

GALATIANS: Called To Freedom - #14 Salvation, Systems & Solution

Galatians 4:8-20

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain” (vv. 8-11)

“Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of your blessedness? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you” (vv. 12-20)

I. Salvation (Gal. 4:8-9a, 13-15)

- A. Loving God (Eph. 2:8-9; Gal. 4:6, 8) - *“You have come to know God, or rather to be known by God.”* (4:9) “Implies a personal relationship with God.” [ESV]
- B. Loving Mankind (1 Jn. 3:14; Gal. 4:13-15)

II. Systems (Gal. 4:8, 9b-10, 17)

- A. Life before Salvation (Gal. 4:8; Rom. 1:23, 25; 1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19-20; 1 Thess. 1:9)

“When we were children, [we] were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.” (4:3) *“Elementary principles...”* refers to the elementary principles the Galatians previously followed, which for Jews would be Moses’ law & for Gentiles the basic concepts of their pagan religions. But the additional overtones of demonic bondage in this phrase should not be ignored; they were, in terms of their mind-set & life situation, under a legalistic system & ‘enslaved.’ Paul explains that this enslavement was *“to those that by nature are not gods.”*(4:8) Legalistic superstition & demonic domination are closely linked. [ESV Note]

- 1. Ethics & Morality (e.g. Confucian ethics, Moses’ Law, Islamic laws)
- 2. Cultural norms [special days (Sabbaths—Jews: Sat., Islam: Fri.), festivals (Halloween, Christmas, Boxing Day, Thanksgiving, Black Friday), etc.]
- 3. Superstitions [e.g. Feng Shui (Chinese: 風水), 444 vs. 888, horoscopes, Psychics, Fortune tellers, “Friday the 13th”, “unlucky 13,” etc]

- B. Life after Salvation (Gal. 4:10)

“Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that...are not gods. But now that you have come to know God... how can you turn back again to the weak & worthless elementary principles...? You observe days & months & seasons & years!” (Gal. 4:8-10) “The Galatians are in danger of ...forfeiting sonship [&] abandoning the true God. ...For these Gentile Galatian Christians, turning to the Jewish law would be like returning to their paganism.” [ESV]

- 1. Days – Sabbath (Col. 2:16-17)

“Days & months & seasons & years” (4:10) were all part of the ceremonial laws of Moses’ covenant. To require Christians to follow such OT laws is to forfeit the gospel of justification by faith in Christ alone. This clearly implies that Christians are no longer under Moses’ covenant. Some see ‘days’ ...as evidence that the Jewish

7th-day Sabbath command was also part of the ceremonial law that Christians, under the new covenant, no longer need to follow.” [ESV]

“Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food & drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17) “The false teacher(s) [in Colossae] were advocating a number of Jewish observances, arguing that they were essential for spiritual advancement.” [ESV] “The old covenant observances pointed to a future reality that was fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, Christians are no longer under Moses’ covenant. Christians are no longer obligated to observe OT dietary laws (“*food & drink*”) or festivals, holidays [incl. Sabbath], & special days (“*a festival ...new moon ...Sabbath,*”), for what these ...have been fulfilled in Christ.” [ESV]

Quotes from N. T. Wright:

- “Jesus [in Luke 4] ...announced the Jubilee ...The time when all the seven, all the Sabbaths, would rush together.”
- “The Sabbath was the signpost pointing forward to God’s promised future... Jesus was announcing that *the future the signpost had been pointing [to] had now arrived in the present.*”
- You don’t need signposts once you’ve arrived. Likewise, “You don’t need the Sabbath when the time is fulfilled.” [*“when the fullness of time came, God sent forth his Son”* Gal. 4:4]
- The Sabbath “was a marker of time pointing forward to the time when time would be fulfilled; that was now happening...Jesus ...is the walking, celebrating, victorious Sabbath...”

2. Principle of days

- a. Galatians 4 – imposition & insistence – Paul was addressing “Judaizers” who wished to impose OT Jewish ordinances (incl. Sabbath) on Gentile believers who’d never kept the Sabbath
- b. Romans 14 – neutral & personal – Paul was addressing receiving/accepting other believers holding differing views on non-essential practices, without judging or condemning them.

“One person [believer] esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord.” (Rom. 14:5-6)

Some believers “thought some days more important than others. Given the Jewish background here, the ‘day’ that is supremely in view is certainly the Sabbath. [Others] think every day is the same. Both views are permissible. Each person must follow his/her own conscience. What is remarkable is that **the Sabbath is no longer a binding commitment** for Paul, but a matter of one’s personal conviction. Unlike the other 9 commandments in Exodus 20, the Sabbath command [is] part of the ‘ceremonial laws’ of the Moses’ covenant, like the dietary laws & the laws about sacrifices, all of which are no longer binding on new covenant believers.” [ESV Note]

“Each ...should be fully convinced in his own mind” (Rom. 14:5) “Clearly implied is the right before God to decide what is appropriate conduct for oneself, even in regard to some cherished but controverted traditions governing social behavior. Paul also clearly accepted the inevitable corollary: that differing [practices] would be the result. His point precisely is that two believers could have contrasting convictions regarding appropriate conduct, and *both* be acceptable to God. It is not necessary for the one to be wrong and the other to be right.” [James D. G. Dunn, *Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 687]

3. Examples: Halloween, Christmas, Easter, etc.

- C. Those who impose have impure motives (Gal. 4:17) – boast, trophy, their club

“The false teachers have been flattering the Galatians, but only to receive flattery back. “*To shut you out*” They want to form an exclusive club of people who observe Jewish ceremonial laws, keeping out any [e.g. Paul] who will not give in to their demands.” [ESV]

- D. “Not turning back to the ...elementary principles of the world” (4:9)

“Back in the old age [before Christ] the enslavement of the Galatians was to beings ‘that by nature are not gods.’ (4:8) But now if they turn their backs on the fulfilled promise of the Spirit and allow themselves to be persuaded to observe Sabbaths & feast days as required by [Jewish] custom, they would simply be putting themselves back into the [pre-Christ] old age, the age of confinement & slavery (4:9-11). The very thought & prospect exasperated Paul & brought him near to despair (4:11).” [James D. G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem*, p. 739]

III. Solution (Gal. 4:12a, 19)

- A. Freedom – “Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am...” (4:12)
- B. Formation – “My little children for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” (4:19)