

Known by God

Relationship, Turning Again, Two Covenants

Galatians 4:8–31

Pastor Dan Crespo

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A Galatians Doctrinal Library

Booklet Seven

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Known by God: Relationship, Turning Again, Two Covenants

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Where a verse is mentioned, it is written out in this edition, so the reader does not have to leave the page. This booklet is the seventh of nine readings from Paul's letter to the Galatians. The booklets may also be issued as one volume.

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Introduction

Booklet Six ended with a son in the Father's house. What does that relationship mean in daily life?

In Galatians 4:8–31, Paul says, believers know God—or, more precisely, are known by Him. He then asks why people who have received that relationship would return to religious bondage.

This booklet follows Paul from that question through his concern for the Galatians and his account of Hagar and Sarah. We will keep his distinction clear: religious practices may have a place, but they cannot become the way a son earns a place with the Father.

A Word to the Reader

Some Christians were never told they could know God. They were taught to manage Him.

They learned days, months, seasons, years. They learned how to look serious. They did not learn, “Abba.”

When they tried to come near, religion handed them a rulebook and called it maturity.

This booklet is written so that the believer can hear Paul's shock: you know God—or rather are known by God—how can you turn again?

**FREEDOM IS NOT THE ABSENCE OF GOD.
IT IS BEING KNOWN BY HIM WITHOUT HIDING.**

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Part One — Known by God

Booklet Six ended by calling believers sons and heirs of God through Christ. Paul now turns from that family status to the relationship itself: people who once served other gods have come to know the living God—and are known by Him.

“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God...”

Galatians 4:8–9, NKJV

Before: you did not know God. Now: you do.

The Gospel is not merely being forgiven, escaping judgment, receiving better doctrine, joining the right church, or learning correct theology. It brings human beings into relationship with the living God.

The purpose of Christianity is not merely that you know more information about Him. It is that you know Him.

And Paul goes further: “...or rather are known by God.”

That may be one of the most intimate statements in this entire letter.

The Galatians had lived in a world full of religion—gods, temples, rituals, spiritual powers, philosophies, and rules. Yet Paul says they did not know God. Religion and knowing God are not the same thing. A person can be deeply religious and still not know the living God.

Human beings will serve something. We attach ourselves, give ourselves, we trust, we fear, and we seek Life from something. The Galatians had served false gods. Modern people may insist they serve no god at all, yet still organize life around money, success, sexual desire, approval, politics, power, family, self, or religion. Something occupies the place from which we seek identity, security, meaning, and hope.

The tragedy of idolatry is not merely that the object is false. It cannot enter the relationship humanity was created for. An idol cannot know you, love you, understand you, speak truth into your life, participate with you, or give spiritual Life.

The living God can.

The Gospel is not merely, “Stop worshiping false things.” It is, “Come to know the true God.”

God Is a Person, Not an Idea

Many people speak about God as though He were an abstract concept: a doctrine, a force, a theological category, something to explain, debate, or defend.

Scripture presents God as a Person. He speaks, knows, loves, acts, responds, leads, creates, and reveals.

The Gospel does not merely give us correct ideas about God. It brings us into relationship with Him.

You can know facts about a person without knowing the person. The same can happen religiously. You may know the attributes of God, the names of God, the doctrines of salvation,

the books of the Bible, and the theology of your denomination—and still live most of your life relating to a system of information rather than personally walking with God.

Good theology matters. Truth matters. Doctrine matters. Six booklets have insisted that truth matters. But doctrine has a destination: God.

If theology makes me more certain about my system but not more willing to trust God, know God, listen to God, love God, depend upon God, and walk with God, then something has gone wrong.

The map is valuable. The map should bring you to the Person.

The God Who Knows Your Actual Name

People often assume God knows categories, not persons. He knows the saved and the unsaved. He knows the compliant and the difficult. He knows the ones who showed up and the ones who slipped.

Paul will not leave you in a category.

Known by God means the living God is dealing with you—your history, your fear, the particular way you hide. That can feel like exposure before it feels like love. If the only God you have met was a scorekeeper, being known sounds like being caught.

The Gospel has to retrain that reflex.

He knows you because you are His, not because He is gathering evidence.

But Now

Booklet Six told you that you are a son. This page is the relationship that sonship opens: not a new system, but a Father who knows you.

Something changed.

Before: you did not know God.

Now: you know Him.

The Gospel changed more than the Galatians' destination after death. It changed their relationship now. Christianity is present Life with God.

There are things about God we cannot know. He is infinite. We are finite. We will never place God completely inside the boundaries of human understanding. That does not mean God cannot be known.

He reveals Himself. His character is consistent. His Word reveals His heart. Christ reveals Him. His Spirit dwells in believers. God intends His children to grow in knowledge of Him.

Once you understand that God can be known, Christianity becomes something different. You are no longer merely asking what rule applies here. You begin asking:

Father, what are You like?

Why does this matter to You?

What are You doing?

What are You teaching me?

How do You see this person?

How do You see me?

How can I participate with You?

That is relationship.

Then Paul deepens the thought: "...or rather are known by God."

He seems unwilling to leave all the emphasis upon our knowledge of God. There is something even more foundational: He knows us.

You are not approaching a distant deity hoping to attract His attention. He knows you.

If God reveals something to you in a way you understand, that itself assumes something. He knows what you understand, where you are, what you fear, what you have experienced, how you think, and what you need. He does not merely broadcast generic truth into the universe. The living God knows the people with whom He is dealing.

Religion can make God feel bureaucratic: input obedience, output blessing; input sin, output punishment; input confession, output forgiveness; input giving, output prosperity.

That is not relationship. That is a machine.

Paul says, "known by God."

You are a person. He is God. The relationship is personal.

Being known by God does not mean you have finished growing. Paul himself continued growing, learning, being transformed, and knowing God more deeply. Your maturity may change. Your understanding may deepen. Old assumptions may fall. But your relationship is not rebuilt from scratch every week.

GOD KNOWS HIS CHILD.

But if being known by God is such a gift, why do believers still hide? That is where religious bondage often begins—not with open rebellion, but with fear.

Part Two — Religion Can Become a Hiding Place

Knowing God is more than keeping religious appointments. Paul is concerned that someone can fill a week with church activity while still being afraid to come honestly to the Father who knows him.

Fear Makes Relationship Shallow

To know someone, there must be trust.

If you believe God is constantly looking for reasons to reject you, you will hide. If you believe every failure places you outside His acceptance, you will keep your distance. If you believe God is fundamentally disappointed in you, you may obey Him, but you will struggle to know Him.

Fear makes relationship shallow. The first response to sin in the Garden of Eden was hiding. Adam and Eve heard God and hid.

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.”

Genesis 3:8, NKJV

Religion can continue that same instinct while appearing spiritual. Instead of hiding behind leaves, we hide behind rules, rituals, religious activity, ministry, doctrine, and performance. We stay busy around God while avoiding God Himself.

Busy Around God, Absent From God

Church is not automatically hiding. Bible study is not hiding. Prayer is not hiding. Serving is not hiding. Doctrine is not hiding. Those can be beautiful expressions of relationship with God. But we can also use religious activity to avoid relationship.

I can study what God said without allowing Him near my heart. I can teach people about God without being honest with Him myself. I can serve God while remaining afraid of Him. I can obey rules, so I never have to learn trust.

- **The flesh can hide in immorality:** give me pleasure, control, attention, sex, money, and power. Religious people recognize that easily and call it the flesh—correctly.
- **The flesh can also hide in religious restraint:** I will control everything, master every appetite, perform, prove that I am good, and establish my righteousness. That person appears opposite from the immoral person.

Both can still operate from self. One indulges self. The other attempts to perfect self. Neither is necessarily depending upon God.

Why would a believer prefer rules to relationship? Because rules can feel safer. A rule tells me exactly where I stand. Relationship requires vulnerability. If God knows me, He sees

everything: weakness, fear, anger, selfishness, confusion, and motives. If I believe God holds all of that against me, knowing Him becomes terrifying.

So, religion gives me a way to manage the relationship. I will perform. Then maybe God will stay at a safe distance.

If you believe God continues holding your sins against you, you will continually negotiate the relationship. If Christ truly dealt with the sin issue, you can stop hiding. You can allow yourself to be known. You can come into the light—not because sin does not matter, but because the Cross has already declared what God did about it.

A wounded church kid often learned the opposite lesson: come into the light and you will be used as an example. So they learned a more sophisticated “hide”—excellent attendance, clean language, useful ministry—and called it discipleship.

PAUL IS AFTER THE “HIDE,” NOT THE USEFULNESS.

Hiding is expensive. It costs honesty with God, honesty with the people who love you, and finally honesty with yourself. You start performing a self that can survive the room. After enough years, the performed self feels like the only self you have.

Known by God is the beginning of getting the real self back—not the impressive one, the actual one.

If you do not believe you are known, you will treat liberty as a threat. You will go looking for a system that can hide you again and call the search holiness.

Am I using Christian activity to come honestly to God, or to keep Him at a safe distance?

Part Three — How Can You Turn Again?

The Galatians had not grown up under the Law of Moses. Before Christ, they had served other gods. That is why Paul's question is surprising: how can moving toward Mosaic observance be a return to bondage for them?

“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?”

Galatians 4:9, NKJV

That is the question controlling everything that follows.

You know God. God knows you. You are sons. The Spirit of His Son is in your hearts. You cry, Abba.

Then why go back?

Again, Is a Shocking Word

These Gentiles had not previously lived under the Mosaic Law. They came from pagan religion. Yet Paul can describe their movement toward religious Law as turning back again.

Why?

Because the outward religious forms may differ, but bondage can operate on the same principle.

Before Christ: religion, rules, fear, slavery.

After Christ, if they submit themselves again to a religious system that governs their standing before God: religion, rules, fear, and slavery.

Different clothing. Same bondage.

Paul calls those elements weak and beggarly.

Weak, because they cannot produce Life. Beggarly, because they possess no spiritual wealth to give the heir. They cannot give what sonship has already given in Christ.

Booklet Six just said that *you are an heir*. Why would an heir return to beggarly elements?

You possess the Spirit of the Son—and you want the slave's rulebook back?

The Galatians apparently saw their movement toward Law as spiritual progress. Paul saw a return to slavery.

If bondage looked obviously evil, Christians would avoid it. Religious bondage can wear a Bible, a suit, a clerical collar, a prayer shawl, church language, moral discipline, seriousness, and sacrifice.

That is what makes it difficult to recognize. It can feel holy.

Yet Paul asks: why do you desire bondage again?

Days, Months, Seasons, Years

“You observe days and months and seasons and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have labored for you in vain.”

Galatians 4:10–11, NKJV

Paul does not begin with murder, sexual immorality, or drunkenness. The evidence of their return to bondage is religious observance.

Days. Months. Seasons. Years.

Religious behavior can itself become evidence that a believer has moved from relationship back toward a governing system of religious obligation.

Practice Is Not the Same Thing as Bondage

The mere fact that someone recognizes a day does not automatically make him enslaved. A Christian can gather on Sunday, celebrate Christmas, remember Passover historically, fast on a chosen day, and build family traditions.

The issue is function.

Is it freely chosen, a remembrance, a helpful practice? Or has it become a religious requirement through which standing, favor, or spiritual maturity is measured?

That is the Galatian problem.

Paul does not treat this lightly. They are not merely changing calendars. They are changing operating systems: from knowing God to religious obligation; from son to slave posture; from promise to performance.

That frightens Paul.

Readers need that distinction kept clean. This booklet is not a war on Christmas, Sunday gathering, or family liturgy. It is a war on using the calendar as a ladder back into acceptance.

If the day serves remembrance, keep it.

If the day has become the mediator, it has become weak and beggarly, no matter how ancient it is.

Has a practice that once helped me remember God become something you use to measure whether you are accepted by Him?

Paul’s concern is now clear. The Galatians are not merely adding religious practices. They are drifting from relationship into a system that measures standing by observance. That is why Paul is afraid for them.

Part Four — Until Christ Is Formed in You

Paul now speaks as a pastor who knows these people. He remembers their welcome when he first preached among them, and he fears that other teachers are drawing them away. His aim is their life with Christ, not a victory in debate.

“Brethren, I urge you to become like me, for I became like you. You have not injured me at all.”

Galatians 4:12, NKJV

This Is Not a Debate Trophy

Paul is not merely proving propositions. He loves them. He has history with them. His argument is personal because the Gospel is personal.

He is not trying to win a debate. He wants them.

This is not personal revenge. He is not offended because the Galatians stopped admiring him. He is concerned because their relationship with God is being pulled back toward bondage.

“You know that because of physical infirmity I preached the gospel to you at the first.”

Galatians 4:13, NKJV

Paul had been weak, human, physically afflicted in some way. The text does not tell us enough to identify the condition with certainty. We should not invent one.

The point is clear enough. They had seen Paul weak. And they had received him.

“And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 4:14, NKJV

They once loved Paul despite weakness. They did not evaluate him by external religious impressiveness.

Something has changed. Other teachers have entered. Those teachers are reshaping the relationship.

When Joy Leaves the Room

“What then was the blessing you enjoyed?”

Galatians 4:15, NKJV

There had once been joy, freedom, warmth, relationship. Now: pressure, suspicion, and religious zeal.

Grace opens the heart. Performance eventually turns the eyes toward measurement. Who is doing enough? Who is more spiritual? Who is correct? Who is failing?

Joy disappears.

“Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”

Galatians 4:16, NKJV

The man who brought them freedom now feels like an enemy because other teachers have redefined what faithfulness looks like.

Truth can become offensive when bondage has been renamed obedience.

“They zealously court you, but for no good;”

Galatians 4:17, NKJV

Zeal can feel validating. Someone passionately wants you, pursues you, affirms you, and makes you feel spiritually important. Intensity does not prove truth.

Booklet Two already showed that Paul himself had once been exceedingly zealous. Zeal needs truth.

“...they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them.”

Galatians 4:17, NKJV

People become separated from freedom, then dependent upon the people who control access to the system.

Paul does not want the Galatians dependent upon Paul. He wants Christ formed in them. That is the mark of healthy spiritual leadership. Not: *you need me*. But: *you need Christ*.

If you have ever been loved most when you were useful to a ministry, you already understand that sentence.

Courting is not the same as fathering. Fathering wants Christ formed in you, even if that means you need the leader less. Courting wants your zeal aimed back at the system.

“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you... I have doubts about you.”

Galatians 4:19–20, NKJV

What does Paul want?

Not better Galatian rule-followers, loyal members of Paul’s movement, or people who simply repeat Paul’s phrases. His goal is Christ formed in you. A healthy parent wants a child to mature. A healthy pastor wants believers to grow. Religious control works differently. It creates permanent dependence.

Paul is laboring so Christ will be formed in them—not so that Paul becomes their permanent intermediary. He knows they received the Gospel. He knows the Spirit worked among them. Yet their present direction is so serious that Paul is alarmed.

The question is not whether they ever heard truth. It is why people who heard truth are returning to bondage.

Part Five — Two Sons, Two Covenants

Paul turns to the story of Abraham's family in Genesis. Abraham had a son, Ishmael, through Hagar, who was enslaved, and later a son, Isaac, through Sarah, who was free. Paul is not retelling the whole story of Genesis. He is drawing out one contrast from it: one son was produced by human effort, and the other came through God's promise.

"Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman."

Galatians 4:21–22, NKJV

Helping God Keep a Promise

Every wounded religious system has a Hagar story.

God said He would do it. Time passed. The promise felt slow. Someone practical said, "We should help."

The help produced something that looked like fruit and behaved like bondage.

Ishmael can be loved as a person and still be the wrong way to fulfill a promise. Systems can be impressive and still be born according to the flesh.

If you have been used to "help God" keep people in line, this will sting.

Good.

The sting is not cruelty. It is Paul refusing to let flesh wear the name of faithfulness.

You Want Law? Then Hear It

You want Law? Then listen to it.

Do not merely quote favorable commandments. Do not selectively use Moses to support your religious system.

Hear what the Law's own story says.

Two sons. Same Abraham. Different women. Different circumstances.

Paul sees in them a picture of the conflict consuming Galatia.

"But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise."

Galatians 4:23, NKJV

Abraham had received a promise. Time passed. The promise seemed impossible. So Abraham and Sarah attempted to produce through human means what God had promised to give.

Hagar represents human attempt to produce the promise.

That is why the story fits Galatians so perfectly.

Two systems again: flesh and promise; human production and divine provision; I will make it happen, and God will fulfill what He promised.

The problem with flesh is not only bad behavior. Ishmael was not produced through drunkenness, a pagan temple, or violent rebellion. Here, flesh does not mean only immoral

desire. It means human effort operating apart from dependence on God—even when that effort looks religious.

The flesh can appear reasonable, practical, religious, responsible. Abraham had a promise. The flesh said, “Help God accomplish it.”

That same instinct appears in Christian religion.

God promises righteousness; we help through Law.

God gives sonship; we help through religious performance.

God gives Life; we help through fleshly restraint.

God promises transformation; we build the system that will force it.

Paul says *bondage*.

Sinai and the Jerusalem That Now Is

“Which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar—for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children—but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.”

Galatians 4:24–26, NKJV

Paul himself tells us he is using the history symbolically. He identifies two covenants. That is his interpretation. We do not have to invent one.

This is devastating to the claim that returning to Sinai is Christian maturity.

Paul connects Sinai here with bondage. Not because the Law was evil—Booklet Five settled that—but because the relationship governed from Sinai is not the believer’s mature sonship relationship in Christ.

He does not say Sinai is the believer’s continuing freedom charter. He says the covenant from Sinai gives birth to bondage.

The same word controlling this entire section.

Paul does not locate the bondage only in paganism. He connects it with the present Jerusalem. That cannot be ignored. Paul’s Galatian argument has repeatedly involved pressure connected to Jerusalem and circumcision. Now he associates the present Jerusalem with bondage.

That is Paul’s language. We do not need to add to it. Nor should we soften it.

Then: “the Jerusalem above is free.” Earthly religious center; then the Jerusalem above.

Paul refuses to make earthly religious geography the center of Christian belonging. Our inheritance comes from God’s promise in Christ.

Part Six — Children of the Free

Paul has named two covenants and contrasted bondage with freedom. He now tells believers where they belong in that picture. They are children of promise, like Isaac, because their inheritance rests on what God gives.

“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”

Galatians 4:28–29, NKJV

Flesh Still Persecutes Promise

Not children of religious performance. Children of promise.

God acted.

God promised.

God fulfilled.

God gave Life.

We received.

This is the same argument Paul has been building since Abraham believed God.

The conflict is not merely doctrinal. The flesh resists what God produces through promise.

RELIGIOUS FLESH IS THREATENED BY A GOSPEL IT CANNOT CONTROL.

Grace offends human achievement because grace leaves no room for boasting.

God promised.

God sent His Son.

God redeemed.

God adopted.

God gave the Spirit.

God gives the inheritance.

Where is human boasting? Gone.

Flesh wants to contribute something that gives it grounds to say, “I did this.” Promise says God did. That is why a believer who begins to rest often meets resistance—sometimes from the very people who first taught them the Bible. Rest looks like compromise to a system that can only recognize labor.

“But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.”

Galatians 4:29, NKJV

Do not interpret that resistance as proof you have left God. It may be proof you have left Hagar.

“Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

Galatians 4:30–31, NKJV

Severe words.

Why?

Paul will not merge bondage and promise into one blended Christian system.

The two do not jointly produce the inheritance. Law and promise cannot both function as the basis of inheritance. Slave and son cannot both define your posture before God. Performance and grace cannot both determine your acceptance. Flesh and Spirit cannot both be the Source.

You may try to mix them. Paul does not.

We are not children of the bondwoman but of the free. Not try harder to be free. Not behave enough to become free. Paul says we are of the free. That is identity.

This is where the booklet must land.

Conclusion — Then Protect That Freedom

Paul began this section with one of the most beautiful descriptions of Christian life: “but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God.” Then immediately: “how is it that you turn again?”

That is the tragedy.

You know God. You are known by God. Yet you want to return to rules that cannot know you.

Before Christ, you may have known religion, spiritual ideas, moral principles, false gods, and religious rituals. Paul says *you did not know God*.

Then the Gospel came. Christ came. The Spirit came. Sonship came.

And now you can know Him.

Christianity is personal—not imaginary, not mystical fantasy, not a license to invent revelations. Real relationship with the living God.

He knows you. He understands you. He teaches, corrects, leads, loves, works within, and invites you to participate.

Even good religious activity can be used to hide you from the very God you claim to serve.

You can attend church and hide, read Scripture and hide, teach and hide, serve and hide, keep rules and hide. The issue is not the activity. The question is whether you are using religion to know God—or to keep Him at a manageable distance.

Why would we hide from Someone who loves us?

Because we do not believe He loves us.

We believe He is angry, keeping score, waiting for failure, holding yesterday’s sin against us, etc...

Complete forgiveness makes intimacy possible.

BEING KNOWN BY GOD MAKES HIDING UNNECESSARY.

Say it in the ordinary rooms of your week.

In the kitchen after you spoke sharply.

In the parking lot after church when you felt measured.

In the dark when the old accusation returns.

He knows you.

He is not discovering you. He is not drafting a new contract. The Son has already brought you home, and the Spirit already cries *Abba* in you.

If a church taught you to fear being known, you will need time to believe this.

Time is not unbelief.

Time is what it takes for a hunted nervous system to learn a Father’s voice.

Stay with the text while the feeling catches up. Paul is not asking you to perform peace. He is telling you the relationship that makes peace possible. And if the people around you prefer you anxious—because anxious people are easier to manage—do not confuse their preferences with God’s.

The living God is not threatened by a son who has stopped hiding.

If you are known by God, and you are of the free—then what?
Paul will not leave freedom unprotected. He is about to say,

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.”

Galatians 5:1, NKJV

That is where Booklet Eight begins.

Before that command arrives, let the first half of Paul’s sentence finish its work in you.

YOU HAVE KNOWN GOD—OR RATHER—YOU ARE KNOWN BY GOD.

So let the argument land plainly:

- You are known by God.
- You do not need to hide.
- Religious performance cannot give you sonship.
- The calendar cannot mediate acceptance.
- The promise cannot be fulfilled by the flesh.
- You are not of the bondwoman, but of the free.

The return to weak elements is not an upgrade. It is a refusal of the most intimate gift in the letter.

Stand fast.