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# MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH

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### *(Galatians)*

The Apostle Paul wrote a strong letter to the Christians in Galatia in an effort to prevent them from moving backward in their faith. He posed this question to them:

“But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?”— *Galatians 4:9*

It appeared to Paul that the Galatians brothers, having accepted the teachings of Jesus, were beginning to turn back to their areas of comfort – the Law Covenant and the Jewish festivals. He told them:

“You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”  
– *Galatians 4:10-11*

Christians today do well to examine the counsel of Paul to the Galatians. Though we are far removed from the Law Covenant and the Jewish festivals, we need to guard against turning back to them, even in a symbolic way. We need to ask ourselves: “Are we **moving forward** in our faith, or are we **turning back** to the weak and beggarly elementary things?”

In Chapter 1, Paul begins:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a **different gospel**— which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!” – *Galatians 1:6-8*

Apparently, some were changing the original message about the Christ and presenting it as a new understanding – a new gospel – another sort of good news! Paul frowned on this. He counseled against using human reasoning and calculations to distort the good news:

“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is **not of human origin**. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”  
– *Galatians 1:11-12*

In Chapter 2, he set forth his credentials as a teacher of the true and original good news, as well as his experience with the apostles in Jerusalem – “those esteemed as leaders” (2:2) – who formed the headquarters, so to speak, for the Christian congregation.

Paul revealed that, when in Antioch, he had a dispute with the leading apostle Peter (Cephas) who, along with other Jewish Christians, “by their hypocrisy” of faith:

“For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by **their hypocrisy** even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” – *Galatians 2:12-14*

Paul did not want the Galatians to fall victim to the same confusion and hypocrisy. He explained that Christians are declared righteous by faith, not by works of law (**2:16**), and that the Law Covenant and the Jewish ways were dead to us (**2:19**). He counseled:

“I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” – *Galatians 2:21*

Never may that happen!

In Chapter 3, he asked them:

“Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” – *Galatians 3:3*

Yes, initially, these brothers accepted the teaching that they are declared righteous by their faith. They began the race **in the spirit**. But over time, they came to accept “a different gospel” and, instead of moving forward in their faith, they sought to complete their course by returning to the olden ways. **Have we today imitated the Galatians?** If so, we need to readjust our thinking and our teachings to conform to the true good news.

So that the brothers were clear, Paul gave them a brief history lesson on the promise of God, the Law Covenant, and the gift of the Christ. At *Galatians 3:15-18*, he explained that the promise to Abraham that God would bless the nations by means of his seed was validated by God 430 years before the Law Covenant, and that the Law Covenant did not invalidate that promise.

But the Law did serve a valuable purpose. It was added because of transgressions” (**3:19**). Paul continued:

“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.” – *Galatians 3:23-25*

There was no longer any need for the Law Covenant. The Christ had arrived and the promise to Abraham was being fulfilled:

“So in Christ Jesus **you are all children of God** through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then **you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.**” – *Galatians 3:26-29*

There is no middle ground. At one point, they were **all** under Law. But with the advent of the Christ, they were **all** freed from the Law and counted as “sons of God.”

In Chapter 4, Paul revealed that some were having difficulty with the concept that they were all the seed of Abraham and sons of God. They did not **feel** like sons:

“What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, **he is no different from a slave**, although he owns the whole estate. The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.” – *Galatians 4:1-5*

The transition from slave of God to son of God is accomplished through no work of our own. It was manifest merely by Jesus’ arrival. He became our new teacher, and the work of the Law was complete. Now all that was left was for us to **receive** our adoption as sons and part of Abraham’s seed – **the original promise**. When we receive our adoption, we have a stirring in our spirit:

“Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.” – *Galatians 4:6-7*

Our sonship is simply a matter of fact. We are no longer slaves, but sons. Really, do we not all refer to God as “our Father?” Do we not speak of him to our family as “the Heavenly Father?” When we engage in heartfelt prayer, are not our hearts compelled to refer to God as “my Father?” Yes, our spirits cry out “Abba Father!” **All of us** who are walking by spirit! The Galatians needed to understand that.

Notwithstanding this tremendous gift of sonship, the Galatians were turning back “to those weak and miserable forces” (**4:9**). They were refusing the gift, and going back to their old

tutor, along with its seasons and festivals and their corresponding meanings (4:10). It was as if the Christ had never come. Paul lamented:

“I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.”  
– *Galatians 4:11*

Have Paul and all the faithful apostles toiled to no purpose respecting us? Has the Christ “died for nothing” (2:21)? Are we looking **back** to the promises given to those under the Law Covenant, or are we looking **forward** to sharing in the promise made manifest in the Christ?

Paul concludes the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter with the symbolic drama of Hagar and Sarah (4:21-31). He tells us that Hagar represents the children under the Law; whereas Sarah represents the free children of the promise – the sons of God. And what is the fate of the children under the Law?

“But what does Scripture say? “Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman’s son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman’s son.” – *Galatians 4:30*

There is no place for the children under the Law. They are driven away, outside of God’s provision. They have no share in God’s purposes. We see why Paul called it a perversion to reject the offer of sonship (1:7).

In Chapter 5, Paul reminded them:

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”  
– *Galatians 5:1*

In verses 2 through 6, he tells us that going backward in our faith will be of no benefit to us. It will result in our falling away from the Father’s undeserved kindness.

Apparently, in the Galatian congregation, there were some making trouble and causing divisions based on this very teaching (5:7-12). Instead of engaging in quarreling, Paul offered a statement that could serve to unite the brothers. He said:

“For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” – *Galatians 5:14*

This ‘saying’ could serve to satisfy those who were looking back to the Law Covenant and those who understood their freedom as sons (5:13). Yet, he continued to point them toward the Christ and the need to walk by spirit, not by flesh (5:16-26).

In Chapter 6, Paul concludes the letter with counsel to those who have spiritual qualifications to try to readjust those who are taking some false step in their faith, rather than merely boasting as having the true understanding. As spiritual men and women, they should sow with a view to the spirit (6:8), manifesting the fruitage of the spirit (5:22-23), especially toward those related to them in the faith (6:10).

What about us today? Can we apply Paul's counsel to the Galatians? Can we readjust one another to the true good news without backbiting and devouring one another? If not, we will be annihilated (5:15). And if those who have been turned to "a different gospel" do not readjust, they will reap corruption from the flesh they so eagerly seek to save (6:7-8).

Neither do we want our brothers to fall into the same folly as the "outstanding men". If you have come to accept your adoption as a son, do not put on a pretense in front of those who count themselves as part of the "circumcised class!" Let the reader use discernment!

If you find yourselves or your loved ones turning back and looking to serve the "weak and beggarly things," we pray that you be as courageous as Paul in readjusting them with a spirit of mildness, helping them move forward in their faith.

["The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen."](#) – *Galatians 6:18*

We welcome your comments.

***"Elaia Luchnia"***