

Galatians 4:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

Analysis

But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Paul's bewildered rebuke. "But now, after that ye have known God" (νυν δέ γνόντες θεόν)—dramatic contrast with verse 8. They've come to know God through the gospel. Paul immediately corrects: "or rather are known of God" (μάλλον δέ γνῶσθεντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ). God's knowledge of us precedes and causes our knowledge of Him. Election and calling come first; human response follows.

"How turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements" (πόσις επιστρέψειτε πάλιν επιτα ασθενῆ καὶ πτῶχα στοιχεία). "Weak" (ασθενῆ, ἀσθενῆς) means powerless, unable to save. "Beggarly" (πτῶχα, πτωχά) means poverty-stricken, bankrupt—these elementary principles are spiritually bankrupt, offering nothing of value. "Turn again" (επιστρέψειτε πάλιν)—shockingly, to embrace law-observance is to return to the same category as pagan religion. "Whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage" (ἵστιοι πάλιν ἀνὸθεν δούλευσαι θελεῖτε)—they want to be enslaved again. This reveals the seductive power of legalism: it feels spiritual but produces slavery.

Historical Context

Paul's equation of Judaism with paganism as equally "weak and beggarly elements" was scandalous. Jewish opponents saw themselves as possessing divine truth while

pagans had false religion. Paul argues both are elementary, external, enslaving systems contrasted with Spirit-empowered gospel freedom. This wasn't anti-Semitism but theological critique: any religion based on human performance rather than grace in Christ—whether pagan ritual or Jewish law—enslaves and bankrupts.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing that God knew and chose you before you knew Him transform your sense of security and stability?
2. In what ways are you tempted to return to 'weak and beggarly' religious systems that promise much but deliver spiritual poverty?
3. Why is legalism (religious law-keeping) so seductive despite being enslaving and spiritually bankrupt?

Interlinear Text

νῦν δὲ γνωσθέντες θεοῦ μᾶλλον δὲ
now But after that ye have known God rather But
G3568 G1161 G1097 G2316 G3123 G1161

γνωσθέντες ὑπὸ θεοῦ πῶς ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν ἐπὶ¹
after that ye have known of God how turn ye again to
G1097 G5259 G2316 G4459 G1994 G3825 G1909

τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα οἵς πάλιν ἄνωθεν
the weak and beggarly elements whereunto again
G3588 G772 G2532 G4434 G4747 G3739 G3825 G509

δουλεύειν θέλετε
to be in bondage ye desire
G1398 G2309

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 8:3 (References God): But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

Galatians 3:3 (Parallel theme): Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Romans 8:3 (References God): For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh:

1 John 5:20 (References God): And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (References God): And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

2 Peter 2:20 (Parallel theme): For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

Hebrews 7:18 (Parallel theme): For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof.

Ephesians 1:17 (References God): That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him:

Exodus 33:17 (Parallel theme): And the LORD said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by name.

1 Corinthians 13:12 (Parallel theme): For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

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