

Galatians 4:8-11

Fears for the Church

The most joyful way to live the Christian life is to remember who you are. The Christian life is a family relationship. You are a child of God, a legal son of God and thus His heir. In the last teaching we read,

And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

(Galatians 4:6, 7)

By God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.¹ We have been given a life of freedom and not bondage. Christianity is not a religion of external formalism of ceremony and ritual. It is the free and joyful relationship of children with their heavenly Father.

Do you remember the parable of the prodigal son? The young man spurned his father, demanded his share of the inheritance and then squandered it all away. When he finally came to his senses and returned home to the father he had spurned, he said, "I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."²

All of us can understand why he said this. But what if he had never run off and then one day said, "I am your child, your son, and I know you love me and have an inheritance for me, but I would rather be your slave." This would be stunning! And this was the error and foolishness of the Galatians, because false Jewish teachers who were poisoning their hearts.

The Galatians had once been enslaved to pagan deities and idols and philosophies influenced by demons. But then Paul led them to the freedom of being children of God by faith in Jesus Christ. But soon after Paul left, these false teachers were pulling these believers back into bondage; not to pagan ritual,

¹ Romans 8:17

² Luke 15:18, 19

but to Old Testament Jewish ritual and law. They were moving away from sonship to bondage to the law.

The apostle Paul in this letter has been trying to convince the Galatians that although the Old Testament law was good, it was never designed to justify and save people. All that it can do is point out what is good and what is bad. As we read our present section in Galatians we can see that this is one of the more personal writings of Paul. WE will get the sense that he almost lost heart. And he felt that his ministry in Galatia may have been in vain.

But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how *is it that* you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?
(Galatians 4:8, 9)

Once, the god of this world, Satan, had blinded the minds of the Galatians.³ And they served the pagan gods that were not really gods at all. People are still like this today. They serve Allah or Buddha or Krishna who are not gods at all. Or they serve a political ideology or some philosophy or their intellect or their bodies or good character. Everyone worships and serves something. We are designed to worship. And we become like the object of our worship.

But after Paul preached to the Galatians the good news of Jesus Christ they came to know the true God. And to know the true God is to be enlightened about life and to have joy and peace. It would be a good thing if we were all to take the time to study the attributes of God. God is holy, he is immutable, He is faithful, gracious, merciful, righteous and just. What do all these things mean?

To study these attributes of God and to understand them and pray over them is to fill our hearts with confidence in God. The more we learn about God the stronger our faith will be and the more meaningful our worship. What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. This is because we become like the God we worship.

So the Galatians came to know God or more importantly God knew them. God knows everyone in one sense. But He knows believers in a deep and

³ 2 Corinthians 4:4

loving way that is full of tender grace. God knows what motivates us. He knows our hopes and fears and concerns. He knows our heart-aches and aspirations.

The Bible says that God knew me before I ever came to faith in Christ.⁴ In fact my name was written in the Book of Life from before the foundation of the world.⁵ The Scriptures say that you and I are the apple of God's eye.⁶ We are all tattooed on the palms of His hands.⁷ God knows what I need before I ask Him.⁸ Believers are children of God and God knows us better than the best earthly father. The Galatians were being duped out of this intimate relationship with God into the weak and beggarly elements of Old Testament law and ritual.

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As we learned when we read about these "elements" earlier in verse 3, these are deceiving demon spirits. Once, the Galatians were in bondage to gods that were not really gods. And the most astonishing thing is that they were in danger of going back to the slavery of demons by being put under the bondage of the Old Testament law.

The Jewish false teachers must have been stunned to read what Paul wrote here. To reject God's grace in Christ is devilish. If you reject Christ's righteousness given to you and you begin to use the Old Testament law and ceremony to show God how good and righteous you are you are under the sway of demons. And you are no better off than you were in your pagan days. And when you think that you are good and righteous because of what you do, you tend to become rigid and legalist with others. This is where the Galatians were headed.

⁴ Romans 8:29

⁵ Revelation 20:15

⁶ Psalm 17:8

⁷ Isaiah 49:16

⁸ Matthew 6:8

You observe days and months
and seasons and years.
(Galatians 4:10)

The days are the Sabbath days of each week. The months are the new moon sacrificial festivals. The seasons are Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. And the years are the Sabbatical years, every seven years leading to the fiftieth Jubilee year when all debts were forgiven. All of these were good in their time and pointed to Christ. And they came to an end with Christ's death and resurrection. Romans 10:4 declares that "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

And so to bow before a pagan god is devilish. To sacrifice to an idol is devilish. To think that circumcision or making an offering to God or observing a Sabbath makes you more righteous than you already are in Christ is devilish. This is because you are trusting in what you do to make you righteous and not in God and Jesus Christ.

There are only two religions in the world. All forms of false religion say, "Look at me, look at what I have done." But true religion says, "I have nothing by which to merit salvation. I come to you God to receive your grace through the merits of Jesus Christ." And when you do you are saved and changed at the very core of who you are. The apostle Paul wrote this to his associate Titus.

But when the kindness and the love
of God our Savior toward man appeared,
⁵ not by works of righteousness which we
have done, but according to His mercy
He saved us, through the washing of
regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
⁶ [which] He poured out on us abundantly
through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ that having
been justified by His grace we should become
heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
(Titus 3:4-7)

The washing of regeneration is the spiritual washing that brings about our regeneration or new birth. We are renewed by the gift of the Spirit. We now have a Spirit generated, Spirit empowered and Spirit protected new life. God promised this in the old covenant when the new covenant would come. We are now God's children and heirs of everlasting life and glory.

If we understand being born-again, that God gives us in His Spirit a new heart and a new nature and new life and makes us righteous in Christ, we would never put ourselves in bondage to rules and rituals.

The apostle Paul had opened a window for the Galatians and the sweet breeze of this gospel truth set people free. But false teachers had closed the window and pulled down the shade. And Paul was stunned and in pain over his spiritual children.

I am afraid for you, lest I
have labored for you in vain.
(Galatians 4:11)

The Greek word translated “afraid” means to be terrified, to be full of great fear. Paul was not afraid that the Galatians were not saved. They had received the Spirit and manifested the Spirit. But he was fearful that churches where Jew and Gentile were set free in Christ to be equal before God would lose that equality. He was afraid that believers who had been set free to have intimate fellowship with God would now have God hidden by ritual. He was fearful that the power of the Spirit would be boxed up by legalism. He was terrified that they would forget who they were—children of God with God’s nature in them.

This was all being lost in Galatia and the apostle’s heart was breaking. There is a warning in all of this for us today. In our quest for holiness we can become hard-hearted legalists always judging ourselves and others. Or in our search for grace we can fall into license and think little about sin.

And so we need to keep our mind focused on Christ, on his sacrifice for us that freed us from sin. And we need to focus on the Spirit working in us that enables us to be more like our Savior. We are children of God and brothers and sisters in the Lord. There is no law or ritual that can make that happen.