**The Letter to the Galatians**

**A Call for Freedom from Legalism - #8**

**God and Human Rituals**

**Galatians 4:8-11**

*This is our last class of the 2016 fall semester. Our class carry-in dinner will be Wednesday, Dec. 7, 6:30 in the E91 Community Room. Join us!*

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***Galatians 4:8*** *But formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that in nature are no gods.*

***9*** *Now, however, since you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God – how can you turn back again to the weak and impotent “elements of the world,” whose slaves you want to become once more?*

***10*** *You observe days and months and seasons and years.*

***11*** *I am afraid for you, lest I might have spent my labor on you in vain.*

**Different translation, 4:8**

New English Bible: *“beings which in their nature are no gods,”* and as an alternative: *“‘Gods’ which in reality do not exist.”*

Jerusalem Bible: *“‘gods’ who are not really gods at all.”*

**Notes on the text - Galatians 4:8**

Paul contends with the Galatians that their case is self-contradictory. The Galatians agree to be their pagan past: *“formerly, when you did not know God you were enslaved to beings which in nature are no gods,”* or: *“which in reality do not exist.”* It is noteworthy that Paul has nothing to say about the religions to which the Galatians adhered in the past. Were they worshippers of the older gods of the ancient world? Or did they come from a variety of cults? Differently from his treatment of Judaism, Paul avoids references to details of the former religion of the Galatians. He prefers to lump them all together under the heading of “the elements of the world.”

Seen in this light, two characteristics mark the Galatians’ past paganism:

1. They “did not know God.” This idea, identifying “pagans” as “ignorant of God” and the converts as “those who know God” comes from missionary language; its roots are in the Old Testament and in Hellenistic Judaism.

2. The Galatians’ “enslavement” has its analogy in the Jews’ enslavement “under the Torah” (cf. Gal 3:22-24; 4:5). In fact, in one way or another they were all enslaved by the “elements of the world.” Strangely, Paul goes on to call these “elements of the world” beings which are “in nature no gods.”

This expression raises the question whether Paul makes use here of an ancient theory of religion which goes under the name of *Euhemerism* (Greek word should be pronounced as “yuhemariizem” and means that the gods were originally historical human figures who were divinized by later generations).

**Questions**

1. What may happen to us if we worship those who are not by nature or in reality gods?
2. What are the basic differences between worshiping false gods and the true God?

**Abba Philemon**

“If you keep certain days as holy days, you deprive God the Father of being the Creator of the other days which you think are not holy.”

**Galatians 4:11**

Extensive debate has focused on what precisely Paul means by*“days and months and seasons and years.”* That they all have to do with the Jewish cultic calendar in some way has seemed obvious, at least for most, from the context. Furthermore, though the use of the verb “watch” or “observe” which occurs nowhere else in the NT or LXX in a religious sense, is use by Josephus in contexts having to do with the observance of the Jewish law supports such a supposition (cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*. 3.91; 11.294; 14.264). But what exactly do the four terms themselves signify?

* “Days” probably refers to Sabbath days, but may also include special festivals of a day’s duration.
* “Months” may have reference to monthly recurring events (cf. Isa 66:23) or to the appearance of the new moon that marked the beginning of each month (cf. Col 2:16; also Num 10:10; 28:11; 1 Chron 23:31)
* “Seasons” seems to have in mind the great feasts of the Jewish calendar, such as Passover and Tabernacles, that were not limited to one day.
* “Years” could mean the recognition of Sabbatical years, of the year of Jubilee, or of Rosh Hashanah, the start of the new year on the first day (or first and second days) of the month Tishri ( falls during September and October).

Debate as to what each of these terms signifies seems endless.

**Questions**

1. Why is the keeping of days, months, years and seasons not needed?
2. Does this conflict with major Christian Doctrines?

**‘We can add nothing’**

**Abba Philemon – Dialogue**

**Philemon:** We have spoken before that faith is the very foundation of everything but I need to remind you of our former agreement.

We agreed that because of our Lord as the only Mediator, we can add nothing of our own to what God bestows on us in his Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

We also agreed that we cannot destroy what God has given because it is beyond distraction because the one who gives is the Father who did not die and the Mediator who conquered death. Thus our sins cannot destroy grace because our redemption in Jesus Christ has removed our condemnation.

So, what should we not fear?

That we lose God’s grace. This is contrary to faith because faith in Jesus does not rest on our goodness but on our sinfulness. I mean that we are accepted by God and by faith alone because we are sinful. God sealed his acceptance of sinners by the blood of his Son; this is not just a temporary guarantee.

**George:** How and why do think that what happened in the past is eroded such as our Baptism?

**Philemon:** This is due to many things:

We think that what is not remembered does not exist, or that it exists when we remember it. God’s grace does not work according to our knowledge or according to what is stored in our memory. God does not deal with us on our terms but according to his unfailing love.

What takes place in time must be seen as either coming from us and is executed by us, or is given to us by God and is part of our participation in the action which God provides and has revealed. Here we must remember all the time that the Father acts in his Son and that any act like that of our adoption is eternal. What is eternal does not grow old but grows up in us.

**George:** What is the best way to be in communion with God and not to depend on our memory?

**Philemon:** Two things we have to be aware of it:

First; it is not our memory that reproduce the grace of God but it is the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

Second: Even if we become lazy and fell into sins, we must not think that our relationship with God starts again by our repentance. Our repentance turns us to what we are, but does not create anything because our new creation is the work of God the Father in his Son Jesus Christ.

Third Dialogue, April 1960

*These weekly notes updated from George’s Spring 2007 E91 class on Galatians.*

*All George’s past class notes and audio available at GeorgeBebawi.com*

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