

Galatians 4:1-11

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[0 : 00] I don't know if you've ever been the wrong person in the wrong place at the wrong time. The story goes of Guy Gomer who was waiting for a job interview in the reception at BBC Television Centre.

! At the same time another Guy, Guy Cuney, was due to appear on live TV that morning. It was five minutes until the interview was due to air.

So the studio manager runs down to reception and goes over to one of the men, Guy. Guy Gomer answers yes. And he's whisked off to answer questions about an intricate lawsuit involving Apple on live TV.

He hadn't a clue what he was talking about. He was the wrong guy in the wrong place at the wrong time. He thought it was part of the interview, so he just kind of muddled through.

But you could tell looking at his face that he was totally out of his comfort zone. And if you can imagine that feeling of being in a situation of total unfamiliarity, of bemusement, being out of your comfort zone.

[1 : 19] That is how a Christian believer should feel with the things that the Galatians were doing. Look at verse 9 and 10 at the bottom of your sheets.

Paul says they are turning back to principles of the world, observing days, months, seasons and years. Paul's been tackling, hasn't he, the lifestyle of these people as they insist on paying for God's acceptance.

It's the drum that he keeps banging all through the letter. Being right with God doesn't happen like that. It comes through what Jesus has done by being a curse for us, paying for our debt in his death.

But here they are trying to supplement Jesus' work, aren't they? With their keeping and observing of certain laws. We've heard about circumcision already. And there are some more laws here, aren't they?

Observing of days and of months and of seasons and of years to be right with God. And he's saying to them in this section, you should feel totally uncomfortable with that.

[2 : 34] You should feel, Christians, like you're in the wrong place. Being the wrong people at the wrong time. Because of who God has made you to be now. You're living your life, Galatians, in the wrong place, first of all.

You're out of place. Look at where Paul says they were before they met with Christ. Look at verse 3. In the same way, we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world.

He says it again in verse 9. Why are you turning back to the elementary principles of the world? He says there is a place that specialises in seeking to pay for salvation.

The world. And he calls the way the world thinks the elementary principles. It's just a posh way of saying the basic values of the world without God.

So, no matter what your ethnicity, your sex, your worldview, your kind of religion, when you peel back the layers of things that are done in the world, this is always the approach.

[3 : 52] It's a universally accepted international value system of human merit, of human tradition, of human work and endeavours to save ourselves.

Whether you're into economics, or environmentalism, or politics, or works, or religion, or veganism, whatever it is.

When someone says they've got a new thing we can do to save the world's problems, outside of the solution that God gives in Jesus, it's always the same.

Paul says it's elementary, my dear. In a world ignoring the God of the Bible, they are the prescriptions and ordinances to which men and women all over the globe surrender themselves outside of Christ.

To be what they think they need to be in the sight of God. The elementary, the kind of basic principles of the world in which we live.

[4 : 56] And it's in the air that we breathe all around us. God says in Jesus, it is done, done, done. All that is necessary, the work that is necessary for you to be right with me is finished.

But the world in its elementary value says, no, forget Jesus, just carry on and do, do, do. In whatever way you can find, whatever works for you, to solve the problems of this world, and your broken relationship with the God who made it.

You know the old kids' chorus. He's got the whole world in his hands. I was stood outside the nursery gate the other week listening to her mum singing that song to their kids, to her kids, but she changed the words.

She sang, we've got the whole world in our hands. The whole world in our hands. Sadly, she was singing the elementary principles of the world to her kids.

The sad thing is, isn't it, that the Galatians, while they don't believe that's true, they live as if it is.

And if we've trusted in Jesus, why do we then still lean on our own performance?

[6 : 15] Even just a little bit. Why do we get crushed when we're aware of sin and when we fail? Or we feel proud when we think like we're doing really well?

Because we've gone back to the place that we came from, the world. Paul is saying, forget the Lord Jesus and his work and you're out of place as a Christian.

And you should feel totally foreign with your life. In this place with these principles. I don't know if you remember a couple of years ago, that defector who escaped from North Korea.

He managed to get into a 4x4, didn't he? He put his foot down and headed for the border. And he got out. He was rescued by medics in South Korea.

But for a while afterwards, for a few weeks, he complained of nightmares. Of being kidnapped and taken back to the place that he'd escaped from. He dreaded the sights and the sounds of that old place.

[7 : 20] And we, as people of faith, if we are, should be uneasy about it. We should have nightmares about any human merit of performance.

Because we're free of all that. We're free from the demands of human merit. We're free from the demands of the law to be right with God. Paul said in chapter 2, didn't he?

I died to the law in Christ. We'd be finding ourselves in the wrong place again altogether. In the world. If we were doing that.

So they're in the wrong place. Secondly though, they're living their lives in the wrong time. They're living lives in the wrong time. If I came in today wearing a waistcoat and a bowler hat, you'd think, get with the times.

What are you doing? But the Galatians are doing that. They're not just loitering around in the wrong place back in the world. But their lives are anchored in the wrong time in God's timeline.

[8 : 22] And look at verse 4. When the fullness of time had come, God sent his son, born of woman, born under the law to redeem those who were under the law.

Did you hear the kind of fullness of time thing going on there? Now the issue of time actually is a really big theme in Galatians.

And we've not highlighted it up until now. But it's there. The idea that performance related salvation that the Galatians are into. Is a characteristic not just of a place of the world without God.

But an age in God's history. In God's timeline there are two ages. There's no bronze age, ice age, all that.

There's just two ages. Marked by a transition when he sends his son into the world to be born of a woman. There's the before that and then there's the after that.

[9 : 25] And what Paul is saying is that the history of the world as we know it with its principles. At the birth of Jesus is beginning to end.

It's winding down. When he sends his son in the incarnation. God is indicating that history is coming to a close.

It's now the fullness of time. It's complete. If you've got a Bible maybe on your phone or later on.

You can go back to the very beginning of Galatians chapter 1.

In the introduction of Galatians. It's the bit you kind of read over isn't it. To get to the important stuff. But actually the important stuff often is there. Paul opens the letter.

Paul an apostle not from men through man. But through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Now we gloss over that bit don't we?

[10:23] But there Paul wants to kind of mention something that he's going to draw out throughout the whole letter. He mentions the resurrection.

There's only one other letter that he does that in. It's Romans. And what he's doing there is hinting at what he now talks about in detail. That in the coming of Jesus there is going to begin a new history.

Which is characterized by resurrection life. What happened in the resurrection was the mark of a new era. A history unlike the old history.

A history of resurrection life. And Jesus was the first to be raised of many like him. So that now Jesus has come. The last grains of sand in the old age are dropping to the bottom of the hourglass. And the bucket of God's history. Of measure of history. As we once knew it. Is filling to the very brim. He carries on in his introduction in chapter 1.

[11:29] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.

You see another reference there to time. And to an old age that is going to pass away with the coming of Jesus. With the work and the coming of Jesus.

The principles of the world now have a shelf life. Paul is saying. And they are coming to an end. And people who trust in Jesus are going to be delivered from that old age.

The age of do, do, do. And brought into a new one. And so back in chapter 4. To live according to our performance. Is effectively to be a spiritual throwback to a bygone age.

It is to flounder around in the past. In a world that is destined for the dustbin of history. Do, do, do.

[12:34] Is so last season. Says God. Paul says. Galatians get with the times of God's history. Because you are now modern people.

In God's timeline. In his calendar. You've been brought into the new age. But they are saying aren't they. We want to go back and work in the Victorian workhouse era.

Lord, Lord. Let me live in the past. Lord, please let it be about me and my works. Let me go back to the world and its ways. That is consigned to the dustbin of redemptive history.

I really want to be there Lord. And even the kind of most fashionable, trendiest ways that people come up with today. Of saving themselves.

Are a thing of the past. Says God. All the principles and prescriptions. And techniques of worldly religion.

[13:33] Of new age spiritualism. Of secular efforts. Of political reform. Of social conditioning. All of those things done without Jesus Christ. Are part of the human merit project.

And the human merit project is cancelled. That time is full. It's finished. It's old hat. And so if you were living like that.

You'd be living in the wrong place. And at the wrong time. But thirdly he says. You'd also be living as the wrong people. You'd be living as the wrong people.

There's another contrast. With what was once true about the Galatians. And what is now true about them. Did you notice in verse 1. They were slaves.

Weren't they? But now. Verse 4. Jesus has made them sons. So there's not only a time and a place change.

[14:32] For them. But a status change. And it's amazing. What has happened to Christians. Is the opposite of what has happened to Jesus Christ.

Look at verse 4. Notice where Jesus begins. It is the same as where Christians end. Verse 4.

Where does Jesus begin? He is the son of God.

And then he comes down doesn't he? He is born of a woman. And then he comes down a little bit more. He's born under the law. Think about that.

That the pre-existent. Eternal. Second person of the Trinity. Takes on a human nature. His human nature. And he comes under the demands of God's standards for our lives.

But what happens in exchange? We men and women are released from the demands of the law. We're redeemed from God's standards.

[15 : 34] And we are made, adopted as sons of God. We end where Jesus begins. C.S. Lewis puts it really nicely.

He says, The son of God became a man. That men might become sons of God. It's brilliant. And because of that status change. Paul says the Holy Spirit comes into a Christian's life. And allows them to call to God as their father. To say, Abba, father. The eternal son of God. Comes down. And he is born of a woman.

And he cries out, Mummy. So that we can call up to our father. In heaven. So, What the Galatians are doing is absurd.

They deny their status as children of God. And they live like slaves. Again. Mark Twain. He wrote the famous story, The Prince and the Pauper.

[16 : 35] It follows as a prince catches glimpse of a poor little boy playing outside the palace. And he welcomes him in and plays with him. Kind of in the throne room. But they look just like each other, it turns out.

So, in a mix-up, the king's guards get them confused. And they get the prince, the real prince, a prince, and throw him out of the palace.

It's a moment of grievous injustice in the story. As the prince is barred entry into the palace. And he's plunged into poverty. This is just not right, you feel.

No, he is the wrong person, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. He should be in the palace. And this is the greatest tragedy of all, isn't it?

Is when Christians plunge themselves back into the world with its principles, and take a leap backwards and forget who they are. Paul says, Paul says, you're no longer a slave, but a son, because of this exchange.

[17 : 47] No one has ever asked the queen's children, or grandchildren, to pay, to get into Buckingham Palace, have they? They don't, kind of, need one of those vouchers, you buy online. The gates fling open, and they come in, there's no questions asked.

And, the fear is, isn't it, that some of us might be waking up today, and realise that we drifted, into a place, and a time, where we no longer belong.

And we've forgotten who we are. Maybe we want the control. Maybe it just feels simpler, to follow a set of rules, doesn't it?

Maybe we still feel guilt, about our past. Maybe we feel the need to pay. Maybe we just don't believe, in this exchange. But, the moment you find yourself, doing something, to make up for your mistakes, and the moment you find yourself, motivated by guilt, when you feel proud, or when you feel crushed, then open your eyes, and look around you, and wake up.

Because, you're the wrong person, in the wrong place, at the wrong time. And you've started to live, like a slave again, in the world, and in the past. You're the prince, and you're acting like a pauper.

[19 : 14] God says, you may enter my palace, free of charge. Why wouldn't you be, allowed to? You are my sons. You're free, from the human merit project.

To enter, in the name of my son, Jesus Christ. And you are subject, to none apart from him. So wake up, and remember, where, and who, and when you are.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.