

Losing the Joy of Salvation

Galatians 4:8-11

A. Saints who had forgotten the joy that comes with faith in God **8-9**

1. Amazingly thought there might be a better way to God than grace
 - a. Paul writes to those set free from slavery to spiritual principles that could not save and made sons of God
 - b. By grace God had freed them from the inevitable failure of working for salvation by keeping the rules
 - c. He is confounded by a willingness to exchange the freedom God gave for a return to the futility of slavery
 - d. He spoke to them of how zealous he had been in keeping the Mosaic law and how fruitless it had proven
 - e. He had argued on the basis of their own experience that law keeping had not produced spiritual power
 - f. He urged them to consider *the* exemplar for Jews, Abraham, how faith not works secured God's blessing
 - g. And despite all this, some were thinking about turning from faith to law keeping as the way to salvation
2. It was as though they forgot what it was like to live without Him
 - a. There was a time in their lives when they lived without fellowship with God, and not that long ago
 - b. In that life before faith in Christ they were distant from God, his enemies, but now they were sons (vs7)
 - c. It is true that even apart from biblical revelation all men can know something about God
 - 1) He has written his law on their hearts (Rom 2:14-15), and revealed himself in nature (Rom 1:20)
 - 2) Most men recognize some differences between good and evil and can see something of his power
 - 3) Paul says in Romans that it is the refusal of unbelievers to see these things that brings judgment
 - d. Yet, apart from faith in Christ no one really knows God, as Lord, Savior and Friend in a personal way
 - e. Most unbelievers we meet know some things about God, but do not have a relationship with him as we do
 - f. The Galatians had forgotten what it was like without knowing the love of God, assurance of salvation
 - 1) As the distance from our new birth grows, we should review the blessings of salvation so we do not
3. They had forgotten what it was like to live as slaves to petty figurines
 - a. They served idols who could not reward their service, accept their adoration, hear prayers or return love
 - 1) Despite this they slaved away following foolish laws and making sacrifices to get on their good side
 - 2) They lived in fear of offending what often really was nothing more than a carved block of wood
 - b. Many today reject a Christian lifestyle because it is too restrictive, depriving them of doing what they want
 - 1) Yet they are slaves to destructive habits and behaviors that bring ruin to them and those they love
 - 2) Today's gods—power, fame, influence, riches, pleasure—are just as demanding as the Galatian's gods
 - 3) Sadly our modern gods are just as incapable of providing a meaningful, fulfilling, eternal life
 - 4) This is evident in that many rich, popular, powerful people are not content, satisfied with their life
 - a) They are constantly looking for the next achievement, the next thrill, that will make them happy
 - 5) When our lives are devoted to the service of any god other than the Lord revealed in Scripture
 - a) we find we are slaves to masters that demand unrelenting work for little enduring rewards, less joy
4. It was as if all the wondrous changes in their lives never happened
 - a. They had been slaves to worthless gods for nothing, but that changed when they came to know God
 - b. Knowing God is more than accepting certain Biblical propositions about him as being true
 - c. It also involves experiencing the value of his wise counsel, warmth of his love, pleasure of his company
 - d. It is to enjoy, thru his Spirit who indwells us, the intimacy of a family relationship with the Lord of all
 - e. They had all this because of God's grace and were acting as if it was no better than what they had before
5. Did they not remember the outstretched arms of a waiting Father?
 - a. As Paul thinks about it, it is not so much that they knew God as it was that God knew them that mattered
 - b. Their lives had changed forever because they found out that they were known by God
 - c. 'Relationship with God does not have its basis in man's seeking (mysticism) or doing (legalism)
 - 1) 'but it originates with God himself and is carried on always by divine grace'
 - d. For Paul there is not really much difference between being known by God and chosen by him **Rom 8:29**
 - e. When they were awakened to the reality of the true God, they discovered he was there waiting for them
 - 1) Like the prodigal son who wondered if his father would accept him they found he did with open arms

B. They begin to think life apart from the true God would not be so bad **9-11**

1. Their old worship was useless, but they were thinking of going back
 - a. Paul wanted to know how those who knew the intimacy of this family relationship with God could possibly want to go back to a life they had decisively rejected as worthless at the start of their new life

- 1) They were turning to the Mosaic law, but Paul calls that ‘turning back,’ turning away from Christ
- 2) In essence he equates the practices of paganism with those of Jewish legalism; stunning for a Pharisee
- 3) That he uses the same word as in vs 3 (basic principles) supports the idea he saw them in the same light
- b. While we sometimes draw subtle distinctions between religions, place some nearer the truth than others
 - 1) Paul divided all religions into two camps: Christian and not Christian; based on truth or on lies
 - 2) Paul knew of only one religion that had the saving message, and that was Christianity
- c. Whether Jewish or pagan, any means used to approach God other than grace that comes thru faith in Christ
 - 1) was to be defined and described as weak and miserable principles
 - 2) Any other religion is poor, lacking in spiritual worth thus incapable of strengthening spiritual life
- d. Men offer different paths to God, but they all have this in common: they cannot give a relationship with him
2. They seemed ready to exchange Christian freedom for slavery to ritual
 - a. They were not yet slaves to those elementary principles, but they were moving that direction
 - 1) Of course the Judaizers would not have characterized their intent as enslavement to such principles
 - 2) The Galatians would not have accepted a message they thought would lead back to a pagan kind of life
 - 3) What they believed did not change the reality tho; they were turning their backs on Christian freedom
 - 4) They were turning away from a precious gift that Christ died for them to be able to enjoy
 - 5) ‘For Paul whatever leads one away from sole reliance on Christ, whether based on good intentions or depraved desires, is sub-Christian and therefore to be condemned’
 - b. Reaching for the law with grace in hand is like the dog grasping for a bone he sees in the water’s reflection
 - 1) As soon as the dog opens his mouth to grab the reflection, he loses that bone and the one in the water
 - 2) Some of the Galatians believed that taking up obedience to the law would add to their spiritual life
 - 3) The truth was they were losing something because faith in Christ and in the law for life is impossible
 - 4) Trusting the law to guide them and obedience to bring assurance meant no longer trusting the Spirit
 - 5) Without trusting the Spirit to lead, there could be no real understanding of the law or strength to obey it
 - 6) The law does have a place in a Christian’s life, but not as our master, not as a substitute for the Spirit
3. They were going to trade Christ’s finished work for shadowy ritual
 - a. As evidence they were reverting to weak principles Paul points to their observance of Jewish special days
 - b. It is as if Paul is saying, ‘You may not think you are heading this way, but just look what you are doing’
 - c. These were designed for the Jews in their time as a nation to teach them valuable spiritual lessons
 - d. When Christ came and his work was finished, the time for these days and festivals was no longer needed
 - e. A well instructed believer knows more about the meaning and purpose of these days than any devout OT Jew
 - f. To return to the shadows for spiritual life is to reject Christ and his teachings as sufficient for this life
 - g. If we trust Christ as our all sufficient Savior, then there is nothing we can add to what he freely gives us
4. As signs pointing to Christ those were good, but were not for worship
 - a. It is important that we note that Paul was not saying the law was bad or useless; it still has value for us
 - b. It is good to understand Passover which speaks of God’s deliverance as associated with shedding of blood
 - c. It is good to reflect on the Feast of Tabernacles which speaks of God’s supply for all his people’s needs
 - d. Looking at these special days to illuminate the glory of Christ can help solidify our faith in our Lord
 - e. The same can be said for other aspects of the law
 - 1) The sacrifices speak to us of different aspects of the blessings that are ours through Jesus’ death
 - 2) The leaders—prophets, priests and kings—tell us about our Lord’s character and roles in saving us
 - 3) Studying these helps us to better understand who our Lord is and what he did so as to strengthen faith
 - 4) It is hard to be strong in faith when you are not sure of what you believe about what God has done
- C. Their change was not a setback to ministry, but a source of personal grief
 1. He did not see their potential rejection of the gospel he shared with them as something of a business failure
 2. For them to leave the faith for any other road to salvation would have brought great personal sorrow to him
 3. No one who proclaims the gospel as he should is satisfied that he has been faithful even if men reject it
 4. We share the gospel because we love the Lord and we love people and want them to find eternal life
 5. This however does not relieve the Galatians of their sinful guilt if they turn away from the good news
 6. Paul’s goal in all he said is not to discourage them, but to encourage them to endure in faith to the end
 7. Like Paul there are those we may fear *perhaps* have made choices so that our sharing of the gospel is in vain
 - a. But also, as with Paul, this is only a ‘perhaps’; we know God’s power and thus hope for better things