

Galatians 4 pt. 2 v.7-18 - The Galatian Condition, the Human Condition.

Paul has gone on driving home the point of what it means to be a child of God, an heir to God's Kingdom by faith in Christ, rather than a slave to the law or to the basic principles of the world.

He has made the point that people are not brought into a right relationship with God because of a rigid system of religious rules but by faith in Christ alone. This is commonly referred to as the doctrine of justification by faith.

In plain language the doctrine of justification by faith is that a person, recognizing their sin, turns from their sin and believes completely that God has provided a way to be made righteous by the person and work of Jesus Christ, and because of that belief God applies the righteousness of Christ to them. They are seen in God's eyes as holy, clean - just as if you had never sinned.

That is the process by which we are brought into God's kingdom, adopted into His eternal family.

In verse 7 Paul writes - [Gal 4:7 NKJV] 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

V.8-9 We see the competing conditions of the human experience - either being separated from God, or known by God.

Paul calls to mind the former state of the believer - “when you did not know God.”

This is a condition experienced by all humanity. We are not born into a right relationship with God. Any assertion otherwise is contrary to God’s Word, the Holy Scriptures. We are all born into a fallen creation. And we find very quickly in our individual lives that we fall short of holiness far more often than we draw near to it.

David writes about this briefly in Psalm 51 as he is considering his own sin.

[Psa 51:5 NKJV] 5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.

He recognized that he was birthed into a world marked by iniquity and sin. And so it is for all of us.

Paul writes about this in Romans:

[Rom 3:23 NKJV] ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

[Rom 5:12 NKJV] ...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--

We are all born flesh, brought forth into a world of sin and iniquity, in need of God's grace.

It was in that previous condition that the Galatians were enslaved to everything else but God.

(v.8 served = δουλεύω; fut. δουλεύσω; 1 aor. ἐδούλευσα; pf.

δεδούλευκα; (δοῦλος);

1. prop. *to be a slave, serve, do service...*

b. in a bad sense, of those who become slaves to some base power, *to yield to, give one's self up to...*(Thayer's))

This was quite literal for the Galatian churches - they literally worshipped other deities before coming to Christ.

Paul's description applies to us as well. Many people serve many different things.

Whether that is a religious law, moral code, or on the other hand immorality - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, it makes no difference.

None of those things are God. But they rule over us as such, bringing us into submission, bringing us into spiritual slavery.

Some people even worship the religion itself, or worship at the altar of patriotism rather than God the Father.

[2Pe 2:19 NKJV] ...for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage.

[Rom 6:16 NKJV] 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin [leading] to death, or of obedience [leading] to righteousness?

It is sad to think that after this glorious adoption, after we come to know God and we are known by God that there are those who would rather regress, rather walk backwards, than find freedom in Christ?

Why return to things that never made us whole or holy in the first place?

Contextually for the Galatians, they exchanged a set of well-rehearsed religious ordinances and ceremonies that were performed to idols for freedom in Christ.

And then they traded their freedom for another set of well-rehearsed religious ordinances found in the legalistic system of the Judaizers.

By doing this Paul indicates that they held a deep seated desire to be enslaved again! A condition that is common among people as long as we call it something that sounds good, something other than bondage or slavery.

We'll call it a system, or a growth track. People feel comfortable operating under systems. Systems make it where we are guided through the process, we don't have to exercise will power or discernment, or dependence on the Holy Spirit, we just do what the manual says and we are good.

This is the Pharisaical model of religion. Unfortunately many who bear the name "christian" have adopted this same model for today.

They see christianity as a moral responsibility, or the best lifestyle choice out of a slew of other choices, rather than the result of God's unmatched love and redemption of His creation.

Yes, there are instructions that are imperative to our faith. However, the all too familiar danger in our culture is that it is possible, and quite common, to see the Bible as ONLY a set of moral regulations for living a "good life."

That is a shallow and incomplete view of God and His Word.

Moreover, it is possible to follow the instructions to the letter and still not know God or be known by Him - style rather than substance.

Recall Christ's words:

[Mat 7:22-23 NKJV] 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Again, recall Christ's words to the overtly religious: [Mat 23:27-28 NKJV] 27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are

like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead [men's] bones and all uncleanness. 28 "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

What does a practical return to slavery look like?

V.10-11- So...well-meaning, religious people, having been adopted into God's family by the blood of Christ traded in their freedom for a rule book and a multitude of religious observations...exactly what they were delivered from!

(JFB) Accustomed as the Galatians had been, when heathen, to the mystic worship...prevalent in the neighboring region of Phrygia, and the...doctrines connected with that worship, they were more readily led to believe that the full privileges of Christianity could only be attained through an elaborate system of ceremonial symbolism.

Beware loved one!

This is not a rant against Christmas and Easter. Some fringe Christian denominations have denounced all holidays but that is just another form of legalism, it's just another set of unbiblical rules.

In all of this Paul's emotions are on display. With all of this confusion and the seeming tendency for the Galatian churches to rather be bound to law, religion, codes of conduct, ceremony, etc. Paul is rightfully worried about them.

He loves them, and wants to see them in a right relationship with the Lord. And, having labored among them in teaching, preaching, and discipleship he is concerned that the churches are throwing away sound doctrine for the weak and beggarly elements that comprise every other religion under the sun.

Every religion has holidays, feasts, observances, rules, codes of conduct, etc. - but THE FAITH brings freedom from those things and closeness to God the Father by FAITH in Christ.

V.12 - Paul's exhortation to be free

This faith is relational. In Christ we are one Body, diverse yet mutually dependent upon one another.

This is what we see in Paul's case.

Become like me - free, new, bound to Christ.

Paul had been a Pharisee, [Phl 3:5-6 NKJV] 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But he threw all of that away for the sake of knowing Jesus, being known by Him, and demonstrating to others that they could be reconciled to God by Him.

He became all things to all men, even becoming like one of the Galatians.

[1Co 9:19-22 NKJV] 19 For though I am free from all [men], I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those [who are] under the law, as under the law, that I might win those [who are] under the law; 21 to those [who are] without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those [who are] without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some.

How many are willing to become like Paul? Not very many.

We are more willing to convince others to become like us, that's the nature of debate right - to prove to somebody that they should adopt our hang ups and our convictions rather than us becoming like them and showing them freedom in Christ?

When Paul said, "become like me," He was introducing them to Jesus, not his own peculiarities.

[1Co 11:1 NKJV] 1 Imitate me, just as I also [imitate] Christ.

And it was Jesus Christ who came to bring freedom and holiness.

V.13-16 Paul's personal history among them.

It appears that because of Paul's infirmity he was able to declare the good news to the churches in Galatia - a constant trait of Paul's ministry.

People spend ages trying to make sure the conditions are perfect or as near to perfect as they can get before sharing the gospel with others.

Paul's God-directed experience was that it was his weakness, and the imperfection of his circumstances, which allowed him to share the goodness of God with others.

Paul could not be credited with setting the perfect conditions for a successful evangelistic experience but rather found himself as a broken instrument in the hands of almighty God to bring this message of redemption to a people who were completely divorced from Jesus - literally worshipping other gods and goddesses.

They were so kind to him! Paul says they would have given him their own eyes if they could. (This is where we infer that Paul had a consistent medical condition affecting his vision, potentially since he had encountered Jesus and lost his sight (Acts 9)).

Nice people believe crazy stuff! Just because they worshipped other gods didn't make them unkind - they received Paul so warmly and cared for him.

It was to these people that he gave what he had - Jesus. And at first, that was glorious. They received this message as from a heavenly messenger, or even Jesus himself. This was so powerful.

So Paul calls on them to remember their relationship with one another. It's almost as if he is saying, "You guys know me, I know you, I'm not your enemy!"

V.17 - While they had at first received the simple gospel of Jesus Christ by faith they had since been deceived by an organized group of people - the Judaizers.

The intent of this group was to establish a religious hierarchy among these new baby christians where they were at the top and the Galatians at the bottom.

(Guzik) The zeal cultivated by legalism is often more a zeal for the group itself than for Jesus Christ. Though they name the name of Jesus, in practice *the group itself* is exalted as the main focus, and usually exalted as the last refuge of the true "super-Christians."

Essentially the Judaizers were feeding their own egos - the baby christians among the Galatians would say, "I want to be like them, they're so holy and respected, how can I do that?" At which point they would be instructed in the complex code of Jewish law, and then they were caught, chained up by religious legalism. Such a sad state and one that occurs today as well.

Or else, the zealous new believers, unable to follow the strict code of religiosity, find themselves excluded altogether, deemed a second class believer, or a “bad” christian; somebody who doesn’t “live up” to the fabricated standard. So many people have been burned by this same legalism today.

I pray it’s comforting to see that God prepared His word to teach our hearts about this very thing 2000 years ago.

About such legalists Matthew Henry writes:

There may appear to be a great deal of zeal where yet there is but little truth and sincerity...It is the usual way of seducers to insinuate themselves into people’s affections, and by that means to draw them into their opinions... Whatever pretences such may make, they have usually more regard to their own interest than that of others, and will not [stop] at ruining the reputation of others, if by that means they can raise their own. (Henry)

V.18 - Who/what are we to be zealous for? Jesus or other people?
Jesus or a celebrity pastor? Jesus or our favorite author? Jesus or our favorite christian tradition?

Ultimately the answer is Jesus Christ alone.

It is good to have teachers, and pastors, and mentors. It is good to desire good things, of course! It is good to pursue God zealously. It is good to follow Christ zealously and enthusiastically - please do! Don't be the Eyore of the bunch!

It is good to do so even when, especially when, nobody is watching.

We must remember that zeal for God's kingdom in the purest sense is brought to us by faith in Christ - not works, not people, not rules - Christ alone.