3-30-25

Galatians 4:1-11

The churches of Galatia, who once so earnestly accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, have fallen prey to false teachers. These teachers are Jews who have accepted Jesus, but don’t hold to the fact that He completed all the work of redemption on the cross. They believe that the Law of Moses must still be carried out for salvation. These people are called Judaizers because they want the Gentile Christians to become Jews.

While we don’t have much in the way of Judaizers these days, the lie of having to add to the work of Christ is still prevalent. We’ve mentioned a few groups that claim Christianity while demanding that followers must also add their own works in order to be complete; groups like Jehovah’s Witness, Mormonism, and Roman Catholicism. Consider those who preach the prosperity gospel, who will claim things like you must give a donation as “seed” money so that the blessings of heaven will be opened to you. Your blessings are already assured in Christ’s work on the cross.

Perhaps most insidious are those whispers of satan that can so easily affect each one of us. We so easily begin to think that we need to do more for God to be pleased with us: more prayer, more worship, more good works. In Jesus Christ, God is pleased with you. There is nothing you can do to make Him more or less pleased. Jesus’ work on the cross was perfect and complete, when we accept Him, there is no more wrath, there is no condemnation, and when God looks upon us He sees the perfect righteousness of Christ. We can’t improve on that.

Now, having accepted Christ as our Saviour, it is our desire to do things that are pleasing to Him; such as pray, worship, do good works. So we want our works, our thoughts and actions, our very lives to be pleasing to God. I hope you see the difference: In Christ, God is already as pleased with us as He can be; so now in Christ, we want our works to be pleasing to Him.

When satan whispers to you that you are not doing enough for God to be pleased with you, rebuke him. And then do more just to be able to offer up more good works that are pleasing to God and will glorify Him. Granted, we can and will perform actions and do works that are not pleasing to God; of course, that is sin. And while these sinful actions will affect our blessings and our fellowship with God, when He looks upon us, He still sees the righteousness of Christ. Even more reason to confess our sin and repent. We want blessed fellowship with our beloved God.

Paul has just written in the previous chapter that the purpose of the Law was to be a tutor that would lead the people of Israel to Jesus. Everything in the Law of Moses pointed to the coming Messiah; and Jesus fulfilled all that the Messiah was supposed to. Now Paul tries from a different angle, but also with some different theological insights.

Under the inheritance laws that were prevalent at the time, a father would set up a will giving all he had to his son (or children). However, the son did not have authority over all the possessions and property until a time set by the father. While the son was underage, he was under the command of various teachers and managers, or as we talked about last week, a pedagogue. So, while everything technically belonged to him, he had no higher social standing than a slave. He simply had to do what he was told.

We get into a little difficulty here because Paul begins talking about two different cultures. While the inheritance practices were similar, the managers were different for the Jews and the Gentiles.

The manager for the Jews was the law; the manager for the Gentiles would be civic rules, carnal desires, and the false gods they worshiped. Either way, all were under bondage whether to the law of Moses or to their own laws. And this is the way God the Father either set up or tolerated until the time He set; which was the coming of Jesus. With the coming of Christ, it was possible to break the bondage of slavery; whether it was trying to earn justification by obeying the law or the bondage of the demonic powers that enslaved the Gentiles.

It is a difficult analogy, but Paul refers to us all as children under the control of someone set over us. But when we receive Christ, we are raised to a better status: we are sons. Under the law or under the carnal forces of the world, we are simply orphan children in bondage. As Christians, we become adopted sons and daughters of Almighty God. In Christ we have a maturity to be able to receive our inheritance. And while we may not fully receive it until we are in heaven; as children of the world, it would never be received.

In verses 3 and 9 is the phrase translated in my Bible as “elemental things”. The phrase is variously translated “elemental spirits”, “basic principles”, “rudimentary teachings”, “elements of the world” and there are many others. All these translations show that there is a difficulty in narrowing down what Paul is saying. I often find, that when some Greek or Hebrew word is used that has a variety of meanings, the Holy Spirit is trying to cover a variety of ideas. In other words, we shouldn’t necessarily try to narrow things down to one meaning.

In this case, elementary things refers to the law of Moses for the Jew. That is the basic set of rules that govern the life of a Jew. For a Gentile it can mean the established rules of the society they live in. But even more deeply, the basic carnal desires of their heart or the directing of the demonic forces that enslave them. We might call that “doing what comes naturally”; which is often contrary to what is pleasing to God.

But thankfully, the time finally came. The time set by the Father arrived where we could be set free from the elemental things that enslave us. Now the legitimate point can be made that once we accept Jesus we become servants or slaves of His. Like it or not, free will not withstanding, we will serve someone or something. And when you cut through all the layers of who your master is, it comes down to being either satan or Jesus.

When we serve satan, it may seem like we are doing what we want and having a good time; but in fact, satan is a horrible taskmaster and no good thing comes from serving him. When we serve Christ, we find a gentle and loving Master who cares for us. As Jesus said at the end of Matthew chapter 11, *“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”* Jesus’ yoke is easy because He helps us carry it; satan will continually add to the weight. Besides, it is a great honor to serve the Living God. Notice how often the apostles begin their New Testament letters by referring to themselves as servants or slaves of Jesus.

Verse 4 has several important things in it. God sent His Son. The Bible calls Israel God’s son, and we learn that if we follow Christ that we will become sons of God. The angels are called sons of God. But this is Jesus, God’s only begotten Son. There is a huge difference. Jesus is deity. Jesus is God the Son. He is a member of the Triune God of the Bible. As Jesus once said *“I and the Father are One.”* (John 10:30) Jesus is God, and that is terribly important for the reality of our salvation.

Next Paul says, *“Born of a woman.”* Equally important. Jesus is completely human. He had to be like us in all things except sin in order to be a proper sacrifice. How could He be 100% God and 100% human at the same time? We can’t fathom that, but then, if we could understand everything about God, He wouldn’t be much of a God. He has to be far above us and awe inspiring and beyond what we can comprehend. And Jesus had to be a human in order to die, since God cannot die.

Which leads us to Isaiah’s prophecy, *“Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.”* This is one of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. And the fact that Jesus was born of a virgin is a core belief of Christianity. It cannot be set aside or everything falls apart. If Jesus had both human father and mother then He is human but not God. One of the ancient heresies was that Jesus was fully human and God indwelt Him until the crucifixion, then left. That would be a lousy thing for God to do. No, the Holy Spirit formed Jesus in the womb of Mary so He can be called “Emanuell”; God with us.

Finally in verse 4, Paul states that Jesus was “*born under the Law*”. Jesus didn’t get a free pass on following the Law of Moses and He followed it perfectly. He had to; or His sacrifice wouldn’t have been perfect. And it wasn’t simply Jesus’ human will that made Him able to follow all the Law. The Law comes directly from God’s character; it reveals who God is. And because Jesus is God, following the Law was following His own character. I’m not saying that it was easy for Him; He had to overcome tremendous temptation and deal with obedience that brought about great suffering. But because it is His character, He was able to do it.

All those things fell into place so that Jesus might redeem us from the law; be it the law of Moses for the Jews or the carnal desires of the Gentiles. Either way, once we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we are no longer required to keep the Law of Moses in order to receive salvation. Jesus kept the law for us; He did the works we were required to do; and He has made it that we can become children of God, heirs along with Him. Again, we might not receive our full inheritance during this lifetime; but we are out from under the management of a pedagogue.

Since we have become adopted children of God in Jesus Christ, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son to reside in our hearts. This is part of our inheritance that we receive now. This is what we refer to as the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit seals us as belonging to God and He lives within us to guide us in paths of righteousness. And here is something precious to hold onto: In the Old Testament we read of times where the Holy Spirit left someone because they became displeasing to God; that won’t happen to us now. As we talked about earlier, when we accept Christ, God is pleased with us because we are covered in Christ’s righteousness. As Jesus said in John 14:16, *“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever.”*

Because we are now children of God, the Holy Spirit enables us to call God, “*Abba, Father*.” Abba is a very interesting word and it is often used in the Bible because we don’t really have a good English translation. Some will say it’s close to “daddy” but that does not encompass the meaning. It is a title of endearment, but it also has a strong air of respect. Perhaps not as formal as Father, but every bit as honoring and respectful.

Another reason to praise God and be in awe of the work Jesus did on the cross. In Christ, we belong to God as children; we can call Him Abba and Father, and we are heirs to the eternal riches of God’s grace.

In verse 8 Paul returns to where the Gentile Galatians came from. They worshiped what they called gods, but as Paul reminds them, they were not really gods. In fact, it gets worse, as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians 10, the gods they worshiped were actually associated with demons. As a note for us today, we must still be very careful with what we associate with or practice. There are many things society considers harmless or even healthy that are based in demonic association: Ouija boards, tarot cards, fortune tellers, yoga, Taichi, most of the oriental martial arts; all of these things were developed focused on accessing certain spirits. They must not be tampered with.

So Paul reminds the Galatian Christians that they were slaves to these sorts of things. Once they heard the Gospel message, they came to know the true God and He then knew them as adopted sons. Now, after receiving freedom and blessing, they want to turn back to slavery under a law that will do them no good.

Paul mentions them holding to certain days and times as if doing so will help them with salvation. This is following rules unnecessarily that do nothing to increase one’s favor with God. As Christians, we do have special days: we have the Lord’s Day, Christmas, and Easter. But these are days that give us opportunity to worship God as the body of Christ. We are able to do something that is pleasing to God; not something that makes us more pleasing to Him.

Paul is concerned about the church of Galatia. These are people he preached to and cared for and loves. Now they are turning to false teaching that is contradictory to the Gospel. At best, they will miss out on blessing, fellowship with God, and eternal reward. At worst, they might miss salvation. They need to heed Paul’s warning.

We need to heed Paul’s warning. There are so many opportunities to fall in this world. Satan’s attacks on the church are relentless and merciless. Jesus warned us, *“See to it that no one misleads you.”* We must not be deceived; and the way to avoid deception is to have a strong foundation of the truth. Jesus claimed to be the truth, and He declared that God’s word is truth. The Bible is the key to avoid being misled; to spotting the lies of satan; to keep from being enslaved to the elemental things of the world.

Prayer

Merciful Lord God, Your servant David once pled with You after committing grievous sin, “*Do not cast me away from Your presence; And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.”* Now Lord we want to thank You for the permanent gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit; we need not fear that He will be taken from us. But now we beg of You Lord, that You would keep us from taking this wonderous gift for granted; that You would prevent us from grieving Him or quenching Him.

May He be a constant reminder to us of Your graciousness; of the freedom we have in Christ; of the light yoke we carry and the rest from our labors that Jesus gives. You know it is our tendency to try to win our own salvation; that our fallen nature resists trusting Jesus for the completed work on Calvery. Direct our thoughts to Your word which assures us that we are incapable of our own redemption.

You are blessed redeemer Lord. You have removed the burden of the Law and removed the curse of living under the carnal laws of nature and the oppression of satan. You are the bringer of redemption and rest.

Thank You Lord in Jesus’ name; Amen.