

“Weak & Beggarly Elements”

by Wayne Goff

“But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?” – Galatians 4:9

The Situation

The region of Galatia had its beginning in Christianity *presumably* from the work of the apostle Paul and his companions (Gal. 4:19). Unfortunately, some false teachers had *infiltrated* these young churches and persuaded them that the Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised in order to be saved (see Acts 15:1). Paul is in a fight for their spiritual lives and writes the Galatian epistle to contrast the **vastly different natures** of the Mosaical system and the Gospel system. The two cannot be joined together, and a proper understanding of them both makes that obvious!

“And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:3-4).

Do you see the contrast? You can either try to earn salvation by keeping “*the whole law*” or you can be saved by the gospel of God’s “*grace*.” It’s one or the other, but not both, nor a combination of the two!

The Law Of Moses

Paul refers to the trappings of the Mosaical system as “*the weak and beggarly elements*” which would enslave them again. He even includes in the next verse (v. 10) the religious observance of days, months, seasons and years. Paul is afraid that his work in converting them has been “*in vain*” (v. 11). Yes, dear readers, this is a salvation issue!

Paul even uses an **allegory** in Galatians 4:21-31 to show the difference between the two systems! Going back to the old law would be like giving up sonship for the slavery of “*the bondwoman and her son*” (v. 30)! Paul is referencing Hagar and Ishmael whom Abraham sent away at the demand of his wife, Sarah, and the instruction of the Lord (Gen. 21:10ff). Sarah’s own son, Isaac, would be the “*heir*” of Abraham (Gal. 4:30), and Paul says that this is “*symbolic*” (v. 24) of the “*two covenants*.” But all of this should show you and me today that we cannot be under the carnal covenant of the Old Law and the spiritual covenant of the New Law at the same time!

Carnal Longings?

There are those people who look for a religion with carnal appeal today. They are impressed by the “*weak and beggarly elements*” — a gold-lined temple, a clergy adorned in priestly garb, or well-educated in one of their seminaries. They look for a large, impressive organizational superstructure so that they can brag about their “big church.” They consider the **size** of a church to be the equivalent of **greatness** in the eyes of the Lord. “Surely,” they think, “such a grand, well-manicured, super-church like this cannot be wrong!” But indeed, they are committing the same mistake as the Galatians of Paul’s day! It is hard for those of this mindset to **transform** their thinking from the material to the spiritual. But “*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth*” (Jn. 4:24). Even the apostles of the Lord’s day had a difficult time making the transition.

But we had better watch our own thinking, brethren, because some among us are impressed with a college-educated “Minister” (Ph.D.?), our own “church camp” (? Really?), and well-heeled constituents. These things indeed are “*weak and beggarly*” in the spiritual realm.

Hebrews 7:18 speaks of the annulling of the “*former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness*.” And the **nature** of the Mosaical system is described like this: “*concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation*” (Heb. 9:10). So let us beware that we do not get all caught up in “child’s play” and let the “shiny, glittery things” of this world blind us from the **perfect, enduring and spiritual relationship** which we have in the Lord’s kingdom!

293403