

Galatians, Chapter Four, Lesson Three

CHILDREN OF PROMISE Galatians 4:21-31

STIMULATE

** In our study together last week we saw the heart of the apostle Paul erupt in an overflowing expression of his love and compassion for his children in the faith, the Galatians. Did Paul abandon his stand for accurate doctrine in that wonderful show of compassion?

Absolutely not! He used his compassion to correct the error and bring his Galatians to the truth.

** Have you remained mentally alert for an opportunity to follow Paul's example of "Correcting with Compassion" anyone that the Lord brings across your path who needs to understand the truth of God's word?

In keeping with Peter's exhortation to "gird your minds for action" (1Peter 1:13), I endeavor to be prepared. Not just with an answer, but with the compassion of Jesus Christ so that I might be speaking the truth in love.

MOTIVATE

** Perhaps you would all agree that we have so much for which we should be thankful. But, where does it all begin? What is the foundational truth that set us on the course of thanksgiving to God in the first place? Today, Paul is going to encourage our hearts with the wonderful news that we are "Children of Promise" who should live our lives daily with an attitude of gratitude. Join me now in Galatians 4:21-31 and we can enjoy God's precious truth together.

Read Passage (V.21-24) (V.25-28) (V.29-31)

Opening Prayer

Children of Promise

INVESTIGATE

V.21 ** To whom is Paul addressing his first question of our passage for today?

"...you who want to be under law..."

** Who was that?

The Judaizers and those Christians who had listened to and succumbed to their heretical teaching.

** What does Paul ask them?

"...do you not listen to the law?" If you insist on living under the law (or in bondage to it), at least listen to what it really is saying. You must be perfect!

Jesus took the same approach in His Sermon on the Mount. cf. Matthew 5:17-20 and 48

** Before we get any further into our passage for today, there is a phrase that we must understand. Look with me at verse 24. What does "allegorically speaking" mean?

"A partial similarity between like features of two things on which a comparison may be made." Paul is going to use a literal, historical account which is analogous to and illustrative of the spiritual truth he wishes to explain.

V.22 ** Now with that in mind, to what historical account is Paul making reference?

To Abraham and his two sons.

** Why would Paul use this account to neutralize the heretical attack of the Judaizers?

They were of the spiritually proud group who had told John the Baptist that they were going to heaven because they had Abraham for their father. cf. Matthew 3:7-9

** What are the names of Abraham's "two sons"?

Ishmael (from Hagar) - Genesis 16:1-2, 11

Isaac (from Sarah) - Genesis 21:1-3

** Is it enough then for the Judaizers to say, "We have Abraham as our father"?

No, physically the Arab and Jewish nations both had Abraham as their father. Those who thought they were self-righteous, not needing a Savior, would depend on their heritage.

Look at John 8:31-44.

** Now, back in Galatians 4:22, what contrast does Paul point out between these two sons?

One is by a "bondwomen", one is by a "free woman".

"Throughout this analogy, all distinctions between the two sons are based on the fact that they had two different mothers, not on the fact that they had a common father! The heritage of the line through one mother is lostness and bondage, and the heritage of the line through the other mother is salvation and freedom." John MacArthur Commentary

V.23 ** How did these two sons come to be, according to what?

Ishmael - "...according to the flesh..."

Isaac - "...through the promise..."

** Does "according to the flesh" mean born of a physical relationship between a man and a woman?

No - everyone (including Isaac, excluding Jesus) is born out of that physical relationship.

** Then what does it mean?

Ishmael was produced by Sarah's and Abraham's own effort or works, and not through faith! (Romans 9:6-9)

** Ishmael then becomes representative of all those who would try to be saved according to their own fleshly efforts, or salvation by works. But what about Isaac, what does he represent in this analogy?

Being born "through the promise", Isaac represents those who are the spiritual descendants of Abraham who was saved by grace through faith. cf. Galatians 3:7

V.24 ** What does this actual event speak of allegorically?

Two covenants.

** What are the two covenants and who represents them?

1) Law and works, represented by Hagar and Ishmael
2) Grace and Faith, represented by Sarah and Isaac
cf. 1Corinthians 11:25 The new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ!

** How does Paul illustrate the first or old covenant?

Hagar, proceeding from Mt. Sinai, bearing slaves!

V.25 ** What present day situation (at the time of Paul's writing) corresponded to Hagar and Ishmael?

The "present Jerusalem" who "is in slavery with her children".

** Was Paul referring to the domination of Rome over the nation Israel when he said, "..she is in slavery.."?

No - He is talking about the established legalistic system of self-righteousness that kept her enslaved to sin and the Law. cf. Galatians 3:10 and 25

Analogous to Sarah and Abraham trying in their own flesh to have children by using Hagar, is the religious system of the day in Israel which tried to produce righteousness by the works of the flesh in keeping the Law.

V.26 ** How does Paul now describe the second covenant?

"the Jerusalem above is free" cf. Ephesians 2:19, Colossians 3:1, Philippians 3:20

** Free from what?

Free from being under the curse of the Law!
Free from the hopelessness of trying to earn our way to heaven by being perfect!

** How does Paul drive home the point that the Jerusalem above represents the free woman of verses 22 and 23?

She (allegorically speaking) is our mother. Heaven is seen as giving birth to her children of promise.

** Just as a footnote, will this city always be above?

No, the apostle John saw her! cf. Revelation 21:1-2

V.27 ** What Old Testament passage does Paul now borrow from to make his point about Sarah?

Isaiah 54:1 - Referring to the prophet as he tried to encourage the Jewish exiles in Babylonian captivity.

** What similarities do you see that speak of Sarah?

- 1) She was a barren woman until her old age.
- 2) She was not in labor.
- 3) She would end up with more children than her friends, who had husbands. cf. Genesis 15:5

V.28 ** To what marvelous conclusion does Paul now bring his Galatian reader?

They are "Children of Promise", just like Isaac!

** Does that make our Godly heritage dependant upon our efforts or His grace?

It is clearly the result of God's loving grace to us through the work of our Lord Jesus Christ!

V.29 ** What is going to be the inevitable relationship between these two son types?

The self-righteous, works oriented "religious" person will always persecute those who are saved by grace, through faith and even think that they are serving God in the process.
cf. John 16:1-3

** What is Paul referring to when he says, "...as at that time..."?

At the celebration feast held on behalf of Isaac (who was approximately 3 years old), where Ishmael (17 years old) mocked the occasion because of his jealousy and hatred for Isaac.
cf. Genesis 21:8-10

And so it is now, those who do not know God through a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, are still mocking and persecuting those of us who belong to Him by faith!

V.30 ** Who is Paul quoting in this verse?

Sarah! (As we have just seen in Genesis 21:10)

** What is the conclusion, that Sarah draws from this lesson of her life?

Doing things in the flesh, while not trusting in God's promise, only produces children who will not be an heir to the Kingdom with Isaac.

V.31 ** How does Paul bring his allegorical argument to an end?

By stating that the "brethren" are not of Hagar and would not try to earn their salvation in fleshly effort but they are of Sarah and will gain their eternal life by grace through faith and God keeping His promise in Jesus Christ.
(V.23)

EXTRICATE

** What reasons did Paul give us today for a person to not want to be under the old covenant?

- 1) The Law demands perfection, "listen to the law".
- 2) It was according to the flesh, not God's grace.
- 3) It produced children who are slaves of sin.
- 4) It produced children who are to be cast out.

DELINEATE

** What are some of the blessings of being under the new covenant?

- 1) We are born through the promise of God.
- 2) We have freedom in Christ from the Law.
- 3) We are privileged to suffer for Jesus Christ.
- 4) We are the heirs of God with Isaac.

EVALUATE

** Jesus said that this new covenant was "in His blood". Does the cost and importance of your redemption get lost in the everyday mundane things of this life? As you look into your own heart, is it a thing of great value to you?

** If so, how then should it effect your life everyday?

- 1) Living with thanksgiving in your heart, always!
- 2) You should be eager to share the good news!

ACTIVATE

** Knowing that we are "Children of Promise" should prompt our hearts to develop an "attitude of gratitude" which will become evident to all, for the glory of Christ.

Will you commit to being available to our Lord this next week, that He might direct you to gratefully share His saving gospel with someone He brings across your path?

Closing Prayer