

**COMMENTARY NOTES & EXCERPTS ...**

- Paul goes on to state that now that they are converted, they have a good beginning. He corrects his own language in his description of their conversion: “But now that you know God—or rather are known by God....” This correction is designed, not to teach that they did not know God, but to put the emphasis where Paul usually puts it: on God’s sovereign grace as the initiating force in conversion. He insists that people do not seek God (cf. Rom. 3:11: “no one who searches for God”); rather, God seeks people. Humans are so caught in their sin and so in love with their sin that they do not seek holiness and love in and of themselves (cf. 1 Cor. 8:3; 13:12; 1 John 4:19: “We love because he first loved us” [cf. v. 10]). [McKnight, S. (1995). *Galatians* (p. 216). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.]
- Here Paul describes their “new-but-bad situation” with the term principles, the same term he used in 4:3 for the Jewish past under the law. ... What is revolutionary here is that Paul considers “moving into Judaism” as nothing other than a reversion to “paganism,” to “non-gods” (cf. Gal. 1:6). He asks, “Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” Their move from idolatry to Christianity and now to Judaism is for Paul no different than a venture back into “idolatry” or “paganism.” [Ibid. (p. 217).]
- \*\*\*R. N. Longenecker says it well: Beyond question, Paul’s lumping of Judaism and paganism together in this manner is radical in the extreme. No Judaizer

would ever have accepted such a characterization of Torah observance; nor would those in Galatia who acceded to their message.... For Paul, however, whatever leads one away from sole reliance on Christ, whether based on good intentions or depraved desires, is sub-Christian and therefore to be condemned. [Ibid. (p. 217).]

- F. F. Bruce adds that this viewpoint is given “not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position.” Incidentally, Paul’s willingness to lump together both unconverted Jew and Gentile under the “elemental principles” encourages our application of the text of Galatians, which so often addresses the Jewish Christian problem, to all groups today. Every human being, Paul would say, is captive to the “element principles” in some way and is only set free by Jesus Christ. [Ibid. (p. 217).]
- Conversion to Christ meant breaking completely with the idolatrous religion and false gods of the surrounding culture. The centrality and finality of Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Christian message. Modern liberal Protestantism, infatuated with the ideologies of pluralism and syncretism, has tended to forget this essential evangelical truth. For some, evangelism has become a dirty word not to be used in polite company, or, worse, it has been redefined as the effort to help the adherence of non-Christian religions to discover the best in their own traditions in hopes that a general fellowship of the various world religions will eventually

emerge. Sadly, even some evangelicals have downplayed the doctrine of hell, the necessity of conversion, and the preaching of the cross in favor of the implicit universalism of many contemporary theologies. In many circles “sinners in the hands of an angry God” has been displaced by a truncated God in the hands of angry sinners. But Paul would have none of this. He knew, as Jonathan Edwards later wrote, that personal faith in Jesus Christ was “the only remedy which God has provided for the miserable, brutish blindness of mankind.... It is the only means that the true God has made successful in his providence, to give the nations of the world the knowledge of himself; and to bring them off from the worship of false gods.” [George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 311). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.]

- Here in Galatians he virtually equates Judaism with heathenism. To go forward into Judaism is to go backward into heathenism. Some interpreters, however, take this too far, claiming that Paul in effect demonizes the law, putting its observance in the same category as the pagan religions of his day (see esp. Hübner 1984: 33–34). So strong a conclusion, however, goes too far. Paul is pulling out all the rhetorical stops to convince the Galatians not to take what he views as a disastrous step. To accomplish this, he implies that putting themselves under the law, since the era of the law has ended with the coming of the promised Seed, is akin to returning to their impotent pagan religions. [Moo, D. J. (2013). *Galatians* (p. 277). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.]
- In some ways as significant, because so stark, is the manner in which

that view, carefully articulated and guarded by Trent, was defended by **the vigorous polemics of Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, who went so far as to write: The principle heresy of Protestants is, that saints may obtain to a certain assurance of their gracious and pardoned state before God.** While the expressed fear of Rome was that assurance would lead to a libertarian approach both in personal morals and ecclesiastical authority, there was clearly a further and more sinister element. As the Reformation was to demonstrate, if assurance of salvation is a reality, then the necessity of the extended sacramental process leading to final justification becomes null and void. Moreover, if assurance can be enjoyed by all at the beginning of the Christian life rather than—in only a few cases—be realized by the end of the Christian life, the power of the church is immediately reduced. What it cannot give, it cannot take away. It was this, in part, that made the Reformers teach that Rome had stolen the glorious birthright of Christians out of their own pockets and kept the children of God walking as children of darkness without the light of assurance. [Ferguson, Sinclair B.. *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (pp. 181-182). Crossway. Kindle Edition.]

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