

Galatians 4:8-11 “Zealous for God”

When we look at this letter to the church in Galatia we see two groups of people being addressed throughout. We see Paul addressing those people who have professed faith in Christ alone for their salvation, and we see the Judaizers being confronted by Paul who are trying to sway those believers in Galatia to adopt a gospel which includes not only Jesus Christ, but also the Mosaic law as an additional means to their salvation.

And essentially, Paul has taken a very logical approach to his argument that the law and grace cannot come together to form a new gospel, because the law is to give way to the redemptive finished work of Christ who came to fulfill the law and issue in a new covenant in His blood and resurrection from the dead.

If this were a courtroom Paul would be seen as brilliant as he knocks down every argument the Judaizers would bring to bear on this issue of salvation as they try and introduce a legal system of works to attain eternal life.

But as we come to verse eight of chapter four Paul is going to begin to incorporate more than mere evidence of the facts, and will now emotionally appeal to these Galatians as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ whom he loves very much.

Keep in mind that Paul was the one who led many of these people to Christ. Paul is the one who originally came to Galatia and poured his life into these people. He laughed with them, he wept with them and he instructed them concerning the things of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

These were his friends. And he is now having to write a letter of rebuke, a letter of correction concerning the most important aspect of their lives; where they will spend eternity, and the means by which to attain such life.

Most of the beginning of this letter really is directed to the Judaizers as Paul picks away at their false notion that the law is necessary to one's relationship with the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But beginning in verse eight of our text he now zeroes in on the Gentiles who are the targets of these Judaizers as he reminds them of their past and pleads with them to consider their futures.

GAL 4:8-11 “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 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? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

This is very instructive because it shows us the mindset of Paul as it relates to the law as we’ll see here in our text. First notice how he reminds them of where they came from.

GAL 4:8 “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.”

There is the tendency to forget where we came from. And though we are never encouraged in Scripture to dwell on our past, we are never to forget what it was which brought us from darkness to light.

If we ever reach the point where we forget how needy and lost we were outside of Christ there is the tendency to drift into a complacency about our salvation. In fact, there is the tendency to lose sight that we are still sinners in need of God’s grace, thinking that we somehow have arrived as we compare ourselves with the world.

And this is where many a person who professes faith in the Messiah can take an attitude which the world has labeled, “holier than thou,” as though we are somehow better than them. It can be seen as some Christians look down on other people outside of the church. Much of it has to do with our insistence that there is only one way to the Father, and that’s though Jesus Christ.

And so, this rap that we are better than others can be a false perception because we do believe there is only one way as the Scriptures clearly teach. But simply because we have embraced the only way, the only solution found in Christ, doesn’t mean we turn our backs on the reality of our past.

Our past keeps us humble, it keeps us sensitive to the love of Christ which none of us deserve, and it keeps us thankful and grateful that we have been given life and the hope of being with our God forever.

Paul is reminding these Galatians that there was a part of their lives in the past which was real and which was taking them down a path

of destruction. And, just like himself, Paul knew that it took God intervening on the Galatians' behalf and actively seeking them to deliver them from that destruction.

He reminds them of their false gods. And though they may have used the word god in their vocabulary in relation to these idols Paul reminds them that they spent their lives not knowing the only true God.

It's like people today who use the word God, or even the word Christian to define themselves. But simply using the words doesn't make it so. I might boast of being an Admiral in the navy, but that doesn't make me one.

If you were to talk with most people today, be they your co-workers, friends or family and ask them if they believe in God, or more specifically are they Christian, you would find that a majority of them would answer in the affirmative. They would say, of course I believe in God.

And then they would make the leap that since they believe in God that that necessarily allows them to be considered Christians, or children of God. And yet, when push comes to shove, and they are confronted with the choice to repent of their sin and not only embrace Christ by faith, but to actually follow Christ as their Lord and Master, they balk at the idea of such a thing as being necessary to be in God's favor.

And so, what they have done is to create a God and a Savior and a salvation in their own image. They have made the rules to suit their own lifestyles, to justify their sin and to allow themselves to be part of a religion which may have a form of godliness, but denies the power of true salvation.

They cannot bring themselves to embrace the only solution to their sin problem found in Christ because they think it's foolishness to embrace such nonsense.

1CO 1:18-20 "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?"

It is the wisdom of the world, the wisdom of people who have created their own form of righteousness, which God looks at as

foolishness. And yet, people today will continue to go down such a path because they will not humble themselves before the one true God. They have created a false god of their own making and a false salvation.

This is where we all were in one form or another before coming to Christ. It may not have taken the form of these Galatians when they were slaves to false gods and images of their own making, but the results are the same whenever we subscribe to a system of false teaching or thinking which puts our works at the forefront of earning heaven.

It is that type of thinking that enslaves all men. And it was this type of thinking that enslaved the Galatians before coming to Christ. And so, in essence, Paul takes them down that road to their past to remind them how foolish it was to think that they could worship false gods and still have the hope of eternal life. But he doesn't leave them in the past. He immediately brings them into the present.

GAL 4:9 "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?"

This is an amazing statement from Paul as we look at the details of what he has said, but first I want to take a moment to just remind all of us that it is important for us to, once in awhile, reflect on where we came from; what it was that we thought important compared to eternity.

Once in a while it's not a bad thing to remember back at a time outside of Christ and consider where we would have been had we died in that state. It humbles me when I look back on my life. And I don't mean to suggest that my entire life prior to Christ was horrible, or that I didn't have wonderful memories of family and school and friends.

But, all of that aside, it really makes little difference the degree to which we were pursuing ungodliness, because the penalty is still the same; death. There were times in my life in the past which were great. But the bottom line is, what if you gain the whole world and lose your soul? What does it profit you? And so, whether you were a criminal or a relatively wonderful person, outside of Christ we were all lost.

In fact, that is one of the reasons we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It's a time of remembrance, albeit remembering Christ's death for our sin, but it infers that we were sinners in need of a Savior. And so, every time we remember what Christ did for us on the cross it should remind us of what we came out of; a life of no hope and a life deserving death.

And so, Paul says, "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?" (GAL 4:9)

Notice the correction Paul makes at the beginning of this verse, "But now that you know God - or rather are known by God"....

What does he mean by this? Well simply, Paul means to remind his readers of the grace that God has bestowed on them. As we move further in this letter we will find that at the time Paul came to them they were not looking for the one true God. They were content with their idols and false gods.

Paul reminds them that, yes, they have come to know God, but it's only because God chose to know them. They have become known by God because it was His desire to bring them into an eternal relationship with Himself through His Son.

When speaking to His apostles, Jesus reminds them, and by extension, all believers, that the Lord does the initiating when it comes to grace.

JOH 15:15-16 "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -fruit that will last."

Towards the end of his life this same man who penned the gospel of John wrote an epistle or letter with the same theme of grace extended to man who is undeserving.

1JO 4:9-10 "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Paul would take it a step further by showing how no man seeks after God, and that God must come to us to rescue us from ourselves.

ROM 3:10-12 "As it is written: [Psa.14:1] "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Not even one? Not even one. Well, then how do we explain anyone coming to Christ? We explain it the same way Scripture does elsewhere, as for example, how God sought Abraham who was not looking for God at the time, or Moses in the desert when he was not looking for God at the time. Or even Paul who was not looking for God at the time.

Yes, it's true that man will seek after what he thinks is God. But, we are told quite clearly that men seek their own ways to their own destruction. It is God who loves us who comes to us and seeks us out and then reveals Himself to us as His Spirit opens our eyes so we can see our need.

Salvation is of the Lord from beginning to end. And though He doesn't believe for us, even there He provides the faith as Paul points out to the Ephesian church when he says, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -..." (EPH 2:8)

Even our faith is a gift. We can certainly say that we know God, but it really is more correct to say that we have come to be known by God Himself who loved us so much that He sent His only begotten Son into this world so that whoever believes on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

But here is the amazing question Paul asks of these people in Galatia in our text which puts the law of Moses into perspective for today as a means of earning salvation.

GAL 4:9-10 "... 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? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!"

Now keep in mind the context. Paul just got through reminding these Galatian Gentiles, who have now embraced Christ by faith, that they formerly once worshipped false gods. This was their past.

And now he asks the question, do you want to go back to these worthless things which do not bring life? Now the question has to be asked in light of what the Judaizers are promoting, “what are these worthless things Paul is referring to?”

Is he referring to the Galatians actually going back to these false gods; gods which were known as Aphrodites, Zeus, or Apollos, among many others? Not at all. Paul was not concerned with them going back to such false deities and idols. Paul has just made the connection of the law of Moses to these false notions of gaining God’s favor.

Paul is reminding these Galatians that just as when you tried to gain favor with the gods through your idols, you are attempting to do the exact same thing through a system which was not intended to accomplish salvation. He is saying that if you use the law as a means to this end you are no different than when, in your former days, you worshipped Zeus, Apollos and others.

You can imagine that this went over big with the Judaizers. But it’s true. The law cannot do anything but enslave us. It cannot save. And Paul says, that if you want to be enslaved all over again to the worthless elemental things you once placed your faith in, then by all means embrace the law as a way to heaven, because it will accomplish the same thing as your former idols; death.

This does not mean to suggest that Paul is trashing the law of Moses, only that Moses understood that the law was not the means of gaining righteousness before God. Its purpose was to lead us to Christ as a tutor.

But Christ has replaced the tutor, so why go back to the thing which led us to Him when we’ve got the real thing?

GAL 4:10-11 “You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”

Now, remember, Paul is still addressing the Gentile believers at this stage. He’ll come back to the Judaizers a little later, but this section is dealing with Gentiles who are being badgered to follow the ways of the law which spelled out how Israel was to observe certain days of the year to remind them of their God and Savior.

But what Paul refers to here is how the law, in this case, is being used as a means to salvation or sanctification. In other words,

there's nothing inherently wrong with observing certain days of the year according to the Jewish calendar. Even Paul did this.

But what he is referring to in our text is the forcing of the law on someone's conscience in such a way that they would be considered inferior or even not saved if they don't observe the law in its many forms. And this is where Paul draws the line and would oppose it adamantly, calling it a false gospel worthy of condemnation.

And the reason Paul says that he fears for them and that he may have wasted his time on them is because if they truly continue down this path, knowing what the true gospel was as Paul delivered it to them when he was with them, then they prove themselves never to have known the one true God.

They, like the Judaizers, were simply playing games with God. Now, granted Paul is in all likelihood exaggerating his case here which he does on purpose. In other words, he knows he hasn't wasted his time on them. Whenever the gospel is able to be shared we never waste our time no matter the outcome.

But when Paul says he fears for them, it's not really a fear which suggests that he fears they will lose their salvation. His fear for them is that they will dishonor Jesus Christ as they continue to entertain the false teachings of these Judaizers.

But it must be said that there may be a legitimate fear on Paul's part that some of those in Galatia who are a part of this church and who are not true believers will pursue these false teachings to their own destruction.

Paul knew that simply because you are a member of a church does not guarantee that you have truly embraced Christ by faith alone. And it would stand to reason that many of the Galatians in the church there had family and friends who would come out to the church who had not believed. And so with this false influence in that church you can see Paul's concern for them.

The fact that he is even writing this letter proves that he doesn't feel that his efforts had been wasted on them. But it allows them to get a peek into his heart and the way this whole thing grieves him to his very soul. Paul loves them and this shows his shepherd's, or pastor's heart, for them.

And this is where the tone of this letter begins to take a change in direction. Up to this point Paul has been matter-of-fact about this whole issue. He could certainly appear to be somewhat incensed

and insensitive in his approach as he systematically goes through this letter dissecting the law and its effects on that church. This is a theological issue, and it appears to be a theological treatise without much love in the process.

And yet, that could not be further from the truth. Paul's theology is love. And Paul's love for the truth of who Jesus Christ is and the salvation He purchased for us is what this letter is all about. Not to point out these things in this theological approach would not be love.

There is the cry today which has gone out from certain quarters of the "church," that we need to get away from doctrine and just love people. We need to de-emphasize teaching and just encourage one another without making them feel as though God expects anything else from them.

But the truth is once we get away from doctrine or teaching, which is all that doctrine is, then we have shot ourselves in the foot as far as being able to go forward with Christ. And even more diabolical, once we get away from doctrine we fall into the same trap as the Galatians where the very gospel of Jesus Christ is called into question.

Let me remind you that the emphasis of the ministry of Jesus Christ on earth was teaching doctrine about the kingdom of God and the salvation which comes from God. It is not a coincidence that Jesus was referred to throughout His ministry as teacher, Rabbi.

And He confirms the necessity of the word of God in our lives as the very means of growing in our salvation. He shows us this in His prayer to the Father on behalf of His disciples both then and now.

JOH 17:15-17 "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth."

There's always the temptation for us to think that we've wasted our time and effort on people when they don't respond to the truth. And it may be true from a human standpoint that we have. I can't tell you how many times I've shared the truth with people who have passed through these doors and have commended us for

staying true to the word and yet will not stick around because God's timetable is not on their timetable.

Or when the truth of God's word cramps their style or their view on life they all of a sudden find themselves needing a breather from God. I've said over the years that it would be much easier telling people what they want to hear, but the problem is that I'm ultimately not accountable to people, but to God.

One day I'll stand before God for the way I've served Him and so will you. God has placed us together for a purpose and that is to go forward with the work no matter what. And I'm always hopeful that even those people who have gone out from among us have been touched in a way by your ministry and mine that it may be useful to them one day.

Paul was at his wits end with the Galatians and yet he just continued to love them with the truth. And we need to continue to love each other with the truth as we also love the world with the truth of the gospel.

We don't ever want to become complacent in our faith. We don't ever want to forget where we came from and where we're going and why. It's all because of Jesus. It's all because He chose to know us and love us and use us to reach a lost and dying world with His message of hope and love.

But it's also in light of our past that our present, along with our futures, need to reflect that love we have tasted in Christ. We need to always be mindful that we have been brought from darkness to the light and that we need to live in that light in the power of the Spirit.

No more excuses for complacency, no more excuses for doing our own thing, no more excuses for living as though salvation doesn't make any difference in this life. Paul didn't give up on the Galatians and we must never give up on the hope we can bring to this world through Jesus Christ.

But it's a hope which should be seen in our lives everyday. Paul put it this way.

1TH 5:5-11 "You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-

controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.”

May we continue to fight the good fight and may we continue to seek the Lord as we encourage each other to love Christ. And may that love be tasted by the world as we go out and show them what it means to be a child of our heavenly Father through faith in Christ alone.

No more going back to the worthless elemental things of the world. We don't belong to the world, we belong to Christ. Let's live like it in His power and strength.