

Background

The opening verses of Galatians identify Paul and several of his traveling companions as the authors of the letter, although Paul was probably the main writer (1:1–2). The letter’s recipients are described as the churches of Galatia—which were planted by Paul during his missionary journeys—but these churches’ locations are debated.

Galatia was a region in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). According to one theory, the Galatians Paul addressed were in the southern part of Galatia, primarily in the cities Acts 13–14 records him visiting: Antioch in Pisidia, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe (Acts 13–14). Paul would have written to these churches during AD 48–51—either before or shortly after the Jerusalem Council, held circa AD 49 (or 51).

Another theory places the Galatian churches in the northern part of the region, corresponding to the mentions of Paul visiting Galatia in Acts 16:6 and 18:23. In this case, Paul’s letter would have been written during his second or third missionary journeys (circa AD 49–57), but likely before he wrote Romans (mid-50s AD).

Regardless of their location, the Galatian churches consisted mostly of non-Jewish (Gentile) believers. Paul taught them that they were free in Christ and that they did not need to start following Jewish law once they

became Christians. However, after Paul left the area, some outsiders arrived and disputed his teaching (Gal 1:6–7). According to them, it simply wasn't possible to be God's people without observing the Jewish laws. Much of Galatians is Paul's response to this claim.

The debate about the letter's recipients and date arises partly because of a connection to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). At this critical meeting, church leaders settled the issue that dominates Galatians: deciding that non-Jewish Christians should not be required to keep Old Testament laws and regulations (outside of a few; Acts 15:22–29). In Galatians, Paul may be articulating the council's decision. Paul could also be offering the same viewpoint, prior to the council; this would mean that Paul's description of his time in Jerusalem and Antioch in Galatians 2:1–14 likely correlates with Paul's time in Antioch (Acts 11:19–30), but not the events of Acts 15. (If this is the case, Paul visited Jerusalem an additional time not recorded in Acts.)

Structure

After a customary greeting (Gal 1:1–5), Paul challenges the Galatians' movement away from the gospel he preached (1:6–10), and he defends his apostleship (1:11–2:21). Paul argues that those in favor of non-Jewish people practicing Jewish law have a flawed understanding of the gospel.

In the next major section (3:1–5:12), Paul aims to correct the misunderstanding by contrasting his gospel and the false teaching. Relying on the law to secure a place among God’s people is foolish, he says; that approach leads only to slavery. In the final part of the letter (5:13–6:18), Paul outlines the practical implications of his gospel. Believers are to live by the Spirit in freedom. If they do this, then sin and divisions will cease.

Outline

- Paul’s defense of his apostleship (1:1–2:21)
- Paul’s defense of his gospel (3:1–5:12)
- Application of his viewpoint (5:13–6:18)

Themes

In Galatians, Paul explains what holds the Church together as God’s people: accepting God’s grace and living in step with His Spirit. The good news Paul preaches is that Christ Jesus has reconciled us to God and thus freed us from having to keep Old Testament law (2:19–21).

Paul says that Christians have to choose between the law and faith (3:10–14). A person who relies on keeping the law has thrown away the need for Jesus. Being right with God doesn’t have anything to do with our own

actions; salvation is all about Jesus—His sacrificial death for our sins and new life taking hold in us (2:19–21; 5:16–24).

The law did have a purpose, though. It guarded God’s people until faith was revealed in Christ (3:24–25). But now, God’s people have the Spirit. We are full heirs of the promise of salvation and true children of God, having inherited what was promised to Abraham (3:23–29; Gen 12:1–3). Now, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are called to be there for one another and to do good for others (Gal 5:25–6:10).

Further Reading¹

THE design of this chapter is, to show the effect of being under the law, and the inconsistency of that kind of bondage or servitude with the freedom which is vouchsafed to the true children of God by the gospel. It is, in accordance with the whole drift of the epistle, to recall the Galatians to just views of the gospel; and to convince them of their error in returning to the practice of the Mosaic rites and customs. In the previous chapter he had shown them that believers in the gospel were the true children of Abraham; that they had been delivered from the curse of the law; that the law was a schoolmaster to lead them to Christ, and that they were all the children of God. To illustrate this

¹ John D. Barry et al., [*Faithlife Study Bible*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016).

further, and to show them the true nature of the freedom which they had as the children of God, is the design of the argument in this chapter. He therefore states:

(1.) That it was under the gospel only that they received the full advantages of freedom; ver. 1–5. Before Christ came, indeed, there were true children of God, and heirs of life. But they were in the condition of *minors*; they had not the privileges of *sons*. An heir to a great estate, says the apostle (ver. 1, 2), is treated substantially as if he were a servant. He is under tutors and governors; he is not permitted to enter on his inheritance; he is kept under the restraint of law. So it was with the people of God under the law of Moses. They were under restraints, and were admitted to comparatively few of the privileges of the children of God. But Christ came to redeem those who were under the law, and to place them in the elevated condition of adopted sons; ver. 4, 5. They were no longer servants; and it was as unreasonable that they should conform again to the Mosaic rites and customs, as it would be for the heir of full age, and who has entered on his inheritance, to return to the condition of minorship, and to be placed again under tutors and governors, and to be treated as a servant.

(2.) As sons of God, God had sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, and they were enabled to cry Abba, Father. They were no longer

servants, but heirs of God, and should avail themselves of the privileges of heirs; ver. 6, 7.

(3.) Sustaining this relation, and being admitted to these privileges, the apostle remonstrates with them for returning again to the “weak and beggarly elements” of the former dispensation—the condition of servitude to rites and customs in which they were before they embraced the gospel; ver. 8–11. When they were ignorant of God, they served those who were no gods, and there was some excuse for that; ver. 8. But now they had known God, they were acquainted with his laws; they were admitted to the privileges of his children; they were made free, and there could be *no* excuse for returning again to the bondage of those who had no true knowledge of the liberty which the gospel gave. Yet they observed days and times as though these were binding, and they had never been freed from them (ver. 10); and the apostle says, that he is afraid that his labours bestowed on them, to make them acquainted with the plan of redemption, had been in vain.

(4.) To bring them to a just sense of their error, he reminds them of their former attachment to him, ver. 12–20. He had indeed preached to them amidst much infirmity, and much that was fitted to prejudice them against him (ver. 13); but they had disregarded that, and had evinced towards him the highest proofs of attachment—so, much so, that they had received him as an angel of God (ver. 14), and had been

ready to pluck out their own eyes to give them to him, ver. 15. With great force, therefore, he asks them why they had changed their views towards him so far as to forsake his doctrines? Had he become their enemy by telling the truth? ver. 16. He tenderly addresses them, therefore, as little children, and says, that he has the deepest solicitude for their welfare, and the deepest anxiety on account of their danger—a solicitude which he compares (ver. 19,) with the pains of child-birth.

(5.) In order to enforce the whole subject, and to show the true nature of the conformity to the law compared with the liberty of the gospel, he allegorizes an interesting part of the Mosaic history—the history of the two children of Abraham; ver. 21–31. The condition of Hagar—a slave—under the command of a master—harshly treated—cast out and disowned, was an apt illustration of the condition of those who were under the servitude of the law. It would strikingly represent Mount Sinai, and the law that was promulgated there, and the condition of those who were under the law. That, too, was a condition of servitude. The law was stern, and showed no mercy. It was like a master of a slave, and would treat those who were under it with a rigidity that might be compared with the condition of Hagar and her son; ver. 24, 25. That same Mount Sinai also was a fair representation of Jerusalem as it was then—a city full of rites and ceremonies, where the law reigned with rigour, where there was a burdensome system of

religion, and where there was none of the freedom which the gospel would furnish; ver. 25. On the other hand, the children of the free woman were an apt illustration of those who were made free from the oppressive ceremonies of the law by the gospel; ver. 22. *That* Jerusalem was free. The new system from heaven was one of liberty and rejoicing; ver. 26, 27. Christians were, like Isaac, the children of promise, and were not slaves to the law; ver. 28, 31. And as there was a command (ver. 30) to cast out the bondwoman and her son, so the command now was to reject all that would bring the mind into ignoble servitude, and prevent its enjoying the full freedom of the gospel. The whole argument is, that it would be as unreasonable for those who were Christians to submit again to the Jewish rites and ceremonies, as it would be for a freeman to sell himself into slavery. And the design of the whole is, to recall them from the conformity to Jewish rites and customs, and from their regarding them as now binding on Christians.

1. *Now I say*. He had before said (ch. 3:24, 25) that while they were under the law they were in a state of minority. This sentiment he proceeds further to illustrate by showing the true condition of one who was a minor.

That *the heir*. Any heir to an estate, or one who has a prospect of an inheritance. No matter how great is the estate; no matter how wealthy his father; no matter to how elevated a rank he may be raised on the

moment that he enters on his inheritance, yet till that time he is in the condition of a servant.

As long as he is a child. Until he arrives at the age. The word rendered “child” (νήπιός) properly means *an infant*; literally, *one not speaking* (νή insep. *un*, ἔπος), and hence a child or babe, but without any definite limitation.—*Rob.* It is used as the word infant is with us in law, to denote *a minor*.

Differeth nothing from a servant, That is, he has no more control of his property; he has it not at his command. This does not mean that he does not differ *in any respect*, but only that *in the matter under consideration* he does not differ. He differs in his prospects of *inheriting* the property, and in the affections of the father, and usually in the advantages of education, and in the respect and attention shown him, but in regard to property, he does not differ, and he is like a servant, under the control and direction of others.

Though he be lord of all. That is, in prospect. He has a prospective right to all the property, which no one else has. The word “lord” here (κύριος), is used in the same sense in which it is often in the Scriptures, to denote master or owner. The idea which this is designed to illustrate is, that the condition of the Jews before the coming of the Messiah was inferior in many respects to what the condition of the friends of God would be under him—as inferior as the condition of an heir was before

he was of age, to what it would be when he should enter on his inheritance. The Jews claimed, indeed, that they were the children or the sons of God, a title which the apostle would not withhold from the pious part of the nation; but it was a condition in which they had not entered on the full inheritance, and which was far inferior to that of those who had embraced the Messiah, and who were admitted to the full privileges of sonship. They were indeed heirs. They were interested in the promises. But still they were in a condition of comparative servitude, and could be made free only by the gospel.

2. *But is under.* Is subject to their control and direction.

Tutors. The word *tutor* with us properly means *instructor*. But this is not quite the sense of the original. The word ἐπίτροπος properly means a steward, manager, agent; Matt. 20:8; Luke 8:3. As used here, it refers to one—usually a slave or a freedman—to whose care the boys of a family were committed, who trained them up, accompanied them to school, or sometimes instructed them at home; comp. Note on ch. 3:24. Such a one would have the control of them.

And governors. This word (οἰκόνομος means a house-manager, an overseer, a steward. It properly refers to one who had authority over the slaves or servants of a family, to assign them their tasks and portions. They generally, also, had the management of the affairs of the household, and of the accounts. They were commonly slaves, who were

intrusted with this office as a reward for fidelity; though sometimes free persons were employed; Luke 16:1, 3, 8. These persons had also charge of the sons of a family, probably in respect to their *pecuniary* matters, and thus differed from those called *tutors*. It is not necessary, however, to mark the difference in the words with great accuracy. The general meaning of the apostle is, that the heir was under government and restraint.

Until the time appointed of the father. The time fixed for his entering on the inheritance. The time when he chose to give him his portion of the property. The law with us fixes the age at twenty-one when a son shall be at liberty to manage for himself. Other countries have affixed other times. But still, the time when the son shall inherit the father's property must be fixed by the father himself if he is living, or may be fixed by his will if he is deceased. The son cannot *claim* the property when he comes of age.

3. *Even so we.* We who were Jews—for so I think the word here is to be limited, and not extended to the heathen, as Bloomfield supposes. The reasons for limiting it are, (1). That the heathens in no sense sustained such a relation to the law and promises of God as is here supposed; (2.) Such an interpretation would not be pertinent to the design of Paul. He is stating reasons why there should not be subjection

to the laws of Moses, and his argument is, that that condition was like that of bondage or minorship.

When we were children (νήπιοι). Minors; see Note on ver. 1. The word is not υἱοι, *sons*; but the idea is, that they were in a state of nonage; and though heirs, yet were under severe discipline and regimen. They were under a kind of government that was fitted to that state, and not to the condition of those who had entered on their inheritance.

Were in bondage. In a state of servitude. Treated as servants or slaves.

Under the elements of the world. Marg. *Rudiments*. The word rendered *elements* (sing. στοιχεῖον), properly means a row or series; a little step; a pin or peg, as the gnomon of a dial; and then any thing *elementary*, as a sound, a letter. It then denotes the elements or rudiments of any kind of instruction, and in the New Testament is applied to the first lessons or principles of religion; Heb. 5:14. It is applied to the elements or component parts of the physical world; 2 Pet. 3:10, 12. Here the figure is kept up of the reference to the infant (ver. 1, 3); and the idea is, that lessons were taught under the Jewish system adapted to their nonage—to a state of childhood. They were treated as children under tutors and governors. The phrase “the elements of the world,” occurs also in Col. 2:8, 20. In ver. 9 of this

chapter, Paul speaks of these lessons as “beggarly elements,” referring to the same thing as here. Different opinions have been held as to the reason why the Jewish institutions are here called “the elements *of the world*.” Rosenmüller supposes it was because many of those rites were common to the Jews and to the heathen—as they also had altars, sacrifices, temples, libations, &c. Doddridge supposes it was because those rites were adapted to the low conceptions of children, who were most affected with sensible objects, and have no taste for spiritual and heavenly things. Locke supposes it was because those institutions led them not beyond this world, or into the possession and taste of their heavenly inheritance. It is probable that there is allusion to the Jewish manner of speaking, so common in the Scriptures, where this world is opposed to the kingdom of God, and where it is spoken of as transient and worthless compared with the future glory. The world is fading, unsatisfactory, temporary. In allusion to this common use of the word, the Jewish institutions are called the *worldly rudiments*. It is not that they were in themselves evil—for that is not true; it is not that they were adapted to foster a worldly spirit—for that is not true; it is not that they had their origin from this world—for that is not true; nor is it from the fact that they resembled the institutions of the heathen world—for that is as little true; but it is, that, like the things of the world, they were transient, temporary, and of little value. They were

unsatisfactory in their nature, and were soon to pass away, and to give place to a better system—as the things of this world are soon to give place to heaven.

4. *But when the fulness of the time was come.* The full time appointed by the Father; the completion (*filling up*, πλήρωμα,) of the designated period for the coming of the Messiah; see Notes on Isa. 49:7, 8; 2 Cor. 6:2. The sense is, that the time which had been predicted, and when it was proper that he should come, was complete. The exact period had arrived when all things were ready for his coming. It is often asked why he did not come sooner, and why mankind did not have the benefit of his incarnation and atonement immediately after the fall? Why were four thousand dark and gloomy years allowed to roll on, and the world suffered to sink deeper and deeper in ignorance and sin? To these questions perhaps no answer entirely satisfactory can be given. God undoubtedly saw reasons which we cannot see, and reasons which we shall approve if they are disclosed to us. It may be observed, however, that this delay of redemption was in entire accordance with the whole system of divine arrangements, and with all the divine interpositions in favour of men. Men are suffered long to pine in want, to suffer from disease, to encounter the evils of ignorance, before interposition is granted. On all the subjects connected with human comfort and improvement, the same questions may be asked as on the

subject of redemption. Why was the invention of the art of printing so long delayed, and men suffered to remain in ignorance? Why was the discovery of vaccination delayed so long, and millions suffered to die who might have been saved? Why was not the bark of Peru sooner known, and why did so many millions die who might have been saved by its use? So of most of the medicines, and of the arts and inventions that go to ward off disease, and to promote the intelligence, the comfort, and the salvation of man. In respect to *all* of these, it may be true that they are made known *at the very best time*, the time that will on the whole most advance the welfare of the race. And so of the incarnation and work of the Saviour. It was seen by God to be the *best* time, the time when on the whole the race would be most benefited by his coming. Even with our limited and imperfect vision, we can see the following things in regard to its being the most fit and proper time. (1.) It was just the time when all the prophecies centred in him, and when there could be no doubt about their fulfilment. It was important that such an event should be predicted in order that there might be full evidence that he came from heaven; and yet in order that prophecy may be seen to have been uttered by God, it must be so far before the event as to make it impossible to have been the result of mere human conjecture. (2.) It was proper that the world should be brought to see its need of a Saviour, and that a fair and satisfactory opportunity should

be given to men to try all other schemes of salvation that they might be prepared to welcome this. This had been done. Four thousand years were sufficient to show to man his own powers, and to give him an opportunity to devise some scheme of salvation. The opportunity had been furnished under every circumstance that could be deemed favourable. The most profound and splendid talent of the world had been brought to bear on it, especially in Greece and Rome; and ample opportunity had been given to make a fair trial of the various systems of religion devised on national happiness and individual welfare; their power to meet and arrest crime; to purify the heart; to promote public morals, and to support man in his trials; their power to conduct him to the true God, and to give him a well-founded hope of immortality. All had failed; and then it was a proper time for the Son of God to come and to reveal a better system. (3.) It was a time when the world was at peace. The temple of Janus, closed only in times of peace, was then shut, though it had been but once closed before during the Roman history. What an appropriate time for the “Prince of Peace” to come! The world was, to a great extent, under the Roman sceptre. Communications between different parts of the world were then more rapid and secure than they had been at any former period, and the gospel could be more easily propagated. Further, the Jews were scattered in almost all lands, acquainted with the promises, looking for

the Messiah, furnishing facilities to their own countrymen the apostles to preach the gospel in numerous synagogues, and qualified, if they embraced the Messiah, to become most zealous and devoted missionaries. The same language, the Greek, was, moreover, after the time of Alexander the Great, the common language of no small part of the world, or as least was spoken and understood among a considerable portion of the nations of the earth. At no period before had there been so extensive a use of the same language. (4.) It was a proper period to make the new system known. It accorded with the benevolence of God, that it should be delayed no longer than that the world should be in a suitable state for receiving the Redeemer. When that period, therefore, had arrived, God did not delay, but sent his Son on the great work of the world's redemption.

God sent forth his Son. This implies that the Son of God had an existence before his incarnation; see John 16:28. The Saviour is often represented as *sent* into the world, and as *coming forth* from God.

Made of a woman, In human nature; born of a woman, This also implies that he had another nature than that which was derived from the woman. On the supposition that he was a mere man, how unmeaning would this assertion be! How natural to ask, in what other way could he appear than to be born of a woman? Why was *he* particularly designated as coming into the world in this manner? How

strange would it sound if it were said, “In the sixteenth century came Faustus Socinus preaching Unitarianism, *made of a woman!*” or, “In the eighteenth century came Dr. Joseph Priestley, *born of a woman*, preaching the doctrines of Socinus!” How else could they appear? would be the natural inquiry. What was there peculiar in their birth and origin that rendered such language necessary? The *language* implies that there were other ways in which the Saviour might have come; that there was something peculiar in the fact that *he* was born of a woman; and that there was some special reason why that fact should be made prominently a matter of record. The promise was (Gen. 3:15) that the Messiah should be the “seed” or the descendant of woman; and Paul probably here alludes to the fulfilment of that promise.

Made under the law. As one of the human race, partaking of human nature, he was subject to the law of God. As a man he was bound by its requirements, and subject to its control. He took his place under the law that he might accomplish an important purpose for those who were under it. He made himself subject to it that he might become one of them, and secure their redemption.

5. *To redeem them.* By his death as an atoning sacrifice; see Note on chap. 3:13.

Them that were under the law. Sinners, who had violated the law, and who were exposed to its dread penalty.

That we might receive the adoption of sons. Be adopted as the sons or the children of God; see Notes, John 1:12; Rom. 8:15.

6. *And because ye are sons.* As a consequence of your being adopted into the family of God, and being regarded as his sons. It follows as a part of his purpose of adoption that his children shall have the spirit of the Lord Jesus.

The Spirit of his Son. The spirit of the Lord Jesus; the spirit which animated him, or which he evinced. The idea is, that as the Lord Jesus was enabled to approach God with the language of endearment and love, so they would be. He, being the true and exalted Son of God, had the spirit appropriate to such a relation; they being adopted, and made like him, have the same spirit. The “spirit” here referred to does not mean, as I suppose, the Holy Spirit as such; nor the miraculous endowments of the Holy Spirit, but the spirit which made them like the Lord Jesus; the spirit by which they were enabled to approach God as his children, and use the reverent, and tender, and affectionate language of a child addressing a father. It is that language used by Christians when they have evidence of adoption; the expression of the warm, and elevated, and glowing emotions which they have when they can approach God as their God, and address him as *their* Father.

Crying. That is, the spirit thus cries, Πνεῦμα—κράζον. Comp. Notes, Rom. 8:26, 27. In Rom. 8:15 it is, “wherewith we cry.”

Abba, Father; see Note, Rom. 8:15. It is said in the Babylonian Gemara, a Jewish work, that it was not permitted slaves to use the title of *Abba* in addressing the master of the family to which they belonged. If so, then the language which Christians are here represented as using is the language of freemen, and denotes that they are not under the servitude of sin.

7. *Wherefore.* In consequence of this privilege of addressing God as your Father.

Thou art no more. You who are Christians.

A servant. In the servitude of sin; or treated as a servant by being bound under the oppressive rites and ceremonies of the law; comp. Note on ver. 3.

But a son. A child of God, adopted into his family, and to be treated as a son.

And if a son, &c. Entitled to all the privileges of a son, and of course to be regarded as an heir through the Redeemer, and with him. See the sentiment here expressed explained in the Note on Rom. 8:17.

8. *Howbeit.* But, Ἀλλὰ. The address in this verse and the following is evidently to the portion of the Galatians who had been heathen. This is probably indicated by the particle ἀλλὰ, *but* denoting a transition. In the previous verses Paul had evidently had the Jewish converts more particularly in his eye, and had described their former condition as one

of servitude to the Mosaic rites and customs, and had shown the inconveniences of that condition, compared with the freedom imparted by the gospel. To complete the description, he refers also to the Gentiles, as a condition of worse servitude still, and shows (ver. 9) the absurdity of *their* turning back to a state of bondage of any kind, after the glorious deliverance which they had obtained from the degrading servitude of pagan rites. The sense is, "If the Jews were in such a state of servitude, how much more galling and severe was that of those who had been heathens. Yet from *that* servitude the gospel had delivered them, and made them freemen. How absurd now to go back to a state of vassalage, and to become servants under the oppressive rites of the Jewish law!"

When ye knew not God. In your state of heathenism, when you had no knowledge of the true God and of his service. The object is not to apologize for what they did, because they did not know God; it is to state the fact that they were in a state of gross and galling *servitude*.

Ye did service. This does not express the force of the original. The meaning is, "Ye were *slaves* to (ἐδουλεύσατε); you were in a condition of *servitude*, as opposed to the freedom of the gospel." comp. ver. 3, where the same word is used to describe the state of the Jews. The drift of the apostle is, to show that the Jews and Gentiles, before their conversion to Christianity, were in a state of vassalage or servitude, and

that it was absurd in the highest degree to return to that condition again.

Unto them which by nature are no gods. Idols, or false gods. The expression “by nature,” φύσει, according to Grotius, means, *in fact, re ipsa*. The sense is, that they *really* had no pretensions to divinity. Many of them were imaginary beings; many were the objects of creation, as the sun, and winds, and streams; and many were departed heroes that had been exalted to be objects of worship. Yet the *servitude* was real. It fettered their faculties; controlled their powers; bound their imagination, and commanded their time and property, and made them slaves. Idolatry is always slavery; and the servitude of sinners to their passions and appetites, to lust and gold, and ambition, is not less galling and severe than was the servitude to the pagan gods or the Jewish rites, or than is the servitude of the African now to a harsh and cruel master. Of all Christians it may be said that before their conversion they “did service,” or were *slaves* to harsh and cruel masters; and nothing but the gospel has made them free. It may be added, that the chains of idolatry all over the world are as fast riveted and as galling as they were in Galatia, and that nothing but the same gospel which Paul preached there can break those chains and restore man to freedom.

9. *But now, &c.* The sense is, that since they had been made free from their ignoble servitude in the worship of false gods, and had been

admitted to the freedom found in the worship of the true God, it was absurd that they should return again to that which was truly slavery or bondage, the observance of the rites of the Jewish law.

That ye have known God. The true God, and the ease and freedom of his service in the gospel.

Or rather are known of God. The sense is, “Or, to speak more accurately or precisely, are known by God.” The *object* of this correction is to avoid the impression which might be derived from the former phrase that their acquaintance with God was owing *to themselves*. He therefore states, that it was rather that they were known of God; that it was all owing to him that they had been brought to an acquaintance with himself. Perhaps, also, he means to bring into view the idea that it was a favour and privilege to be known by God, and that therefore it was the more absurd to turn back to the weak and beggarly elements.

How turn ye again. Marg. *Back.* “How is it that you are returning to such a bondage?” The question implies surprise and indignation that they should do it.

To the weak and beggarly elements. To the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law, imposing a servitude really not less severe than the customs of paganism. On the word *elements*, see Note on ver. 3. They are called “weak” because they had no power to save the soul; no

power to justify the sinner before God. They are called “beggarly” (Gr. πτωχὰ, poor), because they could not impart spiritual riches. They really could confer few benefits on man. Or it may be, as Locke supposes, because the law kept men in the poor estate of pupils from the full enjoyment of the inheritance; ver. 1–3.

Whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage. As if you had a wish to be under servitude. The absurdity is as great as it would be for a man who had been freed from slavery to desire again his chains. They had been freed by the gospel from the galling servitude of heathenism, and they now again had sunk into the Jewish observances, *as if they preferred slavery to freedom*, and were willing to go from one form of it to another. The main idea is, that it is absurd for men who have been made free by the gospel to go back again into any kind of servitude or bondage. We may apply it to Christians now. Many sink into a kind of servitude not less galling than was that to sin before their conversion. Some become the slaves of mere ceremonies and forms in religion. Some are slaves to fashion, and the world yet rules them with the hand of a tyrant. They have escaped, it may be, from the galling chains of ambition, and degrading vice, and low sensuality; but they became slaves to the love of money, or of dress, or of the fashions of the world, *as if they loved slavery and chains*; and they seem no more able to break loose than the slave is to break the bonds which bind him. And

some are slaves to some expensive and foolish habit. Professed Christians, *and Christian ministers too*, become *slaves* to the disgusting and loathsome habit of using *tobacco*, bound by a servitude as galling and as firm as that which ever shackled the limbs of an African. I grieve to add also that many professed Christians are slaves to the habit of “sitting long at the wine,” and indulging in it freely. O that such knew the liberty of Christian freedom, and would break away from all such shackles, and *show* how the gospel frees men from *all* foolish and absurd customs!

10. *Ye observe*. The object of this verse is to *specify* some of the things to which they had become enslaved.

Days. The days here referred to are doubtless the days of the Jewish festivals. They had numerous days of such observances, and in addition to those specified in the Old Testament, the Jews had added many others as days commemorative of the destruction and rebuilding of the temple, and of other important events in their history. It is not a fair interpretation of this to suppose that the apostle refers to the *Sabbath*, properly so called, for this was a part of the Decalogue; and was observed by the Saviour himself, and by the apostles also. It *is* a fair interpretation to apply it to all those days which are not commanded to be kept holy in the Scriptures; and hence the passage is as applicable to the observance of saints’ days, and days in honour of particular events

in sacred history, as to the days observed by the Galatians. There is as real *servitude* in the observance of the numerous festivals, and fasts in the Papal communion and in some Protestant churches, as there was in the observance of the days in the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar, and for any thing that I can see, such observances are as inconsistent now with the freedom of the gospel as they were in the time of Paul. We should observe as seasons of holy time what it can be proved God has commanded us, and no more.

And months. The festivals of the new moon, kept by the Jews. Num. 10:10; 28:11–14. On this festival, in addition to the daily sacrifice, two bullocks, a ram, and seven sheep of a year old were offered in sacrifice. The appearance of the new-moon was announced by the sound of trumpets. See Jahn, *Archae.* § 352.

And times. Stated times; festivals returning periodically, as the Passover, the feast of Pentecost, and the feast of Tabernacles. See Jahn, *Archae.* chap. 3. § 346–360.

And years. The sabbatical year, or the year of jubilee. See Jahn as above.

11. *I am afraid of you, &c.* I have fears respecting you. His fears were that they had no genuine Christian principle. They had been so easily perverted and turned back to the servitude of ceremonies and rites, that he was apprehensive that there could be no real Christian principle

in the case. What pastor has not often had such fears of his people, when he sees them turn to the weak and beggarly elements of the world, or when, after having “run well,” he sees them become the slaves of fashion, or of some habit inconsistent with the simplicity of the gospel?

12. *Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am, &c.* There is great brevity in this passage, and no little obscurity, and a great many different interpretations have been given of it by commentators. The various views expressed may be seen in Bloomfield’s Crit. Dig. Locke renders it, “Let you and I be as if we were all one, Think yourselves to be very me; as I in my own mind put no difference at all between you and myself.” Koppe explains it thus: Imitate my example; for I, though a Jew by birth, care no more for Jewish rites than you.” Rosenmüller explains it, “Imitate my manner of life in rejecting the Jewish rites; as I, having renounced the Jewish rites, was much like you when I preached the gospel to you.” Other interpretations may be seen in Chandler, Doddridge, Calvin, &c. In our version there seems to be an impropriety of expression; for if he was as they were it would seem to be a matter of course that they would be like him, or would resemble him. The sense of the passage, however, it seems to me cannot be difficult. The reference is doubtless to the Jewish rites and customs, and to the question whether they were binding on Christians. Paul’s object is to

persuade them to abandon them. He appeals to them, therefore, by his own example. And it means evidently, “Imitate me in this thing. Follow my example, and yield no conformity to those rites and customs.” The *ground* on which he asks them to imitate him may be either, (1.) That *he* had abandoned them or (2.) Because he asks them *to yield a point* to him. He had done so in many instances for their welfare, and had made many sacrifices for their salvation, and he now asks them to yield this *one* point, and to become as he was, and to cease these Jewish observances, as he had done.

For I am as ye are. Gr. “For I as ye.” This means, I suppose, “For I have conformed to your customs in many things. I have abandoned my own peculiarities; given up my customs as far as possible; conformed to you as Gentiles as far as I could do, in order to benefit and save you. I have laid aside the peculiarity of the Jew on the principle of becoming all things to all men (Notes, 1 Cor. 9:20–22), in order that I might save you. I ask in return only the slight sacrifice that you will now become like me in the matter under consideration.”

Ye have not injured me at all. “It is not a personal matter. I have no cause of complaint. You have done me no personal wrong. There is no variance between us; no unkind feeling; no injury done as individuals. I may, therefore, with the more freedom, ask you to yield this point, when I assure you that I do not feel personally injured. I have no wrong

to complain of, and I ask it on higher grounds than would be an individual request: it is for your good, and the good of the great cause.” When Christians turn away from the truth, and disregard the instructions and exhortations of pastors, and become conformed to the world, it is not a personal matter, or a matter of personal offence to them, painful as it may be to them. They have no peculiar reason to say that they are personally injured. It is a higher matter. The cause suffers. The interests of religion are injured. The church at large is offended, and the Saviour is “wounded in the house of his friends.” Conformity to the world, or a lapse into some sin, is a public offence, and should be regarded as an injury done to the cause of the Redeemer. It shows the magnanimity of Paul, that though they had abandoned his doctrines, and forgotten his love and his toils in their welfare, he did not regard it as a *personal* offence, and did not consider himself personally injured. An ambitious man or an impostor would have made that the main, if not the only thing.

13. *Ye know how.* To show them the folly of their embracing the new views which they had adopted, he reminds them of past times, and particularly of the strength of the attachment which they had evinced for him in former days.²

² Albert Barnes, [*Notes on the New Testament: II Corinthians & Galatians*](#), ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 356–365.

