



360 DISCUSSION 05.07.17

IN PURSUIT OF COMMUNITY

GALATIANS 4:8-20



Even though I know the value of community and have had some incredibly rich experiences in community, I seldom give biblical community the time and space it deserves.

While I have had some rich experiences in community, I have also experienced a few disappointments and setbacks. I am sure you have too.

You may have been in community with those folks who don't quite get the concept of personal space. You knew that at some point during the evening you would find yourself in a really long, really animated conversation with them, no more than a few inches from your face. The more you pulled away, the more they pulled in.

Or maybe you were in community with a leader who never really did their homework, so they powered through on personality. You were pretty sure they were making it up on the spot. It felt like an endless stream of religious platitudes. It didn't really make sense. It didn't really help.

Or maybe you had the opposite experience with a leader that did too much homework, and wanted to share everything they knew, but they somehow never got around to Jesus, to the gospel or to everyday life.

Or maybe you have been in a community that was way too cool. They seemed to be a lot more impressed with themselves than they were Jesus. You were pretty sure you would never fit in.

Let's face it, "Community is really messy, but it's the place we all need to be."

When you look at Galatians 4:8-20 it is obvious that Paul's relationship with the Galatian believers was born out of a rich sense of biblical community. It is a great passage for us to turn to as we elevate our vision of biblical community and recommit ourselves to pursuing it in our fellowship.

DEALING WITH HEART ISSUES (vv. 8-11)

GALATIANS 4:8-11 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. ⁹But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? ¹⁰You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Even though the Galatian believers were turning from a purely pagan lifestyle to embrace a distinctively Jewish way of life, Paul sees the two as equally dangerous. We can be enslaved by the things of this world, or we can be a slave to our religious practice. Both rob us of the freedom we find in the gospel.

1. What are some ways that Jewish practices were superior to the purely pagan practices of the Roman world?
2. In what ways are they no different?
3. How does Paul describe the results of the gospel in the lives of the Galatians believers?
4. What does “knowing God” and “being known by God” offer that neither paganism nor Judaism; religion nor irreligion can offer?
5. What can you learn from Paul, on how to address deep heart idolatries and challenge your group to stay true to Christ?

GIVING OURSELVES FULL TO ONE ANOTHER (vv. 12-16)

GALATIANS 4:12-16 ¹²I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong. ¹³As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, ¹⁴and even though my illness was a trial 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. ¹⁵Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. ¹⁶Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well (1 Thessalonians 2:8).”

1. What happens when we share the gospel, but fail to share our lives?
2. What happens when we share our lives, but fail to share the gospel?

3. How did Paul give himself to the Galatian believers?
4. How did the Galatian believers give themselves to Paul?
5. What are some ways you can more fully give yourself to those around you for the sake of the gospel?

LONGING FOR CHRIST TO BE FORMED IN US (vv. 17-20)

GALATIANS 4:17-20 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 have zeal for them. ¹⁸It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you. ¹⁹My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, ²⁰how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Paul refers to the false teachers that were infiltrating the Galatian church as “those people.” There is a huge contrast between the motives of “those people” and Paul.

1. What motivated the false teachers?
2. What motivated Paul?
3. What was Paul’s desire for the Galatian believers?
4. What do you think it means for Christ to be formed in you?
5. What are some of the results we can expect when Christ is being formed in us?
6. What are some steps we can take to keep Christ at the heart and center of our community?

APPLYING THIS STUFF

In Sunday’s message we challenged you (1) not to give up on community; (2) to pursue a wholistic approach to community, and (3) to consider whether God might be prompting you to lead out in community.

1. Which one of these speaks the most to where you find yourself in relation to biblical community?
2. What happens when we do not fully participate in the life and community of the local church?
3. What if anything is standing in the way of your leading out in biblical community?