

## Review Questions (Lesson #11)

### Answer T for true, F for false

1. Paul had taught the Galatians to eat only food that was clean according to Mosaic Law.
2. Each month began at the new moon.
3. Most of the Christians in Galatia were converted pagans.
4. The Galatians still loved Paul and respected him highly.
5. Observing Jewish legalism would not result in the Galatians being lost since they still believed in Jesus.

### Give short answers:

1. What does it mean to “know God”? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What does it mean to be known by God? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How had the Galatians treated Paul when he had evangelized there in person? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How did the Judaizers get the Galatians to pursue them? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How did Paul illustrate his affection for the Galatians? \_\_\_\_\_

### Fill in the blanks:

1. The “elements” were \_\_\_\_\_ (sick) in that they had no \_\_\_\_\_ to make a sinner \_\_\_\_\_ with God.
2. Paul had been, and still was, \_\_\_\_\_ for the Galatians; but he sought their \_\_\_\_\_, whereas the \_\_\_\_\_ sought to \_\_\_\_\_ them.
3. Not only were the Judaizers teaching a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_ were \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. If they continued seeking \_\_\_\_\_, they would be \_\_\_\_\_ eternally, and Paul’s past work with them would be in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The apostle had not \_\_\_\_\_; he still felt the same \_\_\_\_\_ for them and still preached the \_\_\_\_\_. It was the \_\_\_\_\_ Galatians who had \_\_\_\_\_.

## *Galatians: Guarding the Gospel of Grace*

### Lesson #11 Don’t Go Back! (Galatians 4:8-20)

When God brought the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, they enjoyed a freedom for which they had long prayed. How ironic, then, that only a little more than a year later, they were plotting to overthrow Moses, “select a leader and return to Egypt” (Numbers 13:4). No doubt the Judaizers in Galatia centuries later would have said their ancestors erred by rejecting Moses’ leadership and doubting God. Go back to slavery? Never! Yet that is precisely what the Judaizers were demanding from the Christians in Galatia.

Paul had explained that being under the Law of Moses was like being a minor child, which “does not differ at all from being a slave” (Galatians 4:1). By contrast, a Christian was “no longer a slave, but a son” (that is, an adult, 4:7). That held true in particular for those of a Jewish background who had previously lived under the Law.

The majority of Christians in Galatia, however, were converted pagans, not former Jews. Before obeying the gospel, they “did not know God,” but “served those which by nature are not gods” (4:8). To “know God” is not merely to possess intellectual knowledge about Him, but to have a positive relationship with Him. Far from enjoying such fellowship with the true God, the pagans had been slaves to their idols, which were not really gods at all (see 1 Corinthians 8:5, 6).

By contrast, as Christians the Galatians had known God (benefitted from fellowship with Him). More importantly, they were known by God; that is, God recognized them as His own (4:9a). That being the case, Paul asks, “How is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?” (9b). His question echoes 1:6, saying, in effect, “How could you do something so utterly ridiculous?” “Turn again” is elsewhere translated “convert.” Paul used it as he recalled how the brethren in Thessalonica had “turned to God from idols” (1 Thessalonians 1:9). Tragically, the Galatians were converting back to slavery! No, they weren’t worshipping idols again, but Jewish legalism was still slavery. The “elements” to which they turned are the rudimentary principles already mentioned in 4:3 (see comments in lesson #10). These elements were weak (sick) in that they had no ability to make a sinner right with God; and they were beggarly in that they simply reduced one to begging; whereas in Christ they had full access to “unsearchable riches” (see Ephesians 3:8). Weakness and begging were bad enough, but the Galatians were reverting willingly. No wonder Paul was

astounded!

Galatians 4:10 specifies the “elements” to which the Galatians were going back: “You observe days and months and seasons and years” (compare Colossians 2:16). These were the Mosaic ordinances the Judaizers insisted must be obeyed in order to be saved. “Days” were, of course, the Sabbath days. The word “month” comes from “moon”; each month began at the new moon and was a holy day under the Law (Numbers 10:10). “Seasons” refers to the various feasts of the Jews (Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles). “Years” would be the Sabbath years and the year of Jubilee (every 50th year). The Galatians “observed” these ordinances, meaning that they meticulously, painstakingly kept them. The same word is used of Jesus’ enemies as they “watched” His every move, looking for some excuse to find fault (Luke 20:20). Similarly, the Galatians were scrupulously watching everything they did to make certain they were dotting every “i” and crossing every “t” pertaining to the Law. Their bewildering behavior greatly dismayed Paul. In 4:11 he wrote, literally, “I fear you.” They posed no physical threat. However, if they continued seeking justification through legalism, they would be lost eternally, and Paul’s past work with them would be in vain!

Paul begged the Galatians to abandon their disastrous course and “become like me, for I became like you” (4:12). Paul had grown up in the Jewish religion as a strict Pharisee; yet he had abandoned his former legalism upon his conversion to Christ. Now he pleaded with the brethren in Galatia to do the same. When Paul had been among them, teaching them and leading them to Christ, he had become like them; that is, he had adopted Gentile customs as long as they were not contrary to the gospel of Christ. For example, he made no effort to impose the dietary laws of Moses or the custom of circumcision upon them. He put it this way to the Corinthians (written a few years before Galatians): “to those without law” (Gentiles) “(I became) as without law, not being without law toward God, but under law to Christ, that I might win those who are without law. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:21, 22).

When Paul wrote, “You have not harmed me at all” (Galatians 4:12b), he was talking about the fine way they had treated him when he had worked among them. Unfortunately, their attitude had changed for the worse. Previously, they had welcomed Paul and treated him graciously, despite his illness which they might have found offensive (4:13-14). The record in Acts does not indicate what illness this was, nor do we know whether this concerns

Paul’s first journey through Galatia or his second – “at the first” often means simply “before.” Whatever the case, the Galatians had treated him like an angel, or even like he was the Lord Jesus Himself!

What happened to that wonderful attitude? Previously, they would have done virtually anything to help him. The plucking out of their eyes (4:15) should not be taken literally, but is spoken proverbially, even as today we say “I’d give my right arm to be able to help you.” Some have speculated that Paul’s illness pertained to his eyes, but this is uncertain at best. Sadly, the Galatians no longer felt such devotion toward Paul. The apostle had not changed; he still felt the same love for them, and still preached the truth. It was the fickle Galatians who had changed. Under the influence of the Judaizers, they now viewed him as, at best, a Johnny-come-lately fourth-rate mini-apostle; at worst, he was an outright enemy (4:16).

Not only were the Judaizers teaching a false gospel, their motives were selfish and corrupt. “They zealously court you, but for no good” (4:17a). Like most false teachers, the Judaizers simply wanted a following for themselves. They excluded any Gentile Christians who had not been circumcised and did not keep the Law of Moses. A young girl may pretend to have no interest in a boy when actually she wants him to pursue her. Likewise, by playing “hard to get,” the Judaizers hoodwinked the Galatians into pursuing them and accepting their false claims.

There was nothing wrong with being zealous to reach others, as long as the motives were pure and the truth was taught. Paul had been, and still was, zealous for the Galatians; but he sought their good, whereas the Judaizers sought to enslave them. The Galatians had been zealous for Paul when he was present with them, and Paul wished they would be so in his absence (4:18).

Paul illustrated his affection for the Galatians by calling them his little children, and comparing his work in teaching them and leading them to Christ to a mother laboring and giving birth (4:19). He would be willing to do the hard work and suffer the pain all over again if it would result in Christ being formed in them.

This section closes with Paul’s wish that he might be present with them. It seems easier and more effective to communicate face-to-face than by letter over long distances. In person, he could moderate his tone. Bottom line, Paul was perplexed. He was at a loss to know how to deal with them. But he will not give up! In the next lesson he will present another powerful argument!