

LSB Galatians 4:1 -

*8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you want to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you for nothing.*

Some years ago when I was gainfully employed, out on the test range, a fellow worker, a team lead over me who I particularly enjoyed working with, and for, made a statement that surprised me.

I was working alone, usually my first choice, I liked working solo, and as I worked I was listening to a recorded sermon. My colleague showed up and was curious about my listening choice and when I told him it was a recorded portion of scripture being preached and taught, his reply was; "Oh, extra credit."

From his perspective, people who are religious and who engage in something religious are working for creds with God. Extra credit. Out in the sage brush listening to a sermon. Building up creds with God. In this case, extra creds because why else would you listen to a sermon on a week day out in the sage brush.

Building up points in the assets column to offset some mis step that's in the liability column. Appeasing the deity. Christian or otherwise. If you study religions, worldwide, in every tribe and ethnicity, on remote islands and in large nation states, you will find people doing stuff to appease whatever deity their tradition has developed.

Paul is finishing his polemic argument about grace plus nothing. He has spent four chapters arguing that forgiveness of sins and adoption into God's family with full relational privileges, a one on one intimate relationship with Christ, and the Father, internalized by the idwelling Holy Spirit did

not come by works. Doing stuff. Making points with God.

The intimate friendship with God was realized by hearing a message about God's Son, who came into this world, and died a death, in our place, that we deserved, and who took upon Himself, all of God's wrath that we deserved, in our place, He died and rose from the grave on the third day.

They heard and believed that message and God poured out on them forgiving grace and the Holy Spirit who came to live inside their hearts. The Spirit came and it was real because of faith alone, in Christ alone, salvation by grace alone. No works from them caused the blessing to come.

Paul has developed his polemic argument from every angle possible. He has cursed every one who would bring a different gospel than the one that effectively brought the Spirit and salvation.

The cause for all of this rather serious bluster from Paul is because of persons who came from Jerusalem who claimed to have been sent by James, who have introduced the church's first battle with heresy. Heresy is false doctrine that restricts or outright cancels out the truth. False ideas and beliefs about God.

The truth is that salvation is by grace alone without works. The heresy is that salvation must include embracing the laws of Moses and the traditions of the jews. Even extrabiblical traditions that had already been pronounced deadly to the jews by Jesus Himself.

But the wider truth is that every religion on earth does the same exact thing. Somehow you appease the deities by doing stuff. Do stuff. Like the conclusion my friend jumped to. Get credit. Listen to a sermon, that must be above and beyond credit somehow. The equivalent of torture to appease the deity. Listen to some guy teaching the word of God. Clearly, extra credit. You work for cred with God.

The real truth is that God is holy. Perfect in holiness and we are far removed from Him by sin. The gap is unbridgeable by sinners. The debt is unpayable. And Isaiah made it clear in the old testament that all of our righteousness is nothing but filth to God. Filthy rags. Garments soiled in sewage. We bring nothing. Nothing we offer is acceptable to God.

Worthless, defiled, self righteousness adds only to the unpayable debt because it adds pride to the liabilities of our defilements. And along with pride it adds false thinking about a God who is small and sinners who are only slightly removed from their small God. Self righteousness is a stench in God's nostrils.

Paul had brought the true good news of a Holy God who reached down to sinners, freely offering His forgiveness with full payment of their vile sin in the death of a fully holy and acceptable substitute who died in their place. Believe on the sufficiency of the substitutionary death, in your place, of the very Son of God, and your sins will be wiped away, and you will be clothed in the righteousness of Jesus.

We become adopted brothers of the Son of God who are given a righteousness, not our own. We are called out of this world and into another world, the kingdom of God, in Christ Jesus.

The galatians had gone backwards into a false religion. Judaism had become a false religion embroiled in self righteousness that the Son of God rejected. In effect they had walked backwards, if that is possible, from the kingdom of God, back into this world, back under the ruler of this world.

Let's take a moment to review the paragraph preceding our text this morning to remember the full context. After the four verses we are looking at this morning, Paul leaves his theological reasoning behind and gets very personal, very intimate. There's a break between vs. 11 and vs. 12. But this morning we want to finish this doctrinal argument of Paul's.

*I Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a*

*slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and stewards until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were enslaved under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

*8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. 9 But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you want to be enslaved all over again? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you for nothing.*

Let me set up the argument in a more modern scenario or metaphor. You were a homeless and hopeless refugee living in a refugee camp dependent on others for your very subsistence. Living in a cardboard box in a refugee camp. No hope. No citizenship. Abandoned and alone without hope.

A visiting rich man noticed you and picked you from among the rubble, cleaned you up, brought you into his wealthy comfortable home, gave you not only freedom and mobility in wealth you never imagined, he then went through the courts and adopted you and made you heir of his estate.

Then some people from the tent camp came and told you, conditions are improved, we now have porta potties and we've moved up from cardboard boxes to canvas tents. You should come on back to the refugee slum.

That's non sensical. You don't leave wealth you never imagined and adoption into a family that has everything with full heirship, you will inherit unimaginable wealth in the future, and go back to the slum.

Or another metaphor. You are a slave working in tobacco fields in the south. Every hour of daylight 7 days a week, 365 days a year you are forced labor under a wretched and miserable evil master. If you cease labor there are beatings. You are assigned a wife and your children become the property of the evil master and are slaves their whole lifetimes, like you.

One day your master decides to sell you to pay some debts. He does and you are purchased by a wealthy, kind, generous man who frees you from slavery, no longer a slave, you are a free man, and then he adopts you as a son into his family. You're not only free, you are heir to all he has. And he is wealthy above your wildest dreams. He will share all he has with his adopted heirs. From the most wretched slavery, into the most unimagined possible wealth.

Do you walk away from either scenario and go back to your old life??!! That is bizarre beyond imagination. Who does that!!? Go from freedom and wealth back into slavery and oppression. Impossible! But that's what these folks were doing, and Paul is beside himself.

*8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.*

Before Paul came to the regions of galatia and introduced these pagans to the one true God, creator and sustainer and owner of all things, they were aimless and homeless wanderers in this world as far as a connection with their creator was concerned.

They were pantheists. Many gods (with a small 'g'). Zeus. Hermes. Artemis. Diana. Temples all over the place with bizarre sexual worship practices and meat offerings and who knows what.

You picked a god and you were a slave to whatever that god seemed to demand for their appeasement. Pagan gods that are connected to demons.

Paul tells the Corinthians; 19 *What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed*

*to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to become sharers in demons.*

In some sense, the galatians, in their pagan beliefs and practices before Paul came, were slaves of idolatry and worshippers of demons. Paul reminds them in vs. 8 that they were slaves of deities of this world, pagan gods which are not gods, but which are demonic at their cores.

All non god religions are based in superstitions, often with paranormal spiritual phenomenons in past memory, which are rooted in demons. Demons can cause spiritual phenomena. Then religions get built around the so-called miracles. Paranormal happenings lead to superstitions lead to religious temples, lead to demon worship.

And Paul's warning is this. Even though the judaizers have brought you something clothed in traditional judaism, it is a false religion at worst, as accused and rejected by Jesus himself, or even if it was pure judaism, it wasn't, but best case, even pure Moses is either set aside or fulfilled in Jesus. Only the moral law is binding.

And even at best best scenario. The moral law is in fact intact and cannot be set aside, but it doesn't bring salvation. It only condemns you to hell. You can't fulfil the moral law.

So Paul argues, going backwards, not necessarily back into your paganism, but back into judaism, is going backwards into the elemental things of this world which is connected to demons at worse, or set aside and or already fulfilled in Christ, at best.

You stepped backwards out of unimaginably fantastic adopted wealth, back into the poverty of this world's kingdom. You left the kingdom of heaven and went back into the authority to reign of the unseen powers of this realm, this world.

*8 However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods.*

Judaism at Jesus time was nothing but a parallel of pagan demon worship but with jewish names. The jews were not slaves of the one true God. They were slaves of a works righteousness system that had them jumping through all the same religious hoops as the pagans.

Do stuff to appease god. That's what the pagan galatians were doing before Paul, and that's what they were doing again with new names attached, after the judaizers were finished with them. Same works righteousness religion, new names.

*9 But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God,*

Notice here that Paul sets the record straight. You didn't find the one true God. He found you. You were nothing but a slave in a tobacco field, nothing but a refugee without a country, without hope, when the rich man showed up and for whatever his reasons were, He adopted you.

We didn't know God. He knew us. He reached out to us. We were hopeless aimless wanderers. He found us. He purchased us. He adopted us. Not the other way around.

Also note the word translated to know. *9 But now, having known God, or rather having been known by God,*

In the greek that word is an intimate knowing. It is not knowing about something. It is intimate knowing and being known. Adam knew his wife and she bore him a son.

You went from hopeless wanderer to one who has an intimate relationship with God. That happened by His choice, not yours. He reached out to you, not vice versa with all of your aimless pagan demon worship.

Then Paul asks, how is it, having been rescued, having been purchased, having been made a son, having become an heir to wealth we still have not even been able to full imagine . . . ;

*how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you want to be enslaved all over again?*

You're going to go backwards back into slavery?? You're going to leave the palace where you are a son and go back to the tobacco field and be a slave under a wicked evil taskmaster. Again??

You're going to go back to a system of jumping through hoops to gain creds with some unseen god, like the pagans do? That is bizarre and crazy behaviour. Irrational behaviour.

Nobody goes from wealth and freedom and sonship and intimacy with a benevolent and generous and loving and merciful father who has adopted you and made you his heir, back into oppressive, hopeless, destitute slavery. But that's what these folks had done. Fools. Beyond fools. Paul says they are under a spell. Bewitched.

No sane rational person would choose slavery over freedom. You'd have to be bewitched. Someone would have to cast a spell on you to move you from intimacy with the God of creation, back into slavery under the god of this world. Satan and his demons. It's irrational. You've been bewitched. You've been captured by an enchantment. You've left rational reality behind.

*10 You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

The pagans and the jews both shared this reality. Sabbaths and festivals filled the jewish calendar. Pagans observe new moons and cycles and seasons. They worshipped sun and moon. They devised wild beliefs around zodiac constellations of stars. We have them to this day. Demonic fables.

God designed feasts and festivals for His chosen nation, the jews, and each had a picture, a type, of the coming Messiah who completes all of the types of their religious festivals and sabbaths and offerings.

We don't go back to the picture stories when the real has come and dwelt among us.

Remember that the judaizers had come and told the galatians, observing all these religious festivals and offerings and sabbaths and circumcisions are necessary for your salvation.

Salvation isn't by grace alone. You have to do stuff to appease God. You have to embrace judaism. In total. A judaism that had long ago left the One true God and had become a false religion of works righteousness. Not so different from the pagan religions. Although they did recognize that God is one. They had the right God. They had adopted the elemental worldly jump through hoops, do stuff to appease God.

Paul says; If you're doing stuff . . . to be saved . . . jumping through religious hoops, festivals, sabbaths, feast days of the jews, new moons, whatever else you've dreamed up, to gain salvation creds with God . . . you don't need Jesus. You've gone backwards into hopeless slavery.

Then the final blow in the polemic argument;

*11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you for nothing.*

Listen to the sobering words of the author to the letter to the hebrews. Same exact idea. From Hebrews 6;

*4 For in the case of those once having been enlightened and having tasted of the heavenly gift and having become partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and having tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and having fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,*

*since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. 7 For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; 8 but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is unfit and close to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. 9 But we are convinced about you, beloved, of things that are better and that belong to salvation, though we are speaking in this way.*

There have always been and will always be the problem that Jesus defined for the church of wheat and tares growing together in the same field. Folks who we believe are our brethren in the Lord, who worship with us, take the Lord's supper with us, eat the feast with us, fellowship with us who we cannot judge for certain whether they are true believers or counterfeits.

In the parable of the soils, 3 out of 4 do not produce fruit. Rocky hard ground, shallow ground, weedy ground, good ground that ultimately produces some fruit.

We look across the horizontal parallel at the person who springs up and looks so promising and we're thanking God for them, and then they shrivel up and are gone. Or the person who appears healthy but has problems we can't see down in their roots below the surface and they are choked out.

Two out of the four appear to have full promise and then don't deliver any fruit on that promise.

In the parable of wheat and tares, the plants are look alike at first observance but upon closer examination one is worthless for anything but being burned.

We aren't surprised. Sometimes we are heartbroken. But never surprised, because Jesus told us not to be surprised. And Paul voices the torment of a parent who wants to believe their child is healthy and hopes upon hope that what appears to be cancer will not be fatal.

*11 I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you for nothing.*

That's a shocking thing to say. Did Paul labor over these churches for nothing. Is all of the region of galatia that responded to the gospel nothing more than chaff that is separated from the good wheat . . . and burned.

The possibility exists, but like the writer to the Hebrews, our default is what that author wrote in vs. 9. *But we are convinced about you, beloved, of things that are better and that belong to salvation, though we are speaking in this way.*

Truly saved people can falter. They can be bewitched, temporarily. They can be entangled with besetting sins. They can waste time going down dead end roads. They can be locked down in depressions and who knows what.

In Pilgrims Progress, Bunyan walks us through time after time of besetting setback. The hill difficulty, the slough of despond, being locked up in the giants castle, doing battle with apollyon, trouble in the town of Vanity Fair where faithful is burned. On and on they go until they reach the celestial city. Nothing ultimately stops them although they are set back many times.

There is little doubt that the christians, the real ones, those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, read Paul's letter, repented of their foolish error, and got on their way again. Stronger for the set back.

Then sadly, there is little doubt that some of the number decided to follow in the more fleshly gratifying and prideful path of working for salvation with good works and converting to a kind of works righteousness judaism.

To those we have to fall back on the apostle John's epistle that says; 19 *They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they were of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be manifested that they all are not of us.* 1 Jn. 2:19

True christianity does not come from doing stuff to be good enough for a perfect and holy God. We can never be good enough.

Real christianity is based in faith believing that Jesus came and died for us in our place, on a cross. He took the punishment we deserved, and risen from the dead He lives to give to us His righteousness.

When we believe that gospel and receive Him, He gives us His Holy Spirit who lives inside our hearts. We don't work for salvation, it is a gift we receive by faith.

But then when Jesus dwells in us, we do seek to live through the power of His Spirit lives that glorify the God who has adopted us to be His sons and daughters.