Gal. 4: 8-11; I Cor. 10:14-22; Redeemed from Bondage to False Religion I. The Enslaving Nature of Sin II. The Liberating Benefit of Knowing God

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, are you a slave or are you free? Like the Israelites, most Americans would say- we have never been slaves to anyone! But the truth is, mankind is born in slavery and remain enslaved until God sets them free. In our reading in Gal. 4, Paul is going to be changing focus. A few weeks ago, we saw that Paul compared the Jewish, OT system and ceremony to a school teacher. For a NT saint to go back to the OT ways was to choose the immature over the mature. Going back to the ceremonies and rituals when the time of clarity had come was to choose slavery. To live like an OT saint after Jesus had come and fulfilled the signs and shadows is to choose bondage. We saw that legalism in the church is slavery. Today Paul is shifting focus a little to see that false religion is also enslaving. In fact, legalism in the church and false religion in the world are not all that different! Both are enslaving! To the world, the Chrisitan faith looks like slavery. We go to church, pay our tithes and avoid sinful behavior! For us to obey God’s Law looks like slavery to the world! But the fact is, false religion is the true bondage! Remember that in the Galatian church- there are both Jewish and Gentile believers. Slavery to rituals and slavery to false gods is not all that different! So today we see that Jesus Christ sets us free from bondage to false religion.

**I. The Enslaving Nature of Sin**

In our first point we see the enslaving nature of sin. Remember that the Law alone and without gospel is enslaving as we have seen. Specifically, the ceremonies and rituals by themselves- without faith in God’s messiah- do not save! So some in the Galatian church were called out of this darkness in thinking- out of slavery to manmade laws and grace-less legalism. But others in the Galatian church were called out of slavery to false religion and pagan ritual. Both of these are in view as we see in v. 3 and again in v. 9. Enslaved to elementary principles of the world- and worthless elementary principles. We see the same today- there are Jews who think that their manmade laws are what will satisfy God- and there are Gentiles who worship false gods like Allah, Buddha and the Green Initiative and other movement in the world today. But Paul is making his point clear in v. 8- it does not really matter what your history is. If you were Jew or a Gentile- the fact is that you did not know God! And if you trying to secure peace with God in any other way -then you are enslaved to something that is not god! To say this another way, anyone who is not a true Christian is a slave! Enslaved to things that are not God because they do not know God! Only knowledge of the truth can set you free. So we see this principle at work in our world around us- there is no shortage of bondage! Our world serves created things- things that are not the true God- false gods that promise purpose and protection but in the end cannot save. The fact is- false religion is enslaving- and false religion has not really changed all that much since the days of Paul. In the past, people worshipped trees, animals, possessions and created things. With their blind allegiance to elementary principles- looking to things like money, sex, possessions or power. These false religions are fear inducing- and they demand total obedience. Think of how our world responded in the year 1999- the fear of Y2K! Or the fear we saw during the pandemic- or the fear of war today. When it appears that things are outside of our control- mankind will elevate something- anything to give them a sense of control and power. So we find today- the most common false religions in our society are not those who serve Buddha or Allah- but those who serve at the altar of Global Warming or now called- Climate Change. You also have the trust in the government or social programs. These are gods that people depended on! BLM and DEI- supposed equity and inclusion. They all have their own creeds that demand total service and obedience! You must do this and say this in order to be accepted. All of this is to say- the names may change but the principle is the same. Mankind outside of Christ is enslaved to worthless, elementary principles! Everyone’s life is governed by some principle- some creed that demands allegiance! But these are not a true God- they are only enslaving, and they cannot save! Not only are they elementary principles, but they are also false gods. Paul will say in I Cor. 10: 20 that they were demonic- idolatry! The devil uses these false religions and moments of man to bind and enslave! At its core, every false religion is idolatry- devil worship! Anything that is not of the truth is used by Satan to confuse and blind! So Paul puts every religion of man on the same footing- there is only one true faith, one true God, one mediator between God and man- one name by which we can be saved. Every other religion is false, enslaving- weak and worthless! Before you are a Christian, you are blind and ignorant- you have a darkened mind that cannot see the truth! The chains of ritual hold you fast- you trust in something to save you or save this world that cannot and will not save! No DEI initiative, no BLM riot- no Climate Change program or project will save humanity or liberate this world! These only enslave as they force compliance! Don’t be fooled- these movements are a false religion. Their teachers parrot their talking points- they use fear to gain control! But you have not come to know God this way! You are no longer a slave to these natural religions and elementary principles. No, you have been set free!

**II. The Liberating Benefit of Knowing God**

Unlike the Jewish legalist and the Gentile idolaters, these Galatian saints have come to know God as v. 9 says. You now know God! They have come to know the truth- and the truth has set them free! As 5:1 echoes- for freedom Christ has set us free! As the people of God, you must know, remember and rejoice in the freedom that is your in Christ Jesus! Freedom from slavery to idols- freedom to know the truth! No longer enslaved to passions and worldly pursuits. Appreciate this truth- rejoice in it- you have come to know the only God who is! You have come to know the name of Jesus- the only one who can save! Don’t give away the freedom that is yours- don’t fall back into ignorance and unbelief! Know this truth- you are a sinner who has set free by Jesus! Your blindness has been removed- the scales have fallen off your eyes! Knowing the truth here is more than just an academic realization- like know the color of the grass. No- this knowledge is a deep affection. You know the almighty God! Often in the Bible the sense of knowing someone is found in the realm of the family! Like you know your kids or you know your spouse. But we have come to know the one, true God! But more than that- we not only know God- He knows us! As v. 9 says- we have come to be known by God! As II Tim. 2:19 says- the LORD knows those who are his! Now to be clear- God has and does rightly know everything! God is all knowing- He is omniscient! There is no limit to His knowledge and nothing is hidden from His sight. That is true- but here we are reading about a more intimate and even saving knowledge! We are not only known as creatures- we are lovingly known as children! It is God who knows us first- God who chooses us first! Salvation is not that we know that God is- rather it is that God knows us and loves us first! I did not choose Him- rather He chose me first! Paul is setting us straight- salvation does not start with us choosing to love God- but rather God choosing us to be His own and revealing Himself to us! Would we then pretend like we do not know God- or would we close our eyes and pretend that we cannot see? Being known by God, would we act like He has not claim to us- and we no allegiance to Him? Surely not! But that is the very thing that Paul was warning against!

Interestingly, at the end of our passage Paul expresses his fear and concern. In v. 11- I am afraid that I have labored in vain! Was Paul like a mother who gave birth- only to find out that there was no child present after labor? Was Paul like a runner in a race- that had no finish line? Was he a farmer who planted- but saw no increase? Paul’s love and concern for the church was that his labor in the ministry had been in vain! Had the Galatian saints gone back to their old religions- had they forsaken the truth? Had they like pigs returned to the mud of idolatry after having been washed clean? Or as v. 9 says- would they turn back after having been converted? If the church does not believe the truth proclaimed, the preacher feels like his labors have been in vain! Why do I pour myself out for you- Paul says- if you just go back to the false teaching of the world as soon as you walk out the doors? Does the gospel have any staying power- are you living like a practical atheist? Paul’s concern is that this church is made up of rocky soil- at first showing signs of life only to die out when conflict came. Yes, we believe in the Preservation of the Saints- ultimately the elect cannot be lost- but it is also true that those who have been called must persevere in the faith! To stand fast- as Heb. 10: 36 puts it- you need to endure- you need to persevere in the faith! So don’t shrink back- don’t return to the vomit and filth of this world by bowing the knee to the religions of man! Be bold and stand firm- be steadfast in the Lord and in His strength!

As we close, the lure of natural things and elementary principles is a constant siren song. These play on our senses- they can be seen and touched- we are the ones in control! We want to be seen an recognized in this world- if you want the power you have to play by their rules. But the truth of the gospel brings liberty from bondage to things that cannot save! Consumerism- materialism- all the isms of this age cannot save our soul and will not save humanity or deliver creation from bondage! They are nothing more than the gods of gold and silver that promise power but bring only slavery! Jesus Christ sets us free from bondage to false religion. Those who do not know God cannot see the truth! These are in bondage to their own desires and slaves to their own fears! As with all false religion- you become the thing you fear- you become the very thing you worship- only to find yourself blind and ignorant of the truth. Praise God that He knows us and loves us- and has revealed Himself to us- so that we might be set free!