

The 2010 website of the Chicago Bears football team... presented a series of videos that followed the team's rookies... from their first arrival at training camp... and on through the preseason. ... One video showed part of Coach Lovie Smith's first orientation talk with the rookie class. ... (I must admit that I have not followed the career of Coach Lovie Smith... but I have been told that he is a follower of Christ... and a "class act" among the coaches in the NFL.)

But... back to the story of the rookies... on this 2010 Chicago Bears team. ... Of course, the biggest thing on each rookie's mind is whether he will make the team. ... Rookies know that the team roster begins with 80 players who come to camp. ... After a few weeks... the coaches cut the team down to 65 players. ... Then before the season actually begins... all NFL teams are required to trim down to 53 players. ... Of the 19 rookies who were invited to the 2010 Bears training camp... the team would likely keep only around 7.

Lovie Smith knew that... and so he addressed the rookies' concern in his talk to the 2010 class. ... His challenge to them was... "*Make us put you on the team.*"

In other words... play so well in practice... that the coaches couldn't imagine cutting you. ... Make us put you on the team. ... Take the decision out of the coach's hands. ... Let your performance make the decision for us.

Most religions... and most people of the world... think that God makes the same sort of speech about who will get into heaven. ... "*Do you want to*

'make the team'... Do you want to play for the Saints... and have eternal life? ... Make Me put you on the team. ... Live such a good life... do so many good deeds... that I could not imagine rejecting you. ... Take the decision out of my hands."

The counterintuitive truth is that God works on a completely different basis than football coaches do. ... People who think they can perform so well... that they can make God add them to heaven's roster... because they are so deserving of it - will be **rejected**. ... This is the idea of salvation by works... and it is the opposite of salvation by grace. ... God saves us by His grace and His grace alone... through faith in Jesus Christ.

Many of us cling to this truth... and we have confidence in our salvation... by His grace... and His grace alone. ... But here is where we often encounter a problem...

Colossians 2:6-7 (ESV)

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...

“As you have received Christ Jesus the Lord” ... means by His grace... and by His grace alone. By His grace alone... so walk in Him. Live all of your life – fully dependent on His grace. With every bit as much reliance on God’s grace for your salvation... apply the same reliance on His grace... in your ongoing relationship with Him. ... Do you...?

Let me ask you to do something for just a moment. Consider how you would answer these two questions: From the past year... what has been your most prolonged prayer and urgent plea to God? ... (I want you to stop and think about it for a moment with me...) ... What have you asked God

for... and asked Him with a deep longing... or from a dire need...? Was it something you asked Him to rescue you from...? A relationship crisis...? A financial crisis...? A health concern for you... or a loved-one...?

Question number two: During that time... were you ever tempted... or did you succumb to the temptation... to try and earn God's favor...? Did you feel a need to pray a little harder... or more often...? Make more effort to have quiet time with the Lord...? Be nicer to people...? ... Refrain from some habit that you know displeases God...? Watching that television show...? Was there anything you did... or were you ever tempted to subtly try to earn a better standing before God... so He would be more inclined to grant the desire of your heart...?

There are so many things that we KNOW God wants us to work on in our life... but often... it is when we want something from God... that we start addressing these issues. ... We ought to be doing whatever we know God wants... but not as a bargaining chip... "God I'll do this... so You will do that..." ... This is legalism. ... It is as though we are trying to take the decision out of God's sovereignty... and have our performance make the decision for us.

The point of today's passage is that legalism and grace do not mix. One or the other must be thrown out of our life. They cannot exist together.

The title of today's message is "Cast out the slave woman and her son," because our passage uses the Old Testament story of Hagar and her son, Ishmael (taken from Genesis 12 – 21.) ... But before we turn to our passage in Galatians... where the Apostle Paul will use this Old Testament narrative... as an allegory... I think that we should first refresh ourselves to

the history of what took place. In doing this... I want to rely on a helpful timeline and summary of these events... that Warren Wiersbe used in his commentary on our passage. So let's first be reminded of this history with Hagar and Sarah... Ishmael and Isaac... and then we will see how Paul uses them in his letter to the Galatians.

At the age of 75 — While living life normally in the Land of Ur... Abraham hears God call him to leave his relatives and everything familiar to him... and go to to a land that God would show him. God also promised him many descendants. ... Both Abraham and his wife... Sarah... wanted children... but Sarah was unable to conceive. ... God was waiting until both of them were "as good as dead" ... before He would perform the miracle of sending them a son.

At the age of 85 — The promised son had not yet arrived. ... Sarah became impatient. ... She asked that Abraham have a child with Hagar... who was Sarah's maid. She hoped to have a son by her. ... This act was legal in that society. By having a child through Hagar (considered to be Sarah's property) the child would be Abraham and Sarah's. ... But it was not the will of God... for them to have a child through their own efforts like this. ... Abraham however did follow her suggestion and conceived a child with Hagar.

When Abraham was 86 — Hagar was pregnant... and Sarah became very jealous! ... Things got so difficult in the home... that Sarah threw Hagar out. ... God... however intervened. He sent Hagar back... and promised to take care of her and her son. ... Hagar had a son... and she named him Ishmael.

When he was 99 — God spoke to Abraham and promised again that he will have a son - by Sarah - and said to call his name Isaac. ... Later... God appeared again and reaffirmed the promise to Sarah as well.

When Abraham was 100 years old — Abraham and Sarah's promised son was born. ... They name him Isaac ("laughter") as commanded by God. ... But the arrival of Isaac created a new problem in the home - Ishmael had a rival. ... For fourteen years... Ishmael has been his father's only son. Ishmael had been very dear to Abraham's heart. ... How will Ishmael respond to the presence of a rival?

At 103 — It was customary for the Jews to wean their children at about the age of three... and to make a great occasion of it. ... At the feast... Ishmael starts to mock Isaac... and to create trouble in the home. ... There is only one solution to the problem... and a costly one at that - Hagar and her son have to go. ... With a broken heart... Abraham sent his son away... because this is what' the Lord tells him to do.

On the surface... this story appears to be nothing more than a tale of a family problem. ... Just below the surface... many will recognize that this is the history of the Jews and the Arabs. ... But going down even further beneath the surface... are meanings that carry tremendous spiritual power. Abraham... his two wives... and the two sons... represent spiritual realities... that the Apostle Paul calls upon to teach us important lessons.

Galatians 4:21-31

The Old Testament narrative... provided Paul an opportunity to verbalize a pointed charge... to cast out all forms of legalism from our lives.

Now let me say this immediately... Paul's use of Genesis in this section does not give us license to find "hidden meanings"... in all the events of the Old Testament. ... If we take that approach to the Bible... we can make it mean almost anything we please.

Sadly... there have been many teachers... down through the ages... who have used this passage as their inspiration... and their authorization to ignore the plain meaning of Scripture (thinking that to be less significant)... and preferring a fanciful interpretation... which they think they have discovered through hidden meanings. ... It is not just in recent years that people have claimed they have found a Bible code... embedded in... but unrelated to the text... which they consider to be vastly more important.

You should be very careful of DaVinci codes... Bible Codes... and a new one that I am hearing on the radio... that claims a former pastor has found a diet code in the Bible that he will show you when you pay him enough... and you're guaranteed to loose weight... (It's true... because the Bible is true!)

The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to discern the deeper understanding of the Genesis story. ... We must always interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament... and ONLY where the New Testament gives us permission... we may search for hidden meanings. ... Otherwise... we must accept the plain statements of Scripture and not try to "spiritualize" the meaning that the original author placed on his own words.

So... lets study now... what God inspired Paul to understand.

Galatians 4:21

Paul plays on the different senses of “law”: it can mean the commandments given by God to Moses during the wilderness wanderings (which the Galatians misguidedly want to obey in their totality), but it can also mean the first five books of the Bible as a whole.

This question is simply a plea for the Galatians to truly examine the law. The principle in this plea is look before you leap.

Galatians 4:22

This verse is getting us ready to grasp what Paul understood from the Old Testament account. But perhaps we need to have a perspective that Paul assumed his readers would already know. ... #1. According to ancient law and custom... the status of a mother... affected the status of her son. Hagar was a slave... so Ishmael would have the same status. ... #2. The lesson that Paul is about to bring forth is the contrast between law and grace... and very important... we must not miss this... they are not to be mix together. You cannot depend on grace... and then throw in a little legalism... to make you more spiritual.

Galatians 4:23

Ishmael was the result of Abraham and Sarah taking the promise of God into their own hands. ... Ismael was a product of unbelief. ... He was born entirely by the will of man.

But Isaac was the product of God’s doing. He was the product of belief. He was born entirely by the will of God... by an unconditional covenant.

Galatians 2:24(a)

Paul did not in any sense deny the literal meaning of the story of Abraham... but he declared that that story... especially the matters relating to the conception of the two sons... had an additional meaning. ... Thus he compared the narrative to the conflict between Legalism and Christianity.

There are at least seven easily recognizable parallels... which make this such a good narrative to allegorize. Let me start with Ishmael.

#1. Ishmael was not promised by God. ... Abraham (through Sarah's evil suggestion) had a child via Hagar... the slave of Sarah. This was of the flesh and brought much burden and trouble. ... Likewise... the law will not bless as the Gospel does. ... The law is of the flesh (You must participate and make it happen.) It only burdens — with the worry of whether one has done enough to be saved.

#2. Ishmael was born to Hagar who was a slave. ... Thus he was not born to freedom but to bondage. ... The law compares to this position of Ishmael in that the law does not free from anything... but only puts one under bondage... as Ishmael's birth put him into slavery.

#3. Ishmael came first and was not a satisfactory... long-term solution. The law preceded the grace that Christ brought... and it was not the long-term solution.

Now... lets look at Isaac.

#4. Isaac was a result of an unconditional promise given to Abraham. That is what the grace of salvation is – an unconditional promise.

#5. With Abraham and Sarah being old and beyond child-bearing ability... Isaac was born as a result of the power of God. The new birth of our salvation is also a great miracle of the power of God.

#6. Isaac was born to Sarah a freewoman, for she was Abraham's wife; she was not a bondmaid. Thus Isaac would come into a great inheritance when he became an adult son... just like we do... when we place our faith in Christ.

#7. Isaac's name means "laughter," and certainly he brought joy to his aged parents. Salvation is an experience of joy, not only to the believer himself, but also to those around him. The Gospel brings joy; the law did not; it brought fear.

I hope that you can see... because of these parallels... why Paul wrote in verse 24... "*Now this may be interpreted allegorically...*" He is definitely not... going way out on a limb...

And just as there are parallels between Isaac and Ishmael... there are several to be seen in their mothers... as well.

Galatians 4:24(b)-26

Hagar stood for the first-century **city of Jerusalem**... a city enslaved to Rome and **in slavery** to the Law. ... Sarah... on the other hand... corresponded to the **Jerusalem above**... the heavenly city... which one day will come to earth (as Rev. 21:2 describes). This is the home of departed believers of all ages. Christianity is destined for a greater glory... as God calls out from among the Gentiles... a Bride for His name.

Under our present conditions... it may not be obvious of what we are destined for. Herein Paul draws out a few more parallels. ... After Ishmael was born... it was another 14 years before Isaac came. Sarah was unsatisfied with the solution that she had... herself... proposed. In fact she was quite miserable. She remained childless.

Paul uses Isaiah 54:1 that depicts Sarah's sorrow during this period of waiting. Verse 27 is a direct quote of Isaiah 54:1...

Galatians 4:27

Though Sarah's bareness seemingly hindered the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham... she ultimately became the mother of more children than Hagar. ... Likewise... Christianity is destined for greater glory... than anything legalism could ever deliver.

Galatians 4:28-29

This is a reference to Genesis 21:9 which reports Ishmael's mocking of Isaac. The flesh does not praise the Spirit. The legalists in Galatia... who tried to mix law and grace... mocked Paul and others... who preached the true Gospel message.

This practice of the flesh persecuting the Spirit is still current. ... As Believers... we will be persecuted by unbelievers (flesh). ... Our message of grace will be mocked... and attacked... by those who insist that some system involving works... is necessary for salvation.

But... just like Sarah... right now... our destiny may not appear to be obvious... but God will deliver on His promise! And in the meantime... here is what we must do...

Galatians 4:30-31

Like Abraham rejected and cast out Hagar and Ishmael... it is our responsibility as New Testament believers... to reject legalism. ... We must cast it out of our midst. ... Legalism and grace are direct opposites... and cannot coexist together. ... There will never be harmony between the two. One contradicts the other.

It is impossible for Law and grace... the flesh and the Spirit... to compromise and stay together. ... God did not ask Hagar and Ishmael to make occasional visits to the home... the break was permanent. ...The Legalists in Paul's day — and in our own day — are trying to reconcile Sarah and Hagar... and Isaac and Ishmael... They do this by saying... *“You have accepted Jesus by faith...? Great...! Now here are some rules and regulations... that will make you more spiritual...”* ... Such an attempt to mix the two... is contrary to the Word of God. ... It is an attempt to invite Hagar and Ishmael back home again. ... But it is impossible to mix God's gift of righteousness... and man's attempts to earn righteousness.

From the human point of view... it might seem cruel that God should command Abraham to send away his own son Ishmael... whom he loved very much. ... But it was the only solution to the problem, for "the wild man" could never live with the child of promise.

Churches and individual believers can make the same mistake the Galatians were making... they can fail to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. *Legalism* is one of the major problems among Christians today.

Keep in mind that *legalism* means worshiping some set of standards... and thinking that we are spiritual because we obey them. ... And then it goes so far as to judge other believers on the basis of whether or not they abide by these standards. ... A person can refrain from smoking... drinking... and attending theaters... for example... *and still not be spiritual*. ...The Pharisees had high standards - yet they crucified Jesus.

And then there are the more subtle forms of legalism... that I mentioned at the beginning of this message. There are those times when we try to earn more of God's favor... so He will answer our prayer yearning.

Cast out the slave woman and her son!