

## The Church Ethic 312: Celebrating Christmas



biblestudying.net

Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

Copyright 2012

### Galatians 4 – A Condemnation of Jewish Holy Days or Pagan Holy Days?

This study will trace a series of 18 facts, which demonstrate that Paul's comments in Galatians 4 are referring to pagan holidays, not Jewish holidays.

- 1.) It is a fact that from as early as the book of Acts itself, the pressure for Gentile converts (and indeed even faithful Jews) to keep the Law of Moses was an important issue addressed throughout the New Testament.

In fact, this concern not only arises in Galatians, but it is also the subject of concern in Romans 14-15 and Colossians 2:10-23, in which case Paul very clearly states that it is wholly acceptable to keep the Jewish holidays prescribed by Moses but also reinforces that it is not necessary to do so. Specifically, in Romans 14:14, we know that it is the imposition of Jewish kosher food laws that Paul has in mind, and by extension Jewish holy days as well, because Paul directly refers back to the teaching of Jesus Christ in which Jesus abolished the Jewish kosher dietary laws (Matthew 15:1-20, Mark 7:1-23, and Luke 11:39-41).

**Romans 14:14** I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that *there is* nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.

Specifically in Colossians 2:11-15, the Law of Moses is spoken of as the handwriting of ordinances, which has been blotted out. No doubt this is referential to God writing on the tablets with his own hand. Likewise, the Greek words for “an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*” correspond directly to the three levels of Jewish holy days, the annual days, the monthly new moons, and the weekly Sabbaths.

**Colossians 2:11** In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: 12 Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with *him* through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. 13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 *And* having spoiled principalities

and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. 16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days*: 17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ.

Furthermore, we know from Acts 20 (and most likely 1 Corinthians 16:8) that at least from time to Paul himself continued time to celebrate the Jewish holiday of Pentecost.

**Acts 20:16** For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

**1 Corinthians 16:8** But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost.

In Acts, Paul seems most ardent to celebrate this day in Jerusalem with the Jews and not doubt the Jewish Christians in particular, which indicates the Jewish Christians were still celebrating this Jewish annual holiday, including Paul himself. 1 Corinthians 16:8 would imply that the Gentile Ephesian Christians also kept this Jewish holiday since Paul was to stay with them until the completion of that feast. This departure date is most likely not arbitrary but due to how special it would be for Paul to remain and spend that day with them.

Ultimately, since Paul himself celebrated the Jewish annual holidays, we are forced to conclude that the holidays that are described as permissible but not required in Romans 14 and Colossians 2 are Jewish holidays, not pagan religious feasts, and that Romans 14 and Colossians 2 are indeed pronouncing such Jewish holidays as permissible but not required. Consequently, from these contexts in which it is clear that Paul has in mind the imposing of the holy days prescribed in the Jewish Law, it is equally clear that keeping Jewish holy days was no basis for condemning any one. And consequently, neither was keeping such Jewish holy days in and of itself necessarily a sign of bondage to Moses. As Paul himself hints, such holy days could now be kept out of memorial for those truths and events they foreshadowed, but no longer out of obligation.

- 2.) It is a fact that one of the main themes of Galatians is Paul's refutation of the pressure put upon the Galatians to embrace a need to keep the Law of Moses.
- 3.) It is also a fact that when Paul spoke of bondage in the New Testament, he outlined two distinct types, bondage to the Law of Moses and bondage to sins, particularly in Romans 6:6-23 and 8:, where his language is quite conceptually similar to his comments in Galatians 5.

This can quickly be seen by cross referencing the New Testament usage of the Greek word for bondage found here in Galatians 4 and those words related to it.

### **1398 douleuo**

from 1401; TDNT-2:261,182; v

AV-serve 18, be in bondage 4, do service 3; 25

1) to be a slave, serve, do service

1a) of a nation in subjection to other nations

2) metaph. to obey, submit to

2a) in a good sense, to yield obedience

2b) in a bad sense, of those who become slaves to some base power, to yield to, give one's self up to

In fact, reading through the rest of Romans 7 and 8, it is clear that Paul often speaks both of freedom from bondage to the Law of Moses with its punishment of death and freedom from slavery to sin side by side, just as he does in Galatians 3-5. So, we cannot assume that just because "bondage" is mentioned in Galatians 3 and because Paul has already spoken against servitude to the Law of Moses in the preceding chapters of Galatians that he necessarily could only have in mind bondage to the Law in chapter 4. Elsewhere Paul speaks of both types of bondage in close proximity and there are unavoidable textual cues in Galatians 4 regarding which type of bondage he had in mind at that time.

- 4.) It is a fact that after chapter 4, in chapter 5 of Galatians Paul does indeed touch on both of these two forms of bondage, commanding Christians to turn away from bondage to sin, including idolatry.
- 5.) It is a fact that in Galatians 4:8, Paul uses a phrase that specifically identifies his change of focus from the Jewish Law to the past conduct of the Gentile Galatians who formerly served idols.
- 6.) It is a fact that Paul understood that the nations of the world were ruled by fallen angels and demon spirits.

**Ephesians 6:12** For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high 2032 places.

### **2032 epouranio**

from 1909 and 3772; TDNT-5:538,736; adj

AV-heavenly 16, celestial 2, in heaven 1, high 1; 20

1) existing in heaven

1a) things that take place in heaven

1b) the heavenly regions

1b1) heaven itself, the abode of God and angels

1b2) the lower heavens, of the stars

1b3) the heavens, of the clouds

1c) the heavenly temple or sanctuary

2) of heavenly origin or nature

Notice that in verse 12, Paul states that these principalities, powers, and spiritual rulers are "in high places." The Greek word for "high" here is "epouranios" (Strong's No. 2032), which simply means, "existing in heaven" and "the heavenly regions." In fact, this same word is used earlier in Ephesians 3:10 to once again

refer to these principalities and powers. However, as we can see, here in Ephesians 3:10 it is actually translated into the English word heavenly.

**Ephesians 3:10** To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,

So, from Ephesians 6, we can plainly see that Paul is identifying that these spiritual rulers do indeed reside in the heavenly realms above. This will become more important momentarily when we discuss Paul's use of the Greek word "anothen" in Galatians 4 verse 9.

- 7.) It is a fact that the stars and planets were worshipped in their astronomical cycle as representations of the Gentile gods, who Paul viewed as fallen angels and demon spirits masquerading as gods.
- 8.) It is a fact that Paul mentions the bondage of observance of times after turning his focus away from the Law to the Gentiles' former service to pagan gods.
- 9.) It is a fact that Paul's comments in verses 8-9 are simply meant to a former service to pagan gods at a time when the Gentiles did not know God, interrupted by a time of knowing God and serving him, followed (after knowing the true God) to another time of service to the false gods once again (rather than Paul in this instance fearing bondage to the Law of Moses).
- 10.) It is a fact that when Paul speaks of the Galatians turning to bondage, he uses not only the Greek word for "to turn" but also the Greek word for "again" indicating clearly that the Galatians were turning back to a state they'd formerly been in, which in the context can be no other than Paul's immediately preceding reference to their former service to false gods (and consequently Paul is not referring at this point to service to the Law of Moses).

**Galatians 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?

### 1994 epistrefw

from 1909 and 4762; TDNT-7:722,1093; v

AV-turn 16, be converted 6, return 6, turn about 4, turn again 3, misc 4; 39

1) transitively

1a) to turn to

1a1) to the worship of the true God

1b) to cause to return, to bring back

1b1) to the love and obedience of God

1b2) to the love for the children

1b3) to love wisdom and righteousness

2) intransitively

2a) to turn to one's self

2b) to turn one's self about, turn back

2c) to return, turn back, come back

### **3825 palin**

probably from the same as 3823 (through the idea of oscillatory repetition); ; adv  
AV-again 142; 142

1) anew, again

1a) renewal or repetition of the action

1b) again, anew

2) again, i.e. further, moreover

3) in turn, on the other hand

- 11.)** It is a fact that when Paul speaks of the Galatians turning to be in bondage again, later in the same verse he also uses another Greek word that can mean "again" but primarily and more often means "from above, from a higher place," which most likely indicates Paul has in view service to those false gods of who reside in the heavenly realm above (especially since Paul has already used another word for "again"). (Compare to Ephesians 6 above.)

### **509 anothēn**

from 507; TDNT-1:378,63; adv

AV-from above 5, top 3, again 2, from the first 1, from the beginning 1, not tr 1;  
13

1) from above, from a higher place

1a) of things which come from heaven or God

2) from the first, from the beginning, from the very first

3) anew, over again

- 12.)** It is a fact that the Greek word for "elements" in Galatians 4:3, 9 is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to fundamental teachings (including Christian teachings), but this same word is also used twice by Peter in 2 Peter 3:10-12 to refer to the objects in the expanse of heaven (heavenly bodies, such as stars and planets) most likely in direct contrast to things on earth.

### **4747 stoiceion**

from a presumed derivative of the base of 4748; TDNT-7:670,1087; n n

AV-element 4, rudiment 2, principle 1; 7

1) any first thing, from which the others belonging to some series or composite whole take their rise, an element, first principal

1a) the letters of the alphabet as the elements of speech, not however the written characters, but the spoken sounds

1b) the elements from which all things have come, the material causes of the universe

1c) the heavenly bodies, either as parts of the heavens or (as others think) because in them the elements of man, life and destiny were supposed to reside

1d) the elements, rudiments, primary and fundamental principles of any art, science, or discipline

1d1) i.e. of mathematics, Euclid's geometry

**Galatians 4:3** Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements 4747 of the world:

**Galatians 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 4747, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?

**Colossians 2:8** Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments 4747 of the world, and not after Christ.

**Colossians 2:20** Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments 4747 of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

**Hebrews 5:12** For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles 4747 of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

**2 Peter 3:10** But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements 4747 shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

**2 Peter 3:12** Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements 4747 shall melt with fervent heat?

- 13.) It is a fact that when Paul begins Galatians 4, he refers to the "elements of the world," which cannot be a reference to the Law of Moses, which came from God and can in no way be described as "of the world," especially by Paul who elsewhere in scripture regarded the Law of Moses as good and of God.
- 14.) It is a fact that in Galatians 3 Paul speaks of the Law as a schoolmaster that was to lead men to Jesus Christ.
- 15.) It is a fact that when Paul refers to tutors and governors in chapter 4, he uses plural and distinctly different Greek words than the word he used for "schoolmaster" regarding the Law of Moses, just 7 verses earlier, indicating that Paul is no longer talking about the same thing, the singular Law of Moses.

The basic concept is that Jesus Christ is the heir of the house and therefore, he is supreme over all the servants who have rule in the house, which conveys the idea that he is supreme over all the principalities and powers and other spiritual rulers in high places to whom God had given rule of the nations until Jesus Christ should come and obtain his inheritance. And now, being joint-heirs with him, we also reach maturity in the full stature of him who is supreme over those lower rulers. This continuity of concept is clear when Colossians 2, Ephesians 1-2, Romans 8, and Galatians 3-4 are read side by side. It becomes plain that the tutors and governors are the ruling spirits to whom God gave dominion over man (particularly mankind in sin).

**Colossians 2:10** And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

**Ephesians 1:18** The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all. **2:1** And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

**Romans 8:17** And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

**Galatians 3:24** Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster 3807 *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster 3807. 26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. **4:1** Now I say, *That* the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; 2 But is under tutors 2012 and governors 3623 until the time appointed of the father.

### **3807 paidagwov**

from 3816 and a reduplicated form of 71; TDNT-5:596,753; n m  
AV-schoolmaster 2, instructor 1; 3

1) a tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood.

**2012 epitropov**

from 1909 and 5158 (in the sense of 2011); ; n m

AV-steward 2, tutor 1; 3

1) one to whose care or honour anything has been instructed

1a) a curator, a guardian

1b) a steward or manager of a household, or of lands

1b1) overseer

1c) one who has the care and tutelage of children, either where the father is dead (a guardian of minors), or where the father is still alive

**3623 oikonomov**

from 3624 and the base of 3551; TDNT-5:149,674; n m

AV-steward 8, chamberlain 1, governor 1; 10

1) the manager of household or of household affairs

1a) esp. a steward, manager, superintendent (whether free-born or as was usually the case, a freed-man or a slave) to whom the head of the house or proprietor has intrusted the management of his affairs, the care of receipts and expenditures, and the duty of dealing out the proper portion to every servant and even to the children not yet of age

1b) the manager of a farm or landed estate, an overseer

1c) the superintendent of the city's finances, the treasurer of a city (or of treasurers or quaestors of kings)

2) metaph. the apostles and other Christian teachers and bishops and overseers

- 16.) It is a fact that the same words Paul uses for "elements" are used by Peter to refer to basic elements of the cosmos and in close relationship to the heavenly bodies themselves in 2 Peter 3.
- 17.) It is a fact that in parallel accounts in both Colossians and Romans, Paul forbids condemning Christians for regarding some days as holy days, specifically mentioning Jewish holy days.
- 18.) It is a fact that Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10 do not use parallel or identical vocabulary in the Greek.

The fact that Colossians 2:16 and Galatians 4:10 do not use parallel or identical vocabulary in the Greek is quite relevant. Colossians uses words that are technically precise with regard to the 3 specific modes of Jewish feasts. This can particularly be seen with the Sabbaths (the Jewish weekly holy day) and the new moons (the Jewish monthly holy). In striking contrast, Galatians does not use any of these 3 Greek terms. Instead, it uses 4 entirely different terms. Why is the author going out of his way to avoid using terms that apply to Jewish holidays when he elsewhere shows such great precision in specifying Jewish holidays?

In fact, these more generic terms harken back to the language used in Genesis 1:14, where the stars are to mark the days, seasons, and years. In fact, in the Septuagint text of Genesis 1:14 below, we can clearly see 3 of the same Greek words used in Galatians 4:10: ημερα (hemera, "day"), καιροσ (kairos, "season, time"), ενιαυτοσ (eniautos, "year"). This purpose was, of course, set up for mankind in general before there was any specific nation or people called the Jews.

In other words, such language is strongly suggestive of the mass of mankind in general, the Gentile nations and the holidays they observed according to the movements of the heavenly bodies. Consequently, the vocabulary of Galatians 4 (especially in contrast to Colossians 2) confirms that the author of Galatians intended to refer to the demarcation of days based on pre-Jewish calendars, calendars used by the Gentile nations.

(Septuagint) **Genesis 1:14** και ειπεν ο θεος γενηθητωσαν φωστηρες εν τω στερεωματι του ουρανου εις φασιν της γης του διαχωριζειν ανα μεσον της ημερας και ανα μεσον της νυκτος και εστωσαν εις σημεια και εις **καιρους** και εις **ημερας** και εις **ενιαυτους**

**Colossians 2:16** Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an **holyday 1859**, or of the **new moon 3561**, or of the **sabbath 4521** *days*.

**Galatians 4:10** Ye observe **days 2250**, and **months 3376**, and **times 2540**, and **years 1763**.

### **1859 heorte**

of uncertain affinity; ; n f  
AV-feast 26, holy day 1; 27  
1) a feast day, festival

### **3561 noumenia**

from of a compound of 3501 and 3376 (as noun by implication of 2250); TDNT-4:638, \*; n f  
AV-new moon 1; 1  
1) new moon  
1a) of the Jewish festival of the new moon

### **4521 sabbaton**

of Hebrew origin 07676 tbv; TDNT-7:1,989; n n  
AV-sabbath day 37, sabbath 22, week 9; 68  
1) the seventh day of each week which was a sacred festival on which the Israelites were required to abstain from all work  
1a) the institution of the sabbath, the law for keeping holy every seventh day of the week  
1b) a single sabbath, sabbath day  
2) seven days, a week

### **2250 hemera**

from (with 5610 implied) of a derivative of hemai (to sit, akin to the base of 1476) meaning tame, i.e. gentle; TDNT-2:943,309; n f  
AV-day 355, daily + 2596 15, time 3, not tr 2, misc 14; 389  
1) the day, used of the natural day, or the interval between sunrise and sunset, as distinguished from and contrasted with the night  
1a) in the daytime

- 1b) metaph., "the day" is regarded as the time for abstaining from indulgence, vice, crime, because acts of the sort are perpetrated at night and in darkness
- 2) of the civil day, or the space of twenty four hours (thus including the night)
- 2a) Eastern usage of this term differs from our western usage. Any part of a day is counted as a whole day, hence the expression "three days and three nights" does not mean literally three whole days, but at least one whole day plus part of two other days.
- 3) of the last day of this present age, the day Christ will return from heaven, raise the dead, hold the final judgment, and perfect his kingdom
- 4) used of time in general, i.e. the days of his life.

### **3376 men**

a primary word; TDNT-4:638,591; n m

AV-month 18; 18

1) a month

2) the time of the new moon, new moon (the first day of each month, when the new moon appeared was a festival among the Hebrews)

### **2540 kairos**

of uncertain affinity; TDNT-3:455,389; n m

AV-time 64, season 13, opportunity 2, due time 2, always + 1722 + 3956 2, not tr 1, misc 3; 87

1) due measure

2) a measure of time, a larger or smaller portion of time, hence:

2a) a fixed and definite time, the time when things are brought to crisis, the decisive epoch waited for

2b) opportune or seasonable time

2c) the right time

2d) a limited period of time

2e) to what time brings, the state of the times, the things and events of time

For Synonyms see entry 5853

### **1763 eniautos**

prolongation from a primary enos (a year); ; n m

AV-year 14; 14

1) a year, in a wider sense, for some fixed definite period of time

For Synonyms see entry 5843

### **Conclusion**

All of these facts lead to the conclusion that Paul's condemnation of observing times in Galatians 4 is meant in reference to pagan holy days, not Jewish holy days. The Jewish holy days under the Law were permissible to celebrate and Christians were also at liberty not to celebrate them. But the pagan holy days were never made acceptable.