



Part 13 – Which Side Are You On?

Galatians 4:21-31

(Background from Genesis 16-18, 21) Because the New Testament is built on the Old Testament, this brings us to our passage this morning in Galatians 4:21-31. Here we will see on full display the gospel preached from the Old Testament. Paul helped found the churches in Galatia. He first preached the gospel to them. But now, the Judaizers (we could call them “legalizers” or “legalists”) were seeking to lead the Galatian church into a Christianized form of Judaism. They were proficient in the Old Testament Scriptures, but so was Paul.

In this passage, Paul is taking on the Judaizers on their own terms. He uses passages and stories that they

know well in order to draw contrasts between the religion of works and the message of the gospel of grace. The non-Jewish or Gentile Galatian Christians believed that they needed to be like the Jews in order to be truly faithful to God. They needed to follow the letter of the law to truly be His children. So there was this tension between trying to fulfill the law themselves and believing the gospel of grace that Paul had taught them. That tension sets the stage for our passage this morning.

What do we need to understand this passage?

A definition: Allegory – a symbolic representation; a story that has two meanings

Paul is speaking figuratively using an actual historical event to point towards the finished work of Christ.

A tool: A line

Paul is making a series of contrasts and the line will help us see those.

A question: Which side are you on?

As we are walking through these contrasts, ask yourself, “Which side am I on?”

What does this passage mean?

Let’s walk through the contrasts Paul lays out:

under the law son by a slave woman born according to the flesh Old covenant – Covenant of works Covenant from Mount Sinai Children of slavery Hagar Present Jerusalem Slavery (Offspring through human effort) (Ishmael)	listen to the law son of the free woman born through promise New Covenant – Covenant of grace (Covenant from Mount Zion) (Children of freedom) (Sarah) Jerusalem above Free Miraculous offspring not through human effort Isaac Children of the promise Born according to the Spirit Persecuted Does receive inheritance Children of the free woman
Born according to the flesh Persecutor Does not receive inheritance Children of the slave	

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

“Under the law” – Paul focuses in on the elementary principles (stoicheia) (Galatians 4:9) of Judaism.

- Rules to be perfect or earn favor with God
- They looked to the law for life and salvation, but the law can’t give either.
- You can go through all the right motions, but not actually understand or believe in what you are doing.

“Listen to the law”

- The law shows us the love of God and we seek to live according to the law because we love God.

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.

“Abraham had two sons” – The super religious Jews called Pharisees claimed they were loved by God and were His people because they could trace their bloodlines back to Abraham (Matthew 3:9, John 8:39), but Paul replies to them and to these Judaizers or legalists, “Great! But do you remember that Abraham had two sons?”

Son “by a slave woman”

- The slave obeys out of fear or obligation to try to earn favor with the master.

Son “by a free woman”

- The free person engages out of love and relationship seeking the best for the other person.
- When we talk about freedom what we mean is living as God intended for us to live.

²³ *But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.*

“born according to the flesh” – born by human effort in the ordinary way (John 1:12-13).

- Born out of trying to control or help God out; born of human contriving

“born through promise” – born through supernatural intervention.

²⁴ *Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.*

“two covenants” – The Old Covenant or Covenant of Works versus The New Covenant or Covenant of Grace

²⁵ *Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.*

- “present Jerusalem” – characterized by rituals, rites and works of the law.
- “Jerusalem above” – perfect, right, just, heavenly city
- “she is our mother” – by faith, by God’s supernatural work

²⁷ *For it is written, “Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.”*

The suffering servant passage, Isaiah 53, immediately precedes this quotation from Isaiah 54:1.

- Why can she rejoice? Because of Christ’s work of suffering and dying on her behalf.

Natural/man-made religion versus supernatural/God-made religion.

²⁸ *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.*

“brothers” – Paul is not addressing a church who he thinks have fallen away, rather, Paul is talking to Christians who are in danger of going back into a religion of legalism.

“like Isaac, are children of promise” – Paul is using terminology that Jews would’ve used for themselves, but never for Gentiles.

²⁹ *But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.*

“persecuted him”

- We should not be surprised at persecution. This is how it has always been with those who are supernaturally born, born of the Spirit.
- Those who seek their own justification based on their works will inevitably persecute those who are justified by faith.

³⁰ *But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.”*

What do you do with legalism? Cast it out. Shut it down. Flee from it.

³¹ *So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.*

- “We were therefore sons of the slave woman when we were liable for our sins. But, having received the remission of sins from Christ, we have been made free” (Ambrosiaster, *Ancient Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VIII*, page 71).

What are you going to do with what you have learned in this passage?

Which Side Are You On? Christ versus Idols, Christ with Idols, Christ who needs our help, Christ is Lord and Savior