

Galatians 13 – Children of Promise
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We are in a study of Galatians called “Freedom Through Christ.” Up to the point in this letter Paul has confronted the Galatians for turning from believing that Christ and the cross were enough for salvation and for believing they had to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. He has rebuked them and he has lovingly appealed to them to return to the truth that they are sons of God, not slaves to the law.

Today I’m preaching a message called Children of Promise. In the next passage, Galatians 4:21-31, Paul uses an Old Testament story of 2 mothers to show us that grace and law cannot coexist in our lives. In Galatians 4:21, Paul appeals to those who claim the law for salvation.

Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

Paul is directly addressing those who promoted legalism and those who had been deceived by the legalists. He is addressing those who believe that keeping the law is the basis of salvation and relationship with God.

Why would people want to relate to God through the law?

First, they always have the outward certainty of a list of rules to keep.

Secondly, they can compliment themselves because they keep the rules better than others do.

Thirdly, they can take the credit for their own salvation, because they earned it by keeping the list of rules.

Under the law it is what you do for God that makes you right with Him. Under the grace of God, it is what God has done for us in Christ that makes us right with Him.

Under the law the focus is on our performance. Under the grace of God, the focus is on who Jesus is and what He has done.

Christians have no business living under the law. That’s why Paul asked – are you aware of what the law says? He felt he had not totally gotten his point across yet, so he now approaches the matter with another illustration from the Old Testament.

Paul first reminds his readers of their forefather Abraham and the beginning of the Hebrew race. Galatians 4:22-23 says:

The Scriptures say that Abraham had two sons, one from his slave-wife and one from his freeborn wife. The son of the slave-wife was born in a human attempt to bring about the fulfillment of God's promise. But the son of the

freeborn wife was born as God's own fulfillment of His promise.

Paul took it for granted that his readers knew the Bible. So he explains his point from the story of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah without a lot of detail from the story.

Many of you are familiar with this story, but I'm going to give you a condensed version of it today so everyone understands. God told Abraham in Genesis 13:15-16

All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted.

Then, years later in Genesis 15:3-6

Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." And he believed the Lord, and He counted it to him as righteousness.

Yet more years went by with no children. Genesis 16:1-2 says:

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

Just because someone did something in the Bible, that does not mean that what they did was right. This caused great problems for the family and is causing problems today. When Hagar saw she was pregnant, she treated Sarah with contempt. So Sarah treated her so harshly that she ran away. The angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar and told her to go back and submit to Sarah. Then, Genesis 16:15-16 says:

Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael. But listen to what the angel of the Lord told her in Genesis 16:11-12. The angel of the Lord also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the Lord has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

Ladies and gentlemen, beware of trying to help God bring about His plan. Beware of coming up with your own ideas to speed things up. The result of you trying to bring about God's will in the flesh will cause you to end up with an Ishmael.

This prophetic word about Ishmael came to pass and has caused centuries of problems, wars and terrorism. Ishmael is indeed the father of many because he is the father of those in the religion of Islam. And the seed of Ishmael are to this day living in hostility to those outside their faith – especially to those who are called his brothers here. That is speaking of the children of Isaac, which are the children of Israel, the Jewish people. It was between the sons of Hagar and Sarah that the modern Arab-Israeli animosity began 4,000 years ago, producing a continual conflict between two peoples who both trace their lineage from Abraham.

And many people have brought forth Ishmaels into their lives by trying to bring about the will of God apart from the plan of God. Please stop trying to speed up God's timing. Trust Him to fulfill His promise in His time!

Genesis 17:15-21 says: God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife... I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year."

Genesis 21:1-14 tells us that the Lord's promise came true and Sarah conceived and had a son named Isaac when Abraham was 100 years old. Verses 8-14 say:

The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, and she said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring." Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy.

And that's how both Isaac and Ishmael became the father of nations. Now back to Galatians. The legalists who deceived the Galatians taught that they were right with God because they were children of Abraham. Paul agreed that they are children of Abraham, but said that they forgot that Abraham had two sons. The one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. In these verses, Paul uses these 2 women to contrast law vs. grace.

1- The first contrast Paul draws between grace and legalism is the contrast between flesh and spirit.

One son of Abraham was born by a freewoman, and one was born by a bondwoman. Ishmael was Abraham's son, but he was the son according to the flesh and unbelief and trying to make your own way before God. The birth of Ishmael through Hagar was according to the flesh because the scheme for his conception devised by Sarah and carried out by Abraham was motivated by purely selfish desires.

It doesn't always look like it, but legalism is living according to the flesh. It denies God's promise and tries to make your own way to God through the law.

Warren Wiersbe said: Legalism does not mean the setting of spiritual standards; it means worshipping these standards and thinking we are spiritual because we obey them. It also means judging other believers on the basis of these standards.

In contrast Abraham's second son Isaac was born miraculously, through a miraculous work of the Holy Spirit. Isaac was the son of faith in God's supernatural promise.

2- The second contrast Paul draws between grace and legalism is that law is based on the works, but grace is based on the promise of God.

The birth of Ishmael through Hagar was based on the works of Abraham and Sarah, and as the result, Ishmael was not the son God promised. However, the birth of Isaac, the son by the free woman Sarah, was through the promise of God. The conception of Ishmael represents man's way, the way of the flesh, whereas that of Isaac represents God's way, the way of promise.

Ishmael symbolizes those who have had only natural birth and who trust in their own works. Isaac symbolizes those who also have had spiritual birth because they have trusted in the work of Jesus Christ. Galatians 4:24 says:

Now this may be interpreted allegorically for these women represent two covenants.

Paul wanted it understood that his reference to Hagar and Ishmael were pictures, meant to illustrate his point. Paul used a real story as an allegory to illustrate biblical truth.

It's important to understand that the story from Genesis is a real story – it really happened. The "allegorical" meaning does not do away with the literal meaning of the story.

Paul was guided by the Holy Spirit to use these women as an allegory, a story that is symbolic and illustrates something else. But we must be careful about reading allegorical or symbolic things into the Scriptures. You can take a biblical story and make it an allegory for anything. That's why we must be sure, like Paul, that the allegory is illustrating a biblical truth, not a man-made imaginary truth! Galatians 4:24-27 says:

One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

These women and their sons represent 2 covenants. In the Bible, a covenant is a binding agreement that sets the rules for our relationship with God.

- Hagar and Ishmael represent the covenant of the law and works
- Sarah and Isaac represent the covenant of grace and faith.

3- The third contrast between the law and grace is that law results in slavery and grace results in freedom.

Paul told the Galatian Christians that the legalists wanted them to relate to God by a set of rules, and Paul wanted them to relate to God by the gospel of grace. The Old Covenant of law was given through Moses at Mount Sinai and required God's chosen people, the Jews, to keep all the commands He gave in that covenant.

Because the terms of the covenant were humanly impossible to keep, it produced a type of religious slaves who were bound to a master from whom they could never escape. They could not escape because they were trying to live up to that covenant in their own strength and self-righteousness. They were slaves struggling for freedom that they could never obtain by their own efforts. That is what Hagar and Ishmael represent.

In contrast, grace is free and it results in freedom. It is free because it recognizes that Jesus paid the price, and we don't have to pay it ourselves.

4- The fourth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between heaven and earth.

Real Christianity comes from heaven and not earth. The old covenant corresponds to Jerusalem because that was the capital of religious Judaism. This was the way most Jewish people in Paul's day tried to be right with God — by trusting in their ability to please God by keeping the law. The other covenant is associated with Jerusalem, with Mount Zion — but not the Jerusalem of this earth. Instead, it is associated with God's own New Jerusalem in heaven.

Hebrews 12 tells us that we have not come to Mt. Sinai where the law was given and everyone was afraid. Instead verses 22-24 tell us:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant...

Make sure you go to the right mountain – Mt. Zion, not Mt. Sinai!

5- The fifth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between the persecuted and persecutors.

Galatians 4:28-29 says: Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. As Christians, we don't identify with Ishmael, the child of the flesh. We identify with Isaac, as children of a promise that is received by faith.

Notice that he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit. So we should not be surprised that modern day people who follow God in the flesh persecute those who follow God in faith through the promise.

The persecution Christians face is not always by the world, but also by legalistic people in the church. The legalists — represented by Ishmael — have always persecuted true Christianity, represented by Isaac. As we walk in the freedom of grace and in the miraculous power of the New Covenant, we should expect to be mistreated by those who don't. Those who trust in God have always been persecuted by those who trust in themselves.

So what do we do? The answer is clear, but not easy. Galatians 4:30-31 says:

But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

We must cast out the bondwoman and her son.

Law and grace cannot live together as principles for our Christian life.

Hagar and Sarah could not live together in the same house, so God told Abraham to send Hagar away. Likewise, every Christian must send away the idea of relating to God on the principle of law, the principle of what we do for Him instead of what He has done for us in Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that Sarah could live with Hagar and Ishmael until the son of promise was born. Once Isaac was born, then Hagar and Ishmael had to go. In the same way, people can relate to the law one way before the promise of the gospel was made clear in Jesus Christ. But now that grace has been made clear, there is nothing to do but to cast out the bondswoman and her son. For the son of the bondswoman will not be an heir with the son of the freewoman.

6- The sixth contrast Paul draws between Christianity and legalism is the contrast between inheriting everything and inheriting nothing.

While the "Isaacs" of this world may be persecuted, they also have a glorious inheritance that the "Ishmaels" of this world will never know. We are heirs of God through the principle of grace, not works.

One of the great issues Paul addressed in Galatians was freedom. He knew the bondage of trying to earn his own way before God, because he lived that way for decades. Now he knew the freedom of living as a son of God, free in Jesus Christ. In John 8:36, Jesus said,

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

We are children of the promise, children of grace, which means we are called to freedom. But there are times we are tempted to sink back into the trap of the legalism. Our hearts sometimes cry out like Abraham, "Oh that Ishmael might live!" The works of the flesh cry out to live! That's why Paul said that we must die to the law and to our flesh.

We must remember that we are children of promise, not of the law. We are free, not slaves. We owe our salvation to the power of God, not our own works. So cast out the bondswoman and her son! Refuse to be an Ishmael born of the flesh and doomed to a life of slavery. Remember that grace is more fruitful than legalism. Legalism will not earn us anything from God!

Don't live by the law but live your life by the grace of God! Be an Isaac, a child of promise – destined to an inheritance as a joint heir of Christ. Do what Paul says to do in Galatians 5:1

It is for freedom Christ has set us free; so stand firm and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Jesus died so that we could be set free from the bondage of the law. Make a decision today to never go back there again!!!