

# Returning to Bondage

*Galatians Explained*

By Pastor Pieter Van Ruitenburg

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** Galatians 4:9  
**Preached on:** Sunday, November 3, 2019

## **Bethel Netherlands Reformed Congregation**

8920 Broadway Street  
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5W1

**Website:** [www.nrcchilliwack.org](http://www.nrcchilliwack.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/bnrcchilliwack](http://www.sermonaudio.com/bnrcchilliwack)

Congregation, I hope to go over in the first 11 verses of Galatians 4 but especially verse 9. Galatians 4:9.

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?

So far.

"Returning to Bondage" is the theme this morning. To go back, to come again to bondage. Three thoughts and the first thought is five types of bondage; secondly, redeemed from bondage in all those five ways of being in bondage, redeemed, delivered, freed; and in the third place, returning unto bondage. So they were in bondage and returning to it. Returning unto bondage, the five types of bondage, being redeemed from bondage, and returning unto bondage.

It's a hard chapter, I have to admit. Let me try to make it as simple as I can. I see five prisons next to each other, five buildings, and over those prisons is written "Behave." There are five "Behave" prisons. You have to obey the rules in order to survive. It's a hard regime in those five prisons. You better watch it. It's not easy. In those five prisons there is the law, under the law. In those five prisons is bondage, you can't leave. In those five prisons there is kind of darkness, no freedom, no real joy.

So let me go over those five prisons for a minute. The first prison is the prison of the Gentiles. Look at verse 8, "Howbeit then, when ye knew not God," that ye knew not God, "ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods." So you were, you were before you knew God. You know that prison is a prison of bondage, a bondage to sin and you tried to make yourself happy in this life with idol worship, with being an atheist maybe even, just worldly, worldly regime. And that's a hard service. Why do you think that so many Hollywood stars commit suicide? Lots of money and fame, it does not satisfy. It's a hard service. You always have to perform and to get more and more and it's never enough. It does not satisfy. It does not truly gratify. It does not fill the heart. It's a hard regime to be without God in this world or serving the idols of this world. Sports and

games and movies and just living your life to the fullest, you think you're free but you're in bondage. You're a slave to sin and your eyes get opened and you see it. This is slavery.

I see a second prison, the Jewish orthodoxy with all the rules of the Pharisees, all the legalism. Behave. Do your best. Like the Apostle Paul, pursue in the church of God in going to Damascus and he felt free, he was so bummed with all the laws and rules. Sickening. Behave under the law.

Then the third one, the Judaizer prison. Remember those false teachers that pretended to be Christians? They were not. They were not true Christians. They mixed Phariseism and Old Testament laws, they mixed it with Christianity as if you have to behave and earn your points and please God yourself with circumcision and the feasts. What a bondage. Look at verse 10, "Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years." Those Judaizers are cursed. The Apostle Paul said, "Cursed are you for confusing the church and misdirecting them." It's again that same principle, behave, behave. It's the same principle as the world and the same principle as Jewish orthodoxy, and the same principle are the Judaizers, that same principle that's called here the elements of the world. Look at verse 3, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."

The fourth prison, that's a little different. I see God's people in that prison, the Old Testament believers in that prison, and they were God's children and they believed the Lord Jesus Christ but they were still in bondage somehow like the people in the old dispensation before the Lord Jesus came. It was not so clear yet. They were God's people, no doubt about that. There was a darkness still, a bondage still, not so much freedom yet. The Lord Jesus had not come yet, after all, right? They were looking forward to his coming. They desired him, they hungered for him but he had not come yet so there was not so much freedom yet.

And there's a fifth prison, the prison the Galatians were in. They were God's people as well in the New Testament but they're back in prison. They were still caught again off-guard by those Judaizers and although they're God's people, they were in bondage again, right? They fell back into that bondage.

You know, there are certain principles in this life, in this world, in creation. For example, gravity, right? Gravity is everywhere. It's one of those rudiments, one of those elements, one of those basic principles and in all those five prisons you have those same principles. Behave. The world says, "Behave." The orthodoxy says, "Behave." The Judaizers say, "Behave." The Old Testament service also as a schoolmaster put pressure on God's people, "Behave." They needed to hear that and the congregations in Galatia again, under the law again, under bondage.

So those five prisons are kind of pictured here in this chapter and in the book of Galatians. It's a hard service. It's in our system. It's us. It's in our very nature. Behave. And in any religion, it's a danger. It's the principle to work hard. So, you see for example in verse 3, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of

the world." Under the elements of the world. All those five prisons, you're under the elements of the world.

Let's go to the second thought: redeemed from it. Verse 4, "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." So let's focus on one of those prisons, that Old Testament prison of God's people in the old dispensation. They were still under the law. They were heirs but the Lord Jesus had not died yet and had not come yet, so they're immature so far. Do you see that example? You know, in the Roman culture it was normal that at a certain age a father said to his son, "Now you're not a child anymore. You have matured." And it was his choice, the father's choice if the boy was 17 or 25, when the father felt he was mature there was a special ceremony. And then I see a ceremony of a boy and he had to hand in his ball, "I don't play with balls anymore." And a girl had to hand in her doll. This was a ceremony at a time appointed by the father so that they had more freedom. Before they had hardly any freedom, right? Even the slave, the tutor, the governor, had more freedom than the child. When the child is now mature, that's different. Then they are heirs. Now you have a check for \$1,000 and you give it to a baby, it's worthless to that baby. So someone has to grow up and that's what you see here.

"Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all." He's under tutors and governors until the time appointed by the father. "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of the time was come," at God's time, exactly at God's time, the Lord's time is always the right time, right? Do you believe that? That's also in daily life in everything. God's time is the best time, no matter what. And he's free, he knows what he's doing. He really does. So when the fulness of the time was come, the time that the Scripture was fulfilled, the time there was one language, the Koina Greek language in the world, there were 30,000 kilometers of roads in the Roman Empire, it's amazing. It was the time appointed. That's kind of an absent text, right, because when the fullness of time was come, "God sent forth his Son." The Lord Jesus was born. He came to this world, "made of a woman, made under the law." The Lord Jesus took the place of Adam. He was born in the flesh. He became completely human, took upon himself the human nature so he could suffer and feel pain, and die, and rise, and obey, and be hungry and thirsty, and suffer tremendous agonies. The Lord Jesus visibly came as sent by the Father. It was a very crucial point.

"When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son," not his servant, not someone, his only begotten Son, "made of a woman," virgin birth. I think that's why it says born of a woman, "made under the law." The Lord Jesus also came to prison, was also under bondage, was also suppressed by his own Father, became under the law. He felt the curse of the law. He felt condemned by the law and to die because of the law because of God's holy anger. Made of a woman, made under the law.

Why? "To redeem them that were under the law." To redeem them under the law. To redeem them out of the first prison of the world, and redeem out of the second prison of Jewish orthodoxy, and to get them also relieved from Judaism, the Judaizers, but even to also rescue them from being a child under the old dispensation. I think that's what's mainly meant here, to redeem them, God's people that are under the law, "that we might receive the comfort of the adoption of sons."

Think of a slave market. That's horrible, a slave market. And someone is bidding on a slave, and somebody else is bidding on the slave as well. Some hard-nosed person really wants this slave. He looks so healthy. He's a real asset. And then the other kind man, he bids even more and more and more and he redeems that slave. That slave is so happy that a kind man is redeeming him and buying him instead of that other person. And then that slave is standing before his new master and the new master says, "You may go. You're free." "Really? Free? So you paid and I'm free?" "Yeah, you're free." That's amazing. "Wait a moment, you're not only free, I adopt you as my son." That goes too far, right? That's what the Lord is doing and just this a slave, a sinner. The Lord redeems sinners while sinners and he purges them and he redeems them, he pays the entire price for them and he sets them free and makes them his children.

"To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." So the purchase slave who has been set free and has been adopted receives now the right to say to that man, "Abba, Father." You know, Abba, that's hard to translate because it sounds so trivial if you really translate it to today. But you know, with all reverence, I just was in doubt I would say it but I think I can say it with deep reverence, Abba means Dad. That goes too far. Someone is saying to God Father is one thing, but to say Abba, that is so tender, that is such a term of endearment and that's what it says here. So the Lord has given the church that Spirit, because you are sons God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Also in Romans we see the same expression.

Now do some of God's people receive that spirit of adoption? Some? Maybe just an elite group among God's people, they can say, Abba, Father after special experiences? Well, what do we see here? "Ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." I don't hear that it's only for some. The Lord has given that to all of his people. But I admit that many have a hard time saying it, but they have received the right, they have received that Spirit to not only say Lord, to not only address him as a Master, but to address him as a Father, even addressing him as Abba, Father.

You know, if you have attended the Reformation evening, I liked it and we also read, heard two letters of Guido de Bres to his mother and to his wife, and you may have noticed, you may have heard that he also speaks about Father in prison, on the scaffold, in deep agony, and yet saying Abba, Father, and he writes that he learned in prison more than he learned before that because he preached on things he had not experienced yet. He writes, "I talked about it, I preached about it but now I may experience it." Father, and what a joy he had. He felt a pity with the warden that was picking him up and he pitied

the governess Margaret of Parma. He said, "All those people, they think they're happy but I have more. I have better meals. I have better comfort in life and death."

So redeemed. "Wherefore thou art no more a servant," verse 7, "but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." You see, so relieved, freed from the prison of idolatry and paganism, freed from Jewish Phariseeism, delivered also from the Judaizers, but also delivered from the old dispensation because the old dispensation is a dispensation you can only be saved by faith. But it was quite a place with the law as that schoolmaster, preparing them for more, for Christ. And as I said last time, although we live in different times, still a certain amount of God's people are still living in quite a darkness. They have been redeemed from prison, from idolatry, from Phariseeism, they don't believe in that Judaizer theology, but they are still kind of with one leg in the Old Testament dispensation and don't experience so much freedom, and have a hard time saying Father. They may, but something is keeping them back. So it is important also for them to grow up in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ because he has come to redeem them that are under the law that they might receive the adoption of sons.

So five types of bondage and redeemed from that bondage. Have you been? Are you still in that bondage, young friends? Do you try to find freedom in drinking and partying and alcohol and drugs and money and intimacy, false intimacy, and that's your life? That's your slavery. You need to be redeemed out of the darkness. It won't satisfy you and you cannot stand to be forgotten with that and angry in a holy God because he reminds you that you didn't obey his law.

The third thought, returning into bondage. Verse 9, "But now, after that ye have known God," see that there's conversion, to know God, to know him. How can you know someone if you never meet this someone? You know, some people say you have to believe that you go to heaven, you have to believe that your sins are forgiven, you have to believe that you're safe, you have to believe that, that, that, that. No. It doesn't say anywhere in the Bible that you have to believe that your sins are forgiven, you have to believe in him personally, in the relationship. He's revealed himself, you're to find him, to know him.

"But now, after that ye have known God." That's quite something to know him in his word. Through the Spirit it becomes so real. In his anger, in his grace, in his gift in his Son,

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God." He is editing himself. He is correcting himself. He says, "If you know God," he doesn't go back, "rather know of God." That's the Gospel, also baptism. Baptism does not only ask and requires repentance and faith but it also says, "I give it myself." Of course, to the elect, is right, but he gives it. He doesn't only command to believe and to repent, he is not only saying, "You have to know me," but he also says, "rather are known of God." So just let us feel for a second that it's the Lord's work, that it is his grace, that it's not my choice but God's choice that the Lord has begun, that he is first, that he is last. To know God, yes.

"But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God," glory to him, "how turn ye again?" What happened? Why? "Turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?" What are those weak and beggarly elements? We talked about that. All those prisons said, "Behave." Cause and effect. That's the karma of this life. Do something, earn points here, deserve something, the deserving theology. You have to deserve it. You deserve it. You deserve to be saved. You deserve to be going to heaven. You deserve, God loves you, you deserve that God loves you. That type of theology is the karma of this world. People like it and love it. They feel tickled by it. It's a lie. Those are the weak and beggarly elements whereunto they desire again to be in bondage.

It's weak because it doesn't work. It does not work. That's how simple it is, that "Behave" theology. You do your best theology. It doesn't work. It's weak. It's beggarly. And I looked that up, I said, "What does that mean?" I didn't know, beggarly. It's simple. You know what a beggar is, right? A beggar is someone who's poor, now translate it with "poor." Weak and poor elements of this world, because it doesn't suffice. It does not bring that comfort. It does not give that assurance. It does not give that freedom. And now sad to say the Apostle Paul is writing to the Galatians and he said, "You know, you were delivered out of several of those prisons. You know God, rather you are know of him, so why are you returning to those weak and beggarly traditions, elements, rudiments, basic points of the world by falling back into those A, B, C things? He is so much more."

So that's one of the reasons why we have baptism because the Lord doesn't only give that for them unconverted and to have you promise something, but also the Lord gives holy baptism to remind the congregation and even all the believers, all of his children, to remind them that it is by grace only. Oh, they knew it already. Yes, they knew but we forget. Because of those weak and beggarly elements, "Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world," verse 3, and now verse 9, "the beggarly and weak elements of the world." It's in our system and it sticks up its ugly head time and again. Then again, we go again back, back, falling back into those observed days and months and times and years, and the Apostle Paul almost throws up his hands, "I'm afraid of you lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain!" He's concerned.

So what is necessary for those Christians the Apostle Paul is addressing? It's important that they meditate more on, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." And he fulfilled that law. He obeyed that law and obeyed the law, yet he had to die as if he had sinned all the sins. He had not sinned. He knew no sin but he was made to be sin for us that we may be righteousness of God in him. That's freedom. Never been set free by looking unto Jesus? That's what you need.

So do you see if you're still in one of those prisons, especially the first three, that's horrible. I pity you. I'm not jealous of you at all. You're still under those weak and beggarly elements of this world. It does not work. You don't receive freedom. You have to find that freedom outside of yourself. To be in the midst of death yourself, having

absolutely nothing to please God with, be stripped from all your self-righteousness, but to find salvation by faith outside of self in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's freedom and that's the freedom I preach to you. That's the freedom I preach to all of you. That's the freedom there is so much room, the riches of his grace, and holy baptism points that out to you, that the door is open and baptism points it out to you that it's not your work but God's work. He saves a people for his own name's sake and glory. Amen.