

Galatians 4: 21-27; “The Two Covenants”, Message # 28 in the series - “The Two Covenants”, A Bible Study conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall on the evening of August 20th, at the church.

Let us ask ourselves a very simple questions as we begin to try to understand what Paul is saying here. What is it that is revealed to us here in these verses which will teach us something more about the difference between being under law and under grace? For that is the Apostle's purpose is in relating to us this Biblical allegory. 1st of all – That Abraham had two sons, and these sons represent Abraham's coming to understand the difference between the principles of law and grace. 2nd – That these sons and their mothers are symbolic of the 2 Covenants of Law and grace. And 3rd – That the mothers of these sons represent the bondage of those under the law and the freedom under grace.

1st of all – Abraham had two sons and these sons represent Abraham's coming to understand the difference between the principles of law and grace. (verses 21-23a)

“Tell me you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?” “It is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a free-woman.” “But he who was of the bond-woman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise.” I hope that you understand that the allegorizing of Scripture is generally not a good thing. The Scriptures are meant to be read plainly and straightforwardly, as they were written. It is not a good thing to be trying hard to find a hidden spiritual meaning in every text and every narrative in the Scripture. Over the history of the Church, this has led to some of the most wild and exaggerated views of what ought to be plain, from a plain reading. Let me read to you what John Oakes says, from his website – “Evidence for Christianity”. “To allegorize is to read into a historical narrative a spiritualized interpretation which is not obviously justified by the actual historical events.” “Many of the Jewish teachers taught the Old Testament as allegory.” “Most famous of these was Philo, a Jewish teacher of the first century.” “He tended to pull things out of the Old Testament which were clearly produced in his own mind.” “He was able to teach virtually anything he wanted by spiritualizing the Old Testament.” “Unfortunately, allegorization was a major influence in early Christian interpretation of the Old Testament as well.” “Such teachers as Clement of Alexandria and Origen committed rather blatant excesses in their spiritualizing/allegorization of the Old Testament.”

Brethren, this is an accurate statement. The key to knowing whether you are rightly warranted in interpreting the Scriptures in an allegorical way is whether the actual historical events that you are looking at are further amplified in a specific theological, doctrinal, or practical way by the Apostles themselves in the New Testament. This is what is happening here in our text. The Apostle says here: “For it is written,” and then he amplifies on the intent of God the Holy Spirit in further opening up the subject of grace; not only in Abraham's life, but in the life of every Christian. The Bible is a spiritual book. And it often conveys meanings and applications on more than just the literal level. But it is wrong to superimpose some story of our own devising, or our own private interpretation upon it; as if we ourselves have divine inspiration on the level of the Apostles and prophets; Old Testament or New. That, we should never do. We should always want to engage in holy and reasonable exegesis of Scripture, not unholy eisegesis. The Wikipedia Dictionary says - “Eisegesis is best understood when contrasted with exegesis.” “While exegesis is the process of drawing out the meaning from a text in accordance with the context and discoverable meaning of its author, eisegesis occurs when a reader imposes his or her interpretation into and onto the text.” “As a result, exegesis tends to be objective when employed effectively while eisegesis is regarded as highly subjective.”

What the Apostle Paul is engaging in here is inspired Exegesis of the Old Testament Scripture. As an Apostle, Paul had every right to do this, and in the process, he shows us how to do good Biblical exegesis ourselves; not in any revelatory sense, but in the sense of praying for the Holy Spirit to help us to “rightly divide” and apply the Word of Truth. Let’s see if we can rightly apply it here. Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond-woman, the other by a freewoman. The freewoman was Sarah, his wife; and the bond-woman was Hagar, Sarah’s Egyptian maidservant. In Genesis 16: 1-6 we find the story of the son by the bondwoman. “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife had born him no children.” “And she had an Egyptian maidservant whose name was Hagar.” “So Sarai said to Abram, ‘See now, the Lord has restrained me from bearing children.’” “Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children by her.” “And Abram heeded the voice of Sarai.” “Then Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan.” So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived,. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes.” “Then Sarai said to Abram, ‘My wrong be upon you!’” “I gave my maid into your embrace and when she saw that she had conceived, I became despised in her eyes.” “The Lord judge between you and me.” “So Abram said to Sarai, ‘Indeed your maid is in your hand; do to her as you please.’” “And when Sarai dealt harshly with her, she fled from her presence.”

Now there are some things which we need to notice of here, in relation to these verses in our text in Galatians. Abram and Sarai had been in the land of Canaan for 10 years. God had promised them a child, one who would be born to them, but Sarai had not conceived during all that time. She must have been very sad and frustrated that she could not have the child of promise and so she did something that she should not have done. She concluded that she would have to bring about Abraham’s having children, by giving her maid Hagar to be his concubine wife, and thereby they would have a child through her. Ishmael’s birth is described in Galatians 4: 23 as “being born according to the flesh”. That is, this son of the bondwoman was brought forth according to the fleshly wisdom and efforts of Abram and Sarai. This was not simply Sarai’s fault. Abram “heeded the voice of his wife” in this matter. He did not have to do so. It reminds me of Adam’s fall in the beginning. Adam “heeded the voice of his wife” instead of heeding God’s command that he not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Abraham heeded his wife’s voice, and in doing so, he went along with all her doubts and fears that God would not fulfill His promise to them.

This we should apply in this way. The worst thing that a Christian can do is to take matters into their own hands to try to bring about something which God has promised, according to their own fleshly reasoning and wisdom, instead of expressly believing in His Word, and awaiting His time, for the accomplished fulfillment of it. The principle is this: “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”. “That which is born of the Spirit is spirit”. Abram and Sarai really thought that they could fulfill God’s promise in their having a child, according to their own fleshly reasoning and efforts, through Hagar’s becoming a substitute wife for Sarai. But this was not according to the promissory Word of God, nor was it according to His preceptive will for them to bring Hagar into their marriage.

This is the principle of law coming to bear in the thinking of these two Christian people. The principle of law is “Do this and live.” Or in relation to this situation, you go about to do God’s will leaning to your own understand. You end up doing things according to what your own fleshly mind wants to do, and you do it according to your own fleshly efforts. You do not consult God or His Word. You take matters into your own hands to bring about what God has expressly said that He will do for you; and you do it in the strength of your own earthly wisdom and understanding. You end up bringing trouble and vexation upon yourself because you thought that you knew better than God how truly good things should come to pass. But this is believing a

lie. And this is what many in the churches of Galatia were doing. They thought, according to their own reasoning and fleshly understanding that they needed to add to the promise of salvation through faith in Christ alone, their own fleshly efforts, to keep the law. But this would only undermine the truth of the gospel by which they were saved, and cause them much grief and trouble in their souls. And indeed if they truly believed that something more was needed rather than Christ's finished work in order to be saved, they were under the curse of the law.

The 2nd Purpose of Paul's telling us of this allegory was to inform us that these sons and their mothers are symbolic of the 2 Covenants of Law and Grace. (verses 23b-24)

Verse 23 – “But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, 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.” We have looked at the bondwoman Hagar who bore a son for Abraham, and she named him Ishmael. This son was born of the fleshly efforts of Abraham with Hagar. Paul now reveals here that she is symbolically representative of Mount Sinai in Arabia. The law was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai, and it fulfilled the purpose of God to show forth His righteous standard of what He expected of Israel, and indeed of all men, Gentiles and Jews. God expects me to keep His law. But since the fall of Adam, and since the fleshly efforts of Abraham, we should be able to clearly see that the law was not given in order that people might be saved through it. It was given in order to show that God's holy and righteous standard could only be fulfilled through the one Man, Christ Jesus. All of this was pre-figured by Abraham and Sarai's only being able to have a child through God's giving them a promise and then sovereignly fulfilling that promise in his own good time.

Isaac was born, it says in verse 23, “through the promise.” Turn over to Chapter 17, verse 15. “Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.’ “And I will bless her and also give you a son by her; then I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be from her.” “Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Shall a child be born to a man who is one hundred years old?’ “And shall Sarah, who is ninety years old bear a child?” “And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!’ “Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.’ “And as for Ishmael, I have heard you.” “Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly.” “He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation.” “But My covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this set time next year.” There is the promise of God, once again asserted to Abraham. And there is given to him the set time of the fulfillment of the promise; “this set time next year.”

Notice how very much Abraham would like Ishmael, that is, the fruit of his own efforts and labors with Hagar, to be established in God's sight as the child of promise. But God says to him, “No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him.” This is how it often is with many Christians. They would like their own conception of what their Christian life should be to stand. It is all about their labors for God, rather than what God would do for them, and bring about for them, in His good time. The truth of the matter is that many Christians do not understand that God's ways are above their ways, and His thoughts are above their thoughts. They do not seem to understand that trying to live the Christian life in a legal , trying to justify yourself by what you are doing for God, that this way leads to bondage. All of your trying to do righteous things to keep God's law, in order to find favor with God, or stay in favor with Him, after you have been saved from all of your sins by faith in the Lord Jesus, is a

really dishonoring thing in His sight. You are putting yourself in a legal bondage when you do that.

And then 3rd – Paul would show us that the mothers of these sons represent the bondage of those under the law and the freedom under grace.

“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.” “For it is written: ‘Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear!’ ‘Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor!’” “For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband.” “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.” Turn with me in closing over to John Chapter 8, verses 31-36. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed in Him, ‘If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.’” “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” “They answered Him, ‘We are Abraham’s descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone.’” “How can you say, ‘You will be made free?’” (You see, they were still in bondage to sin, even though physically descended from Abraham.) “Jesus answered them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.’” “And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever.” “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.”

Jesus is saying that when you trust in Him alone for your justification and your righteousness; when you are trusting in Him for grace to do and keep the commandments of God, and to be pleasing to Him, you are set free. You become a part of the City of God, the New Jerusalem, the Jerusalem above, which is where all believers names are registered in the Book of life. Therefore, your mouth should be full of laughter, even as Abraham’s was, for you have been set free from the law. The two covenants mentioned here are the covenant of law, or works, and the covenant of grace. The mother of those in bondage is Hagar; she corresponds to the Jerusalem that then was, the unbelieving Jews who were trying to keep the law in their own fleshly strength and wisdom. The mother of those who are free is Sarah, who corresponds to the Jerusalem above, that is, all those persons who believe that they can only be saved and become fruitful for God, by grace. They believe that they will be brought to heaven, not through their own efforts and wisdom, but through faith; and that this faith is not of themselves, it is the gift of God. We brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.