**Weak and Beggarly Elements**

*Galatians 4:9*

**Introduction**

1. When the Bible reveals that spiritual blessings, life, and substance are all exclusively in Christ Jesus it means that everything else is impotent, and void.
2. As Christians, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious in His word, and must be coming back to that source for everything spiritual **(cf. 1 Peter 2:2-3)**.
3. We must not make the mistake of turning away from the power and riches in Christ for “weak and beggarly elements” that feign spiritual power and wealth.
4. Paul’s Fear for the Galatians (**Galatians 4:1-20**)
5. General Context of Galatians
   1. The Galatians are turning to a different gospel – **Galatians 1:6-7**
   2. Judaizing teachers are compelling gentile Galatians to become Jews, or to keep the Law of Moses, in order to be right with God:
      1. Paul confronting Peter used as an example to show the error in this – **Galatians 2:14** – ***“to live as Jews”*** – *Ioudaizō* – “to become a Judaean, i.e. “Judaize” (STRONG)
      2. Keeping the custom of circumcision stands for keeping the whole law – **Galatians 5:3, 6; 6:12, 15**
   3. Paul is warning about the consequences of such – **Galatians 5:5-6**
6. The Change in Relation to God from Under the Old Law to In Christ (**vv. 1-7**)
   1. Paul has just argued that the Old Law was not meant to justify/save, but to point us to Christ where we are justified by faith – **Galatians 3:24-25** – therefore we are no longer under the law.
      1. In Christ we are sons of God – **Galatians 3:26-29**
      2. **Chapter 4 continues this with the contrast of what Jews were under the Old Law before Christ.**
         1. The contrast has to do with being an heir.
         2. Heirship as a minor, versus heirship as one who is grown, no longer ***“under guardians and stewards.”***
         3. **Argument – inferiority of time under Old Law w/out Christ to time after Christ came.**
   2. **No different from a slave** – (**vv. 1-2**) – while a slave is a part of the household, he has no right to an inheritance.
      1. While a son is an heir, in his youth he does not have rights to the inheritance.
      2. **(v. 2)** – there is an appointed time he is waiting for, but until then he doesn’t have anything.
   3. **Application** – (**vv. 3-5**):
      1. **(v. 3)** – as children (i.e. those under the Law before Christ came) we were in bondage (as a slave).
         1. NOTE: ***“we”*** – especially in reference to Jews.
         2. ***“elements of the world”*** – *stoicheion* – “basic components of someth., elements…(a) of substances underlying the natural world, the basic elements fr. which everything in the world is made and of which it is composed…(c) of things that constitute the foundation of learning, fundamental principles” (BDAG)
            1. In this case, both A and C.
            2. A – ***“of the world”***
            3. C – **Galatians 3:24** – tutor to bring to Christ.
         3. **Hebrews 9:1, 8-11** – earthly ordinances given by God to indicate by symbols things which were to come, but which in themselves had no power to save – ***“But Christ came”***
      2. **(vv. 4-5)** – when Christ came at the time appointed by God, we received actual atonement, redemption, adoption as sons.
   4. Blessing of life in Christ separate from the Old Law **(vv. 6-7)** – for the Galatians (gentiles) as well as the Jews who are in Christ.
      1. This could not be said under the Old Law.
      2. **Cf. Romans 9:6-8** – spiritual Israel according to the promise
7. The Irony and Danger in the Galatians’ Turn to the Old Law (**vv. 8-11**)
   1. Contrast of their relation to God now versus before becoming Christians – (**v. 8**) – not only did not know God, but worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator (**cf. Romans 1:24-25**).
   2. Irony in what they are doing now after they have come to know the true God through Christ – **(vv. 9-11)**
      1. (**v. 9)** – after you know God you are turning to things which you should know are incompatible with Him (**cf. Acts 7:48; 17:24-25, 29** – Jew and Gentile folly), and impotent to save!
         1. ***“weak and beggarly elements”*** = **(v. 3)**
            1. **Weak** – impotence; **beggarly** – destitution (opposite of wealth in Christ)
            2. **What are they?** – (**v. 10**) – the customs of the Law of Moses
         2. ***“turn again”*** – brings in their previous state of their time in idolatry **(v. 8).**
         3. Implication – THE EARTHLY/FLESHLY CUSTOMS OF MOSES HAVE NO MORE POWER TO SAVE THAN EARTHLY/FLESHLY CUSTOMS OF IDOLATRY.
            1. **In themselves there is no inherent spiritual value.**
            2. Spiritual blessings are in Christ – **Ephesians 1:3, 9-10; 3:11** – this was always the case, the eternal purpose of God.
      2. (**v. 11)** – fear that his labor in the gospel is for naught.
8. Paul’s Plea (**vv. 12-20**)
   1. Become like me – (**v. 12**) – dead to the Old Law, alive to Christ (**Galatians 2:19-21**)
      1. Paul had become like them – **1 Corinthians 9:19, 21** – to those without law, as without law.
      2. He did not see it necessary to bind the OT on them, while now are they living as if even Paul is lost for not keeping it.
   2. A reminder of how they treated Him when he preached them the gospel. Why the change? – **(vv. 13-16**) – they didn’t despise him but cared for him. What for? Is he now their enemy for teaching the same truth?
   3. A caution concerning the motives of the false teachers – (**vv. 17-18**) – they simply want you to follow them. They aren’t concerned for your soul.
   4. Paul’s efforts, and concern for them – (**vv. 19-20**) – Paul wants to form Christ in them, but their entertainment of a false gospel is troubling.
      1. ***“for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you”***
      2. This is his focus and should be their focus!
      3. Christ formed in them **– Colossians 1:27; 2:2-3** – HOPE OF GLORY; where all riches are hidden.
      4. Keeping the OT – (**v. 9**) – weak and beggarly (no better than idolatry).
9. **Do not cheat yourself of the power and wealth in Christ by being deceived that spiritual power and treasure are elsewhere, in things that are characterized by the “elements of the world.”**
10. Do Not Turn to the Weak and Beggarly Elements
11. Appealing to Authority in Old Testament
    1. Our understanding of the function of the Old Testament today is vital to our faith:
       1. **Good** – **Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:15** – written for learning, admonition, to point us to Christ.
       2. **Bad** – **Galatians 5:1-6** – attempting to find justification through the Law of Moses takes one away from salvation in Christ.
          1. This is true on any level.
          2. Justifying specific practices based on authority derived from the Old Testament is vain, and sinful.
    2. Two major areas where the weak and beggarly elements of the Old Testament are appealed to for justification:
       1. **Salvation without baptism** – **Luke 23:42-43** – the thief on the cross.
          1. But the law of Christ says – **Mark 16:16**
       2. **Instrumental music** – they used instruments under the Old Law.
          1. But the law of Christ says – **Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**
12. Self-Imposed Religion
    1. Not all religious thought and activity are equal. Pure and undefiled religion is only what God reveals – **James 1:19-20, 26-27**
    2. **There is plenty of thought and activity by people claiming to be Christians that seems “spiritual” or “spiritually minded,” but in reality is fleshly and “weak and beggarly.”**
    3. That which comes from man’s mind in pride – **Colossians 2:18-19** – not humble appeal to Christ.
    4. That which is “self-imposed” – **Colossians 2:20-23** – not revealed from God.
       1. NOTE: **(v. 23)** – no value against flesh – “weak and beggarly”
    5. **Rituals, traditions, entertainment (plays, skits, praise bands), claimed visions/dreams, creeds, doctrines of men, market driven evangelism, etc.**
       1. These things may have an appearance of spirituality, but because they are not revealed by God they are “weak and beggarly elements.”
13. Emotionalism
    1. False syllogism:
       1. Emotions are created by God.
       2. I am emotional about a spiritual experience.
       3. My strong emotions are proof of fellowship with God.
    2. **Emotions are from God, and have a function, but they are not the substance of spiritual growth, edification, and life.**
    3. Demons are emotional in their knowledge of God – **James 2:19**
    4. **Emotions, however real, do not themselves represent reality** – **Genesis 37:33-36** – Jacob’s false conclusion about Joseph despite the truth.
       1. **EX: emotional about a doctrine that is false, a song that is untrue, or a song simply for the melody, emotional about company rather than spiritual truth, etc.**
       2. Just because one experiences emotions does not mean they are experiencing true spiritual substance.
    5. Example of worship – **John 4:24** – ***“spirit and truth”*** worship is far deeper than emotions.
14. Empty Ritualism
    1. **We acknowledge the problem of empty ritualism and formalism with the Jews, but we must not think we are immune to the same mistakes.**
       1. Simply doing things right outwardly is not enough.
       2. The physical is still not the point – location, bodily movement, bodily mechanics, outward form, etc.
    2. **Singing** – **Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16**
       1. Technically still involves mechanics – our voices – tongues, lips, vocal cords, etc.
       2. The instrument is our heart – not physical, but inner man.
          1. Requires meditation on the spiritual/scriptural message of the song.
          2. Requires devotion to the message of the song in application.
    3. **Lord’s Supper** – **1 Corinthians 11:23-29**
       1. Too many Christians assume the Lord’s Supper is the “main” part of worship that somehow has spiritual substance within the very elements. (This is closer to the idea of sacramentalism.)
       2. Taking the Lord’s supper involves more than eating the bread and drinking the cup.
       3. Without meditation on the death of Christ, and following devotion it is a “weak and beggarly” activity.

**Conclusion**

1. Instead of seeking spiritual substance in other places, we need to trust that the gospel of Christ is sufficient for all things.
2. Christ thoroughly equips us with His word – **2 Timothy 3:16-17** – all else is “weak and beggarly.”