



Known By God (Breaking The Power of Idols)

Sunday 3rd March 2024

GALATIANS 4:8-11

Our segment of Scripture today is going to bring us face to face with three vital things for living life in all its fullness and all ministry – (1) the life the gospel calls us from, (2) the God the gospel calls us to, and (3) the ministry the gospel calls us into.

Before I came to know Christ I was not in need of a gospel that would entertain me to convince me God, the church, the Bible and all other Christian things had a five star rating compared the entertainment of this world as say a 1 star rating. I did not need a gospel that would hug me and make me feel warmer or even more confident. I did not need a gospel that would intellectually engage me, entertain me or overwhelm me with an emotional sense of wellbeing.

No, I needed a gospel that would have a result Paul describes in Romans 6:13,

And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God **as being alive from the dead**, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

I needed a gospel that could bring life to dead bones, bring life to a dead souls and turn a heart of stone to a heart of flesh!

Before I came to Christ I could do no better than serve those things which by nature are not gods; those things which were ‘utterly incapable of bestowing any blessing whatever on their worshippers’ (Joseph Benson).


Tim Keller defined an idol as ‘**good things turned by our hearts into ultimate things**’ because as he goes on to say, our hearts are ‘idol factories’. Listen to the description given to these gods (or idols) in Deuteronomy 4:27-28,

And the Lord will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the Lord will drive you. ²⁸And there you will serve gods, the **work of men’s hands**, wood and stone, **which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell**.


This warning brings us back to the very first of the ten commandments in Exodus 20:1-3,

And God spoke all these words, saying:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. ³“You shall have no other gods before Me.

 **The breaking of the first commandment is what leads to breaking any of the others.** It's the people, the dreams, the plans, the relationships, the friends, the jobs, the money, the power, the road trips, the applause, the achievements, the power over self, the gadgets, the games, the drinks, the friends, cars, the courses, the qualifications, the wins, the successes - any of these things (none of which are actually evil in and of themselves) that absorb our heart and imagination and desire, **above God** have then become an idol.

Money is a good thing but when you turn it into an ultimate thing it will destroy you. A friendship is a good thing but when it becomes an ultimate thing it can destroy all other relationships. Relaxation and rest are good thing but when you turn these into ultimate things and build a life aimed at minimal output from me and maximum input from others it will destroy you leave you exhausted. Children are a gift from the Lord, but you turn them into an ultimate thing you will need them to remain a child, always dependent and on you and the day they become an adult and accept all their own responsibilities they will run a mile and probably end up hating you.

 The truth is our hearts can turn any thing into an ultimate thing and this is why we must listen to and act upon the words of the Lord in Jeremiah 17:9,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?”

When someone says ‘follow your heart’ you should run as far as you can from that idea. Because none of these THINGS (gods, idols) care about you, none have feelings for you, none of these things know you, none of these things understand you, none of these things can feed you. As C. S. Lewis wrote these ‘dumb idols’ will ‘break the hearts of their worshippers’.

 Let's move into what Paul describes next in verses 9-10,

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? ¹⁰You observe days and months and seasons and years.

When you trust in Christ for salvation alone and rely 100% on the grace of God to save from your sin and its consequences, everything you've ever known, your whole life and your eternity pivot – it turns 180 degrees on this:

To be known by God

This changes everything. An idol cannot know you it can NEVER do more than you can imagine it to do. Compare that to the God Paul describes in Ephesians 3:20-21,

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

God is able to do way beyond anything that can ever pass through your mind. And so the church is designed by God to be a place where the glory of what He has done in countless broken and dead lives are brought together for His glory.

What does it mean to be known by God? Let's think of what it means to be unknown. In the midst of a crowd of commuters, starting a new job, starting a new school, learning under a new teacher, the day you were adopted into your forever family, the day you arrived in a new country, or moved to a new part of the country, or the first day of retirement. These are all moments we feel completely unknown – it is lonely, it's an anxious time, it's a time of uncertainty, we feel vulnerable, we imagine a thousand things that all the others are thinking of us. And if we could rewind back to our old life we would.

But then there's that moment – the first friendly smile, a warm handshake, an introduction, an exchange of names, a welcome, a hug, a conversation. And very quickly we feel known.

That is a description of coming to God as your Father. Can any THING compare to that?! When you are known by God you are never alone, never a stranger, never the odd one out, and always fully known.

The Galatians had turned away from the God by whom they were known back to the dead gods and idols that could never know them. **Money can never know you, a friend can never fully know you, a job can never know you, a performance can never know you, laziness can never know you. No THING can ever know you. No wonder Jesus had compassion on the crowds.**

Then in verse 11 Paul describes the core of all ministry,

I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.

➤ All ministry is labour; it is work. But ministry is also work for (towards) others. With the end goal that they might be known by God and then make this living, breathing, loving God known to others so they too might...

Be known by God.

➤ So what must we do?

1. Realise every chair is designed to be a place where someone else can be known by God
2. Provide a welcome at the doors that says you are known – you matter and you are welcome
3. Check your heart every day and ask yourself what am I going to do today that must not become an ultimate thing (ask God to reveal these to you)
4. Have compassion on anyone whose life is directed towards an idol that cannot eat breathe or smell
5. Be in prayer for all to come and believe in the God who knows