

# Galatians 4:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

## Analysis

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**Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.** Paul reminds the Gentile Galatians of their pagan past. "Howbeit then" (alla tote men)—contrasting their previous condition. "When ye knew not God" (ouk eidotes theon)—their pre-Christian ignorance of the true God. To not know God is spiritual death, the root of idolatry. "Ye did service" (edouleusate, ἐδουλεύσατε)—you served as slaves, you were enslaved.

"Unto them which by nature are no gods" (tois physei mē ousin theois)—to beings that by nature aren't gods at all. Pagan deities were non-entities, whether demons (1 Corinthians 10:20) or mere human imagination. Either way, not truly divine. The Galatians had been enslaved to worthless, powerless, non-existent gods. Their slavery was to illusion. Paul's point: having been liberated from bondage to false gods, why would they return to bondage under law's elementary principles? Both enslave; neither saves.

## Historical Context

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The Galatian region had various pagan cults: Cybele (mother goddess), Men (moon god), Zeus, and others. Pagan religion involved sacrifices, festivals, sacred days, ritual purity—external observances not unlike Judaism. Paul's equation of law-observance with pagan religion was offensive but strategic: both are external, works-based systems that enslave. Both miss the gospel of internal transformation

through the Spirit. The Judaizers promised the Galatians maturity through law; Paul showed they'd simply exchange one form of slavery for another.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What false gods (not necessarily literal idols) did you serve before knowing Christ, and how did they enslave you?
2. How does remembering your former slavery to worthless things magnify your gratitude for knowing the true God?
3. In what ways might religious observance become a new form of slavery to 'no-gods' when divorced from Spirit-empowered faith?

## Interlinear Text

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|         |                           |       |       |              |        |                |       |
|---------|---------------------------|-------|-------|--------------|--------|----------------|-------|
| Ἀλλὰ    | τότε                      | μὲν   | οὐκ   | εἰδότες      | θεοῖς· | ἐδουλεύσατε    | τοῖς  |
| Howbeit | then                      | G3303 | not   | when ye knew | God    | ye did service | G3588 |
| G235    | G5119                     |       | G3756 | G1492        | G2316  | G1398          |       |
| μὴ      | φύσει                     |       | οὖσιν | θεοῖς·       |        |                |       |
| no      | unto them which by nature |       | are   | God          |        |                |       |
| G3361   | G5449                     |       | G5607 | G2316        |        |                |       |

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Corinthians 8:4** (References God): As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

**1 Thessalonians 4:5** (References God): Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

**1 Thessalonians 1:9** (References God): For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God;

**2 Thessalonians 1:8** (References God): In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

**Isaiah 37:19** (References God): And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them.

**1 Corinthians 1:21** (References God): For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

**2 Chronicles 13:9** (References God): Have ye not cast out the priests of the LORD, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and have made you priests after the manner of the nations of other lands? so that whosoever cometh to consecrate himself with a young bullock and seven rams, the same may be a priest of them that are no gods.

**1 Peter 4:3** (Parallel theme): For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

**Jeremiah 10:25** (Parallel theme): Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name: for they have eaten up Jacob, and devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.

**Ephesians 4:18** (References God): Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: