

Study 9
Galatians 4:8-11

1. How is the observance of certain holy days months or years equivalent to being enslaved to idolatry again?

Observing holy days, months, or years as a means of gaining righteousness before God is equivalent to idolatry because it replaces faith in Christ with reliance on human effort and religious rituals. Just as idol worshippers seek security and blessing from false gods, those who depend on religious observances for salvation submit themselves to a system that cannot truly free or justify them, making them slaves to works rather than recipients of grace.

2. How were the Judaizers and the Gentiles in Galatia idolaters in their own right?

The Judaizers in Galatia were idolaters because they treated the Mosaic Law as a means of salvation, making obedience to the law their ultimate source of righteousness rather than faith in Christ. Similarly, the Gentiles were idolaters in their previous pagan practices, worshiping elemental forces, false gods, and seeking security through rituals and superstitions. Both groups, though different in approach, were enslaved to systems that replaced dependence on God's grace with human effort and external observances.

3. Tim Keller writes in his book *Counterfeit Gods* "[An idol] is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give." Can you share what are the modern-day idols that we struggle with every day?
4. Paul's description of idols whatever their shape or form is that they are "weak and worthless" Gal 4:9. In what way are idols weak and worthless?

Idols are *weak* because they have no real power to save, transform, or provide lasting fulfillment, leaving people in spiritual bondage rather than true freedom. They are *worthless* because they offer only temporary or false security, failing to satisfy the deepest needs of the human soul, which can only be met by God. Ultimately, idols cannot give life, meaning, or righteousness, making them futile objects of worship.

b) Reflection Question. How have you personally experienced their weakness in your life please share.

5. Paul writes that the Galatians have come to "know God" and then further clarifies that rather they have been "known by God" What is he attempting to clarify and why does this matter?

Paul's clarification emphasizes that salvation is not primarily about human effort in seeking God, but about God's initiative in calling and knowing His people first. This matters because it reinforces that salvation is an act of divine grace, not human achievement—God's knowledge of believers secures their identity in Him, making their return to legalism or idolatry both unnecessary and absurd.

Case Study 1

1. April Devadass was a recent member of the 4th Baptist church who had been quite involved with the church for a few weeks but with time had gotten cynical. She noted how members were always coming late. She listened to the groups of members as they complained that particular individuals who were leaders would act in a selfish greedy manner. One leader in particular, she was told always fronted up to the Alpha meetings and never put a cent into the offering but always complained about the food. Another leader never lifted a finger to help in the ministry and just sat around. Still, these members with criticisms would never bring up the complaints to the individuals. April brought up these grouses on their behalf to the elders of the church and after a few months, she did not notice any change. She wanted the elders to tell these folks to change their behavior to try harder and that she expected better from the church leadership. She said Jesus expected better. The elders to whom she complained spoke to the individual leaders who were criticized and they denied such behavior. There was a lot of acrimony and the result was these leaders left the church. A new set of leaders were installed and they were less mature than the previous lot hence more complaints were forthcoming from April as she picked all these up from the ground. The elders asked her if she would like to be a leader but she declined and said "no time".
 - a. What do you think is the problem here? It is complex with many elements involved.

April is picking on the sins of her leaders however trivial they may be and magnifying them. She is echoing the private opinions of others amplifying them and forcing the elders to act. She is not doing it out of love but out of a sense of self-righteousness. They are leaders and supposed to be better sanctified hence she is excused from the very behavior she accuses the leaders of. The others in church are not criticizing but she is taking their negative perceptions of leaders and magnifying them.

- b. What is April's problem if any?

Here is a case where April has lost her bearing with regard to justification by faith for herself and for others in the church. She is insecure and critical of others because she sees them as deficient in their sanctification. She does not see them as justified sinners but as people who have been saved but are doing a poor job of completing their sanctification by works and behavior. Her target is leaders because the leaders represent the best that the church should be able to offer and yet she felt disappointed they fell short. She desperately wanted them to try harder and provide the example that she craved so she could complete her. salvation by trying to be

better too. Hence the critical spirit which is really a reflection of her own insecurity. Her view of the cross in justification is too small.

c. What should April have done instead? (Matt 18:15-17 is a useful reference)

April if she is interested in the sanctification of her leaders ought to spend a period of prayer for them to ensure her actions are out of love and not out of disappointment and self-righteousness. She should get to know these leaders to see if she can be in a position to understand the criticisms for herself and not rely on the comments of others. She has not seen them herself and chooses to believe the worst in people.

Then she should advise the people who have grouses to directly bring them to the attention of those they are unhappy about for the purpose of building them up and not tearing them down. If the people are not interested in approaching these leaders and bringing the matter up then they should not be passing comments and spreading rumors in order to cast aspersions and lower the church's esteem of its leaders. If the leader refuses to listen they are to bring someone else along and follow Matt 18 and in this way preserve the dignity of these leaders and not spread the rot.

April should also understand that we are all justified sinners, righteous in the eyes of God because of Jesus and yet still sinners, and that our sanctification rests not on human effort but on a clearer ever-increasing understanding of the cross of Jesus of what God has done for us. So everyone is on a journey including leaders and the aim is to help encourage each one in their journey and not be too outraged about their behavior whilst blissfully blind to our own faults. If April had a better grasp of her own sin and the magnitude of grace shown to her then she would be more understanding and be less self-righteous and judgemental.

d. Did the elders do the right thing by listening to April?

The elders should not have acted immediately as if they had investigated they would have found out how much criticism April had and how she was magnifying all the comments from the far corners of the church.

They should have encouraged her to ask those members who have passed those comments to pray for the ones they criticized and approach them directly and be prepared to be approached directly when others have issues with them.

April should have been advised not to go around with such a judgemental attitude to stir up trouble in the community.

e. How should they have handled the whole thing?

The elders should have done their own investigations discretely

Case Study 2

Celine had been a banker for many years and was attending the 3rd Baptist church. She has always struggled with depression and loneliness as she was single and pushing 40 with little prospect of getting married. She was overweight with oily skin and bad breath. She had a kind of funny inappropriate laugh which was a cross between a hyena's and a wolf's. She had difficulty loving others and was always critical of others in church dividing people up into the "good guys" and the "bad guys" based on how they treated her. A couple of her friends tried to help her do a makeover with a new hairstyle, braces, weight loss program, and a dermatologist but with her looks it would have taken major surgery hence that effort failed leaving her frustrated and more bitter.

The other friends in church told her to learn to love herself, pimples and all, and said to her unless she learned to love herself she could not get over her depression. She was taught to look at herself in the mirror each day and say to herself that she was a beautiful person, a wonderful person.

a. Why do you think the physical makeover program will always fail?

The physical makeover program whilst commendable, will always fail as physical beauty is a matter of perception and physical beauty over time will ultimately fail. The physical approach will miss her spiritual issue which is really a self-esteem built on looks rather than her value in the eyes of Jesus who died for her.

b. Do you think her other friend's advice about loving herself and looking at herself in the mirror will work?

There is often a tendency to mix popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others... But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. She must be able to warm herself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources like her looks and ability this is actually the root of holiness...

c. What should Celine do instead?

Takeaway

Paul warns the Galatians against returning to the bondage of the law and idolatry, emphasizing that true freedom comes through faith in Christ alone, not religious observances or human efforts. He urges them to trust in God's calling and grace rather than relying on their own works for salvation