

**Galatians:  
Commentary  
Galatians 4:8-11**

With identity and inheritance well established, Paul now turns his attention and teaching focus to the dangers of turning back, the very problem facing the Galatians who had been deceived by the Judaizers' manipulative false teaching.

**8**

**Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.**

With this sentence, Paul introduces a retrospective that will serve as a foil to their new reality (articulated in verse 9). He is causing the Galatians to take a backward glance at the lives they led prior to being introduced to Christ. These were Gentile people who worshipped at a multitude of pagan altars. They were given to regional gods and trade/professional deities. Paul is making clear that gods are no gods at all. They are imps before the true God. They have no power, and yet these people willfully subjected themselves to these false gods as slaves. The Galatians did this because they "did not know God." This indicates both an ignorance of the true God, as well as a rejection of Him, as the case may be.

**9**

**But now that you have come to know God,**

"But now" is Paul's indicator of change. Things are not how they used to be. The catalyst of change is the knowledge of God - the experiential personal awareness of him.

**or rather to be known by God,**

Paul offers this vital rhetorical correction to clarify that the dynamic that changes a person's disposition before God is not because the person has acquired an intimate understanding of God that was different than before. Rather, because the person has humbly come to God by faith, God now relates to the person intimately as the Father to His child. The person is known down to the most intimate of details by the Father - the child's being (hopes, dreams, fears, failures, insecurities, aspirations, ambitions, intentions, potential, to name merely a few of the attributes known by the Father of the child).

**how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?**

After making the rhetorical correction, Paul then asks a rhetorical question, highlighting the preposterousness of the proposition. The "elementary principles of the world" are the carnal, demonic forces identified in earlier passages and elsewhere in Scripture, and labeled as powerless gods in verse 8.

Paul likens their inclination to embrace the Judaizers' extra burdens as to a desire to return to their former enslavement to the demonic forces.

**10**

**You observe days and months and seasons and years!**

An indication to Paul of the concerning regression of the Galatians is the likelihood of their reported activity of giving increasing attention to external matters such as the Sabbath, the prescribed holidays and feasts, and even years of note. To mark these commemorations in a legalistic

manner is a return to the effort to add to God's grace and move backward to the destructive doctrine of works.

**11**

**I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.**

It should be observed that Paul likely is not asserting that a person is in danger of losing or revoking the salvation earned by Christ's atonement. However, since it is impossible to know the authenticity of each specific Galatian's belief, he is simply expressing a genuine concern that some among them may have undergone the mechanics of spiritual disciplines without having experienced authentic spiritual transformation.

*Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life*  
**Galatians 4:8-11 - *Known By God!***  
**Small Group Leader Guide**

**Start the conversation**

Choose which of these four is most desirable to you, and explain why:

- Greater wealth
- Greater popularity
- Greater influence
- Greater skills or abilities

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**Enslaved! (Galatians 4:8)**

What does Paul ask them to look back and remember?

How did Paul characterize that time?

What does the term "by their very nature were not God" mean to you? Why is this significant?

What are some "not God" gods that had enslaved you before you knew God? What did that enslavement look like in your life?

**Known! (Galatians 4:9)**

Why do you think it's important that Paul makes the clarification that more important than you now knowing God, God knows you?

How is your life different now than it was before when you were enslaved to the "not God" gods?

In this verse, how does Paul describe the "not God" gods? How do your experiences affirm Paul's descriptions?

**Old Habits (Read Galatians 4:10)**

Why do you think the Galatians were so inclined to observe these days with such legalism?

What do you think we can take away from the Galatians' habit and Paul's address to them, regarding our own observances and holidays?

**Concern (Read Galatians 4:11)**

How do you interpret Paul's concern in this verse?

What are some things you do now that can give the appearance that you still are enslaved to "not God" gods? What are the good things you inappropriately esteem? What will life look like if you turn away from that?

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**Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 4:8-11 in the Week ahead**

***Day 1***

Remember the depths from which you have been raised. Recall the enslavement to your old habits and mindsets. Praise God for His salvation! Rejoice in your resurrection in Jesus, raised to walk in new life!

***Day 2***

Take time to detail what you have come to know experientially about God through your faith in Jesus. Worship God in prayer, praising Him for who He is, What He has done, and how He reveals Himself through His Word.

***Day 3***

Today, list the things that God knows about you. Your secrets. Your fears. Your dreams. Your goals. Your habits. Your victories and your setbacks. Your breakthroughs and your burdens. Ask God to show you more about yourself because he knows you better than you know yourself. Submit to His loving authority, and receive His offer to transform you into the you He desires you to be.

***Day 4***

People in your family, in your schools, teams, and work are enslaved to the "not God" gods. Pray for them today, asking God to overcome these weak and worthless strongholds in the lives of people you know. Pray for these people by name, and determine to invite them to church or to an upcoming opportunity to get close to God through the church.

***Day 5***

Our church is a church of grace, but the lure of legalism is ever-present. In praying for our church today, thank God for leadership and direction that is grace-focused. Ask God to continue to protect us from the subtle snare of legalism, and to empower us to embrace grace and be compelled by grace to share Jesus with others in Scottsdale and beyond.

## **Day 6**

Pray for our next multisite today, asking God's Spirit to go before us in preparing a new community to receive the Gospel of Jesus and the ministry of our church. Ask God to save people, to restore broken relationships, to meet the needs of the hurting and underserved, and to bring much glory to Himself through this new congregation of our church. Pray for multisite Pastor Neal Montgomery and his family, asking God to use him powerfully in this exciting front-line ministry to impact eternity.

### **Family Talk**

As each person comes to the table for the conversation, tell them to bring with them every form of personal identification they can easily bring. Driver's license, student ID, library card, Social Security card, Passports, or birth certificates.

Take time to discuss how these all identify us, and what information is shared in this.

#### **Ask**

If a person knows all the information on this card, do they know you? (*in a casual, surface way...yes. They know about you. But they don't really know you.*)

How do people know the "real you?" (*They spend time with you, building relationship with you*)

Hold up your Bible. **Say**

In a sense, this is God's ID Card. He chose to reveal things about Himself so he could be known.

#### **Ask**

What do we know about God through what He has revealed in the Bible? (*affirm the many possible answers*)

Is it possible to know about God but not really know God? How?

Read Galatians 4:9 **Say**

In this verse, the Apostle Paul says that because of Jesus you now know God, and even more important, He knows you.

**Discuss** what that means.

#### **Ask**

How do we know God more and better than just "knowing about Him" because He knows us through Jesus? (*Through Jesus, we **experience** the reality of God rather than just read about Him. He lives in us and changes us.*)

Close by giving each person the chance to share something about God they have experienced in this past week. Pray together, thanking God that He chooses to be known to us and He did everything necessary through Jesus to know us.

The following pages  
are for small group leaders.

## *Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life*

**Galatians 4:8-11 - Known By God!**

### **Small Group Leader Guide**

#### **Prepare: Things to do before your small group convenes**

- **Read** through the daily news (whether in your daily paper or maybe your preferred news Web site). Take note of the different things that enslave people around the world - false religions, power, chasing after fame or money, or even notoriety. **Open your preparation time in prayer**, thanking God for delivering you from the shackles of the slavery to false gods and empty pursuits.
- **Review** Galatians 4:8-11 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to open your eyes to see opportunity to share His love and truth with others, that you might also live by faith. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Read** the provided [commentary on Galatians 4:8-11](#). **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

#### ***To The Point - What to impart to your small group***

**Key Verse:** But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Galatians 4:9, ESV)

**Objectives:** Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

**Discuss** the objects that ensnare people prior to coming to faith in Jesus.

**Identify** ways that people are tempted to return to old ways and false gods.

**Explore** the implications of how identity in Christ empowers a person to overcome the lure of worldly snares.

#### **Leader Guide Key:**

**Blue** - hyperlinks to other resources

**Red** - Reading prompts

**Green** - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

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#### **Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience**

##### **Start the conversation**

Announce that each person in the group must choose to identify one of four personal preferences:

- Greater wealth
- Greater popularity
- Greater influence
- Greater skills or abilities

Assign a different corner of the room to each preference, and have each member go to the corner of their preference. Then, have each corner "make their case" why their preference is the best choice for a preferred life.

After a time of friendly debate,

### **Say**

These are the four pursuits that capture the attention of most people. Unfortunately, because it comes so naturally to most people, This is the natural way, and its the way that ends up controlling and even derailing many people. As Paul continues his exhortation to the Galatians (and to us), he recalls reality before Christ and even articulates concern of being ineffective. His cautionary words should focus us to not be lured by the things that can never satisfy, and determine to live by faith in a way that meets our needs and establishes a lasting significance.

Open in prayer for your time together.

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### **Enslaved! (Galatians 4:8)**

#### **Say**

Paul introduces this section of his appeal by having his audience take a backward glance to the way things "used to be."

#### **Ask**

What does Paul ask them to look back and remember?

*Paul asks them to remember to the time before they knew God.*

How did Paul characterize that time?

*He reminded them that before they knew God, they were enslaved to things that by their very nature were not God.*

What does the term "by their very nature were not God" mean to you? Why is this significant?

*This term means that prior to knowing the true God, people chose to worship other created things, that in their essential substance had no worth of being treated as Creator or Lord. This is significant because it shows that the result of such action is enslavement.*

What are some "not God" gods that had enslaved you before you knew God? What did that enslavement look like in your life?

*Answers will vary.*

### **Known! (Galatians 4:9)**

#### **Say**

Paul then makes it clear that everything changed!

#### **Ask**

Why do you think it's important that Paul makes the clarification that more important that you now knowing God, God knows you?

*This clarification is important because it is not our actions of learning more about God or becoming*

*more familiar with Him that makes the difference. Rather, because of Jesus reconciling us, redeeming us back to God, He now knows us as His children. Through Jesus, you are no longer distant from God, but you are welcomed in to His family with total love and acceptance.*

How is your life different now than it was before when you were enslaved to the "not God" gods?

*Answers will vary.*

In this verse, how does Paul describe the "not God" gods? How do your experiences affirm Paul's descriptions?

*He describes them as weak and worthless. Among the varying answers, it is important to emphasize that these false gods have no power to bless, but only to enslave. They have no ability to relate. They cannot satisfy but only condemn and take. They are weak because they possess none of the power of God. They are worthless because they have no intrinsic (self-emanating) value. They can only reflect the value given them, and require constant provision from misdirected worship to do so.*

### **Old Habits (Read Galatians 4:10)**

#### **Say**

To give evidence of the Galatians propensity to return to false gods, Paul points to their habit of legalistically observing various holidays and commemorations (such as Sabbath, Feasts, and even years of observance).

#### **Ask**

Why do you think the Galatians were so inclined to observe these days with such legalism?

*The lure of legalism is strong because it suggests you have something to offer. The dangers of legalism is that it is never satisfied because the standard is impossibly perfect. As such, it led to people adding more and more ways they could do more to demonstrate righteousness, such as these observations and commemorations. This was giving them a false sense of having God's approval.*

#### **Ask**

What do you think we can take away from the Galatians' habit and Paul's address to them, regarding our own observances and holidays?

*Holidays, commemorations, and observances are in themselves not bad. They are good when they lead us to worship God in spirit and in truth. They are not good when they become the object of undue attention (worship). We are well served to take every day and redeem it to God's purpose and glory, and not become enslaved to a tradition or put an inappropriate value or esteem in any created thing.*

### **Concern (Read Galatians 4:11)**

#### **Ask**

How do you interpret Paul's concern in this verse?

*While answers will vary, it is important to emphasize that Paul is not suggesting that anyone can lose their salvation. Rather, he is expressing his concern that though many appeared to receive the Gospel, their conduct afterward suggests they did not. Paul is expressing his earnest desire for them that they would be free from all legalism and no longer under the enslavement of the "not God" gods from their pre-salvation life.*

What are some things you do now that can give the appearance that you still are enslaved to "not God" gods? What are the good things you inappropriately esteem? What will life look like if you turn away from that?

*Answers will vary.*

## Say

The key in this daily experience of being free is to remember that you are known by God. He has broken the illusion of power that the "not God" gods have had over you. Then, He filled you with His Spirit so you may be free, and in your freedom, you may be holy! Then, He placed you in community where we can worship together, grow together, and serve together! We are free because we are known!

Let's close in prayer:

*Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important.*

*Encourage your group to use the "Continue in grace" resources (below and on the Group Members Page) on their own or with their family, to extend the small group experience into the week. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!*

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