



Daily Verse and Comment

Galatians 4:9-10

(9) 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? (10) You observe days and months and seasons and years.

New King James Version

The common, traditional explanation of [Galatians 4:9-10](#) is that Paul is reprimanding the Galatians for returning to [Old Testament](#) observances that were a form of "bondage." Insisting that Paul taught that the Old Testament law was "done away" ([Colossians 2:14](#)), they conclude that Christians should not keep the days that [God](#) had commanded Israel to keep. In verse 10, Paul mentions observances of "days and months and seasons and years." Some contend that these observances refer to God's [Sabbath](#) and [holy days](#) commanded in the Old Testament. But this interpretation overlooks many foundational points.

Galatia was not a city but a province in Asia Minor. The church membership was undoubtedly composed mainly of Gentiles, and the males were physically uncircumcised ([Galatians 5:2](#); [6:12-13](#)). In looking at Paul's initial dealings with these people, we find that they had a history of worshipping pagan deities. In Lystra, a city in Galatia, God healed a crippled man through Paul ([Acts 14:8-18](#)). The people of the area were so astonished at this miracle that they supposed [Barnabas](#) and Paul, whom they called Zeus and Hermes (verse 12), to be pagan gods! They wanted to sacrifice to them, and would have, if the apostles had not stopped them (verses 13-18). This shows that the people in Galatia were generally superstitious and worshipped pagan deities.

The major theme of the Galatian epistle is to put them "back on the track" because someone had been teaching "a different gospel," a perversion of [the](#)

[gospel](#) of [Christ](#) ([Galatians 1:6-7](#)). The Galatians had derailed on their understanding of how sinners are justified. [False teachers](#) in Galatia taught that one was justified by doing physical works of some kind. The majority of evidence indicates that the false teachers were teaching a blend of Judaism and [Gnosticism](#). The philosophy of Gnosticism taught that everything physical was evil, and that people could attain a higher spiritual understanding through effort. It was the type of philosophy that its adherents thought could be used to enhance or improve anyone's religion. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, we read of this same philosophy having an influence on the church there. It was characterized by strict legalism, a "taste not, touch not" attitude, neglect of the body, worship of angels, and a false humility ([Colossians 2:18-23](#)).

What, then, were the "days, months, seasons and years" that Paul criticizes the Galatians for observing? First, Paul nowhere in the entire letter mentions God's holy days. Second, the apostle would never refer to holy days that God instituted as "weak and beggarly elements." He honored and revered God's law ([Romans 7:12](#), 14, 16). Besides, he taught the Corinthians to observe [Passover](#) and the [Days of Unleavened Bread](#) ([I Corinthians 5:7-8](#)), and he kept the Sabbath and holy days himself ([Acts 16:13](#); [18:21](#); [20:6](#); [I Corinthians 16:8](#)).

When the scriptures in question are put into context, the explanation of what these days were becomes clear. In [Galatians 4:1-5](#), Paul draws an analogy in which he likens the Jew to a child who is [waiting](#) to come into an inheritance and the Gentile to a slave in the same household. He explains how, before the coming of Christ, the spiritual state of the Jew was no different from the Gentile because neither had had their sins forgiven nor had they received God's Spirit. Prior to the coming of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles were "in bondage under the elements of [the world](#)" (verse 3).

The word "elements" is the Greek *stoicheion*, which means any first thing or principle. "In bondage under the elements of the world" refers to the fact that the unconverted mind is subject to the influence of [Satan](#) and his demons, the rulers of this world and the authors of all idolatrous worship. Satan and his demons are the origin, the underlying cause, of the evil ways of this world, and all unconverted humans are under their sway. "Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can

be" ([Romans 8:7](#)). Paul is saying that both Jews and Gentiles had been in bondage to [sin](#).

In [Galatians 4:8](#), Paul brings up the subject of the idolatry and paganism that they had participated in before their conversion. "But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods." This obviously refers to the worship of pagan deities ([Acts 14:8-18](#)). He is making it clear that God had called them out of that way of life. Paul continues this thought in verse 9, where his obvious concern was that the Galatians were returning to the way of life from which God had called them. The "weak and beggarly elements" were demon-inspired, idolatrous practices, NOT something God had commanded. "Elements" here is the same word, *stoicheion*, translated "elements" in verse 3. An extension of *stoicheion* can refer to the heavenly bodies that regulate the calendar and are associated with pagan festivals. The apostle condemns the practices and way of life that had been inspired by Satan and his demons, the principal cause of all the world's evil. Paul recognized that the Galatians had begun to return to their former slavish, sinful practices.

It is evident that the "days, months, seasons and years" Paul refers to in verse 10 were the pagan, idolatrous festivals and observances that the Galatian Gentiles had observed before their conversion. They could not possibly be God's holy days because these Gentiles had never observed them before being called, nor would Paul ever call them "weak and beggarly." Rather, they were turning back to their old, heathen way of life that included keeping various superstitious holidays connected to the worship of pagan deities.

Far from doing away with God's holy days, these scriptures show that we should not be observing "days, months, seasons and years" that have their roots in paganism, such as [Christmas](#), [Easter](#), Valentine's Day, [Halloween](#), and any other days that originated from the worship of pagan gods.

— Earl L. Henn

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