

**GALATIANS - SERMON 19**  
**GALATIANS 4:8-11 — NOT GOING BACK TO THE OLD COVENANT**  
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 4:8-20

Paul is asking the Galatians why they would want to go back to the old covenant for the salvation that they already have in their possession? The Judaizers are attempting to reinstate the old covenant among the Galatian believers, but there really is no need at all to return to that covenant. The old covenant was never given for the purpose of providing salvation. Hence, Paul asks in verse 9 - *how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?* Why would the church return to its state in its immaturity?

OUTLINE:

- I THE APPLICATION OF THE COVENANTAL EXPLANATION.
- II TWO APPLICATIONS

I THE APPLICATION OF THE COVENANTAL EXPLANATION.

Having set out the unfolding development of the old covenant and the new covenant in the preceding verses, Paul now makes application of that instruction. We must remember that the Galatians were Gentiles, not Jews. Had they been Jews this issue of circumcision would not have materialized as they would have already been circumcised. The Galatians were formerly pagan worshipers.

A Galatians 4:8

*But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.*

The Galatians, as Gentiles, had never been under the old covenant at all. There was a common element between the Jews under the old covenant and the Galatians as worshipers of pagan gods. That common element was a kind bondage to elaborate rituals, continual sacrifices, and they were greatly restricted with respect to their personal liberties. Both old covenant Judaism and Gentile paganism involved a great deal of external observances in foods, purifications, and in special days of observance.

Paul's point in this place is that the developing heresy among the Galatians is no advancement at all, but rather a return to something quite similar to what they had known as pagan idolaters.

B Galatians 4:9

*But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?*

This is the same phrase (*elements*) that Paul used in Galatians 4:3. Under the old covenant the Jews had been placed under bondage to the *elements of the world*.

Here in Galatians 4:9 the same word is used to demonstrate that the Galatians were returning to something quite similar to what they had been delivered out from. They were simply moving from the bondage of the pagan system to the bondage of the old covenant system.

Paul thought this to be a shocking development among them. Though the old covenant system, when it was the approved system of God was quite different from the pagan system. Paganism was never approved of God, while the old covenant was given by God for a specific purpose and was a valid system while it was in effect.

This equation between paganism and old covenant religion, made by Paul, could not have endeared him to the Judaizers at all. This must have provoked much persecution.

Hence, Paul's reference to the Galatians *turning back* is a strong equation between old covenant religion and paganism. Technically the Galatian believers, in adopting old covenant religion, were not *turning back* since they had never been in that system before. It was, therefore, considered a *turning back* by Paul in so far as the now set-aside old covenant paralleled the pagan religion in many respects.

The *elements* unto which the Galatians were turning, Paul characterizes as *weak* and *beggarly*. These are very 'strong' terms to use regarding the old covenant religion which the Judaizers still embraced. Again, this could not have endeared Paul to his opponents.

The word *beggarly* (πτωχᾶ) means poor referring to one who is a pauper.

The elements of Judaism under the old covenant have neither the power (*weak*) nor the resources (*beggarly*) to bring one to salvation. Likewise they have neither the power (*weak*) nor the resources (*beggarly*) to bring one to a mature relationship with God.

Once the Galatians were slaves to false gods. That was an understandable circumstance prior to their conversion. However, having acknowledged God and God having acknowledged the Galatians as His sons rather than servants, why would they want to return to an outdated and old system that so closely parallels the bondage of their former paganism?

C Galatians 4:10

*You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

In the old covenant calendar there were a lot of observances related to months, times, days, and years. As the Judaizers began to have their influence over the Galatian believers, they also began to reintroduce the old covenant observances. The Galatians were starting to observe carefully the feast days, the fast days, the festivals, the new moons, and the annual celebrations of the old covenant. The practice of these things among the Galatians demonstrates for us just how far back into the old covenant religion they had fallen.

D Galatians 4:11

*I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.*

Paul was alarmed that the Galatians were falling back into the old covenant religion. In other passages Paul declares these things to be matters of indifference. Observances of these old covenant rituals are truly matters of indifference except under one condition. When the old covenant rituals are used in order to obtain salvation or merit and favor with God, then they become dangerous intrusions upon sound new covenant faith. They then become expressions of false heretical religion. Under those conditions Paul becomes fearful for the state of the Galatians believers. He also begins to fear that his labor among the Galatians has proven to be in vain.

The role and ministry of the minister (Paul) is to bring people to faith and trust in Christ alone for salvation. Paul, seeing the Galatians resist that principle and truth in favor of Christ plus the old covenant rituals alarms him as to his own effect among them, it would have been *in vain*.

Paul is questioning the salvation of the Galatians based upon their conduct. There is an application in this for us. It is not inappropriate to question the legitimacy of one's profession of faith based upon one's conduct. Though we cannot determine with perfect precision the salvation status of anyone, we can call it into question when there is evidence to support suspicion. Paul has stated his confidence in their salvation earlier (Galatians 3:1-4), but there is place for reasonable doubt based upon their present conduct. Paul does not hesitate to air this suspicion. [This is not a hateful or spiteful or judgmental activity on the part of the sincere exhorter, but rather it is a loving and hopeful action. It is certainly an appropriate exhortation for pastors and parents to use with their charges.]

## II TWO APPLICATIONS

- 1 It is easy to fall into the practice of the Galatians. Having been saved by faith alone, over time, one can begin to fall into an old covenant mentality by importing rituals and observances for the purpose and with the intention of securing one's salvation and favor with God. This is the grave error at the root of Roman Catholicism. The Roman church has imported a tremendous amount of the old covenant religion and ritual into its worship. Catholicism has reinstated the special class of priests who alone can handle certain elements of the worship. They have rebuilt physical altars for the performance of sacrifices. They have reinstated the sacrificial system with the mass which they believe to be a real blood offering to God and a re-sacrificing of Jesus Christ. They have re-employed the use of old covenant incense. They have imported candles and holy garments just like the old covenant priesthood. They have instituted numerous holy days, days of holy obligation. They have ritual washings with holy water. They have sacred festivals like the old covenant religion. Roman Catholicism is a classic example of the heresy of the Galatians. They have, to an extreme measure, attempted to return to the old covenant religion, modifying it to include Jesus Christ.
- 2 We must be watchful that we, having been saved by grace through faith, do not likewise begin to think that our performance and activities are the basis of our acceptance with God. It is very easy for Christians to fall back into a works-based relationship with God. Basing our fellowship and acceptance with God upon our activities (prayer, Bible reading and study) is a degeneration to works-based faith. Those activities are necessary and important, but they are not to become the basis of our acceptance, a kind of earned acceptance, with God. Our acceptance with God is

based solely upon the shed blood, finished work, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. We can easily become as guilty as the Galatians in these things.

**Conclusion:**

This is no confirmation of the antinomian religion which says that one's style of living is of no importance to God at all. It is simply a condemnation of any works-based system of acceptance with God. Discipline and chastisement are a certainty for those genuine believers who neglect the precepts of God, but they are still beloved with God because of the work of Jesus Christ on their behalf. God loves us no matter what. If we sin He will love us by chastising us. If we walk in righteousness, He will love us by blessing us. Nothing can separate the children of God from that love He has for them.

Prayer is cut off half way through

The sermon ends here early due to lack of time for next point.