Galatians 4:8-11

5. Exhortations, 4:8-6:10

Introduction: You are slipping back into slavery, 4:8-11

Argument

Paul has concluded his major doctrinal argument and he now turns to exhort his readers in their Christian walk. Before doing this, he makes a personal observation and expresses his fears for the salvation of some of his readers. Sadly, many of the Galatian believers have adopted the idea that the performance of religious duty somehow advances their spiritual life for the appropriation of God's blessings. As far as Paul is concerned, law-obedience for blessing is nothing more than a form of spiritual slavery that leads to damnation.

Issues

i] Context: See 1:1-11. Paul's exhortations to the Galatians from 4:21 to 5:12 focus on the dangers associated with nomism - law-obedience to restrain sin and promote sanctification / holiness for the appropriation of God's covenant blessings - life. From 5:13 to 6:10, Paul focuses on the danger of libertarianism, reminding his readers that the Christian life is "at once free and holy", Allan.

Chapter 4:8-11 is usually tied to 4:1-7, even to a wider unit identified by Bruce as 3:26-4:11, or by Fung as 2:15-5:12, or by Garlington as 3:1-4:31, so it may well serve as a personal statement rounding up Paul's doctrinal arguments covering 3:1-4:7, so Dumbrell, Longenecker, Dunn, ... (Note the similar expression of distress in 3:1-5). None-the-less, it also serves well as an introduction to the exhortations that run through to the postscript, 6:11-18. Longenecker argues that the first exhortation is "against the judaizing threat", 4:12-5:12, although Garlington thinks that section ends at 4:31, with the next exhortation being "Freedom in the Spirit", 5:1-5:24/6:10). Numerous arrangements are suggested, indicating that we need an open mind on the matter. These notes suggest 6 exhortations, 4:12-6:10, introduced by a personal statement, "Paul's concern for the Galatians", Longenecker, 4:8-11.

The six exhortations present as follows:

- Strengthen the bonds between us, 4:12-20
- Stand firm and do not submit again to the slavery of the law, 4:21-5:1
- Do not cut yourself off from Christ by submitting to the Mosaic law, 5:2-12
- Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for sin, but let your lives be guided by the Spirit, 5:13-18
- Be led by the Spirit and not by the flesh, 5:19-25
- Care for one another, 5:26-6:10

ii] Background: See 1:1-10.

iii] Structure: *Paul's introduction to his exhortations*:

Rhetorical question:

Why do you desire to be slaves again?

Argument:

Prior to their conversion, the Galatians were enslaved to the dictates of paganism, v8.

Having been set free in Christ, v9a,

they are now seeking to be enslaved again, this time by the Law, v9b,

to the dictates of religious observance, Jewish festivals etc, v10.

Given this fact, Paul wonders whether his ministry has been for nothing, v11.

iv] Interpretation:

This introductory exhortation, "slipping back into slavery", Barnes, "no turning back", Bruce, "Relapse", Hunter, serves to set the ground for the following exhortations. So, Paul introduces his exhortations with a personal appeal evidencing something of the distress he is feeling at the moment. How is it that some of the brothers and sisters in Galatia have so easily slipped "back again to weak and beggarly elemental spirits", namely, law-obedience for blessing (the heresy of sanctification by obedience)? Paul is faced with the terrible possibility that his ministry in Galatia "may have been wasted."

v] Homiletics: *Knowledge is easily forgotten*

The year 2009 will be remembered by the letters GFC: "global financial crisis." Economists will argue for years over who was responsible, and the conclusions will reflect either their socialist, or capitalist, leanings. Was the problem caused by an unregulated free market, or was it caused by government interference in the free market?

Fredrich Hayek, some years ago, made this comment about economics, a comment that applies to the GFC, as it does to the Christian life: "knowledge once gained and spread is often not disproved, but simply lost, or forgotten." The knowledge of God is like a grain of wheat sown among weeds; it springs to life, but can easily be choked, choked by the cares of the world.

The Galatian believers had discovered the living God; they had heard the good news about Jesus Christ, they had believed and were now indwelt with the renewing presence of the Spirit of Christ. Everything was theirs freely in Christ - new life in Christ, eternity. Yet, their knowledge of the unencumbered grace of God had slipped from their memory.

Body: See "Structure" above

We will give Fredrich the final word, even though he is talking about economics, because what he says applies equally to Biblical truth: "You can never establish a truth once and for all, but have to convince every generation anew." *Image: Luxury Wall Art*

Text - 4:8

A return to slavery, v8-11. The Galatians, when they didn't know God, were enslaved to the "beggarly principles of the world" (the totality of secularism / paganism, its law, cult, ...), v8, but now, having been set free to know the living God in Christ, they have returned to that slavery, the same beggarly principles of the world, this time in their submission to the law of Moses, v9. Note how Paul equates the slavery of secularism / paganism with the slavery of the law. Obviously the bondage is the same, but the jailers are different. This time "not under duress, but by choice ..... they subject themselves to all sorts of legalistic stipulations", Ridderbos.

αλλα "-" - BUT. Often argued as a link to v7, and so functioning as an adversative. Yet, it is more likely that it introduces the μεν .... δε construction and so helps establish the contrast found in v1-2.

μεν .... δε "-" - With δε (v9) establishing an adversative comparative construction, "on the one hand ..... (v7), but on the other hand ..... (v8)". On the one hand once slaves to paganism, on the other hand now slaves to the law of Moses.

τοτε adv. "**formerly**" - THEN. Introducing a temporal clause. For the Galatians, "the period before conversion ... their pagan past", Betz. So, this verse, along with verse 9, seems to reinforce the view that, in this letter, Paul is primarily addressing Gentile believers. Yet, the state of "not knowing God" was not just a pagan problem, but a problem facing Israel as well. So, Paul is likely addressing all the Galatian believers, Jews and Gentiles, although one would assume that his focus is on Gentile believers.

ουκ ειδοντες [οιδα] perf. part. "**when you did not know**" - NOT KNOWING [GOD]. The participle is probably adverbial, temporal as NIV, although Bligh suggests causal; "formerly, because you did not know God, you accepted as gods, creatures who are not gods, and you served them as slaves." "Know" better than "acknowledge", NEB. The verbal aspect of the perfect tense here is

backgrounding that of the aorist "you were slaves", but a simple past tense in English best expresses the action of both, as NIV. "Formerly", "in the past", TEV, they were not in a relationship with the one living God. "Before you believed in Jesus", TH.

εδουλευσατε [δουλευω] aor. "**you were slaves**" - YOU SERVED AS SLAVES. In bondage, but to what/who? See below.

τοις ουσιν [ειμι] dat. pres. part. "**to those who**" - TO THE ONES BEING. The participle serves as a substantive, dative of direct object after the verb "to serve as a slave to." Paul probably understands these "ones", these "powers", in similar terms to "the elements / fundamental principles / elemental spirits /... of the world", 4:3, cf., v9. As already noted, possible meanings for this phrase in 4:3 include the following, with the last being the most likely intended meaning:

> • "material world", referring to Israel's contamination by the surrounding nations, prompting the loss of the nation's uniqueness, and held to this reality by the law, so Dumbrell, Longenecker, Sanders;
>
> • "the elemental spirits of the world", referring to evil satanic forces, or lesser spiritual beings, Betz, Wright, or more generally "primal and cosmic forces however conceptualized", Dunn;
>
> • "the celestial elements of the universe", referring to the elements of the cosmos - earth, air, fire, water;
>
> • "the rudiments of the world" RV, referring to the elementary teachings, truths, regulations, rules.... For a Jew, such "powers" are "the rudiments of the service of God", Belleville, or particularly, the law of Moses, the Torah, Hayes, Martyn, Fung, Barnes, Bruce. For a pagan, such "powers" are "the prescriptions and ordinances to which religious men outside of Christ surrender to", Ridderbos. So, the nomist believers in Galatia, whether Jew or Gentile, were in bondage to the prescriptions and ordinances of religion", and now they are heading back there, back to the Mosaic law. "You were slaves to the restrictive regulations of religion."

φυσει [ις εως] "**by nature**" - BY NATURE [NOT BEING GODS]. The dative "nature" is probably adverbial, reference / respect, "with respect to." "Powers that are really not", TH. "Those (gods) that become so by human positing", Betz. In the end, "powers" which do not exist, "counterfeit deities", Bruce; "which in reality do not exist", NEB.

v9

The Galatian believers "have come to know God" through the preached word, or as Paul puts it, "known by God". Now he wants to know why it is that

they have turned back to the rudimentary principles of morality and the restrictive regulations of religion. "Do you wish to be a slave of darkness all over again?"

νυν δε "**but now**" - BUT/AND NOW. Adversative, introducing the second part of the μεν .... δε construction.

γνοντες [γινωσκω] aor. part. "**that you know**" - HAVING KNOWN [GOD]. The participle is probably adverbial, causal as in v8, "because, since", or possibly temporal, "while now you have come to recognise God", Cassirer, or even concessive, "although ...." As above, "recognise / acknowledge" is a bit soft on the commitment / union side, since this "knowing" is usually in the terms of a husband knowing his wife. The verb is probably inceptive / ingressive, "you have come to know", NRSV.

μαλλον adv. "**rather**" - RATHER, MORE. "Or rather .."

γνωσθεντες [γινωσκω] aor. pas. part. "**are known**" - HAVING BEEN KNOWN. The participle is adverbial, causal or concessive, as above. This is a very interesting qualification, something more than a rhetorical flare, or a pedantic correction. In Galatians, Paul emphasises what God has done for us in Christ. Our relationship with the living God, now and into the future, rests on his initiative, not ours. He is the one who reaches out to us, we but take his hand. Of course, those holding a reformed position go a step further; the qualification "has the same sense as being called (effectually) and chosen", Fung.

ὑπο + gen. "**by [God]**" - Expressing agency.

πως "**how is it**" - HOW. Identifying an "inconsistency", Bligh, cf., 2:14.

επιστρεφετε [εφιστρεφω] pres. "**you are turning back**" - DO YOU RETURN AGAIN, TURN BACK, TURN AROUND. Is this present tense conative, "trying to turn back"?

επι + acc. "**to**" - Spatial, expressing direction toward; "to".

τα ασθενη και πτωχα στοιχεια "**those weak and miserable principles**" - THE WEAK AND IMPOVERISHED BASIC PRINCIPLES. Paul is obviously referring back to verse 3. See also "to those who", v8. The first adjective expresses ineffectiveness, "powerless", NAB, and the second inadequacy, "worthless", NAB. The noun "principles", possibly better "elemental powers", can be variously interpreted, see v8, but as noted above, it probably means something like "the rudiments of religion"; "the elementary rules and lessons imposed by the powers", Bligh. So, the "principles" are the regulations themselves rather than say demonic forces - these "counterfeit deities ... not only regulated the Jewish way of life under the law; they regulated the pagan way of life in the service of gods that are no gods", Bruce. It is, of course, the law of Moses that the Galatians have enslaved themselves to; "Under the Torah equals under the elements (principles) of the world", Betz. The Galatian believers' attempt to promote their

sanctification for divine favour by returning to the Sinai covenant (the Law), is as good as returning to paganism and thus death.

δουλευειν [δουλευω] pres. inf. "**to be enslaved**" - [TO WHICH AGAIN YOU WANT] TO SERVE AS SLAVES. Complementary infinitive completing the sense of "wish".

οἷς dat. pro. "**by them**" - TO WHICH. Dative of direct object after the verb "to serve as a slave to." In the Gk. text, the relative pronoun is used to commence a new sentence.

παλιν ανωθεν adv. "**all over again**" - AGAIN ANEW. Mutually reinforcing adverbs; "once more." "Strongly expressing the completeness of their reversion", Guthrie.

v10

The fact that many of the Galatian believers have returned to the Mosaic law is evidenced by their performing of "Jewish special observances (Sabbaths, new moon festivals, appointed and annual feasts, perhaps also new year, jubilees and sabbatical years)", Dumbrell. Paul has obviously received news "to the effect that the Galatians [are] actually adopting the Jewish calendar", Bruce. Other suggestions are less convincing, eg., that Paul's list here reflects the Galatians' return to "the veneration of cosmic elements", Martyn.

παρατηρεισθε [παρατηρεω] pres. mid. "**you are observing**" - YOU ARE WATCHING, OBSERVING. The present tense is durative expressing ongoing action, ie., expressing the current practice of the Galatian nomists. Possible variant (P46) παρατηρουντες links the verse to the question in v9, "how is it that you are turning back ..... by observing days .....?", cf., Betz. Bligh argues that v10 is best translated as a question, "do you want to observe ....?" The middle voice may imply that they are "calculating their arrival", Bruce.

ἡμερας "**days**" - DAYS [AND MONTHS AND SEASONS AND YEARS]. As noted above, we have here a reference to holy / sacred celebrations listed in the Jewish calendar, cf., Col.2:16. In Romans 14:5, Paul seems happy to adopt a live-let-live approach to the Jewish calendar (Jewish celebrations were adopted into the Christian church, eg., Passover, Pentecost), so why not here? Obviously a principle is involved here, namely, the erroneous use of the Mosaic law to promote sanctification for divine blessing. Where such error does not exist, then such practice becomes a non-issue.

v11

Paul's distress may have been for the loss of the Galatian believers' Christian freedom, but it is more likely that it was for the undermining of their salvation. Their reliance on law-obedience to restrain sin and promote holiness for blessing could easily infect the basis of their salvation, a salvation which is by grace

through faith and not works of the law. So, Paul fears that his evangelistic work among them has all been in vain.

φοβουμαι [φοβεω] pres. pas. "**I fear for**" - "I am in full dread on your behalf", Cassirer.

ὑμας pro. acc. "**you**" - Accusative of respect. Paul identifies the object of his fear.

μη "**that**" - LEST. The negation μη, when used with verbs of fearing, serves to introduce the feared outcome. The position in the Gk. is emphatic.

πως "**somehow**" - Indefinite adverb, "somehow"; "lest by any means."

κεκοπιακα [κοπιαω] perf. ind. "**I have [wasted] my efforts**" - I HAVE LABOURED, TOILED WITH EFFORT [IN VAIN]. The perfect tense expresses Paul's fears that this situation may be permanent. Given the indefinite πως, "somehow", a subjunctive mood might have been expected, "I may have wasted my efforts", but Paul's use of the indicative indicates that he fears he has indeed wasted his time. "All the toil I spent on you has gone for nothing", Barclay.

εις + acc. "**on [you]**" - TO, INTO [YOU]. Here expressing advantage; "for you."