

## Galatians | The Grace Manifesto

### Elemental Things and That Sense of Blessing

#### 4.6-20

7.21.19

*Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"<sup>7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

*<sup>8</sup> However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? <sup>10</sup> You observe days and months and seasons and years. <sup>11</sup> I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.*

*<sup>12</sup> I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are. You have done me no wrong; <sup>13</sup> but you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time; <sup>14</sup> and that which was a trial to you in my bodily condition you did not despise or loathe, but you received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus Himself. <sup>15</sup> Where then is that sense of blessing you had? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me. <sup>16</sup> So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? <sup>17</sup> They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will seek them. <sup>18</sup> But it is good always to be eagerly sought in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you. <sup>19</sup> My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you-- <sup>20</sup> but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.*

This summer we're working our way through Paul's Letter to the Galatians. It's a revolutionary document – revolutionary when it was first written, revolutionary in the Protestant Reformation and it's revolutionary today for anyone who gets it and receives it's main idea – it changes everything.

Paul is trying to persuade these young Christians to come back to the one foundational truth that separates Christianity from any religion or spiritual practice/program. It's not simply an abstract truth but a Person, truth embodied in a real human Being. "Come back to God's grace embodied and come down from above in the Person and work of Jesus Christ!"

Paul uses the three modes of persuasion in ancient rhetoric – logos (meaning content/ideas/logic) and ethos (meaning the ethics or character of the speaker) and then pathos (an appeal to the feelings). In our own day it's this last mode that people find most persuasive

and now Paul shifts into this gear – pathos. He appeals (8) to the experience of liberation they had at first and then (12) to his relationship with them and the mutual love and empathy they once shared.

The THING today...the theme or topic at the center of this passage and sermon is the MYSTERY of motivation. Why do we do WHAT we do? It's very important to what Christianity IS. Part of the THING is the danger or difficulty of dealing with freedom. Do you live as you're FREE to live OR as you're forced to live? FREE or FORCED?

We all want freedom... but somehow it frightens us and as much as we laud/admire freedom (it's the main thing people want!) but when we get it, we don't know what to DO with it. It's like when prisoners get free after a long incarceration or even when people retire or graduate from school – send me back to prison where I at least know what to DO with myself.

In today's passage you'll find three question marks. I want to: 1) Look at the THREE questions  
 2) Answer them with ONE contrast  
 3) Look at THREE implications

Three Questions – the first of which is found in v. 9 – why do you want to return to the weak and worthless elemental things that once enslaved you?

That's a phrase Paul uses about six times in his writings: “elemental things”. And I think what he means is that basic approach to life and God that we could call karma (what you put out into the universe WILL come back to you – for good or bad) or quid-pro-quo (“this-for-that”) or transactional relationships where God gives us requirements, WE meet the demands and then we get compensated. It's elemental.

It's the way everything works. It's how your job functions – you do what's required and your employer gives you your due. And Paul will use this word to speak about pagan religion (you put an orange or incense in front of the statue and then you get to stay healthy) AND Paul will use this word (elemental things) to refer to how First Century Jewish people thought about Torah or God's Law – “do this and live”

The problem with this transactional thing is that no one actually does it – in other words, no one actually measures up; no one earns the compensation (Gal 3.12) because no one does enough. So the worshiper either lives under constant guilt OR he finds creative ways to deceive himself (maybe the chief way is by comparing ourselves to people who don't even try).

And Paul refers to this system – this basic approach or elemental principles as slavery... an indentured servant who never pays off his debt. He keeps trying but it's never enough. Why would anyone want to live in that system? Well, at least you can control your efforts even if those efforts never pay off.

So, the Galatian Christians return to keeping the Jewish calendar in order to kind of “do their part” so at least they would have something to show just in case the Jesus thing didn’t work out.

The second question (15) comes from the pathos or feelings the Galatians once had toward Paul: “where then is that sense of blessing you once had?” Paul takes them back to their initial meeting. Paul had evidently been sick or injured. Maybe he had injuries from being beaten (Acts 14.19-20). Maybe he was temporarily blinded due to being stoned.

He came to the Galatians in this condition and even though he looked like a loser, a person no one could take seriously but his words about how they could know God and about what God accomplished in Jesus Christ – those words brought such relief that the Galatians not only overlooked his pitiful appearance but they received his message as if he were an angel...as if Paul were Jesus Christ Himself!

Paul says, “Remember? You would have gouged out your own eyes and given them to me!... That was then but NOW that reckless un-self-conscious sense of unbounded generosity is gone. You’ve become very serious and austere/calculated. Where’s the joy and that initial sense of relief?”

Then the third question (16) also a pathos question, pulling their heartstrings/feelings, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” Where’s the love? I was once your best friend (an angel!) but now you’ve turned on me and you’ve cozied up to these new teachers who really look the part – really look successful and respectable and aloof/important the way real religious leaders OUGHT to look/act.

“They eagerly seek you” says Paul. In other words, these new guys have impressed you (because they look the part) but they’re only trying to control you and you’re lapping it up because “real religious leaders are supposed to be strong and they ARE!”

So those are the three questions: why return to slavery and spiritual futility? Where’s that sense of blessing you once had? And (third) have I become your enemy ...because I’m not strict/demanding enough?

Now, here’s the ONE CONTRAST that answers all three of these questions: at that time when you did not know God... but NOW that you have come to know God. Then vs. Now.

See Paul is saying, “I’m here to remind you that a change has taken place. You were Gentile idol worshipers who were enslaved to counterfeit gods OR were Jewish people whose ideas of God were so weird that you had re-made God in your own image– (You know the saying, “God made us in His image and we returned the favor!”) In Psalm 50.21 God says, “You thought that I was just like you...”

You live in all your relationships by this karma-code where you invite ME to dinner so I now have to invite YOU to dinner. Everything is a transaction. Life is this basic system of pay-backs and putting people in your debt and “You thought that I was just like you...” BUT I AM NOT LIKE YOU!”

In Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled the Law that WE could not keep. In Jesus Christ, God demonstrated that the karma-code is OVER, the basic elemental pay-back system is DEAD! It was a tyrannical dragon and when Jesus Christ died He dragged that dragon into the tomb and left it there.

And now, says Paul to these Galatian believers... these unbelieving believers: NOW, you have become FREE – you’ve been liberated from your indentured servitude to gods that are NOT God... and you have actually come to know Him, the one true and living God...” BUT THEN Paul catches himself (middle of v.9) “Now that you have come to know God OR RATHER TO BE KNOWN BY GOD...”

Paul finds yet another way to sneak into this already grace-saturated letter YET ANOTHER beautiful reminder that grace comes down – we don’t so much come to know God (as if WE made the colossal discovery) but GOD HAS COME TO US! He has acknowledged you! He who according to YOUR efforts should have disowned you has NOW OWNED YOU! Grace comes down!

Phil told us about it last week – God sent His Son to live the life we failed to live and die the death we deserved die – in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son...and because it was so foreign from the way we think, so opposite the basic operating system of this world (the elementary things) because we just couldn't receive it – we were blind and helpless to make ourselves believe, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our very hearts crying ‘Abba Father!’”

Everything that has to be done IS DONE! Even the faith we need to receive this grace has been given to God’s people – the Father planned it, the Son did the work and the Spirit brings it home to our hearts.

God has come to know us... and everything is finished. Jesus Christ’s dying words: “It is finished!” The basic operating system of the world is now null and void. We were using an abacus that didn’t have the right number of beads and NOTHING was adding up! But now we’re given a Super Computer with unlimited power... SO, don’t go back to that broken abacus...

A New Creation is dawning so enjoy it by faith.

Now, three questions, one contrast and three implications: First, this old system and the idols

(the counterfeit gods that enslave people) will be a (maybe thĒ) great temptation of the Christian life.

Be always on your guard against returning to this old, dead, defunct, obsolete system of law, of works, of transaction and human effort. For them, it was the attempt to do rituals and avoid foods and keep the right dates and days so that when the chips are down you could say to God... "well... I wasn't perfect but at least I ate right ...at least I observed the holy days... at least I underwent the ritual of circumcision.... "Cause, you know, you don't wanna come before God empty handed!"

And Paul is saying, "NO! That's exactly how you want to come before God – empty handed – I got nothin' ... nothing except what Jesus Christ did for me!"

"Nothing in my hands I bring – Simply to Thy Cross I cling!" (Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages")

For them, it was rituals and holy days for us, it's the attempt to feel good about myself because I'm a great teacher or a great accountant or a great parent or... a great preacher. All these and countless numbers of things we do to find (David Zahl) a sense of "enoughness". Don't you see: THAT operating system is not only obsolete (like a broken abacus) but they will all enslave you – you have to feed and water those idols and they always want more!

Instead...keep telling yourself...keep believing that "Yes! I am enough because HE SAID, "It is enough... It is finished!" The old logic is dead and a New Creation has emerged from the tomb! Don't go back!

Second – where is that sense of blessing? See, the Christian life is lived out of this sense of blessing. When you are a believing believer, when you have a sense of God's grace and favor on your heart and you are trusting what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have done for you – that you are a son, not a slave – THEN you can obey like a dance.

You can give your eyes away. You can be wildly generous because you see and feel that, "Even if I lose my money...my time...my comfort... SO WHAT! What are these silly little things to a child of the King who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, who in fact owns it all! God knows me! He recognizes me and calls me His own delightful child!

When we find ourselves obeying and doing the right thing but it's a drudgery, a chore, a grind (not FREE but FORCED) – then we should say, "Father...something is NOT right! I need that sense of blessing... my obedience is old-logic obedience... Spirit of God, a need a gust of Your life-giving energy to remind me that God is my Abba..."

When that happens, I can serve my neighbor and give away my precious time/attention...and I can actually listen to my neighbor out of this sense of fullness and NOT so that he will appreciate

me!”

Last, Paul is saying, these leaders have impressed you and then coerced you because they seem so different from you – they seem lofty and important and super self-confident... I on the other hand... I became like you...v. 12 “ I beg of you, brethren, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.”

“You ate pork...so I ate pork (I don’t like pork... I grew up thinking it was dirty) but I ate it so I could relate to you and could show you that eating the right food would NOT force God to bless us.”

Now, says Paul...become like me... live in this new freedom where you give up the control and by faith you walk in freedom...with nothing in your hands but the perfect life, sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

See... this is a very different way of leadership. Paul says, “I’m like a mother in labor...wanting only to see you born into the image of the New Humanity that God is forming – I’m in birth pangs until I see Christ in you and I see you living NOT TO GET MY APPROVAL but to see you living and loving under God’s approval.”

Because Paul was secure in that approval he could give up his rights/comforts/control and that’s what it will do for Christian parents and leaders in the church and workplace...

Leaders who are believing the Gospel won’t look austere and impressive and aloof... they’ll look like Jesus, who became like us so we could become like Him moving toward those they lead with grace and self-sacrifice, invested like a mother giving birth. That’s leadership in the New Logic.