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**A1019 – May 9, 2010 – Galatians 1:1-3 – The Stoicheia**

Don't we rely on Acts 2 to build the doctrine of the Church (the 6<sup>th</sup> dispensation)? Answer. Acts 2 is the origin of the Church. We rely on four passages to establish the Acts 2 origin. Acts 1:5 the prediction of the baptism of the Spirit which points to Acts 2, Acts 11:15, the historic fulfillment of the baptism of the Spirit which points back to Acts 2, 1 Cor 12:13 which explains that the baptism of the Spirit puts an individual into the "body," and Eph 1:21-23 that defines the "body" as the Church. So we have prediction, fulfillment, explanation and definition. Those are your four key passages that build the doctrine of the Church and establish it's origin as Acts 2.

Dispensation, a distinguishable arrangement in the outworking of God's eternal purpose

Today we want to move into Gal 4 where Paul gets more into doctrinal illustrations rather than doctrinal explanations. So there's a connection with chapter 3, Paul's still dealing with doctrine. And this connection can be seen in Gal 4:1 with the words "This is what I mean" or "Let me put it this way." So he's connecting this with what he's said before about the Law being our Guardian and that the Guardian was a strict disciplinarian and it was teaching us a lesson, namely that we could never generate righteousness by works of the Law, we could never measure up and God showed us over and over by His discipline that we just didn't meet His criteria.

In verse 1 he's going to continue along a similar line of thought. So he says, **Now I say, or, "This is what I mean," as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father.** The thing to pull away from vv 1-2, the key is that a **child** is no

different than a **slave** before he reaches maturity, in that both are under an authority. And if both are under an authority they are not at liberty to do as they please. The only difference is that the **child** is **the heir** and eventual **owner of everything** when he reaches maturity, but when he reaches maturity is a time **set by the father**. This could be as early as age 14 and as old as 25. Here's a Roman father talking about his two sons who were minors, "If I die before...Horus and Eudaemon have completed twenty years, their brother Thonis and their maternal grandfather Harpa:esis...shall be guardian (ἐπίτροπος) of each of them until he completes twenty years."<sup>1</sup> So this particular father set the date as the twentieth birthday, it was the father's prerogative; it was the father's choice.

Now this is an analogy in the first two verses that finds its parallel in vv 3-11. And the analogy is between the Jewish people and the Gentile people and their relationship to God the Father. So we have the **child**, he is the rightful **heir** of the **father**, who is God. We know from the OT that Israel was in a Father-son relationship with God, so Israel is the **child**, they are the rightful **heirs** of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And so this looks back to the Abrahamic promises that God made to Israel, His covenant people, His covenant son. Out of Egypt I called My son. Then we have the **slave** and the **slave** did not have this Father-son relationship with God. The Gentiles are the **slave**, they were not the rightful heirs of the promises made to Abraham, but if you look at verse 7, something has happened now that Christ has come so that they are also heirs, they've been adopted by the Father. And he's trying to get across the point of Gal 3:28 that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in this new entity called the Church. This is not Israel, this is the Church and now that Christ has come all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, are sons of God and are heirs and have this Father-son relationship.

So the analogy in vv 1-2 is setting us up for the rest of the passage. And first he's going to deal with the **child**, who is Israel, the rightful heir, and Israel is the focal point of vv 3-5. Then he's going to deal with the **slave**, the Gentiles, and the Gentiles are the focal point of vv 6-11. So is everyone clear on the identity of the **child** and the **slave** and the **father**? Child = Israel; slave = Gentiles; father = God.

Verse 3, **So also we**, that's **we** Jews, vv 3-5 refers to the Jews. **while we Jews were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world.** I want to work the grammar out so we at least have a picture of what this verse is saying with respect to the Jewish time frame. **while we were children**, that's an imperfect and the imperfect means ongoing action in past time, so he's saying this went on for a long period of time, **we were children, children, children** and **while we were children** he says, **we were held**, also imperfect, so ongoing action in past time, that is, while we were children for a long, long time we were also held in bondage or enslaved to these elemental things for a long period of time. Then we have the participle **in bondage** and it's a perfect participle without the article so it's functioning verbally and should be translated, "having been enslaved." The perfect tense means past completed action, with ongoing results. This is the key. At some point in Israel's OT history, at some very critical juncture, they were enslaved with the effect that they remained enslaved **under the elemental things of the world** until verse 4, "the fullness of the time came." That would be analogous to the date set by the father in verse 2. So Israel was on a time table. At some point in their OT history they became enslaved under the **elemental things of the world**, that's your perfect participle. Once that took place it had the ongoing effect that while they **were children**, while they were still in that period of training, all during that period they **where held** under the domination of the **elemental things of the world** until the fullness of the time came when God sent forth His Son.

Now the **elemental things of the world** are not specifically defined here. If we go back to Gal 3:23 we read similar language. "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law..." so the Law is the elemental things, the Law was the guardian. Verse 24, "Therefore the Law has become our guardian with a view to Christ..." So it sounds as if the Law is the elemental things of the world. And yet it sounds very strange to say the Law, which was given by God at Mt Sinai could be said to be **of the world**. And so we have some difficulties to solve.

To make things worse the Gentiles are also said to be under the elemental things in Gal 4:9. **But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things**, or *stoicheia*, same exact word. So the

Jews were under the *stoicheia* and the Gentiles were under the *stoicheia* and in danger of falling back under them again. So how could Jews who had the Law and Gentiles who did not have the Law be under the same elemental things? That's a problem. And what are the elemental things? The *stoicheia*.

Here's the word, *s-t-o-i-c-h-e-i-a*, it has three possible meanings depending on the context. So we want to work with this difficult but important word. First, "The word στοιχεῖα means primarily things placed side by side in a row; it is used of the letters of the alphabet, the ABCs, and then, because the learning of the ABCs is the first lesson in a literary education, it comes to mean 'first principles.'" What do you learn first in English class? Hopefully, they still teach this kind of thing. You learn your alphabet, A, B, C's. Then you learn your vowels and consonants. Then you learn how to take the vowels and consonants and put them together into nouns; dog, cat, tree, pet, mom, and dad. Then you add some verbs in there; run, see, do, make and finally you start to make sentences. These are the elementary principles, the *stoicheia*. Turn to Heb 5:12. Everybody wants to argue over Hebrews 6 and whether it refers to believers or not. If they'd just read Heb 5 they wouldn't have a problem. It's very obvious that these are believers who just didn't get beyond the elementary principles of Christian doctrine. They're like kids who never learned their A, B, C's. Of course they can't read. Here's Heb 5:12, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers," why in the world you would you ever say that to an unbeliever is beyond me? Stupid view. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles," the *stoicheia*, "of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food." In other words the author says, there's something called Christianity 101 and Christianity 101 is the A, B, C's of Christianity, basic doctrines; things like who is God, who is man, what is nature, what is sin, what is faith, who is Jesus Christ, what did He do, what is fellowship, basic stuff, basic doctrines that are elementary to the Christian life. And he says, you don't even have the *stoicheia*. How can I teach you how all the *stoicheia* relate, how can I teach you systematic theology, how to put all these doctrines together into a coherent way of thinking if you don't even have the *stoicheia*, the elementary principles. That's the basic idea of *stoicheia*.

Turn to 2 Pet 3:10 for the second usage. The second meaning of *stoicheia* is the basic elements of the physical universe. The context is Peter's final words

to the Church and they're of chief importance. We've been studying on Wednesday nights the theme song of paganism, that all continues just as it has since the beginning of creation. Peter says pagans don't know their earth history. They forget the Flood that laid down virtually all the sedimentary strata on the entire earth and buried millions of animals that now are encased in the fossil record of the earth as an everlasting memorial that God disrupts man's sinful agenda, God judges, catastrophically. And then he comes along in verse 10 and speaks of a future catastrophe that will once again disrupt man's sinful agenda. So it behooves us to remember that God judges sin. And here he says it, not a global Flood, but a global furnace. Verse 10, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up." See the word "elements" That's the word *stoicheia*. You see it again in verse 12 where the elements of the material universe will melt with intense heat in the re-organization of the earth in preparation for the millennium. So the second usage of *stoicheia* is the basic elements of the material universe. In the ancient world they identified these elements as earth, air, water and fire and today we have a refinement of that in chemistry class: solid, gas, liquid and plasma. It's all the same thing, ancient man and modern man are both pagan man. This is what pagan man says everything consists of, just these material elements. And the ancients, Philo speaks of this. Philo was a Jew who lived in Alexandria, Egypt and he loved Greek thought and Greek categories but he also loved his Judaism and so what he did was meld the two together, blend these ideas, which is what a lot of people today like to do, just have a cafeteria of beliefs - I'll take some of Buddhism, some of Christianity, some of Hinduism. It's syncretism and God hates it. But in any case Philo said, the Greeks revere these four elements (στοιχεῖα)—earth, water, air, fire—and give them the names of divinities (respectively) Demeter, Poseidon, Hera, Hephaestus; in another place (*Decal.* 53) he says that 'some have deified the four elements (στοιχεῖα), earth, water, air, fire; others the sun and moon and the other planets and fixed stars; others again the heaven alone; others the whole world', and he mentions not only the names by which the elements are worshipped but those given to the luminaries and so forth." So pagan man projected onto these four elements godlike status, they worshipped the heavens, they were into astrology and the zodiac. And here Peter is saying,

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*Decal. De Decalogo* (Philo)

all that stuff is going to burn up, that is not all there is to the world. If your cosmology is exclusively material with uniformitarian processes then your cosmology is wrong.

For the third usage turn to Col 2:8. Paul didn't coin the word *stoicheia* but we do think he coined this third meaning. First it can just mean the A, B, C's of a curriculum, elementary principles, the building blocks of knowledge. Second, it can mean the building blocks of the material universe, the elements of the universe and third, it can refer to the traditions of men, the philosophies, the classification schemes, the pseudo-epistemologies of the world systems. This is the meaning Paul coins in Col 2:8. This is a stiff warning to all Christians, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." There it is - the elementary principles of the world. And by that he's talking about the total system of pagan thought, everything that has derived from the world, the flesh and the devil. It is the total system of paganism that exalts itself against Christ. He says beware of the system. We can't accept what the chemistry professor says when he boldly pronounces that all that exists is either solid, gas, liquid or plasma. That's a materialism that will destroy you spiritually, if you buy into it. We can't assume what the biology professor is saying about the definition of life because it excludes categorically anything beyond the physical world. We can't assume the classification scheme of every science class on the university campus: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. If we buy into that we've just said man is an animal. But the word of God says man is the image of God, not an animal, not derived from the same substance or flesh, but a different flesh. That's not taking every thought captive, that's letting the elementary principles of the world system govern the way you think and Paul says, no, no, don't do that. Take every thought captive to Christ. Come down to verse 20, this explains some more. "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, <sup>21</sup>"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" <sup>22</sup>(which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men?" What's that a warning of? Why does he bring up these decrees, these religious things? These teachings of men? Because the Colossians are falling back on human religion, they're returning to a system of legalism, a system of works, a system that is fleshly. And he says, in verse

20, look, if you have died with Christ to those elementary principles of the world don't go back to them. Why go back to the world's decrees, to the world's religions practices, to the world's traditions? Those are just the teachings of men. Look at v 21, don't handle that, don't taste that, don't touch that, it's all just legalism; it has nothing to do with spirituality. It's just ritual, do this, don't do that, don't eat meat on Friday, wear a yamaka, put some ash on your forehead, it's all just religious do's and don'ts and it can all be done by the flesh. See, that's the difference between religion and true spirituality. Religion can be done by the flesh, spiritually cannot, it can only be done by the Spirit of God. So this is the third meaning of stoicheia and what it is the total system of paganism that is ruled by the demonic world.

So what definition of stoicheia is Paul using in Gal 4:3? He's using this third meaning. And if we have our picture of Gal 4:3 - here's Israel, this child in training during the OT and she, at a point in time, became enslaved to the elementary things of the world, the system of paganism ruled by the demons and then she remained under their authority for the rest of the OT until Christ came.

That's the picture and we want to identify when the nation Israel became enslaved. The perfect participle indicates a specific event. So go back with me in Israel's history. God called out Abraham, circa 2000BC, God gives him the promises, Abraham has Isaac and God gives the promises to Isaac, Isaac has Jacob and God gives the promises to Jacob, Jacob has twelve sons who are all given the promises and they go down to Egypt for 430 years. Jacob and his sons go down to Egypt about 1875BC, Joseph was already there of course, Israel stays in Egypt for a total of 430 years and during those years they grew into a mighty nation and that brings you to the Exodus in the year 1446BC. In that year God delivers them from Egypt and they walk across the desert to Mt Sinai. At Mt Sinai God gives them the Law. God verbally speaks His Law in the Hebrew language to over 2 million people in that valley before Mt Sinai, that's the year 1446 or 1445BC. Now turn to Acts 7, Stephen's speech. Stephen gives a brilliant literal + typological defense of the Messiahship of Jesus by demonstrating parallels between Abraham and Jesus, Joseph and Jesus and Moses and Jesus and that these parallels are so amazing that any Jew that believes God is sovereign over history cannot deny these parallels. But there was a point in Israel's history where they started to reject these parallels. In fact, it was before this that Joseph is

rejected by his brothers; Joseph is really the first typical messiah that the nation rejected. Then came Moses and how did the people receive Moses? They didn't receive him either, they rejected him. So now Stephen is going to move into the consequences of this rejection. And the principle here is that when the truth is rejected people don't suddenly become neutral, people don't become non-religious. All people worship, all people are religious, it's just a matter of who or what they worship, but no one is neutral, no one is unbiased. When they go on negative volition their mind is darkened and they can no longer see reality correctly. They think they see correctly but their sin is distorting reality and eventually they are heavily demonically influenced by pagan ideas and eventually they end up in an idolatrous system. And so when the nation Israel rejects the authority of God's deliverer Moses they come to embrace an idolatrous system. Just as night follows day. Verse 39, "Our fathers were unwilling to be obedient to him, [speaking of Moses] but repudiated him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt, <sup>40</sup>saying to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.' <sup>41</sup>"At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands. <sup>42</sup>"But God turned away and delivered them up to serve the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, 'It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel? <sup>43</sup>' You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon."

Now, what he's doing here is he's talking about the consequences of sin. And he's answering the question, "Why did the nation Israel go into Exile? Why did they get kicked out of the land? What was the series of events which led to this?" It started all the way back at Sinai, the place the nation got the Law. The seed of idolatry was planted the same time we got our Law at Mt Sinai and that seed grew and grew and grew until it was a plant and we went into Exile in Babylon, we rejected the Law. The nation Israel didn't want to hear the word of God; they said Moses, you go talk to god and come back and tell us what He said, then we'll decide if we want to hear it. And they didn't want to hear it. It was just rejection after rejection, after rejection. Negative volition to the word of God, that's the story of Israel's history. They wanted to go back to Egypt; they wanted to go back to the comforts of human view point, they wanted to go back to the elemental things. Deep down they never



left Egypt. They didn't want God's deliverance; they didn't want God's deliverer. They wanted Pharaoh. Result, verse 40, see, there are consequences to rejecting the word of God, you reject and God says fine, your mind will get all screwed up and you won't be able to think straight, you'll distort reality, you'll twist the facts and you'll get hung up in idolatry, under the oppressive forces and deceptive schemes of the satanic forces. Verse 40, 'They said "to Aaron, 'Make for us gods who will go before us; for this Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt—we do not know what happened to him.'<sup>41</sup>"At that time they made a calf and brought a sacrifice to the idol, and were rejoicing in the works of their hands.'" So they turned to idolatry. What they made it says was a calf, the golden calf. This was the Apis bull of Egypt, it was a massive bull that signified power and fertility and this was their idol who had his home over in Memphis, Egypt. See, that's what it says in at the end of verse 39, "their hearts turned back to Egypt;" not their bodies, not a physical return, a spiritual return. They were accustomed to the Egyptian idolatry and so they returned to it and built the golden calf. Years later a fine fellow named Jeroboam I was given the right to rule the northern kingdom and he built two sanctuaries in his kingdom and he built this golden calf and put one at Dan and the other at Bethel. They never got rid of it, it started with this one act of idolatry at Mt Sinai. That's our perfect participle in Gal 4:3. When were they enslaved? At Mt Sinai. The very moment God was giving the Law to Moses up on top of Mt Sinai what were the people doing down below? They were building an idol. It's a terrifying picture. Here God is giving the Law on top of the mountain and there they are at the foot of the mountain rejecting the Law, breaking the very first commandment, Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. What did they do? They had other gods before Him and they became enslaved to idols, the elemental things of this world.

Now verse 42 gives us a principle, how did God respond to idolatry? He hated it and he turned them over to worship the stars. There are consequences to negative volition to the word of God. These people became interested in the same things the surrounding pagan nations were interested in; astrology, the Zodiac, finding your sign, getting your daily horoscope and so forth. Modern man is no different, he turns to the stars for his destiny, it's all ancient pagan religion, it's a God-substitute, it's idolatry, it's rejecting God as the source of revelation. Such that verse 42 reads, "It was not to Me that you offered victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, was it, O house of Israel?"

Obviously it was not, it was to demons. The victims here were their own children, they offered them in the fire to Moloch, mothers would put their babies in the fire and listen to them scream as they sizzled in the flames. It was terrible but that's what happens when a people go negative, negative, negative to the word of God. Verse 43, 'You also took along the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Rompha, the images which you made to worship. I also will remove you beyond Babylon.' More idolatry. And look at the consequences. You may be free to sin, but you're not free from the consequences of your sin. God said in the Mosaic Law at Sinai, Lev 26 and Deut 28, that if you curse Me, I'll curse you and the cursings come in five stages or degrees. Exile was the last one, it happened to the Northern Kingdom in 722BC. Then you had the Southern Kingdom in 586BC, they went to Babylon. In that year of 586BC as the Babylonian armies gathered around the city of Jerusalem they began to starve the people out. That was standard procedure and the Jews refused to surrender. And as things got worse and worse in the city, according to prophecy as all laid out in Lev 26, they began to eat the rats, dogs, cats, anything they could find in the city; driven mad by hunger because they're being slowly starved into submission. And finally when they ran out of dogs and cats and mice they began to eat the dead bodies of the soldiers that were killed by the arrows going across the wall. And finally they ran out of bodies and they began to eat their own children. Jewish mothers would eat their own baby; so they'd kill, and they'd eat and finally it got so bad that Josephus says that there would be hordes of gangs going down the street and they'd see some mother who had just killed her baby and she was munching on his flesh, they would grab her hair, open her mouth, stick their hand in and pull out the food so they could eat it. That was how far the Jewish people were reduced in their last defiant stand against God's discipline.

And Stephen is saying, ever since that day we got the law on Sinai our history has been one big idolatrous movement. And if you go back to Gal 4:3 now you see that it was all during this time that they **were children**, it was all during this time they **were held**, enslaved to **the elemental things of this world**. And you say, but they had the good and holy Law. Yes, they did, but they didn't follow that Law. Starting at Mt Sinai they were enslaved to the elemental things of the world, the idols and all the demonic activity, they came under the authority of the demonic realm and they worshipped them and worshipped them and worshipped them. They did it in the northern

kingdom and they did it in the southern kingdom, it didn't matter. The south held out a little bit longer, but both kingdoms worshipped idols and God finally said, that's it, I've had it with you, if you love the pagan gods so much, you want to worship demons, go ahead. I'll cast you right into the melting pot of paganism. And He did and the nation had to live out there in the Gentile world.

So we have one period from 1440 or so, down to say, 500 where they worshipped gods of nature. Then we have a second period, called the intertestamental period, and this is the 400 years between your Old and New Testament, where books like Maccabees, Bel and the Dragon and other apocryphal books were written. This is the period when the Jews developed non-Temple Judaism. Why did they develop non-Temple Judaism? Because they didn't have a temple when they went back to the land. So they created a new religion. And if you turn to Mark 7 you'll see what Jesus thought of this new religion. This is what we call Judaism. It's a moral religion, it's concerned with ethics, it's concerned with doing good, it's concerned with works, it's about man and man saving himself and this is the religion that came to be identified with the Pharisees in the NT. So they turned from worshipping nature to worshipping man. Notice Mark 7:1, this is one of those conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees. "The Pharisees and some of the scribes gathered around Him when they had come from Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>and had seen that some of His disciples were eating their bread with impure hands, that is, unwashed." And so the Pharisees see this and uh, oh, Jesus, your disciples are bad boys, and then Mark gives some explanation for his Gentile readers, verse 3, "(For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they carefully wash their hands, *thus* observing the traditions of the elders;" and you want to underline that word "traditions." Verse 4, "and *when they come* from the market place, they do not eat unless they cleanse themselves; and there are many other things which they have received in order to observe, such as the washing of cups and pitchers and copper pots.)" And this is just the beginning of all the traditions that had been built up since the Exile. Verse 5, "The Pharisees and the scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders," There it is again, mark it, "the traditions." Verse 6, Jesus doesn't miss a beat. "And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. <sup>7</sup>BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF

MEN.’<sup>8</sup>“Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.” There it is again; mark it, “He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition. <sup>10</sup>“For Moses said, ‘HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER’; and, ‘HE WHO SPEAKS EVIL OF FATHER OR MOTHER, IS TO BE PUT TO DEATH’; <sup>11</sup>but you say, ‘If a man says to *his* father or *his* mother, whatever I have that would help you is Corban (that is to say, given *to God*),’ <sup>12</sup>you no longer permit him to do anything for *his* father or *his* mother; <sup>13</sup>*thus* invalidating the word of God by your tradition which you have handed down; and you do many things such as that.” So how did Jesus like the traditions of Judaism? I’d venture to say He didn’t like it one bit. Jesus says all the little laws they invented invalidated the word of God. It becomes so very clear that by the NT times Judaism was a religion that was not derived from the Scriptures but was antagonistic to the Scriptures. It was a moral, ethical pagan system of religion. It was the doctrine of demons. Look at Gal 1:14, Paul admits he was a part of this pagan system of religion. “and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” Those are traditions that go back to the Exile, they are distortions of the OT and that’s why every distortion of the word of God, every misinterpretation is ultimately a demonic doctrine, it has kept you from the truth of God’s word.

So that’s what he’s saying they’re under in Gal 4:3, they came under the elemental things at Mt Sinai and they went negative, negative, negative to the word of God. The consequences of that are a darkened mind, a twisted view of reality, and demonic influence. That’s what you’re asking for when you get into sin and you stay in it for prolonged periods; you don’t confess your sin, you are asking for demonic influence and finally you can’t trust the word at all and you’re convinced the Bible is wrong and paganism is right. You haven’t become non-religions, you’ve become idolatrous and that’s the picture of Israel’s Judaism with all their do’s and don’ts in the first century.

But notice in verse 9 the Gentiles are also under the elemental things of the world. What are the elemental things for the Gentiles? Same thing; notice the end of verse 8, things which by nature are not gods. So let’s conclude:

“The στοιχεῖα (see on v 3), it is now made plain, not only regulated the Jewish way of life under [distorted] law; they also regulated the pagan way of

life on the service of gods that were no gods. To be enslaved to such counterfeit deities was to be enslaved to the στοιχεῖα, and the Galatians would be enslaved to the στοιχεῖα all over again if they ‘reverted’ not to their former paganism but to Jewish religious practices. That, as Paul saw it, his Gentile readers were tending to revert to a form of religion which they had practiced before their conversion to Christianity is emphasized by his repeated πάλιν...πάλιν ἄνωθεν. For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make; yet Paul makes it—not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position.

The στοιχεῖα to which the Galatians had been in bondage were the counterfeit gods of v 8; the bondage to which they were now disposed to turn back was that of the law.

under legalism as a principle of life. “The demonic forces of legalism, then, both Jewish and Gentile, can be called “principalities and powers” or “elemental spirits of the world”

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<sup>i</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Includes Indexes. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 192.

[Back To The Top](#)

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