

Sermon Series: When Relationships Collide
To Be Used With: Session Four “Stand Your Ground”
Sermon Title Possibilities: “A Hill To Die On”
Sermon Text: [Galatians 2:1–14](#)

Introduction

Earning Freedom is the account of how Michael Santos rebuilt his life. At age 19 he was sentenced to 45 years in prison for heading up an illegal drug organization. Inside prison he developed a plan to educate himself, network with a support group, and continue to contribute to the good of society as he prepared to enter the world again. He earned two degrees, built a website, wrote several articles and books, and helped other prisoners develop skills to cope with life in prison. After serving 25 of his 45 year sentence, he was released and today continues to write and speak about the power of human determination and will.

Santos’ story, though admirable, is a story of self-salvation. While we should celebrate the common grace of willpower, determination, and perseverance, we must understand how the Gospel radically redefines the role of human effort in salvation. Grace cannot be earned; it is a gift to all who believe. Anyone with a different message should be accursed (Gal. 1:9)! But the Galatian churches struggled to understand this. Paul recounted a few events in his ministry to stress the importance of salvation by grace alone.

[Read Galatians 2:1–14]

While Christians need not die on every hill, the truth of the Gospel is worth fighting for. The events Paul recounted here occurred during a highly sensitive time for the church. As it expanded, opposition continued to arise both from the inside and outside. Paul knew which battles to fight, which hills to die on. Let’s look at four truths that can prepare us to know how to do this in our own lives.

1. Seek confirmation of your convictions. (vv. 1–3)

Paul went to Jerusalem in order to make certain he was not running in vain (v.2). He did not believe the Gospel he preached contained error or falsehood, but he wanted to make certain that his message produced fruit. A divided church would not adorn the Gospel. If the Jewish Christians forced the Gentiles to be circumcised, this would be no advantage to Paul or the church at large. Paul made sure of this himself.

To be prepared to stand our ground and discern which hills are worth dying on, we must confirm our convictions. We must seek actual evidence that our beliefs are bearing fruit and bringing glory to God. We must be humble enough to learn from those with whom we disagree, without disputing or harboring anger and resentment. We must learn to ask good questions and be prepared to have wise saints pull us aside to lovingly offer correction (Acts 18:26). We must spend time meditating, studying, and praying over our theological and philosophical positions. The more we do this, the areas we should give up, and the ones we should stand firm on, will become clearer.

Application: Paul told Timothy “But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed” (1 Tim. 1:12). How firm are you in your theological and biblical convictions? Are you overly confident in some areas, but unresolved in others? How can you confirm your convictions about the Gospel and the Christian life?

2. Be careful with your critics (vv.4–5).

In verse 4 he says false brothers were secretly brought in “so that they might bring us into slavery.” Paul immediately faced opposition and resistance to the Gospel of grace. Rather than debate them or engage the opposition, Paul said “to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, *so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you*” (v.5, emphasis added). Paul did not engage them because by doing so, the Gentiles in Galatia would not have received the Gospel.

Charles Spurgeon urged his young students to keep a blind eye and a deaf ear. He said, “be deaf and blind to the longstanding differences which may survive in the church” ([Charles Spurgeon, Lectures To My Students](#)). This is sound advice! All of us will face critics. We can neither outrun, outsmart, or outnumber our critics. We must learn how to handle them. Paul refused to entangle in dialogue with them. He charged Timothy to avoid such critics as well (1 Tim. 6:20–21). Some situations call for us to engage our critics, but when doing so prevents someone from receiving the Gospel, we must not yield to them even for a moment.

Application: Do you find yourself responding to every critic? Why do you feel the need to be right and manage the opinions people have of you? Apply the Gospel to your own heart and trust that you are totally accepted by God because of Christ.

3. Rest in the role God assigned to you. (vv.6–10)

James, Cephas, and John gave Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, yet their roles were different. Paul and Barnabas went to the Gentiles (“the uncircumcised”) with the Gospel, while James, Cephas, and John proclaimed the Gospel to the Jews (“the circumcised”). They understood the role God commissioned them with, which allowed them to unite and work together for the sake of the Gospel.

The body of Christ is a beautiful thing. Each believer is gifted for a particular role. Some are given teaching and leadership gifts. Others are gifted at serving or showing mercy (Rom. 12:6–8). The problem occurs when we begin to elevate one particular gift above the other. Could this be the reason each time Paul discussed the spiritual gifts he immediately called the church to love one another (See: Romans 12:7–21; 1 Corinthians 13)? We must learn to rest in our roles. If we do not, we fight unnecessary theological and biblical battles which cause division and dissension in the church.

Application Idea: List some of the places of ministry in your church. Celebrate all of them. Thank the ones whom God has gifted for these areas. Encourage the congregation to praise God for all of these.

4. Refuse to give in when it comes to the Gospel (vv.11–14).

Scholars disagree over how to interpret verses 11–14. Why Peter pulled back from Gentiles considering the scene in Acts 10 is a mystery. D.A. Carson suggests that “certain men from James” (v.12) refers to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. The Christians there suffered at the hands of unconverted Jews because of their connection with Gentiles. Peter, due to his profile and connection with Gentiles, pulled back upon hearing the news of the hostility against the church. Paul opposed him and challenged him to stand firm in the Gospel. If this view is correct, we can understand why Peter did what he did. But Paul was clear: nothing was to compromise the message of the Gospel.

Christians can disagree on many things. How worship services should be conducted, election and free will, eschatology, etc., are all areas for discussion and disagreement. But when it comes to walking in step with truth of the Gospel, the truth that *anyone* who believes on the work of Christ can be saved, we must stand our ground! This is a hill to die on. Isaac Watts understood how precious the Gospel was when he wrote “Love so amazing, so divine. Demands my soul, my life, my all” (Isaac Watts, *When I Survey The Wondrous Cross*). No matter our personality, leadership capabilities, or public influence, we must stand our ground when the truth of the Gospel is being called into question.

Application: Is the Gospel this precious to you? Is your life grounded in the Gospel so that you recognize when it is being compromised or undermined? Let us study, meditate on and exult in this glorious message.

Conclusion

Which battles are worth fighting? It depends. Are you firm in your own convictions? Are you handling your critics well? Have you accepted your God-ordained role? Is the Gospel at stake? When we have answers to these questions we can discern whether or not a battle is worth fighting. As we meditate on the Gospel it will teach us to be winsome, humble, and courageous when it comes to standing our ground (Titus 2:11–14).

Greg Breazeale (M.Div. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, D.Min. student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) is senior pastor at Metro East Baptist Church in Wichita, KS. He and his wife Heather have two sons, Cross and Rhyse, and are expecting their third child in August. He blogs at yearnforGod.org. Twitter: [@pastorbreaaz](https://twitter.com/pastorbreaaz).