

## **FAQ - Galatians 4:9 – Is the "Law of God" Actually “Weak and Beggarly Elements?”**

Galatians 4:8-10 is often evidence that believers are to no longer to keep all of God's commandments, particularly His Sabbaths and Feast days. Context forces some absurd questions.

*Are the Sabbaths and Feast days "weak and beggarly elements?"*

*Are the Lord's Sabbaths and Feast days "elements of the world" that place us under "bondage?"*

*More importantly, does Scripture teach us that the "law of God" is bondage?*

These are the questions we need to ask ourselves and test to Scripture. These questions force us to examine and apply the surrounding context, instead of injecting our own bias into the text.

**Ga 4:8** Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

**Ga 4:9** But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

**Ga 4:10** Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

In relation to God's law, Galatians is perhaps the single most confusing letter of Paul's. Once someone discovers that the whole Bible is true and that nothing in God's Word is abolished, it is not long before someone states "go read Galatians again." This is because many mistakenly believe Galatians teaches against obedience to God's law.

In reality, Paul is correcting the false doctrine of justification through God's law. As a result, throughout the letter, Paul teaches the correct and simple process of salvation in faith by grace to counter this false doctrine. Nowhere does Paul teach against obedience to God's law, just against the doctrine of salvation by God's law. It is the ability to discern the difference between legalism and obedience that enables a reader of Paul's letter to draw sound doctrinal conclusions.

### **A Brief Introduction on Paul's Writings:**

Paul is the only author of Scripture in which we are issued a clear warning about His writings as being rather "difficult to understand" (2 Peter 3:15-17). According to Peter, Paul's readers need to be stable and educated (know God's Word) or otherwise they are at risk of twisting and distorting Paul's writings to make the "error of lawless men" (make void God's commandments). Thus, anytime Paul is teaching about law (which was quite often), we should exercise extreme caution to ensure we understand exactly what Paul intended us to understand, and not make the "error of lawless men." We need to ensure that we read Paul with a solid Scriptural foundation and approach his writings from a first century Hebraic perspective.

*Why are Paul's letters "difficult to understand" as it relates to the law?*

Paul does not always clearly distinguish what law he is referring to in every verse. The surrounding context is always necessary to clue us in. If we always assume Paul is referring to God's law in his writings, then we will build and subscribe to a faulty (law abolishing) theology, making the "error of lawless men." Instead, to avoid this error, we need to exercise extra effort in extracting valuable context when studying Paul's letters.

What we frequently find is that an often cited verse here and another verse there are extracted from Paul's letters out of context, to support such faulty doctrine or theology. If it is already difficult to determine what

law Paul is referring to in the reading of Galatians 2,000 years ago (as Peter warns us), it should be simple to imagine how such poor methodology could further compound such confusion when isolated verses are quoted out Paul's letters.

Many do not even realize that Paul references different laws, and that is of course the root cause of the problem. As it turns out, Paul clearly establishes a pro- "law of God" sentiment in his writings (i.e. Ro 3:31; 1 Timothy 1:8), but also expresses a very anti- "law of sin (and death)" and anti- "commandments of men" position (i.e. Col. 2; Ro 6:14; 8:1-3; Ga 2:4;4:3). If we do not establish which specific law or commandments Paul is referencing in his writings when isolating verses, we often decide to quote them to support our particular theology. Consequently, the theology we subscribe to might resemble a doctrine that Peter warns us about (2 Peter 3:15-17). So it should serve us well to examine these different "laws."

### **A Brief Introduction on Paul's usage of the word "law:"**

As covered above, when reading Paul many make the unfortunate mistake of assuming that the word "law" in Paul's letters is always referencing God's law. In reality, Paul mentions several different types of laws. We need to equip ourselves with the ability to recognize the difference between these laws before reading his letters, especially Galatians. If we can not accurately identify the correct law Paul is teaching on, then Paul will certainly be "difficult to understand", as opposed to easy to understand. We might not even realize that we have confused ourselves.

#### **1) "Law of Sin (and death)" vs. the "Law of God"**

**Example #1: Ro 7:22-25** For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:

But I see **another law** in my members, warring against the **law of my mind**, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the **law of sin**.

**Example #2: Ro 8:2** For the **law of the Spirit** of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the **law of sin and death**.

- The law of the Spirit of life that was in Y'shua (Jesus) is the same as the Law of God (Spiritual mind)(Ro 8:5-10). The Spirit teaches us His Truth (John 14:17,26)(John 16:13)(1 Jn 2:27) and God's law is the Truth (Ps 119:142)(Mal 2:6)(Ro 2:20)(Gal 5:7)(Ps 43:2-4)(Jo 8:31-32). The Spirit can not be separated from God's law, as it is through the Spirit that we are to keep God's law (Ez. 36:26-27)(Jer. 31:31-33) thus God still only has one law (light) for His people to be obedient to and to bless His people (Lev 19:34)(Lev 24:22)(Num 9:14)(Num 15-16)(Num 15:29)(Is 42:6)(Is 60:3)(Mat 5:14) (Eph 2:10-13)(Ac 13:47)(Ro 11:16-27)(Jer31:31-34)(Ez 36:26-27)(Ez 37)(1 Jo 2:10)(1 Jo 1:7). The "law of God" is "life" (Job 33:30)(Ps 36:9)(Prov 6:23)(Rev 22:14) and God's law is still Truth and instructions in righteousness (Ro 3:31; 7:12,21; 1 Ti 1:8; 2 Tim 3:16-17).

- The "law of sin" leads us all into death (Ro 5:12) which is why Paul also calls it the "law of sin and death" (Ro 8:2).

- The "law of God" is also referred to as "commandments of God" (1 Cor. 7:19). Paul delights in and serves the "law of God" (Ro 7:22-25).

- The war between the "law of sin" and the "law of God" continues in all believers. Our goal is the Spiritual mind that serves the "law of God", which is against the carnal "law of sin."

- It is the "law of sin" that brings us into captivity and bondage, not the "law of God." The "law of God" is defined as freedom in Scripture (Ps 119:45)(Jam 1:25, 2:12). The "law of sin" is defined as bondage. Thus disobedience (sin) is bondage and obedience is freedom. Commandments of men and "elements of the world" are also considered bondage according to Paul (Ga 2:4;4:3), which are also not the "law of God."

## 2) “Oral Law” and “Commandments of Men”

In the first century, mainstream Jewish leadership practiced something called the “oral law” (Talmud). Paul refers to this doctrine as the “works of law” or “commandments of men.” Y’shua (Jesus) also referred to the “oral law” as the “traditions of the elders” that violates the “law of God” (Mark 7; Matthew 23). There is much that can be said about the “oral law”. However, at a very basic level, the “oral law” consisted of doctrines, teachings, and commandments of men that much of the mainstream Jewish leadership of the first century elevated above the commandments of God. In some cases the “oral law” even contradicted the commandments of God. This major issue of the first century is also the point and purpose of Y’shua’s (Jesus’) teaching in Matthew 5, and many of His points of contention with Jewish leadership during His ministry. The critical point to remember here is that there is a clear difference between the “commandments of men” and the “commandments of God.” In Galatians Paul refers to such doctrine, elements of the world, and commandments of men as bondage (Ga 2:4;4:3).

Now that we briefly understand the different laws that Paul references we need to understand the three major issues Paul needs to address in his letter to the Galatians.

### A Brief Overview on the Debates in Galatia (The Context):

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, there are three (3) major issues Paul is correcting:

#### 1) Galatians are falsely taught to keep God’s law for salvation.

False teachers (“Circumcision Party” - Ga 2:7-12; 5:12 and “Works of Law” - Ga 2:16;3:2;3:5;3:10) began promoting their doctrine (“oral law”) that required Gentiles to be circumcised in a certain way, and also taught that all commandments of God coupled with commandments of men need to be followed before one can be justified for salvation.

**Ga 2:16** Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

This theme continues throughout Galatians: (i.e. Ga 2:21; 3:2; 3:3; 3:5; 3:11; 5:4)

#### “Works of Law”

*Qumran document 4QMMT (4Q394-5) gives us some insight to a Jewish sect in the first century called “Works of Law” The Jewish sect of Works of Law believed many things in their doctrine that were contrary to God’s law, and also taught that Gentiles could not be saved. They were, in effect, not living God’s law in faith but in fact living their own invented law-which was a twisted form of God’s law (similar practice of the 6 sects of the Pharisees). Their doctrine was very similar to those of the “Circumcision Group. This would be why Galatians 6:13 states that this group (that is supposedly teaching God’s law for salvation) does not even keep God’s law themselves”*

#### “Circumcision Party”

*The Jewish sect of the “Circumcision Party” appears in Acts 10:45;11:2; 15; Ga 2:7-12 Ga 5:12; Eph. 2:11; Titus 1:10.*

#### 2) The Galatians began to focus on pleasing men (commandments of men) instead of pleasing God (commandments of God).

As a result of the doctrine from the “Works of Law” and the “Circumcision Party”, the Galatians became more consumed with pleasing men (following commandments and doctrines of men) than pleasing God (following commandments of God).

**Ga 1:10** For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.

This theme continues throughout Galatians: (i.e. Ga 1:10; 1:11; 2:3; 4:3; 4:9; 6:12; 6:13)

God's commandments are designed to love God (1 John 5:2-3). Commandments of men draw man's attention to men and negate the purpose of God's commandments (Mark 7).

### **3) The Galatians were also still engaging in their cultic sun god worship practices and holidays.**

We also know that converted Gentiles in Galatia were falling back into the cultic pagan temple practices they were previously familiar with. This is why James focused on correcting such pagan activity first. For example, he did this in Acts 15:20, before the Gentiles could be expected to learn the rest of the "law of God" in the synagogues every Sabbath (15:21). Paul addresses this problem in more detail in Galatians 4, as it relates to being in bondage in "elements of the world" (sun god worship) and "going back" to their old gods; serving them in their holidays and established calendar patterns.

As a result of all of the above problems, Paul's solution was to teach the Galatians that the law can not justify anyone into God's plan of salvation. Therefore Paul focused on faith and grace to counter the several (primarily 3) false teachings penetrating and impacting Galatia. Many make the mistake that because Paul is teaching against being justified by works of the law (legalism), that Paul was teaching against God's law. Legalism (wrong) and obedience (right) are two completely different concepts. What we find is that Paul simply teaches the Galatians the process of salvation (simply removing the curse of the law).

So now we should have the foundation necessary to examine the often misunderstood verse(s).

#### **The Verses in Question: Galatians 4:8-10**

**Ga 4:8** Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

**Ga 4:9** But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

**Ga 4:10** Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.

#### **First we should establish some context.**

**Ga 4:3** Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:

Galatians 4:3 clearly states that the context is "elements of the world." So can verses 4:9-10 be referencing the "law of God" (Sabbaths and Feast days)? If the "law of God" is worldly instead of Spiritual, then that might make some sense. However:

**Ro 7:14** For we know that the law is spiritual

From that alone we know that the context can not be the "law of God" in verses 4:9-10. However, we do not need to stop there. There is much more context to pull in to really understand what Paul is teaching.

#### **Is God's Law Bondage?**

1) Verses 1-6 clearly state that before Christ we were in bondage under the elements of the world (not bondage under the "law of God" like some teach). God's law is not of the world, and God's law cannot be called both freedom and bondage without creating a contradiction in scripture.

**Ps 119:44-45** I will always obey your law, for ever and ever. I will walk about in freedom, for I have sought out your precepts.

**Ja 1:25** But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

**Ja 2:12** So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Paul is declaring the ways of the world as bondage, not the ways of God. God's ways (law) are freedom from man's ways (world's ways) in the sense that God's ways are set apart (holy) from the world's ways (bondage). The only people in all of scripture that ever referred to God's ways as bondage and refused to do them were the ones He was angry with. The ones that were obedient to His ways/path (Psalm 119) were stated to be after His own heart (Acts 13:22). God's ways are freedom from the world's ways. We are "called out" to not be of the world. It is actually quite simple. To live according to the world's ways is to go back to Egypt, back to bondage.

2) (Verses 8-19) A massive error often occurs here. It is easily cleared up and the truth then becomes undeniable. Often, verses 8-19 are used as evidence that we are no longer to be obedient to God's Feast days and Sabbaths (9-10). Read it again, and note what is underlined in the below.

**Galatians 4:8-20** But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all. You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first. And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. What then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me. Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

They zealously court you, but for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them. But it is good to be zealous in a good thing always, and not only when I am present with you. My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.

**Let's create a list of some key points from the above:**

1. These are Gentile converts that Paul is talking to.
2. They used to serve other gods.
3. Now they know the True God.
4. Even so, they GO BACK to WEAK AND BEGGERLY ELEMENTS.
5. And they DESIRE AGAIN to go back into BONDAGE.
6. What they are turning back to is observing certain days, months, and years.

Perhaps that may have cleared up the confusion already, but let's discuss it in more detail. Remember, it is all about context and using scripture to interpret scripture, not bringing our own bias into it.

The assumption, which is the root of the error often made in these verses, is that the observation of the days, months, and years are God's Feast days, Sabbaths, etc. Therein lies the bias that is usually injected into this text. It rarely crosses anyone's mind that the Gentiles worshiped days, months, and years of their

sun gods before they came to faith in the True God. If we were asked which holidays were bondage, God's holy (set apart) days or sun god worship days, what should we suppose the correct answer to be?

### **What does the text say?**

Let's ask this: How do Greeks, who used to worship false gods (who had their own sun god holidays and observations), who now worship the True God (verse 9), somehow go back to worshipping God's Feast days? That is a little difficult to answer, isn't it? How can they go back to something that they never used to do? See how the paradigm that ignores context brings in false assumptions fails when tested?

Let's ask this, how do Greeks, go back, to "weak and beggarly elements," even if we are making the mistake of calling the weak and beggarly elements from God? That is also a little difficult to answer, is it not? These are Greeks. If they are going back to something, they are going back to what scripture says they came from, which is a false god worship system (verse 8). Do we not think that false god's do not have their own holidays? They certainly do today. In fact, we retained those same pagan sun god days and cultic traditions in the form of Christmas and Easter. Again, the bias and assumptions fail.

The Galatians were being influenced left and right. We have the "Circumcision Party" attempting to have them follow God's law and the oral law (Talmud) as a means to salvation, instead of simply for obedience. That is one problem. We also have the Galatians reverting back to their old holidays and traditions, likely from pressure from unconverted friends and family.

If the Galatians suddenly gave up all of their false god (sun god) holidays and traditions and focused on God's holidays, imagine how difficult must that have been. They would have left traditions and special days that they were culturally raised in, and other family members and friends likely still even practiced. The Galatians were trying to do both; God's days and sun god worship days. They were simply trying to please men at the expense of God's Word.

**Ga 1:10 For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.**

This is not the first time that happened in scripture and God has never found it acceptable. Some simple encyclopedia research today will bring to light which days are the sun god worship days and the cultic traditions related to them if one is really interested.

Acts 15:20 is evidence that those in Galatia were falling back into the cultic temple worship that Gentiles were familiar with in their culture.

**Ac 14:26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. (Galatia)**

**Ac 15:20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. (sun god cultic worship traditions)**

Let's ask this, since when are God's Feast days and Sabbaths called "weak and beggarly elements in scripture?" Where did that strange concept come from, men or Scripture? Didn't Paul define bondage, teachings and doctrines of men, and principles of the world, as the weak and beggarly elements? Are these not the same thing Y'shua (Jesus) railed against (Mark 7; Matthew 23)? Y'shua (Jesus) spent His whole ministry teaching, rebuking, and correcting from the Law of Moses and now we are saying it is bad?

Paul kept the feast days and Sabbath according to numerous documentations in the Book of Acts. Who wants to tell Paul that his actions put him in bondage because of the weak and beggarly elements of God's Word? Even more disturbing, who wants to tell Y'shua (Jesus) He was in bondage given the things He practiced and taught ("law of God")? Who wants to tell God that His Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23) is bondage when we are celebrating it and observing it in the 1000 year reign (Zech. 14)?

The bottom line is this, if we ignore the context here, and allow doctrines of men to insert the context for us that contradicts His Word, it is going to start looking ridiculous if one really gives scripture the attention and study that it deserves.

**1Th 5:21** Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

**2Ti 2:15** Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Ask yourself the hard questions. Ask others. Ask the Word. Test your faith. Challenge yourself. Test everything.

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