

## Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Paul’s Pastoral Appeal – 19-25 August 2017

**C**hrist would have us heed Paul’s pastoral appeal. Paul says, “Brethren, I beseech you, be as I *am*; for I *am* as ye *are*: ye have not injured me at all” (Galatians 4:12). In this week we cover some grounds not covered last week – we read Galatians 4:8-21:

“Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. 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? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain. Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are; ye have not injured me at all. Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?”

Heathen Bondage – “At that time, not knowing God, ye were in bondage to them which by nature are no gods” (Galatians 4:8). The Galatians had been heathen, worshiping idols, in bondage to horrible and degrading superstitions. Bear in mind that this bondage is the same as that which is spoken of in the preceding chapter, – they were “shut up” under the law. It was the very same bondage in which all unconverted persons are, for in the second and third chapters of Romans we are told “there is no difference; for all have sinned.” We read in Romans 3:22-24: “Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” The Jews themselves, who did not know the Lord by personal experience, were in the same bondage, – the bondage of sin. “Every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin” (John 8:34). And “he that committeth sin is of the devil” (1 John 3:8). “The things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God” (1 Corinthians 10:20). But ourselves once walked “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2), and we “were aforetime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another” (Titus 3:3). So we also were “in bondage to them which by nature are no gods.” The meaner the master, the worse the bondage. What language can depict the horror of being in bondage to corruption itself?

In Love with Bondage – “Now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known of God, how turn ye back again to the weak and beggarly rudiments, whereunto ye desire to be in bondage over again?” Is it not strange that men should be in love with chains? Christ has proclaimed “liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isaiah 61:1), saying to the prisoners, “Go forth,” and to them that are in darkness, “Show yourselves” (Isaiah 49:9); yet men who have heard these words, and have come forth, and have seen the light of “the Sun of Righteousness,” and have tasted the sweets of liberty, actually turn round and go back into their prison, submit to be bound with their old chains, even fondling them, and labour away at the hard treadmill of sin. Remind most Seventh-day Adventists that Jesus is literally the only begotten Son of God and you will be horrified how men hate the truth and love bondage! It is no fancy picture. It is sad that many Adventists have come to hate the Son of God and love death; for Christ says, “All they that hate Me love death” (Proverbs 8:36). In Galatians, we are reading a perfectly human experience!

Observing Heathen Customs – “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.” This was an evidence of their bondage. ‘Ah,’ says some one, ‘they had gone back to the old Jewish Sabbath; that was the bondage against which Paul would warn us!’ How strange it is

that men have such an insane hatred of the Sabbath, which the Lord Himself gave to the Jews, in common with all other people on the earth, that they will seize upon every word that they think they can turn against it, although in order to do so they must shut their eyes to all the words that are around it! Anybody who reads the Epistle to the Galatians, and thinks as he reads, must know that the Galatians were not Jews. They had been converted from heathenism. Therefore, previous to their conversion they had never had anything to do with any religious custom that was practiced by the Jews. They had nothing whatever in common with the Jews. Consequently, when they *turned again* to the “weak and beggarly elements” to which they were willing again to be in bondage, it is evident that they were not going back to any Jewish practice. They were going back to their old heathen customs. ‘But were not the men who were perverting them Jews?’ – Yes, they were. But remember this one thing, when you seek to turn a man away from Christ to some substitute for Christ, you cannot tell where he will end. You cannot make him stop just where you want him to. If a converted drunkard loses faith in Christ, he will take up his drinking habits as surely as he lives, even though the Lord may have taken the appetite away from him. So when these “false brethren” (Galatians 4:2) – Jewish opposers of “the truth of the Gospel” as it is in Christ – succeeded in seducing the Galatians from Christ, they could not get them to stop with their own Jewish ceremonies. No; the Galatians inevitably drifted back to their old heathen superstitions.

Forbidden Practices – Read the tenth verse of Galatians the fourth chapter again, and then read Deuteronomy 18:10: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an *observer of times*, or an enchanter, or a witch.” Now read what the Lord says to the heathen who would shield themselves from just judgment that is about to come upon them: “Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the star-gazers, the *monthly prognosticators*, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee” (Isaiah 47:13). Here we see that the very things to which the Galatians were returning, were forbidden by the Lord when He brought Israel out of Egypt. Now we might as well say that when God forbade these things He was warning the Israelites against keeping the Sabbath, as to say that Paul was upbraiding the Galatians for keeping it, or that he had any reference to it whatever. God forbade these things at the very time when He gave the commandment concerning Sabbath-keeping. So far back into their old ways had the Galatians gone that Paul was afraid lest all his labour on them had been in vain. So Paul made his appeal.

Desiring to be Under the Law – “Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law?” (Galatians 4:21). After what we have already had, there will be no one to come with the objection that to be under the law cannot be a very deplorable condition, else the Galatians would not have desired to be under it. Ah, “there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:25)! How many there are who love ways that everybody except themselves can see are leading them direct to death, yes, there are many who, with their eyes wide open to the consequences of their course, will persist in it, deliberately choosing “the pleasures of sin for a season,” rather than length of days! To be “under the law” of God is to be condemned by it as a sinner chained and doomed to death, yet many millions besides the Galatians have loved the condition, and still love it. Ah, if they would only hear what it says! “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

What Saith the Law? – It saith, “Cast out the bondwoman and her son; for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” (Genesis 21:10). To what place shall the wicked bond-servant be cast out? – “Into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” Therefore “remember ye the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments” (Malachi 4:1, 4). All who are under the law, whether they be *called* Jews or Gentiles, Christians or non-Christians, are in bondage to Satan, – in the bondage of transgression and sin, – and are to be cast out. “Every one that committeth sin is the bond-servant of sin. And the bond-servant abideth not in the house forever; the son abideth forever.” Thank God, then, for “the adoption of sons.”