

BRIEF PERSPECTIVE ON ABRAHAM'S TWO SONS (GALATIANS 4:21-31)

The situation confronting the Galatians Christians were unique. They were, in the same congregation so to speak, as Jewish Christians. The Jewish Christians were straddling a number of covenants - the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the New Covenant in Jesus. The cultural forces that shaped the Jews were strong and some Jewish Christians had difficulty in relinquishing their former practices.

Paul now uses an allegory to drive home his earlier points - the Gentiles who have faith like Abraham are sons, not slaves. They are sons by faith in Christ and have received the gift of the Holy Spirit as a sign of their faith. Some of the Jewish Christians (the Judaizers) are forcing the Gentiles to obey the law by undergoing circumcision and thus into slavery. Paul's writings in Galatians 4 invite two critical questions.

- Sons or slaves?
- Living as sons or living as slaves?

The first question addresses the identity. A son is one who professed faith in Jesus and living by the power of the Holy Spirit as a demonstration of his faith. A slave is one who has not professed his faith in Jesus and consequently do not have the Holy Spirit. The Galatians Gentiles are sons of God. Our situation is similar, we have never heard of the Law nor under any compulsion to follow the Law. Our first encounter of God is within the new covenant in Jesus Christ.

Having established the answer to the first question, let's examine the second question. Can a slave live like a son? Only in the external. The Pharisees were well known for their strict adherence to a code of living. But there is no relationship to God, no inward reality. The power to live the faith-filled life comes from the Spirit which the slave does not have. So, the slave can only live like a slave (which is the default mode for mankind).

Can a son live like a son? Obviously, yes. The faith that he has in Jesus meant the Spirit is given to him to live that Spirit-empowered life. It is also possible that some of God's children are not aware of the truth that God has freely given His Spirit to us. Some are not appropriating the fullness of blessing that the Father has given to His children.

Can a son live like a slave? Yes, but with serious eternal consequences. That's next week's sermon! For a preview, follow Paul's argument in 5:4, 21.

So, the questions to ask ourselves after this week's sermon: are we sons or slaves and are we living as sons or slaves?

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WARMING UP

1. Has anyone said that you looked like your father or your mother? Has anyone said that you are Christ-like?
2. Are we offended when people asked if we are saved? Why or why not?

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read Gal 4:21-23 - Son or slave?

3. What were the similarities and what were the differences in the circumstances of Isaac and Ishmael birth?
4. What does the passage teaches us about living by faith?

Read Gal 4:24-27, Jer 31:31-34 - Covenant relationship with God

5. Which two covenants were being compared? According to Jeremiah, which of these covenants has been superseded?
6. Why is an understanding of the covenant important?

Read Gal 4:28-31, Gen 17:15, 16, Gen 21:8-13 - We are children of promise

7. Which two synonymous phrases on the identity of the Galatians Gentiles are repeated in these verses?
8. Why is there persecution for children of promise and why should our response be?

MOVING FORWARD

Let us examine ourselves that we are still professing faith in Jesus, repenting of our sins and living by the power of the Holy Spirit (the conditions set by God in our covenant relationship with Him).

Pray for one another as even the cultural forces of Paul's day seek to hinder the Christians from running well, there are forces in our society that thwart us from following Jesus wholeheartedly.

LIFE TOGETHER

The Galatians problem highlighted for us the need for the pure gospel – faith in Jesus Christ alone is enough.

Pray that our church will not use any other substitute or add or subtract to God's grace in Jesus.

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Leaders Guides

These notes are primarily for the Into the Passage portion, and are to be used just as guidelines or commentary notes. Most of them are my own thoughts, so take that with a grain of salt. Let the Word of God lead you to truth, not these notes.

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read Gal 4:21-23 - Son or slave?

3. What were the similarities and what were the differences in the circumstances of Isaac and Ishmael birth?

Both are Abraham's sons. Both were born to fulfil God's promise.

One is born out of human attempt to fulfil God's promise whereas Isaac was born as God's own fulfilment of His promise

4. What does the passage teaches us about living by faith?

Faith is about obedience to God and trusting God to work out His plan and purpose. Practically, our faith is worked out when we spent time with God in His Word and in prayer.

Read Gal 4:24-27, Jer 31:31-34 - Covenant relationship with God

5. Which two covenants were being compared? According to Jeremiah, which of these covenants has been superseded?

The Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants were being compared. Jeremiah referred to the Mosaic covenant being superseded by a new covenant in Jesus Christ. Whereas the new covenant in Jesus Christ is a fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant.

6. Why is an understanding of the covenant important?

**On the negative side, the Judaizers were probably twisting the significance of the covenant to suit their teaching.
On the positive side, our relationship with God is based on a covenant. Many Christians do not fully appreciate the covenant**

that God has made with them. The new covenant in Jesus brings great blessings but also obligations. For example, one cannot enjoy the blessings of sonship without repentance of sins and faith in Jesus. Some also understood wrongly that they can live however they like with no consequence, once they have professed faith in Jesus. The death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) happened when they lied to the Holy Spirit.

Read Gal 4:28-31, Gen 17:15, 16, Gen 21:8-13 - We are children of promise

7. Which two synonymous phrases on the identity of the Galatians Gentiles are repeated in these verses?

We are children of promise, just like Isaac (verse 28) and we are children of the free woman (verse 31). Just as Isaac was born out of God's fulfilment of His own promise, likewise, our new birth in the spirit was only possible because Jesus has paid the price.

Children of slaves will become slaves.

The Abrahamic covenant includes Sarah (who was given a new name like Abram) with a pronouncement of blessing. Like Abraham, who is described as father of the nations, Sarah was described as mother of the nations. So, the fulfilment of the promise came through two persons, Abraham and Sarah.

8. Why is there persecution for children of promise and why should our response be?

Ishmael as son of Hagar, represented the human attempt and stood as opposing principles to God's grace. The way of the flesh will subvert the grace of God and must be dealt with severely (be sent away). This principle of dealing severely with the flesh is seen throughout Scriptures, including this instance in Galatians. Paul used harsh words on the people who are trying to lead God's people astray (Gal 5:10 - God will judge that person, whoever he is... wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!)