through acts of paganism. But he's saying, like if I could walk through some of them here, on the days, you would have Sabbath observances and other feasts celebrated for only a day; months, new moon rituals; seasons, Passover, Pentecost, tabernacle; years, Year of Jubilee, the Sabbatical year (I keep trying to show our elders that that's biblical. I keep getting shut down on it) and New Year celebrations.

Now follow me here, you have Paul saying, "You once were enslaved to demons via paganism, and I fear you're going to be enslaved to demons once again via religious observance." I need to make something clear so we don't... This is not an outline of special festivals or seasons, because I saw some of you are like, *You take Christmas from me, bro, we are gone, all right?* You can't take this text and lay it on any type of any external celebration and go, "It's unbiblical. It's ungodly."

There have been people in church history who actually have done this. In fact, the most ironic group, I believe, are the pilgrims. The pilgrims escape and come to the New World, and you know, they wouldn't celebrate Christmas? They viewed it as just another day, and some of their justification was in text like this. *There are no days that are holier than others. This is just another workday.* They didn't want to give into a type of paganism.

So how did we reward them 150 or so years later? By creating a holiday for them...Thanksgiving. So it's just ironic to me that the pilgrims are like, "This is sinful!" "Okay, Thanksgiving. You guys made it through that first winter. Let's celebrate that. Festival!" It's just ironic and goes to show you what happens when we don't let the Word of God shape and mold, but rather take something and run to places that are not a good reflection of what the whole of Scripture teaches.

Let me show you where the Bible says, really, a day or a festival or a meal isn't evil or good within itself, but rather how we're using it. So let's look at Romans 14:5-6. It says this: **"One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God."**

Here's Paul's point: In celebrating seasons and rhythms and times, it matters how you're using those things that determines whether or not they are demonic or good. Let me do this. This might help us try to frame it in a modern context. Can we all agree that what we're doing in here today is not worshipping demons? Can we agree? Okay, no demonic worship going on, okay? Now according to this text, that is only true if you've come here today to be grateful for the salvation you have found in Jesus Christ.

So look right at me. Here's what is crazy about this text: If you are here because you believe your attendance here somehow keeps you in right standing with God or somehow saves you, then you have bought into a kind of cyclical belief system that has your attendance here as a means of salvation. According to the text, you are enslaved to elementary principles, and what you are doing here is worshipping demons and not Jesus Christ. Some of us are not enslaved to demons here and worshipping demons, but some of us most definitely are.

Has that ever kind of piqued your curiosity that we have to add several services every time Christmas and Easter roll around? Like do you know how many seats we have in here? Fifteen hundred seats. Do you know how many we have in Denton and Dallas? I mean we have large sanctuaries, and then you have to go from 4 services to 6 services to 8 services to 15 services. For what? For Christmas and Easter. Now what is that if it's not this? What is that if it's not...? *Well, it's Easter. Let me go offer myself to this deed in order to stay in good standing.*

See I think this is epidemic in the Bible Belt. Even some of you here today, this is what you do. *It's Sunday. This is what we do.* If we had to be straight with one another, you're not walking in any freedom. You don't have a genuine delight in the Lord. You're heavy laden, don't walk in the victory that Christ came and

brought for you. You have no difference of life during the week. You just do this because you believe your attendance here somehow keeps you in right standing with God.

The Bible says you're enslaved to religious practice and, ultimately, are worshipping demons. They're not legitimate arguments, but they are great conversations with friends I have in New York and in Seattle and San Francisco, those kinds of places I wanted to go before the Lord put me here, that I really think the job I have to do down here is monumentally harder than the jobs they have now. Regardless of where you do ministry, there are going to be obstacles. The world is fallen and broken.

But reality is what we trade in obstacles, I think, makes doing church in the South and preaching gospel in the South much more difficult than an overly secularized location, and here's simply why: In an environment that's completely secular, people know they don't know God. They know they have no desire for him. They know they don't believe in him. They know that idea is silly, and they have no intention of submitting their lives to him...vocal and verbal, with no social consequence. That's not true here.

The danger so many of us are in today is if we don't know God, so many of us have no idea we don't know him. We think we do know him because we equate it to moral behavior. We equate it to church attendance. We equate it to being better than other people. We equate it to those things, and that's the wrong standard. The text here is saying what's happening, men, is you're enslaved, and you're enslaved to elementary principles, dark, spiritual forces.

Here's what has kind of rocked my mind as I studied it over the last few weeks. In fact, my wife and I have had tons of conversation. The Galatians were into paganism before they were converted. If you were to stumble upon a pagan ritual, most of us would be like, "Yeah, that's dark and spooky, man. Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Probably some demons up in here," everything from temple prostitution to self-mutilation to sacrifice. Sometimes human sacrifice, historically speaking, would take place in a pagan ritual. So we would look at something like that and go, "That's dark."

But what Paul is saying is you're in the same boat when you're trying to use holiness standards as a means of salvation. Now I think church attendance is a great thing to sanctify you. I think home group (we're doing a Group Connect this afternoon), those types of things are spectacular things in which to sanctify and grow you into Jesus Christ, but if you are using them as a method of salvation, you are enslaved to something that cannot deliver what it promises.

You being here this morning is not going to make your life any better. You joining a home group, ultimately, isn't going to justify you before Holy God. That's not how it works. Those are tools that, when

we're in glad submission to Jesus Christ, are used by the Spirit of Christ to mature us and grow us, but there are no silver bullets in this game. There is glad submission to Jesus Christ and all that entails.

I'll tell you one of the reasons I love this text. Any pastor really, kind of, straddles two things simultaneously and always. One is *theological content*. That's extremely important for anybody who wants to preach and teach, and I think theology and doctrine kind of gets a hard knock. I mean people are like, "Oh, it's just kind of cold and dead," but everyone is a theologian. Do you have any thoughts about God and what he is like, and what he does and what he doesn't do? That's theology. Just some of us aren't very good at it.

As a pastor, you have to have a passion for and a desire to be straight about the truth, but in that, you must also have pastoral concern. Otherwise, if you have theological content without pastoral concern, you yield doctrine and theology like a bat instead of like a scalpel. Truth is to be used as a scalpel, not a club, and the only way that happens is if you have genuine concern and genuine love for people.

If you don't have one of those, you get a perversion of both of those. If all you have is theological content with no pastoral concern, you get a perversion of what we're called to do as men of God. If you have pastoral concern but no theological content, then you have another perversion of what we've been called to as men of God. You have to have them both.

I love this text, and this text has resonated with me because you get to see both in this text. He is driving home these, kind of, high-level, doctrinal ideas, but then look at where he goes in verse 12: "**Brothers...**" Now that's a change of tone, isn't it? Because so far, they've been fools, and they've been bewitched, and they're dumb, and they're... Right? I mean he has just been working them, hasn't he? I mean through this whole book, it's just this unrelenting verbal beat down.

Now all of a sudden, he is like, "**Brothers...**" Watch where he goes here: "**...I entreat you...**" This word *entreat* means to plead, to beg, to hurt for, to have an angst in heart for. *I plead with you. I entreat you. I beg you.* Here would be my point: You don't entreat people you don't love. You don't beg people. You don't plead with people who you don't care about. You only entreat, plead, and beg with people who you have a deep concern for.

I know some of you are going to be like, *Well, that's not necessarily true. Sometimes you will entreat, beg, and plead with people when you are the beneficiary of them doing what you want them to do.* I'll give you that, but I'll also remind you, historically, Paul is in prison, is nowhere near the churches in Galatia, and is not taking up an offering. He has nothing to gain here. He is heavy of heart, unbelievably burdened for this group of people who he sees is on the precipice of destruction, and so he is entreating. He is pleading.

Look at what he is entreating them to. **"Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are."** Paul has this habit (in his writings) of saying something similar to this, which sounds like this in other texts: "Follow me as I follow Christ. So I'm going to fix my eyes on Jesus. I'm going to follow Jesus. You follow me while I follow Jesus," and you have this same kind of rhythm going here, but I think his point is even deeper than that. He is trying to encourage them to walk in the freedom he is walking in.

I've tried to point out to you before, I've never read, in history, a man more free than the apostle Paul, literally, a guy whose confidence in Jesus Christ was so profound you couldn't touch him. It didn't matter if he was in prison, shipwrecked in the open sea. It didn't matter if he was being beaten, whether he was wealthy, or poor. In fact, do you know that great coffee-cup verse, Philippians 4:13, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"**? Do you know that text?

What we did is we kind of took it out of its context and put it on tee shirts and stuff about sports and training and business, and all of that, but really, the weight of the text isn't that at all. In fact, right before it, he says, "I have learned to be in plenty, and I have learned to be in want. I have learned to live and love the Lord when things are lavish, and I have learned to love the Lord when I'm sleeping on a cold, concrete floor in a dungeon. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

You couldn't touch him. If you threatened to kill him, to die is gain. If you were going to leave him alone, to live as Christ. If you wanted to beat him up to get him to stop talking, he wouldn't count the present sufferings of this world as worthy to be compared to the future glory. If you put him in a dungeon, he would sing hymns and convert all your guards. He was literally a man who you couldn't touch.

So here's what he is saying: "There's freedom. Come to freedom. Don't be enslaved to that. There's freedom to be had. Come where I am. I have been where you are. It doesn't work." We've already seen, in Galatians, where he keeps referring back to how fervently he followed the law and how it just enslaved him. "Be like I am for I have been where you are. I have been like you. It's not going to work. It's enslavement. It doesn't bring joy. It doesn't bring freedom. Come to Jesus." Now let's look at where he goes next.

"Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me."

Everybody always wonders and speculates about what this ailment is, and he also mentions he has a thorn in the flesh in another text, and so he has this ailment that kind of follows him everywhere. The best we can tell from Scripture is it has something to do with his eyes. We know that from several other texts, and we know that here, where they're watching him suffer. He is a bit of a trial to them. What would they be willing to do to help him? Gouge out their own eyes. *What? To not look on him?* No, to give them... This is pure speculation, but maybe, if your mind works like mine, that's something I just need to know. It doesn't matter in the long run, but I was curious.

They would even be willing to gouge out their eyes and give them to Paul. So what you have in this history is they received the gospel gladly when Paul proclaimed it to them, although Paul was a bit difficult to look at. So his bodily ailment was a trial to them, which probably means maybe he's contagious. Maybe he's not. Maybe there was some concern about Paul while he was there, but they readily received him with honor, respected him, heard from him, were transformed by the gospel message he proclaimed. Now he is saying, "What happened? I was grotesque to look at, and yet you received me, and now what has happened between us?"

Here's where I think we get to a really important part of what we need to get the bottom of today. I have found it to be a terrifying idea that you can be actively involved in religious practice under the banner of Christianity and Jesus Christ and ultimately be enslaved to demonic forces. So how do we know if we are, to quote Galatians 2, "...walking in step with gospel," or if we are actually enslaved to a kind of religious external ordeal that is not transformative and not led us into the beauty of the gospel? Well, Paul is about to unpack a little bit of how you can tell the difference in who you're following, who you're listening to, who you're learning from, and what might be going on in your heart that would reveal where you are with Jesus.

Let's look at it. We'll pick it up in verse 16: **"Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"**

Now there are several things going on in this text that really separate out gospel ministry and gospel transformation from a different kind of enslavement to religious practice that, behind it, has a demonic oppression. All right, now. They're not going to be easy, so I'm just going to lay that out for you before we even get into it. They're not going to be easy to hear, not going to be easy to be embraced.

Here's one of the markers of there being a legitimate possibility of enslavement to religion that honors the demonic instead of freedom that comes in Jesus Christ: You want your ears tickled. You don't want to hear

what's true. So here's what I know is reality for many of us: We have come in here today, and there are legitimate difficult issues in our lives. Some of us are in marriages that are hard. Some of us are in financial situations that feel crushing. We have loved ones who are sick. We have children who are wayward. We have all sorts of steady pressures on our soul, and so we've come in here.

Here's what would be easy, and it would make us really good friends...for me to talk about how, in life, life in Christ, if you would just submit your life in Christ, all that's going to go away. There will be no difficulties in marriage. It will just rain \$100 bills on you, and all of your problems are going to go away. Maybe I pull a text out about God blessing. Maybe I pull a text out of something about sowing and reaping, and then we all get "geeked up" that God is going to do this.

You leave happy, and I leave happy because you love that I made you happy, so you love Matt Chandler. He made you happy, and so we have this dark, symbiotic, dysfunctional, codependent nonsense going on, where, in the end, you're going to get blown up because you believed a lie, and I'm going to be judged by God for not being honest with you. Even if you love Jesus Christ, it is very possible, even probable, there will be days and seasons where your tears and your snot are your only food, where you, in a ball on the floor, can't think weekly or monthly, or it would crush you.

The thought of having to endure longer than today feels impossible. I'm talking to those of you who love Jesus Christ. I've been a pastor for a long time now. I've been in the room. The beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not that in trusting Christ everything goes like you want it to go. The beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ is we *get* God regardless of circumstance, and he'll be enough. He'll be enough. See this takes us back to *enslavement*.

Some of you are in here today trying to use God to get something you want. Well, what you get is God. Now is God able to accomplish more than we can ever dream or think or imagine? Absolutely, he is. Can he restore and heal marriages? We've seen him do it hundreds of times here. Can he lead you out of financial ruin? Absolutely, he can. Can he heal diseases? Yes! But is that why we go to him? If that's why we go to him, then what we want is not him, but rather him to do those things. That's *idolatry*.

So how do you know if you're enslaved or if you're walking in the gospel? People who have a heart that has been captivated by the gospel, they're about Jesus. They want to know Jesus. A preacher or a teacher wants to proclaim Jesus, wants to point you to Jesus, wants to make sure you understand. Did you hear Paul's language here? He is in *anguish*. Until what? "**...Christ is formed in you.**" What does he want? He doesn't want them to look him even though he said, "Become like I am." He wants them to know Jesus, follow Jesus, be captivated by Jesus, worship Jesus, make much of Jesus.

In fact, Paul, if we had time to get in to the letter to the Corinthians, he *hated* talking about himself. The only time he had actually really talked about himself is when he had to lay his life next to those making false accusations and go, "Okay, who actually is following here, and who actually...?" Do you see what he said about them? "They want you to make much of..." what? Them. "They want to block you from Jesus because if you don't have Jesus, then you have to make much of them, and they're trying to earn their salvation via pouring themselves out for you, not in pointing you towards to Jesus Christ, so how do you respond to truth?"

Regardless of what domain we could bring up...marriage, family, work...you and I have blind spots, and there are truths about us we would rather not hear. Can we just agree? Can we be honest enough with each other that there are truths about me I don't like? You? Yeah. So there are things that are true about me, right now, not me last year, last week, last month...right now...that I don't like, and here's the thing: The Word of God is going to expose those. It's going to cut into those (not to harm me but for my good) to reveal in me those things that would enslave me and rather fix my hands on the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus Christ.

So how do you respond to truth? Would you rather have your ears tickled, or would you rather hear what's true and allow the Holy Spirit of God to work in that and stir that up? Because listen, it's ugly, isn't it? Again, it doesn't matter what domain we're talking. It's ugly when you see shortcomings and weaknesses and idolatry, and you see who you are. It can be an ugly thing, but keep in mind the grace, mercy, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ is always quickly behind that revelation. The Word of God does not expose you for what you are to crush you except to crush you into joy.

It's not God's desire to hard press you but rather to set you free. That's why saying you *were* in enslaved. Don't go back to *being* enslaved; rather, walk into freedom. Now look at this, these last two lines, verse 20: **"I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you."** Now again, this is one of those texts that resonates with me as a pastor, as I love theological content, and I love pastoral concern. Because I'll just be straight, as your pastor, there are times I am perplexed by us. Confused.

I am perplexed, at times, at why we look so much like our culture and so little like Jesus Christ. I am perplexed why there seems to be a lack of fervency in worship and for prayer. I am perplexed at a loss of fervency over the gospel message being heard and received by those who live around us, work with us, walk with us. I am perplexed by the amount of you who simply come here every so often on a weekend maybe because you find me entertaining, or maybe you're here because it feels like penance to you. Maybe you just want me to yell at you. "I really screwed up this week. I'm going to The Village."

"Why? To repent?"

"No, because Chandler will yell at me. I can feel like trash for a little bit and move on."

That's not how it works, man. I'm perplexed by that. I'm always glad to yell at you. Always. But ultimately, I'm perplexed by the fact, week in and week out, we're laying out, biblically, the offer of freedom, the offer of full life that's found only in Jesus Christ, only in a glad submission to Jesus Christ, and so many of us continually run back to the idols and the elementary spirits of this area, of this place. I'll press a little bit harder, and then I'll pray.

I can't tell you how non-rare it is for us to counsel with many of you who have gone into a ridiculous amount of debt trying to show out for the Jones'. So you live in a house you can't afford, drive a car you can't afford, and buy clothes you can't afford. For what reason? Listen, it's the same reason that drove stuff when you were a seventh grader, isn't it? Except now it's houses and cars instead of Cavaricci's. I lost a generation there, but some of you are with me.

Think how juvenile and how enslaved you are when you're carrying all the weight of massive debt that reveals, in your heart, you have no confidence in Jesus Christ and your identity in him, so you have to flex out your identity. That's why so many of us are in the gym as much as we are. Again, houses, cars, nice bodies, good hair, none of that is evil in and of itself except when that becomes your identity and that becomes what defines you. At that moment, you're engaging in demonic activity, and Christ says, "Stop this nonsense. Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden. I will give you rest for your souls."

Here's what I want you to do...I want you to process something because this is a terrifying passage of Scripture that some of you here today are worshipping demons by being here. It's a poignant enough text, I think, to maybe expose some things and to create maybe a little anxiety in you, good anxiety, that I hope leads to your joy and freedom in Jesus Christ. I'm going to pray for us, and then we'll enter into worship and singing and Communion in Denton and Dallas, and then there will be men and women up here who can help clarify some of these things.

They can pray with you. Maybe today, for the first time, you've realized, *Oh, man, I'm definitely enslaved to elementary principles. I'm definitely enslaved to things that have not brought about joy, not brought about gladness in Christ, not set me free, so I'm rather busy religiously but still trapped and enslaved to a practice that doesn't bring life and freedom.* My hope is the Spirit would expose and engage in ways that set you free today. Let's pray.

Holy Spirit, I just ask for your help. I pray for my brothers and sisters in here who are enslaved to elementary principles, you would make that clear. Maybe we would have that moment where you, in your grace and mercy, would wake up our hearts and the *Holy, oh no! What have I done?* might resound through our hearts, and you might set us free. I thank you for the invitation to be blameless and holy in your sight.

I pray for glad submission to that. I pray you would move through here and move through our hearts in ways we hoped for and dreamed but never experienced. I pray where there are not believers, you would give birth to believers, and where there is hypocrisy, we would repent of our hypocrisy; we would run to the grace and mercy found only in you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you guys.

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