

STUDYING GALATIANS

BIBLE STUDY OUTREACH @ 1984, 1993

LESSON 11
Galatians 4: 8 - 11

The Pressure To Turn Back

According to recent polls, 40% or more Americans claim to be born again Christians; 20% of the American children in this country are attending private schools, most of which we can suppose are Christian schools. This does show some concern on the part of families. Yet there isn't evidence of those numbers at church services on a Sunday morning. There is no evidence of basic spiritual conviction or demonstration of godly commitment in our public institutions, places of business, or in halls of government. It is a strange thing when so many people consider themselves Christians and even express the fact, but display so little evidence of it. They may not understand what it means to be Christian or they may be misled. So many say they are and it may be true because there are many who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ and are God's people. They have had a genuine experience of a new birth, but have never grown. Or, having trusted Christ they had begun to go forward with God, but then turned around and walked the other way. We cannot be sure if they are Christians or not; it is not for us to judge. However, it is a matter of deep concern to those of us who long to see a strong witness for God, because that is the only way there can be a turnaround in our nation. This is what is needed and what we must have to halt the ungodliness that is sweeping our land. This should be of grave concern for every Christian.

Paul fought the same battle we do today. Not many years after Paul had traveled through that region preaching the gospel, winning souls and establishing healthy churches, he wrote the words in this section of his epistle, "I fear for you that I may have labored over you in vain" (11). Here Paul expressed a deep concern in his heart for his people, who having begun in Christ, were not continuing with Him. There was a turnaround and it grieved Paul.

We can suppose that if we could have known those Christians we would have found very little difference in their life-style from those who were not Christians. We see there is a truth in this passage that has an application for each of us. Each one of us can pray that God will help us to put this application to use; "Lord, speak to me now, out of this passage. Do not let me think about how it applies to someone else. Help me to apply it to my life. Father, bring these words in to my mind with great power and clarity from the Holy Spirit."

There were certain Jews from Jerusalem who were legalistic law-keepers who taught the Galatians they must keep the law in addition to their faith in Christ. The Galatians had accepted these lies; now Paul was writing to them to get them back to a pure belief in Christ. These men taught a perverted, twisted form of old Testament religion. It was not the religion taught by the prophets in the Scripture. They had the Scriptures, but they did not use them, nor did they understand them. They picked and chose the parts they wanted and ignored the rest. Their expression of religion was not the true faith in God and Jesus. It distorted God's truth, for there was no spiritual relationship with God. This is why when Christ came to earth they didn't recognize Him as their Messiah. They did not listen to His words, or obey His teachings. What they wanted was to get rid of Him and this they did. Their degree of perversion is measured by their intense hatred and rejection of the One who came to save them.

We wonder how the Galatians could be taken in by their false teachings, but nevertheless they were and had gone back into the very things from which they'd been freed. Paul alludes to this in v. 10 when he

says, “You observe days and months, and seasons.” It must have been incredulous for Paul to see the way the Galatian Christians had abandoned their freedom in God’s grace. He asked in amazement, “Now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again?” He meant, back to the old ways, the old life-style, the old religion that compromised their faith in Christ. Why was this? It was because it is always easy to slip back into something you once believed and with which you are comfortable. For instance when you or I go through times of struggle as a Christian, or in times of great pressure may doubt God’s Word, there is enormous temptation to quit. The world draws the uncertain person as a moth is drawn to the flame. The Christians of the first century were surrounded by sensual ungodly people whose life-styles were expressions of their beliefs. When temptation comes and is not checked but given in to, we usually turn to something familiar to quiet our uncertainty. People who backslide seldom repudiate religion. They simply walk away from God and neglect studying the Bible and truth. They may look for another form of religion that would satisfy or take the place of the true walk of faith. They seek something that has some connection with religion, but actually is not. This is what the Galatian Christians had done. They had believed in Christ and were saved; they had lived godly lives and were truly Christians. Then they began to believe the lies told to them by the Judaizers, people who did not believe Christ was sufficient and who insisted they add Judaic practices to their worship. This brought them back into bondage to the law. This said, “Christ is not enough, I have to do something more.”

The pressure to keep a Christian from going on with Christ and growing in Christ is always strong. It has been said, “Satan doesn’t bother those he already has.” However, we can count on him to put every possible obstacle in our way, to keep our fellowship with the Father strained and weak. The enemy doesn’t always put “bad” things before us. We need to be alert to the “good” things in our lives that waste our precious time which should be spent in God’s Word or prayer. These things may be something we enjoy or feel good about doing. They may not be wrong or sinful in themselves, but they are used to take up the time that could be spent with Jesus, which would intensify our relationship with God. Jesus spent long hours in the presence of His Heavenly Father. He prayed for His believers, His disciples, the sick and lame. He prayed for those who would turn against Him and eventually crucify Him. We must take heart, for we have every resource we need. The true mark of a Christian is found in his relationship to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Satan cannot touch that. He doesn’t know he is a defeated enemy, so he keeps at us. When the Christian is walking in God’s Spirit, strong in faith, bold in prayer, always remembering who he is and Who lives in him, then he cannot fail! He will be victorious. Christ is Christianity! Christianity is Christ! Know the power of this truth. It is truth that sets you free, free from being led into false teachings, free to grow and to bear much fruit for your Heavenly Father.

Paul loved his converts with a passion. He thrilled to give a good report about them, of their growth and increase. They had increased in Christ and in numbers, so that they were a delight to both him and to God. Now this! Oh, that they would remember that it wasn’t a religious format to keep, but a vital relationship with God by Christ’s life in them! This is the secret of it all, for it is Christ in you and me that raises us up to God for eternity!

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SCRIPTURE TO MEDITATE UPON:

“...every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:2).

Consider what God is saying to YOU. In order to really fix it in your mind, study the following carefully:

1) Jesus’ life is full of fruit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and self-control. 2) It is Jesus purpose that all those around you benefit from this fruit. 3) It is the power of fruit-bearing that will win others to Jesus. 4) People’s lives are more important than their work. 5) Each branch is attached, or fastened, to the vine. 6) Jesus can produce much fruit in and through YOU, the branch, if you stay in Him and He in you!

QUESTIONS:

1. Read John 15:8 and explain what it means to you personally.
2. Review: Gal. 4:6 gives us very important information, tell what it is.
3. How does knowing that God sent Jesus into your heart serve as a deterrent of falling back into your pre-Christian life-style?
4. Read Jonah 1:5 and explain what is meant by the mariners crying out, each to his own gods.
5.
 - a. What are some of the “gods” non-Christians have in their lives today:
 - b. Name some “gods” Christians are guilty of worshiping
 - c. Please be honest and share some “gods” you have that you would like to dispose of.
 - d. Have you asked anyone to pray with you about our answer to 5. c.? Share with the class. It is very cleansing; to allow God to “prune.”
- 6/ Give the main thought from the following verses:
Exodus 20:3
Exodus 20:4
Exodus 20:5

7. How have questions 3 - 5 helped you understand Gal.4:8?
8. Explain from v.9b what Paul meant by “rather, now that God knows you.”
9. What was Paul challenging the Galatians to consider when he asked them why they turned back to weak and beggarly elements?
10.
 - a. What was Paul’s last question in verse 9?
 - b. As a Christian, have you ever asked yourself this same question?
 - c. If you have, will you share how you were kept from your old life-style?
11. Paul wrote to the Colossians to warn them about being led away from the gospel. What did he say to them in Col. 2:8?
12.
 - a. Write your opinion or explanation of the following statement: “It is not the keeping of special days and religious services that are evil, but the reason for doing them.”
 - b. Paul didn’t understand how the Galatian converts could turn back to their old religion. What did he say that showed the futility of what they were doing?
 - c. Is there anything in your worship of God that you could relate to Paul’s comment?
13. Paul loved his converts. What did he say to the Corinthians he had led to Christ, that illustrated his love and concern? (2 Cor. 2:4.)
14.
 - a. Read Rom. 14:5,6 and tell what Paul is really pointing out.
 - b. Comment on what this prayer means to you: “Lord, help me not to criticize my neighbors, instead help me to love and pray for them.”
15. When the Galatians grew weak in their faith in Christ, they became less productive as Christians. Explain why.

Are you being tempted to return to some former habit or a situation that God has already freed you from? Reread the prayer in the notes and the Meditation Scripture; then let Jesus’ power help you. He is waiting.