

July 8, 2007

“Striving to Remember”  
Galatians 4:8-20

FCF: Prone to forget, to lose sight of who/what we are

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because of our tendency to forget the most beautiful things,  
(magnet) we must continually strive to remember all that God has done.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

A recent headline of no small encouragement – “*Report: Alzheimer’s Vaccine Just Years Away.*” Not just slowing the progression of the illness, these shots could possibly stop it in its tracks. Given the hurt suffered by so many families, this is a ray of hope. Alzheimer’s is a thief, robbing its victims and those who love them of so much – so many plans made, so many memories lost, so many very beautiful things forgotten.

I do not say this lightly. But in the heartfelt plea of our text, Paul alludes to much the same – the possibility of so much lost, of so many very beautiful things forgotten.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Galatians 4:8-20

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“*How can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?*” Given all that they had been rescued from and delivered to, that is a striking question. Paul alluded to this earlier in chapter four and we talked about it a few weeks ago. These “elemental forms of religion,” striving to attain a right standing with God based on our own efforts, whether through pagan superstition or pseudo-Christian legalism, amount to the same thing – a hollow self-righteousness that is a spiritual enslavement. Paul’s readers had given into this by their stubborn adherence to the Jewish ceremonial calendar (**READ Galatians 4:10-11**). As with so many things, faithfully observing such days was not wrong in itself but insisting that it had to be done to be right with God was to forsake the Lord Jesus.

The point Paul is making here is vital. This former Pharisee now made “the apostle of the heart set free” is saying that outside of the Christian gospel, outside of coming to God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, it really doesn’t matter what you do. Because bondage is bondage, misery is misery, and slavery is slavery.

A striking point well worth our taking to heart. Like the Galatians, we need to hear this repeatedly. For we are so prone to forgetting the most beautiful things – the festal joy and freedom that are ours in Christ we will trade in for a cold bowl of porridge. We are so foolish and wayward, so easily distracted and lured away. And so we need to hear this good news again and again that it might sweep over us anew, continually striving to remember all that God has done. And He has done so much. So very much.

**I. HAVING THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

Consider this. First among these beautiful things to be remembered and never to be forgotten, we have been given “the knowledge of God” (**READ Galatians 4:8-9**).

*A) A Personal Knowledge*

Paul is speaking here not of a knowledge of ideas but of personal relationship.

1. Knowing God

There was a time his readers did not know God. But through hearing and believing the gospel they had come into this intimacy – beyond friendship or kinship but sonship.

2. Being known by God

They now knew God – not exhaustively but truly. And more, they themselves had come to be “known” in the deepest, most intimate and significant sense by the living God.

### B) *A Pastoral Plea*

And so flowing from the reality of this personal knowledge comes a pastoral plea.

#### 1. Paul's concern

For Paul is perplexed, exasperated, concerned. Was it all in vain? How he had labored for them! He had preached to them, persevered for them, endured persecution for their sake – feeling not just the insults thrown at him but the stones as well. Read Acts 13-14.

#### 2. Paul's calling

His concern is deep. And highly significant considering his calling as an apostle. That his readers had at least at one time recognized the significance of this will come up again.

You see, if Paul, as an apostle, is an authorized spokesman of the risen ruling Jesus, who then, ultimately, is expressing this perplexity, this passion, this pain for these people? JESUS! The same One who had given Himself for them they were now giving up on. And the same One they had turned from was now calling them to turn back.

#### *Application:*

So who, even today, is calling us back from our formalistic, cold, clinical worship and service? JESUS! Who longs for us to turn from our ritualism where we substitute religious activity for dependence upon Him? JESUS! Who longs for us to turn from our ethicism where we elevate certain behaviors to be taken as proof of authentic spirituality and loyalty to Him? JESUS! What Paul is showing us here is that when we forget the gospel, we are forgetting Jesus – “the most beautiful thing” of all. We have been given the knowledge of God. May we not lose sight of that. Such is the first thing here.

## II. **LOVING THE WORD OF GOD**

The second of the beautiful things to be remembered is the Word of God itself (**READ Galatians 4:12-16**). Note the contrasts here in the Galatians' attitude to Paul.

### A) *Their Feelings Then*

Their feelings then – back in the past at their first encounter – were so different.

#### 1. Paul's condition

Paul was suffering from a “condition,” a “bodily ailment.” We don't know what it was – likely the “thorn in the flesh” he mentions elsewhere, possibly malaria, poor eyesight, even epilepsy. We don't really know. Apparently, it left him somewhat disfigured.

#### 2. Their response

And yet, instead of rejecting him, the Galatians received him. Why? Because they knew who was speaking, working through Paul – the Lord Jesus Himself. That was then.

### B) *Their Feelings Now*

But things had changed. The feelings they had then were not the feelings now.

#### 1. Paul's standing

Paul's standing in their eyes was diminished. The “blessing” they felt regarding him, the “satisfaction” in him was gone. Their dear friend was now deemed their dire enemy.

#### 2. Their response

Hospitality had given way to hostility. Estrangement had settled in. Not that his preaching, the message he proclaimed had changed. But their stance towards it had.

#### *Application:*

The Word of God is a beautiful thing to be remembered. Sometimes this message and its messengers tell us things we don't want to hear. Sometimes this message tells the messengers things they don't want to hear. But given this new relationship into which we have been embraced – adoption and sonship – we should rejoice in hearing the Word, any

word, from our Father. Knowing that even when it is hard to hear (restraining us from going in one direction, constraining us to go in others), He speaks it only for our good.

We have been given the Word of God, the Word of the Father spoken to His beloved children. May we not lose sight of that and ever turn away from it.

### III. BECOMING LIKE THE SON OF GOD

Which takes us to the third of these beautiful things not to be forgotten. As we hear this Word, changes occur. For our Lord intends to make us like Himself (**READ Galatians 4:17-20**). Notice another contrast – the attitudes held towards the Galatians.

#### A) *The Desires of Paul's Opponents*

1. To separate them from the gospel

The desire of Paul's opponents was to separate his readers from the gospel.

2. To woo them to themselves

Flattering, fawning, fussing with no “good purpose” that they might have a following. Which is where Christianity as a system of rules and regulations inevitably takes you – subjection to gurus. But true Christianity as freedom takes you to maturity in Christ.

#### B) *The Desires of Paul's Heart*

1. Not the favor of men

We see that in the desires of Paul's heart for them – not the favor of men. The maternal imagery used here is not to keep them tied to his apron strings but to speak of his pain for them. These false teachers wanted themselves at the center of the lives of their charges.

2. But the formation of Christ

But Paul wanted Christ – for them to become like Him. Not all at once but slowly and surely. Or, as George Whitefield put it, “*Christ formed in the heart.*” Glorious indeed!

#### *Application:*

This too is a beautiful thing to be remembered. God's desire is to make us like Himself, like His Son, like our older brother. We talked about this a few weeks ago. It's not just that the Son was sent forth to secure us. But the Spirit was sent forth to assure us – Christ dwelling in us, formed within us, transforming us. Recognizing the wonder of this, the work begun in us and through us, would we forget or just walk away from this? Why on earth would we? It's not too good to be true but too good to be forgotten.

### CONCLUSION:

By the grace of God we must determine to remember who and whose we are, where and what we once were and never to go back, fighting this forgetfulness, striving to remember. A good example of this is John Newton (**READ Stott quote, p.110**):

*He was an only child and lost his mother when he was seven years old. He went to sea at the tender age of eleven and later become involved, in the words of one of his biographers, 'in the unspeakable atrocities of the African slave trade'. He plumbed the depths of human sin and degradation. When he was twenty-three, on 10 March 1748, when his ship was in imminent peril of foundering in a terrific storm, he cried to God for mercy, and he found it. He was truly converted, and he never forgot how God had had mercy upon him, a former blasphemer. He sought diligently to remember what he had previously been, and what God had done for him. In order to imprint it on his memory, he had written in bold letters and fastened across the wall over the mantelpiece of his study the words of Deuteronomy 15:15: 'Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman (a slave) in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.'*

Christian, that is what you are – once a slave now made a child of God. There are pressures all around us and temptations within us, threatening to drown out this glorious song and recast our ideas as to who we are. Don't forget. Remember. Remember.

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