

## THE COMPASS

# Slaves for Sale

### *Postcards From Paul, Part 3*

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How much would you pay for a slave?

The year George Washington died, you could buy a field hand for \$300 to \$450.

And Washington did. He owned 123 slaves himself.

But less than 10 years later, Congress made it illegal to import slaves from Africa.

But the result of this ban on the African slave trade, of course, wasn't an end to slavery. In fact, the result wasn't that there were fewer slaves.

The result was that the price went up — and owners became breeders.

Every year, another 50,000 babies were born into slavery.

By 1830, when Andrew Jackson was President (and he owned more than 100 slaves), the slave population in America had increased to 2 million — about 15 out of every 100 people living in the USA.

At the beginning of the Civil War, you could buy or sell a slave for your cotton fields for \$2,000.

That was a lot of money in 1860. It would be \$21,000 today. You're talking about a capital expense.

For that kind of money you had the right to beat your slave, torture your slave, sell off your slave's children.

You could make your slave do any kind of work you didn't want to do yourself.

A slave had no human rights, no civil rights, no legal or political rights.

A slave was property, like a piece of furniture or a tool in the tool shed.

You could bust up your property, abuse it, if you wanted to — you'd just have to write off that much investment, but hey, go ahead.

Slavery was a horrible way to live.

And slavery has been around a long time.

If you talked about slaves in the days of the apostle Paul, everybody knew what you were talking about, and they knew it was unpleasant.

By the same token, when you talked about freedom in Paul's day, you weren't talking about something philosophical, or theoretical.

You were talking about something practical. Something you could see every day, all around you, in the differences between the lives of free people and slaves.

Let's look at slavery in Galatia; that's the province that sits smack in the center of modern-day Turkey.

The Christians in Galatia province asked Paul to come minister to them, teach them, help them understand more of the Gospel, and help them lead more people in the region to faith in Christ.

So Paul shows up, sets up shop. He spends a whole year, going from city to city all over the province of Galatia, teaching and preaching and evangelizing and discipling and ministering.

In fact, we know that Paul was in Galatia at least twice, maybe more, and at least once he stayed a whole year or more.

But eventually, Paul leaves town. His ministry continues, his travels continue.

And now he gets word that something is going on in Galatia province.

The Christians have been fooled by new teachers, who have come along and convinced them that it's not really just about Thing 1 and Thing 2, loving God by loving people — they say no, there are rules and regulations to be followed.

In fact, what they're saying is that if you're Jewish, you can't be right with God just by accepting Christ's sacrifice on your behalf — you still have to do all the Jewish rituals.

And on top of that, even if you're a Gentile, you have to observe the Jewish customs — to be really, really right with God.

The key thing, they said, was to obey the law — the law of Moses, pages and pages of detailed regulations.

Obedying the rules, they said, is what saves you. Makes you right with God, gets you his love, lets you access his power, gets you into heaven when you die.

And when Paul hears this, he goes ballistic. Because he has taught and taught and taught and taught the truth about what God really wants from people, and that's relationship.

It's not about rules, it's about relationship.

Love God, love people — Thing 1 and Thing 2 — that's all!

God arranged the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to cover all our sins, so there wouldn't have to be any barrier between us and God.

And if his love is flowing into us, it will flow on through us and into the lives of others.

FAITH IN CHRIST — in other words, trusting God to be telling the truth about what Jesus did for us — IS ALL IT TAKES to receive God's Spirit as a personal gift, and begin a new life of walking with him and talking with him and experiencing the power of his love in every aspect of your existence.

This faith — our decision to believe God about the job Jesus did — is what saves us from the old life we led.

It saves us for eternity, but it also saves us every day: it grows us, it matures us, it moves us toward the ideal that God designed us to become.

But now, in Galatia province, these new guys were saying that the old laws, the old "rules and regs," were the key.

And Paul just went kinda crazy.

He sat down and fired off a HOT letter. I mean, it's passionate. There are some strong words in here.

He starts with "**I am astonished**" (**Galatians 1:6-8**) — he accuses them of desertion — he says their new faith system "**is really no Gospel at all**" — he says the people selling them this bill of goods "**are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ,**" and they ought to be "**eternally condemned!**" EXCLAMATION POINT!

And he's not even two paragraphs into his letter yet. Yikes!

Why is Paul so bent out of shape? Because of slavery. These people came from spiritual slavery into spiritual SONSHIP — but now they were going back to the life of a slave.

In **Galatians 3:26** Paul pleads with them to get a handle on WHO THEY ARE:

**Galatians 3:**

**26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**

He goes on to say a little later on (**Galatians 4:4,5**) that through Christ we “**receive the full rights of sons.**”

Faith in Christ — that’s all!

But there’s something in the human psyche that somehow just can’t quite believe that it’s so simple.

So group after group, century after century, have made up new packages of rules and regulations that supposedly gain you access to God’s love.

But these rules, these laws, just have the effect of tying people up, weighing them down. They’re a burden. They’re like the chains on a slave.

Paul told the Galatians that even God’s law — the law that Moses brought down with the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai — was a device to show people how impossible it was to measure up to God’s design under their own power ... which would point people to God’s grace, a gift they could receive simply by faith.

God never intended us to be made spiritually clean by observing the Ten Commandments or the old law, or any other grid of rules and regulations.

God has arranged for your freedom. That’s what he sent Jesus for.

Then Paul says:

**Galatians 4:**

**7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.**

An heir is in line to receive something. A relationship with God entitles you.

As a son or daughter, you have certain promises. As an heir, you have certain hopes for the future.

As a slave, you have nothing.

Paul is saying, Don’t go back to slavery.

Don’t be fooled into thinking that your relationship with God hinges on any rules or regulations or rituals or religion.

Your faith — your trust in God — your conviction that he is telling you the truth, and your acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice — is the hinge-pin of your salvation.

Paul goes on to say:

**Galatians 4:**

**8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves....**

**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 principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?**

He's talking about something we call "legalism," and it's more than just tiresome. It's deadly.

And it's more than just people in Galatia province, 2,000 years ago, trying to get on God's good side by going back to old religious customs.

It's about us.

We have to be vigilant in guarding against the idea that any routine or ceremony will somehow make us better in God's eyes.

Of course there are still groups today who cling to the Old Testament law in one form or another.

Seventh-Day Adventists, for example, and followers of Bill Gothard feel strongly about the calendar; they observe the Sabbath on Saturday. They don't worship on Sunday.

And they observe dietary restrictions from the Old Testament law: they won't eat pork and other foods regarded as unclean under the Mosaic system.

They observe certain sexual restrictions from the old law as well.

And if I didn't grow up in the Jewish faith or the Adventist tradition or the Gothard movement, I look at those rules and I say, What's up with that? How could they get hung up on such stuff?

Except that I am just as susceptible to other forms of rules, based on the teaching I've been exposed to and what I believe.

Some are just as adamant about worship on Sunday as the Seventh-Day Adventists are about worship on Saturday.

Or hey, your church meets on Wednesday or Thursday evening? Is that legitimate? Does God know to show up?

Or maybe your thing is a church building — no steeple, no pews, it ain't church. Or, to be more precise, what you're really feeling is, this can't really be pleasing to God.

Or maybe your slavery is denominational — my denomination pleases God more than your denomination.

Or maybe your slavery is the method of water baptism: dunking, sprinkling, doing it to children, waiting till you're a certain age?

Or maybe your slavery is a certain music style. I had a friend who honestly felt that you could play drums in church unless you were serving communion, then you had to lay off — that it wasn't pleasing to God to hear drums during the Lord's Supper.

Slavery can generate fierce emotions.

Just go down the tobacco and alcohol road and you'll find strong opinions.

But even more insidious than cultural issues like tobacco and alcohol are the spiritual exercises.

It doesn't seem like daily Bible reading could be a form of slavery, does it?

But some feel you have to read your Bible every day in order to be a good Christian.

The most common form of this belief, I think, is the guilt that people feel when they DON'T read their Bible every day.

If I'm not reading my Bible every day, then I hope the subject doesn't come up in conversation, because I either have to pretend to be a daily Bible reader, or I have to kind of finesse the conversation around somehow so I can be thought of as a daily Bible reader without actually claiming to be a daily Bible reader, because if I claim to be and I'm not, that's a lie, and lying is something a good Christian DEFINITELY can't do.

It's exhausting!

We need to understand that anytime we try and decide who is "in" and who is "out," from that moment, we are in the slave trade.

We are not moving toward God, or loving others well.

We are setting up another manmade measuring stick — which does not really help that person love God more ... it's actually more useful in telling US whether the other guy is "good enough" to meet OUR standards, OUR expectations.

And now, measuring up to that standard becomes the important thing.

Gotta do the do's and not do the don'ts.

It's not about relationship; it's about performance.

It's slavery.

God didn't invent that measuring stick — although we tell ourselves he LOVES our particular measuring stick ... and he's *a little DISAPPOINTED* in the other guy's measuring stick.

He loves my devotion to traditional music over contemporary music, but he has no use whatsoever for my friend's devotion to Saturday worship over Sunday worship.

God accepts ME — more than he accepts YOU — because I have the right measuring stick!

This is a lie.

It was a lie that made Paul crazy.

And I think it breaks God's heart.

Paul says in **Galatians 5:**

**1 It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. [This is not a philosophical concept; he bought us our freedom so we could live every day — breathe — relax — have a good life! It's freedom! Be free!] Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.**

***Legalism is deadly because it makes me a slave again.***

We were slaves before we came to Christ; and now we're going back — just with different kinds of chains!

And even worse, you get to the end of your life without ever having really experienced the relationship with God that he longed for from the beginning.

Paul says:

**Galatians 5:**

**4 You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace....**

**6 ...The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

Later on in his letter to the Galatians, Paul nails this again:

**Galatians 6:**

**15 ...What counts is a new creation.**

**16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule....**

If you have to follow a rule, this is the one to follow: The rule that says, No rules! You're free!

You can almost hear Paul's heartbreak as he says:

**Galatians 5:**

**7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth?**

How could you get sidetracked on these non-issues?

**8 That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you.**

If we are passing judgment on each other's standing before God, it's not the Spirit of Christ whispering those ideas in our ears.

These laws cannot save a sinner, nor can they sanctify a saint.

Maybe we'll agree to worship using a guitar and a keyboard and a drum kit.

Maybe we'll agree to honor God that way.

But I can't establish a guitar rule for worship, and if you don't like it, you're less righteous than me.

I can't judge your standing before God to be inferior because you have a glass of Chardonnay with dinner and I don't.

I can't peer into your heart.

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Maybe it disturbs you.

You feel a little uneasy about this kind of freedom.

There need to be rules. You need to know what to do and what not to do.

You need to know that the people you're journeying with, in this walk of faith, are doing the right thing.

But at the end of his letter to the Galatians, Paul says, basically, Don't worry.

**Galatians 5:**

**19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious....**

Later he says,

**Galatians 6:**

**1 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

**4 Each one should test his OWN actions. Then he can take pride in HIMSELF, without comparing himself to somebody ELSE,**

**5 for each one should carry his OWN load....**

I can say to you, Brother, you're breaking my heart — you're hurting yourself. Stop doing what you're doing. Let the power of God's love lead you differently.

Or I may say to you, My friend, you inspire me — you're doing so great. Tell me how God is helping you. I want to be excelling the way you're excelling.

But God help us to avoid legislating against each other.  
Let's not be rule-makers. Let's get out of the slave trade.  
God help us to live in the freedom that Christ bought for us on the cross ... and let  
each other live in that freedom as well.