

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Turning Back to Weak and Worthless Things Galatians 4:6-11

Here Paul continues his illustration of being fully mature "sons" in the Roman culture of his day, and he goes on to describe what it would be like to give up that status and return to slavery.

On the POSITIVE Side: (because of your salvation)

You are a privileged son by legal adoption, and you are now able to address God using the language of a family member (Gal 4:6)

- Because (*hoti*) - this explains that the Holy Spirit would not have been given to you if you were not a "son" by adoption. The Spirit comes to indwell the believer because of his adoption by God (see Gal. 3:2 and 3:5).
- The Gentile believers in Galatia might have thought: "Since the Jews were under the Law before their adoption, then maybe we also should be under the Law." But Paul responds by declaring, "You Are Sons!" You are no longer children who are under the supervision of guardians, but you have attained the status of free sons and heirs. There is no going back!
- The Babylonian *Gemara* (an ancient Jewish book) states that slaves were not permitted to use the title 'Abba' in addressing the master of the family who owned them. Therefore, this verse shows that believers are able to use the language of freemen. They are truly not under bondage to sin and the Law.

Not only are you free (no longer a slave), but you are also the rightful heir to the blessings God promised (Gal 4:7)

- According to Roman law, all of the children (sons and daughters) received the inheritance of the family.
- According to Jewish law, the inheritance of the sons varied based on birth order or the father's choice, and the daughters were completely excluded from the inheritance (except where there were no male heirs).
- In this case, then, Roman law provides a more accurate illustration of the privileges of Christians (see Gal. 3:28-29)

On the NEGATIVE Side: (before your salvation)

You did not know, see, or perceive God - and you were in slavery to things that by their very nature were not worthy of devotion (Gal 4:8)

- Previously Paul had spoken of the Law and being in slavery to the Mosaic rituals (which would be familiar to the Jewish believers), and he contrasts that condition with the freedom given by the gospel.
- Now (to complete this picture) Paul refers to the pagan religious rituals that would be familiar to the Gentiles. Here he points out the absurdity of turning back to a state of bondage to things which by nature are not gods but are falsely worshipped.
- Many of the pagan deities were imaginary beings, and many were objects of creation (such as the

sun, moon, stars, winds, streams, and trees). Many were departed heroes that had been exalted to the status of a god. In most cases the pagan religious rituals required very degrading servitude, and this bondage was real (even if the objects of the ritual were imaginary).

- False worship practices dulled the senses and thinking, bound the imagination, controlled the energies, and demanded their time and property. It made them into slaves.

This brings up a very good question:

Now that you have come into a personal relationship with God by His grace and through faith in Christ, why are you turning back again to be in slavery to a set of weak and worthless habits and practices?

But... = Paul emphasizes the contrast between bondage to any system of religious practice vs. freedom in a personal relationship with God (Gal 4:9)

- You have come to know or rather to be known (*ginosko*) = experiential, personal, and relational knowledge of God. The juxtaposition of these two phrases demonstrates that true knowledge of God comes from God Himself.
- Weak and worthless = these two adjectives emphasize the utter impotence of these "elements" to do what was required for a person to be justified before God.
- "Elemental things" = these include the Pharisaic legalism of the Jews as well as the philosophical and religious systems of the pagan Gentiles. It was absurd that they would turn back to something that would enslave them again.
- "To which you desire (*thelete*) to be enslaved again" = It was more than a mere desire - they were determined (an act of the will) to put themselves into bondage again.

The Galatians were beginning to observe the Jewish ceremonial Law (Gal 4:10)

- Observe (*paratereisthe*) = careful, scrupulous observance; watching intently lest any of the prescribed regulations should be overlooked. Any legalistic or ritualistic system leads to this kind of bondage in its followers.

Paul is afraid that the worst had already happened (Gal 4:11)

- The grammar of the original Greek text shows that Paul was in fear of something that had actually happened (*me pos* + the perfect active indicative of *kopiao*, to toil wearily). A fear about the uncertain future would be expressed by the subjunctive mood.
- Evidently the report had reached Paul that these things were already starting to occur, and he thought perhaps all of his efforts had been to no effect.

Conclusion

Some rituals or routines of life are valuable - like good habits - and we should continue to do them. But some of our practices may be part of the "weak and worthless things" from which the Lord Jesus rescued us. We need to remind ourselves and others that when we trusted in Christ for our personal salvation, we became sons related to God and heirs of the blessings He promised.