

LOSING MY RELIGION

"RELIGION RELAPSE" GALATIANS 4:8-20

This Week's Core Competency

Salvation by Grace – I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by his grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9, *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.*

Paul's concern for the Galatians' spiritual direction raises the question of *eternal security*. Can salvation be lost through sin or subsequent unbelief? One theologian poses the question this way: "Will the believer who has genuinely been regenerated, justified, adopted by God, and united with Jesus Christ persist in that relationship?" (Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3:986). Charles Templeton, the man who went from minister to agnostic, is a fascinating case in point. Billy Graham's companion evangelist, a man who founded a church that quickly overflowed its 1,200-seat sanctuary, saw a picture in *Time* magazine that proved to be the straw that broke the camel's back. When Lee Strobel asked Templeton, "Was there one thing in particular that caused you to lose your faith in God?" he replied, "It was a picture of a black woman in Northern Africa. They were experiencing a devastating drought. And she was holding her dead baby in her arms and looking up to heaven with the most forlorn expression. I looked at it and I thought, 'Is it possible to believe that there is a loving or caring Creator when all this

Jesus is the most important human being who has ever existed . . . I miss him.

— Charles Templeton

woman needed was *rain?*' . . . When I saw that photograph, I immediately knew it is not possible for this to happen and for there to be a loving God. There was no way. Who else but a fiend could destroy a baby and virtually kill its mother with agony—when all that was needed was *rain?*" (Read the entire interview in *The Case for Faith*, 9-18.)

In Galatians 4:8-11 the apostle writes: "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you." Paul makes it clear in his letter that people are justified by faith, not by observing the law of Moses (2:15-16; 3:6-14) or by following the ABCs of any religion for that matter (4:3, 9). But what about people who "know God" by faith or "rather are known by God" who turn back "to those weak and miserable principles" (4:9), or perhaps commit some heinous sin or persist in some particular sin? When Paul tells his readers "I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you," is he worried that the Galatians are on the verge of losing their salvation? Remember, he calls them "sons through faith" (3:26; 4:6) and confirms they have received the Holy Spirit (3:2-5; 4:6).

Another theologian defines *eternal security* this way: "Eternal security is the work of God that guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is forever and cannot be lost. The concept of eternal security emphasizes God's activity in guaranteeing the eternal possession of the gift of

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eternal life. It relates to those the Holy Spirit regenerates, and its veracity does not rest on feeling or experiences" (Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 379). Put differently, salvation is a one-way spiritual street that runs from predestination through regeneration to glorification, which Paul maps this way: "And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (Ro 8:30). U-turns are not possible on this street; once justified, there's no going back.

Many of the reasons for eternal security are related to the Holy Spirit. The same theologian explains: "1. *He regenerates*. If we are born again by the Spirit when we believe, then if we can renounce our faith to lose our salvation, we would have to have the new birth taken away as well. 2. *He indwells*. If salvation can be lost, then the presence of the Spirit within the life of the believer would have to be removed. The Christian would become disindwelt. 3. *He baptizes*. The Spirit joins the believer to the body of Christ when he believes (1 Cor. 12:13); therefore, if salvation can be lost, the Christian would have to be detached from the body of Christ. 4. *He seals*. The Spirit seals the believer until the day of redemption (Eph 4:30). If salvation can be lost, then His sealing would not be until the day of redemption but only until the day of sinning, or apostasy, or disbelief. To be sure, believers sin and are warned against false profession and Christian immaturity, but God never takes back the gift of His salvation once it is received" (383-84).

As far as the Galatians were concerned, Paul worried that even though they were justified and were adult sons no longer subject to "guardians and trustees" (4:2), they might return to their former condition as minor children enslaved to those "weak and miserable principles" (v. 9) of the world. As far as Charles Templeton is concerned, I suspect that upon his death he was surprised to find he was right the first time—his book *Farewell to God* notwithstanding.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Galatians 4:8-20

8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? 10 You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! 11 I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

12 I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. 13 As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. 14 Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt

or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. 15 What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. 16 Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

17 Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you [from us], so that you may be zealous for them. 18 It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. 19 My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, 20 how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Draw a line from "formerly" in v. 8 to "now" in v. 9.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 9.
- * Underline "weak and miserable" in v. 9.
- * Circle "principles" in v. 9.
- * Bracket the *rhetorical* questions in v. 9.
- * Underline "special days," "months," "seasons," and "years" in v. 10.
- * Box "like" indicating *comparison* in v. 12 (2x).
- * Box "instead" indicating *contrast* in v. 14.
- * Bracket "torn out your eyes" in v. 15.
- * Circle "those people" in v. 17.
- * Circle "zealous" in vv. 17 (2x), 18.
- * Underline "my dear children" in v. 19.
- * Circle "formed" in v. 19.

day 2

EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Explain Paul's use of *contrast* in verses 8-9.
2. How does "or rather are known by God" affect the meaning of verse 9?
3. What does Paul's use of the *present* tense, "are turning," in verse 9 indicate?
4. Paul points out that sons (v. 6) can "be enslaved by [weak and miserable principles] all over again" (v. 9). Explain.
5. Put what Paul fears in your own words.
6. Verse 12 contains the first *imperative* in the letter. What is it, and what does it mean?
7. Explain what Paul means by "You have done me no wrong."
8. Who are "those people" (v. 17), and what's wrong with what they want?
9. **Discussion:** Many Jews continued to follow their Jewish customs after becoming Christians. If that was acceptable, talk about why the Galatians "observing special days and months and seasons and years" was not.

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Galatians 4:8-20 marks a transition in the book of Galatians. While various approaches have been taken to the structure of the book, the one offered by Richard N. Longenecker has much to commend it. It recognizes that Paul's letter shares the structure of Greek letters of his day. It has an *opening*, a *body*, and a *closing*. The opening salutation (1:1-5) and the closing subscription (6:11-18) are clearly identified. The body (1:6-6:10) can then be divided into two parts: a *rebuke* section that begins with the words "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (1:6) and a *request* section that contains the first imperative in the letter, "become like me" (4:12). The first part is marked by the use of *forensic* rhetoric; the second part is marked by *deliberative* rhetoric. The difference between these two types of persuasion is described this way: "Deliberative rhetoric, rather than taking a judicial or defensive stance, seeks to exhort or dissuade an audience regarding future actions by demonstrating that those actions are expedient or harmful (cf. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1.3.5: 'The end of the deliberative speaker is the expedient or harmful; for he who exhorts recommends a course of action as better, and he who dissuades advises against it as worse'). In 4:12ff. Paul is no longer so much concerned to accuse or defend as to persuade his Galatian converts to adopt a certain course of action" (Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 41, Galatians, 184). This analysis explains in part why so many different outlines of the book generally agree that the first part is *doctrinal* and the second part is *practical*.

In verses 8-11 Paul warns the Galatians that the turn they are taking is heading them in the wrong direction. He begins by contrasting their former spiritual condition with their present spiritual condition. Formerly, they were slaves to the ABCs of paganism and its so-called gods. But now, they know the true God; what's more important, God knows them. That being the case, why in the world would they turn to be enslaved all over again—this time by the ABCs of Judaism? Already they are heading in the wrong direction, having turned to observe "special days and months and season and years" (v. 10), a clear allusion to the Jewish religious calendar.

As a result Paul fears, not for their salvation, but for their freedom in Christ. If they return to being enslaved under the basic principles of the world, he fails to accomplish his mission. His goal is to see them enjoy the liberty that is theirs in Christ. No wonder his first imperative to them is "become like me" (v. 12), i.e., "to be free from legal bondage and to know the liberty that is in Christ (cf. 5:1)" (Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, 195).

In verses 12-20 Paul turns his attention away from impersonal doctrinal matters to personal practical matters. One commentator contrasts this section with the previous one. "If the reader is inclined to think Paul has been impersonal in dealing with the problems at Galatia, that he has been arguing as a scholar and not as a pastor, the present passage should disabuse him of this idea. It is true that Paul has dealt with the issues facing the Galatians as doctrinal ones and has even been somewhat distant in addressing his converts. The most endearing he has been is in calling them 'brothers' (1:1; 3:15), but this was certainly a common enough term within the Christian community. Now, however, all this changes and the deep pastoral concern of Paul for the Galatians, which has stood behind even his staunch biblical and theological discussion, surfaces. In these verses Paul intensifies his appeal to them. He calls them 'brothers' once again and then 'dear children.' The latter, common in John's writings occurs only here in Paul's. Moreover, Paul bases his appeal on their past and present relationship to one another; first their past relationship to him (vv. 12-16) and second, his past and present relationship to them (vv. 17-20). He contrasts the former with their present actions; the latter he contrasts with the actions of the Judaizers" (James Montgomery Boice, "Galatians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:477-78).

In verses 12-16 Paul pleads with them to reverse course and "become like me." Live free from bondage to the law as adult sons and heirs. Originally, his ministry to them filled them with great joy, but now all that has changed—thanks to "those people" (v. 17). The Galatians' joy is gone; they no longer delight in him. Ironically, by telling them the truth, he has become their enemy. And that's just not right. In verses 17-20 Paul explains

that his opponents lack integrity. They are simply trying to court the Galatians' favor, a good thing in itself, but for all the wrong reasons, making it a bad thing. The Judaizers simply want to drive a wedge between Paul and the Galatians so that they might follow them rather than Paul. It all leaves the apostle feeling like a mother in the pains of childbirth all over again. First, he experienced labor pains at the time of their conversion, and now he is experiencing them once again to see Christ formed in them. On his use of imagery, one commentator explains: "The verb used

(*morphousthai*) refers to the process whereby the fetus develops into an infant; Paul's desire is to see Christ thus 'formed' in his converts. If the imagery suggested by the language is unusual, its intended meaning is not in doubt; to say that the image of Christ should take shape in the believers is but a more effective way of saying that 'Christ should fashion them according to His own image,' that in submission to him they may reflect his image and glory in their lives" (Fung, 203). Paul concludes by expressing a wish; he wishes he were in Galatia to make his case face to face.

The Message of the Passage

Those who know God by faith, or more importantly are known by God, must never abandon the freedom that is theirs in Christ to live in bondage to the weak and miserable ABCs of religious observance.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James suggests in James 1:22. Try some of the challenges below to apply what you have learned this week.

- **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 8 **formerly** In contrast to "now" (v. 9), i.e., "the contrast between their status described in vv 6-7 and that now described in v 8" (Longenecker, 179).
- v. 9 **are turning** Present tense implies the Galatians' "turning" was in progress as indicated by verse 10: "You are observing special days . . ."
- v. 9 **weak and miserable** I.e., "weak," "powerless," "feeble" and "poor," "beggarly," "miserable," "impotent" (181). "Before conversion, Paul's readers (mainly Gentiles but some Jews) 'were slaves' to religious traditions that, in the case of Gentiles, included counterfeit gods. Now at liberty, they were in danger of turning back to the same slavery. They might return to a system that was 'weak' (with no power to justify or sanctify), 'worthless' (providing no inheritance), and elementary ('elemental')" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Galatians," 2015 ed., 53, www.soniclight.com).
- v. 9 **principles** Cf., v. 3. "Paul lumped the pre-Christian religious experiences of both Jews and Gentiles under the same epithet, that of being [*ta stoicheia*] or 'basic principles.' For though qualitatively quite different, both have been superseded by the relationship of being 'in Christ'" (Longenecker, 181). "For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make . . . The [*stoicheia*] to which the Galatians had been in bondage were the counterfeit gods of v 8; the bondage to which they were now disposed to turn back was that of the law" (F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NIGNT, 202-203).
- v. 10 **special days** . . . "Others understand 4:10 as a reference to the Jewish religious calendar, and this still appears to be the most natural view. On this view, 'special days' are the Sabbath (cf. Col. 2:16) and other religious fast or feast days, 'months' are new moon observances (cf. Num 28:11-15), 'seasons' are feasts or festival seasons lasting more than one day (cf. Lev. 23), and 'years' are Sabbatical or Jubilee years or, more probably, New Year celebrations. Thus 'the four terms without mutual exclusiveness [cover] all kinds of celebrations of days and periods observed by the Jews" (Fung, 193).
- v. 15 **tom . . . eyes** Cf., "plucked out your eyes" (NASB). "'Plucked out your eyes' is probably a figurative expression similar to 'given your eye teeth' (Constable, 57). 'It is unlikely that the language here implies eye trouble on Paul's part'" (Fung, 199).
- v. 12 **become like me** "Paul had 'become as' his readers were, in the sense that he had lived among them as a Gentile, not under the Mosaic Law. He now called on them, out of a sense of fair play, to live independent of the Law as he did. This is the first imperative (in the Greek text) in Galatians" (Constable, 56).
- v. 13 **no wrong** Paul's statement is susceptible to a number of interpretations (see Longenecker, 190). It likely means "Paul had no reason to complain of their former treatment of him [see vv. 13-15]—which implies an entreaty—that they were to continue in that cordial attitude towards him and not to injure him now by ignoring his plea" (Fung, 195). In other words, "You have done me no wrong in the past; do me no wrong now."
- v. 13 **illness** Paul's illness unknown for certain. "Scholars have diagnosed a variety of ailments, including malaria (which Paul is presumed to have contracted in the low-lying country of Pamphylia), epilepsy (suggested by the reference in v. 14 to spitting out [cf. marginal note in NASB]), ophthalmia (inferred from v. 15b and from the 'big letters' with which he wrote, 6:11), and 'severe neuralgia or hysteria accompanied by depression.' Paul's illness has further been linked with his 'thorn' or 'stake' in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7f)" (196-97).
- v. 17 **zealous** The Gk verb *zeloo* means "strive," "desire," "exert oneself" (see Longenecker, 194). "Lightfoot has drawn attention to its use by Plutarch in *De Virtute Morali* 448E in contexts of courtship between men and women and friendship between teachers and students (Galatians [1890], 176-77). And that is how the verb is used here in v 17 as well: of the Judaizers who were trying to 'earnestly court' the Galatian Christians' favor, and who desired that they would 'earnestly court' them in return . . . Paul's evaluation of the Judaizers' activity is that it was 'for no good' and that it sprang from a 'desire to exclude you'" [i.e., to exclude the Galatians from Paul] (194). "The Judaizers were seeking to 'shut' the Galatians 'out' of the sphere of Paul's influence and the gospel's, so that his readers would become dependent on them. Paul 'sought' his readers for the right reason ('in a commendable manner'), namely, their need to grow in grace, not only while he was with them but always" (Constable, 57).
- v. 19 **formed in you** Cf., "until you take the shape of Christ" (NEB); "'until you have taken the form of Christ,' as the embryo develops into the child. Compare the similar expression of 'growing up into the full stature of Christ,' Ephes. iv. 13" (J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 178).
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Family Time

Parents, our summer series in *PantegoKids* is called **True or False?** Like the adults, we will be studying the book of Galatians to discover how to live out true faith. *Our kids' lessons, however, will not textually align each week with adult teaching. Core competencies will also likely be different. We will be memorizing Galatians 5:22-26.*

George Boldt worked faithfully for years at a small hotel. One day an elderly couple came into the lobby and asked for a place to stay. Every room in town was occupied. Realizing the elderly couple had nowhere to sleep, Boldt offered them his room. They accepted because George insisted. The next morning when they were checking out, the man said to George, "You're the kind of man who should be managing the best hotel in the country. Some day I'm going to build that hotel and let you manage it." Years later, Boldt received a letter in the mail. It contained a round-trip ticket to New York City and a note from the man he had given his room to years before. When he arrived in New York, the man took him to a downtown corner where a huge building stood. "George, this is the hotel I built for you to manage." Boldt stared at the structure. The hotel was the Waldorf-Astoria! The man was William Waldorf Astor, one of the wealthiest men in the country. Boldt's faithfulness in managing a small hotel prepared him to manage one of the most magnificent hotels in this country.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Mt 25:14-30

1. What did the master instruct the servants to do?
2. What did each servant do?
3. Which one displeased the master?

What Do You Think

Faithful people are usually given more responsibility and can be trusted with more. Do you consider yourself a faithful person? Give examples. Is there an area where you need to work on being faithful? Pray and ask God to help you be faithful!

What R U Going To Do

There are so many stories of God's faithfulness to His people in the Bible. Look one up and read it with your family. Ask your parents for help if you need it. Write which story you chose on your Scrolls.

MEMORY TIME

Post the kid-friendly Core Competency and the Memory Verse throughout the house.

Core Comp

Faithfulness - I am loyal to God and others, so they know they can count on me.

Memory Verse

Galatians 5:26 - *Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you develop the beliefs, practices, and virtues of a follower of Jesus Christ called The 30 Core Competencies through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.