



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

Galatians 4:8-20

New International Version

February 12, 2017

The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, February 12, 2017**, is from **Galatians 4:8-20**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Galatians 4:8) Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods.

The Bible teaches that whether someone will admit it or not, before they come to believe in God and trust their lives to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are slaves to those beings or things that are not God. Paul's letter describes and explains some of our behavior before we become Christians or totally committed to following Christ; it also explains the immoral and ungodly words and actions of many we read about or see around us. The way to freedom is receiving and continuing in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(Galatians 4:9) 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 forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?

After God reveals himself to us through the Word of God incarnate (our Lord Jesus Christ) and the written Word (the Bible), we know God and He knows us. Unfortunately, Paul learned that the Galatians were turning back to what had previously enslaved them. We must turn to Christ daily and turn from the evil powers around us that would enslave us again to remain free and empowered to serve the true God and others.

(Galatians 4:10) You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!

Sometimes when people have lost touch with God and/or have become spiritually impoverished, they will seek to regain what they have lost through special spiritual experiences spent on special days. The Galatians were adding either pagan ritual days or Jewish ritual days or both to their religious practices in an effort to regain what they had lost spiritually, or in order to have more religious experiences or attain a higher spirituality that was promised to them if they observed these special celebrations on special days.

(Galatians 4:11) I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you.

Paul honestly feared for the future of the Galatians. In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Christian is misled by Mr. Worldly-Wiseman before he reached the wicket gate (the entrance to the way of salvation); thankfully, Evangelist pointed him back to the way he should go, for Christian later came to the cross and his burden of sin fell away. Paul felt that he might have wasted his time, because the Galatians were returning to their previous ways of walking on the broad way to destruction (see Matthew 7:13). Paul was concerned that if the Galatians continued to walk away from Christ that he would have wasted his time—they would be lost for not doing what Paul taught about salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

(Galatians 4:12) I plead with you, brothers and sisters, become like me, for I became like you. You did me no wrong.

Paul pleaded with them because he loved them and they had loved him at one time too. Paul came to them and lived like a Gentile with them and not like a Jew with their ceremonial laws and customs that would have kept him separated from them. They did him no wrong as he lived among them and shared the gospel of Christ with them—they accepted him and his message as from God.

(Galatians 4:13) As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you,

Paul must have stopped in Galatia to recover from or prayerfully seek treatment for an illness. While he was there, Paul did not waste any of his time, but preached to them about Jesus. If they now turned away from the gospel of freedom and turned back slavery, then they would be worse off than before and Paul's time would have been wasted (see Matthew 12:43-45). They would not bear the good fruit of the Spirit of God.

(Galatians 4:14) and 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.

The Holy Spirit so empowered Paul and influenced the Galatians that they did not turn away from Paul because of his illness. They probably marveled that despite his illness he manifested faith in God, love for them, and spiritual power as he taught them about Jesus. They saw Christ Jesus in Paul and received Paul as a true messenger from God and not an outcast from God because of his unsightly sickness.

(Galatians 4:15) Where, then, is your blessing of me now? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.

In response to his teaching, they loved Paul so much that they blessed him or brought him great happiness, which was no longer the case because they were turning from faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and away from Paul as their spiritual father. Some believe this verse indicates that Paul had an eye disease or infection that so disfigured his eyes and face that his features would have repelled people. Because they loved Paul, the Galatians were willing to give Paul their eyes to replace his diseased eyes.

(Galatians 4:16) Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?

Paul knew from experience what Jesus also experienced: no matter how much love you express to and for someone when you tell them the truth, instead of all your good intentions you can find that they have become your enemy. The Galatians did not want to hear that faith in and following Jesus Christ could not be done while turning from Christ to practicing pagan ways or trusting in Jewish ceremonies as the way to be right with God.

(Galatians 4:17) 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 have zeal for them.

“Those people” could include their pagan friends or family members who were inviting them to or leading them back into pagan festivals or observing special days. “Those people” could include the Jews who lived in Galatia and/or the Jews who followed behind Paul to destroy the effect of his teaching when Paul led Jews and Gentiles to faith in Jesus. These Jews taught that observing Jewish customs and ceremonies were essential practices on the way of salvation. “Those people” wanted the Galatians to have zeal for them and their teachings while turning them away from Christ and the apostle. They wanted to enjoy the zeal of the Galatians that they knew Paul enjoyed.

(Galatians 4:18) It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always, not just when I am with you.

Some have a zeal for God, but without knowledge (Romans 10:2). Here Paul commends zeal if it is for a good purpose. Zeal based on knowledge of the truth with a good purpose should enable someone to help many come to trust in Jesus Christ alone for salvation. A hypocrite is not what he appears to be. The Galatians appeared to be zealous for the truth and for Paul when they were with him: they should have acted this way all the time toward Paul, and not have zeal only for those who are near them at the time.

(Galatians 4:19) My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

Paul again takes the position of their spiritual father. Paul was careful to warn them about the consequences of turning from trusting in Christ alone for their salvation, which would result in their losing their freedom and bring them into slavery once again to the world, the flesh, and the devil. It was painfully difficult for Paul to lead them to sincere saving faith in Jesus Christ when he first preached to them. Now Paul is willing to go through the whole process again so they will allow Christ to totally change their lives from the inside out through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Paul also knew that this process of turning back to Jesus Christ and trusting in Christ alone could be painful for the Galatians as they reexamined their lives and repented of their sins and sought to become like Jesus Christ morally and spiritually despite the opposition of others.

(Galatians 4:20) how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

Paul would have preferred to see them personally to truly learn what was going through their hearts and minds. He probably had such questions as: “Are they just confused and need clarification on a few facts about the Christian faith?” “Have they totally turned from faith in Christ and back to paganism?” “Have they been misled into practicing once again the rules and special days in the ceremonial laws of Moses that were designed to point to the coming of Jesus Christ and were not designed to save anyone from their sins.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. What is the way to be freed from slavery to beings and things that are not gods?
2. What can we do if we find ourselves turning back to the forces that once enslaved us?

3. What kind of example did Paul give when he preached the gospel to the Galatians despite an illness?
4. Why do you think the Galatians welcomed Paul despite his illness?
5. What can be the response of someone if we tell them the truth?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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Contact: P.O. Box 1052, Edmond, Oklahoma, 73083 and lgp@theiblf.com.