

Galatians 4: 8-12; “Being Known By God”, Message # 26 in the series – “Christ Has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on the evening of June 11th, 2014, at the church.

We have here in these verses a question being asked by the Apostle Paul, to the churches of Galatia. The question is – How can you go back? After you have come to know the Lord through New Covenant grace, how can you go back to the Old Covenant ceremonial law? It really is a good question, not only for the churches of that time, but of many churches in our own time. It is simply amazing to see how many true Christians are tempted to go back to simply “being religious”, rather than pressing on to know the Lord. This evening we want to see and understand better the contrast that the Apostle Paul is making here between nature and grace. The contrast is noted by Paul in 2 particular ways. 1st – When people are in the state of nature, they do not know God, and they serve other gods. 2nd – When they are in a state of grace, they come to know God and are known by Him.

1st of all – When people are in the state of nature they do not know God, and they serve other gods.

Verse 8 says: “But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.” Now this is a very interesting verse because if Paul is speaking to Jews as well as Gentiles, because it seems to pose a problem to our understanding. That is, the verse would be saying that before these Jews had come to Christ, they had served those things which by nature were not gods. Is that possible? I think that if we study the history of the Jews, even at this time which Paul was writing, we have to conclude that it was true. What we now know from Paul’s letters is this: That the true Church of Jesus Christ is one Church composed of Jews and Gentiles, and one of the reasons that the Apostle Paul had to write this letter was because there were people in both groups which had been deceived into going back to the law and its ordinances.

Some in both groups falsely thought that this was needed to make them spiritual; that is, to observe things of the ceremonial law besides their serving God through Christ and His grace. It seems apparent to me that there were both Jews and Gentiles in the churches of Galatia. The Jews had the law given to them, both the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments, and the ceremonial law with all of its typical ordinances. The Gentiles having not the law, were a law to themselves because the work of the law was written in their hearts. This is called the law of nature in theology. But whether a person is a Jew or whether they are a Gentile, they are all guilty of worshiping other gods if they do not worship God through Jesus Christ His Son. Whether you are a Jew or a Gentile you are in a state of nature, and you need to be brought into a state of grace through faith in the gospel if you would be saved.

Let’s look at some verses to prove this to ourselves. First, let’s look at the Jew. Turn with me over to Romans 2: 17. “Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law.” “You therefore who teach another, do you not teach yourself?” “You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal?” “You who say, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ do you commit adultery?” “You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?” “You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?” “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you, as it is written.” Now I hope that you can see here that this being religious outwardly, but not teaching yourself the truth that you need to repent of your sins, is a very foolish thing. It is a false religion which worships a false god; the

god of your own religious reasoning. In the case of religious but unsaved Jews, it shows us that those Jews who have the form and truth in the law and who do not teach themselves their need of repentance make themselves into those who worship a false god; a god of their own making in their minds. Outwardly they may hate and abhor idols, but secretly and in their hearts, they are robbing temples. They boast in the law, but dishonor God through breaking the law, when they are in a state of nature and not grace. When you are religious without conversion to Christ, you are still in the state of nature. Let's apply this to all of us, Jew or Gentile. Your being religious and observing the religious rituals of your church will not avail you to be saved. You have devised a god of your own making. In the case of the Jews, it is a god who is served through carnal ordinances of the ceremonial law. In the case of the Gentile professed Christians of our day, who believe in a sacramental and outwardly ceremonial salvation and worship, it is also the worship of a God of your own religious imagination. This kind of worship and works only compounds and aggravates your condemnation in the sight of God. Why? Because you are not believing in your need of God's grace in Christ, and that salvation is by grace through faith and not of yourself. You think that being saved from sin, knowing God and following Christ are of your own religious ideas of things. You are actually believing in yourself and your own ability to please God by being religious and participating in religious ordinances and observances, ceremonies and rites of your church. This is not knowing God, but serving those things which are by nature, not God.

You can find further proof of this in Romans 1: 18. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them." "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." "Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." "Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lust of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever." "Amen." Now, what is the major sin which is committed by unregenerate, but religious men, as it is declared here? It is that they "suppress the truth in unrighteousness". They have had the truth of God revealed to them through the creation; God's invisible attributes being clearly shown forth there. But having had revelation given to them, it does not lead them to inquire about what this God has specifically said about Himself, nor are they thankful when they are told that God has revealed Himself in His written word and promises. But they become futile in their thoughts. They became "vain in their imaginations" it says in the King James version. In other words, they are just proud enough to believe their own speculations about God, or the writings of philosophers and false prophets about Him. They are deceived enough to believe that their own thoughts and deeds, they can find God and worship Him in self-deceived ways.

What is God's response to this? Seeing that they have made themselves fools by their false reasoning about Him, He gives them up to uncleanness and the lust of their hearts to dishonor their bodies among themselves. Seeing as they have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and are really worshipping and serving the creature rather than the creator, He give them over to what their sinful minds and hearts really wants; the lusts of their hearts. This actually leads to the degrading behavior of homosexuality which is described for us in verses 26 and 27 as "vile passions". Since they did not want to retain God in their knowledge, God gives them over to a debased mind leading to all of the sins listed in verses 29-32. All of this in one ugly form or

another comes to those who suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness. This is the state of nature; not knowing God according to His revelation of Himself in creation and His word.

2nd – When people are in a state of grace they come to know God and are known by God.

Verse 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.” “You observe days and months and seasons and years.” “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.” It appears from these words that the Apostle Paul sincerely wanted to believe that those to whom he was writing were believers. He says, “After you have known God, or rather are known by God,” how can you turn back to the Old Testament ceremonial observances of the law? He is saying that they have not understood the first principles of Christianity aright. The first principles of Christianity are found in coming to know the Lord. And the way that you come to know the Lord is by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; placing faith in the gospel of Christ. Turn to Romans 10, verse 4 – “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” “For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, ‘The man who does those things shall live by them.’” But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is to bring Christ down from above? Or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is to bring Christ up from the dead).” “But what does it say?” “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart,” (that is the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” “For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” “For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.’” “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.”

Those are the basic principles of Christianity. Salvation is not by your works, but only on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot ascend to heaven to bring Him down, or descend to into the abyss to bring Him up from the dead. But the gospel is the word preached by those who have been saved, and your confession of your need of Christ’s righteousness and His sacrifice on the cross for your sins will avail unto salvation. Every person who is ever saved must confess by faith their need of Christ’s grace, and receive by faith this atonement for sin that He purchased with His perfect life and sacrificial death. Trying to keep the law, either moral or ceremonial, or thinking that you can be saved by participation in ceremonies or sacraments will never bring about your coming to know God, or God’s knowing you. The use of the words, “How is it that you turn again” refer to the fact that at least some of these believers in the churches of Galatia were Jews who had not known God before they heard the gospel from Paul. Paul had taught them that the ceremonial and moral law were completely fulfilled in Christ. But now they were being deceived by the false Judaizing teachers, who would have them go back to the ceremonial observances of the law, such as Passover and Circumcision, and the stated feasts which were ordered by God under the law to be observed by the Jews. These persons who were convinced by these false teachers, in the churches, would then have had little trouble convincing those who were formerly idol-worshipping Gentiles among them, that this was the supposedly right thing to do, even having believed in Christ. They began to observe the festival sabbath days, and months, seasons and years of the ceremonial law.

The reason that Paul calls them “weak and beggarly elements” is because they had no efficacy in themselves to save anyone from their sins, or give to them the power to live a godly life. They all pointed forward to the coming of Christ and the great grace that would be revealed in New Testament times to those who make up the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul diagnoses the churches of Galatia as “desired again to be in bondage”. These people in the Galatian churches were desiring to turn back again and place themselves in bondage to the God-

devised system of the Mosaic law, when ever since Christ fulfilled it, it was set aside, as to ceremonies. Many people in our day desire to place themselves into a bondage of attending upon ritualistic ceremonies and partaking of sacraments in order to think that they are saved and spiritual. But these are weak and beggarly elements as well. If Paul were to walk into these churches today, he would say the same thing to them as Paul says in verse 11 – “I am afraid for you, lest I have labored in vain.” The key to knowing God is to realize that through faith in Christ, God has come to know you. Indeed it is because God takes the initiative in the conversion of every person who believes in the gospel, to give them the Holy Spirit, so that they come to know that they really do know God. We will close with 1st Corinthians 8: 1-6. “Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge.” “Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies.” “And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.” “But if anyone loves God this one is known by Him.” This is the same kind of language as Paul has used in our verses in Galatians. But look at verse 5. “For even if there are many so-called gods and many lords?, yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.” Let us ask ourselves in closing, whether we love God because He has first loved us, in and through Christ; and whether we are living our lives exclusively to Him? And are we observing the true ordinances which God would have us to observe? Do I observe the Lord’s Day as the Christian Sabbath? Have I been baptized with believer’s water baptism, and am I observing the Lord’s Supper with a church that I have given my testimony to so that I can join with them in worship and serving the Lord. These are the things which please our God and our Christ.