

• A reminder of their spiritual history

Paul has re-stated his teaching concerning our being 'justified' in the sight of God. <sup>¶1</sup> He has produced various arguments <sup>¶2</sup> and explanations <sup>¶3</sup> Now he begins to appeal to the Galatians to abandon their attraction to the Jewish law of the Mosaic covenant. One way he has of appealing to them is to remind them of their spiritual history.

<sup>¶1</sup> 2:15–21  
<sup>¶2</sup> 3:1–5, 6–14, 15–18  
<sup>¶3</sup> 3:19–4:7

1. We should not forget the days before we knew God

1. **We should not forget the days before we knew God.** God had done great things for these Galatians, but there was a time when they had been in spiritual darkness. *'Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods'* <sup>¶1</sup> This is the Bible's view of pagan religions. Paul does not hold the idea that all religions are basically the same, or that they are different but equal ways to God. Not at all! The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the one-and-only true God. All other so-called gods are idols. They do not give any knowledge of God at all. 'You did not know God,' said Paul. There is no true and personal knowledge of God in the religions of the world. None of them lead anyone to the true and living God.

<sup>¶1</sup> 4:8

• They had been slaves to sin and darkness

The religions of the world are tyrannical. They lead their worshippers into bondage. Actually the 'gods' of the world are not divine at all. They are at best human products, man-made statues or carvings, man-made ideas. Or worse still they are demons, spiritual beings that wish to hold us in spiritual darkness and impurity. Their worshippers and admirers are unable to break free from sin. 'When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe' <sup>¶1</sup> In the religions of the world Satan keeps his captives in blindness and bondage. The Galatians had come to salvation, but they could remember a time when they had been slaves to sin and darkness.

<sup>¶1</sup> Luke 11:21

2. We should not forget the great mercy of God in our conversion

2. **We should not forget the great mercy of God in our conversion.** In the case of the Galatians a great change had come into their lives. *'But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God...* Paul had held up the cross before them. <sup>¶1</sup> They had come to faith. <sup>¶2</sup> The Spirit had been poured out upon them. <sup>¶3</sup> They experienced great blessing. <sup>¶4</sup> They loved the apostle Paul as the one who had brought the gospel message to them. <sup>¶5</sup> This is what the Christian faith is. It begins with the preaching of the cross. The blessings of Jesus are received by trusting in His promises. Jesus – without any help – transforms our lives. At the heart of our conversion is the fact that through knowing Jesus Christ, we know God. Christ is the way to the Father; He leads us to God. <sup>¶6</sup> We get to know God personally.

<sup>¶1</sup> 3:1  
<sup>¶2</sup> 3:2, 5  
<sup>¶3</sup> 3:2  
<sup>¶4</sup> 4:15  
<sup>¶5</sup> 4:14  
<sup>¶6</sup> John 14:6, 1 Peter 3:18

• 'Chosen in love'

We come to know God, says Paul. But a deeper and more profound truth is that God has already set His knowledge on us. Often the word 'know' means 'choose in love'. 'The Lord knows those who are His,' says the Bible. Of course in a sense He knows everyone, but He sets His loving knowledge upon His people in a deeper way. No one would ever believe in the Lord Jesus Christ if God did not draw people in His loving grace. The Galatians got to know God, but that was because God had set His loving knowledge upon them. It had brought them assurance of salvation, release from sin, power to live good and joyful lives.

3. There is the danger that we

3. **But then there is the danger that we should go back to 'religiosity' instead of persisting in Christian faith.** This is what happened to the Galatian Christians. The Judaizers came to them persuading them not to listen to Paul but to take Mosaic law-keeping into

**should go back to 'religiosity' instead of persisting in Christian faith**

**• Freedom from the bondage of rules, holy days and rituals**

**• Don't turn back to things that bring fear, heavy burdens and needless guilt**

their lives. Paul is horrified. He says to them, *'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 destitute spiritual principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?'* <sup>¶1</sup> And he tells us some of the details. It seems the intruders in Galatia were specially eager to get the Galatians keeping 'holy days'. 'Why are you going back to the kind of religion from which you once escaped?' Paul asks. *'You observe days and months and seasons and years!'* <sup>¶2</sup>

¶1 4:9  
 ¶2 4:10

There are many characteristics of legalistic religiosity. It tends to have rules about what you can eat and drink, what you must touch and not touch, where you must go or not go. It wants to control your life in its tiny details, and so on. Another characteristic of legalistic religiosity is that it tends to love 'holy days'. In Galatia there was a false Christianity, spread by the Judaizers who were trying to win over the members of the churches founded by Paul. And there was true Christian faith, that had been preached by the apostle Paul in Galatia. The false gospel demanded that the Christians keep a long list of 'holy days'. The Galatians had known this kind of religion before their conversion since there were 'holy days' and rituals in the religion of the Roman empire. But they had been set free from that kind of bondage. But now the intruders are trying to drag the Galatian Christians back into a similar kind of religion.

There are always Christians who turn the gospel into some heavy and momentous task. They feel bound to attend every meeting, bound to keep every holy day in the calendar. They regard God as a great taskmaster, ever watching over them, watching to see whether this regulation or that regulation has been kept. But true Christian faith is something entirely different. Paul says, 'If you are like that, I wonder whether you really understand the gospel at all!' *'I am afraid I may have worked for your benefit in vain.'* <sup>¶1</sup> Do you understand the gospel? Jesus has died for your sins. You are not under a thousand regulations. You have the Holy Spirit within you, and you follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. If you do not understand these things you have failed to understand the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. We who are pastors will have to start all over again with you! We are not struggling to live up to a list of laws, and the churches must not put too heavy a burden upon their members in demanding attendance at this 'holy day' and that 'holy day'. Christian godliness is not a matter of holy days. It is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Anything which brings fear or becomes a heavy burden or spreads needless guilt is not the gospel at all. Don't become a slave! Don't go back to the 'destitute spiritual principles' of worldly religiosity. The Holy Spirit is not a spirit of fear or of timidity. The Christian uses his time wisely, following the Holy Spirit, and experiencing the love and power and sound mind that He gives us.

¶1 4:11



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