

“The Story of Two Sons”
Galatians 4:21-31
(Preached at Trinity, May 19, 2013)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been expounded on the glorious blessings of the New Covenant. He stated the antithesis between the Law and Grace in **Chapter 3**
Galatians 3:23 NAU - "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law"
Galatians 3:25 NAU - "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."
2. As we entered **Chapter 4** Paul has described the work of Christ in fulfilling God's promise according to the perfecting timing of God – the fullness of time.
Galatians 4:4-5 NAU - "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."
3. He redeemed us that we might receive the fullness of our inheritance. We have been adopted as the children of God. We've been brought into a unique relationship with our infinite, eternal, Creator.
4. Paul's point is this: With all of the glorious liberty of the Gospel of grace why would you ever desire to come back under the bondage of the Law?
Galatians 4:9 NAU - "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"
5. In **Verses 12-20** Paul suddenly changes his tone. He steps aside momentarily to speak to them on a personal level. Paul knew many of them personally. He had led many of them to Christ. He had lived with them, ministered to them, taught them, loved them. So in these verses he speaks to them as a pastor.
6. Now, in **Verses 21-31** Paul returns to his defense of the Gospel. He has been arguing that being under the Law is a form of slavery or bondage.
Galatians 4:3 NAU - "So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world."
Galatians 4:7-9 NAU - "Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. ⁸ However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?"
7. In other words, before the New Covenant the Law was written upon stone tablets. It stood before us as an absolute master demanding absolute submission. Obedience was not an option but fulfilling its demands was an impossible burden.
It is only by the grace of the Gospel that the Law has become our friend. God has written it on our hearts. We have the glorious liberty of faith.

8. In order to drive home his point Paul now sets before his readers an allegory of two mothers and two sons. This will conclude the theological section of Galatians.
9. This passage is important regarding understanding Covenant Theology.
I admit we are going to deal with doctrinal matters this morning but this should not scare us. God has purposely placed this here for our edification and we need to give ourselves to it. But we need to pay close attention.
On one hand God made one single Abrahamic Covenant in which God promised to raise up a nation.
This formal Abrahamic Covenant was given in **Genesis 17** and was represented by circumcision.
Genesis 17:5-10 NAS - "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.
⁶ "And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. ⁷ "And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. ⁸ "And I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." ⁹ God said further to Abraham, "Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised."
10. This was a covenant that included all of national Israel and circumcision was the sign. But God also made a very distinct particular promise to Abraham.
Genesis 22:17-18 NAS - "indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies. ¹⁸ "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"
This was a further revelation of the Covenant of Grace, a promise would be fulfilled in Christ.
Galatians 3:16 NAU - "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ."
11. It was through this promise that God would raise up a people.
Not all of Israel was included in this promise.
Romans 9:6-8 NAS - "For they are not all Israel who are *descended* from Israel; ⁷ neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but: "through Isaac your descendants will be named." ⁸ That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants."
12. God has always had but one people of promise—one true Israel.
But Abraham also had children of the flesh. In this sense there were two covenants: A covenant of promise and a covenant of the flesh.
13. This is where the paedobaptists go wrong. While they are correct to see a single Abrahamic Covenant, they fail to see the distinction between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Covenant of Grace.

- A. They see a single Abrahamic covenant consisting of both children of promise and children of the flesh—spiritual Israel and national Israel. And they see this as continuing today. This is their justification for including both regenerate and unregenerate in the church.
 - B. Baptists see a strict distinction between the Covenant of Grace which was revealed in the spiritual promise to Abraham fully revealed and fulfilled in Christ, and the Abrahamic Covenant of circumcision.
14. This is at the heart of this passage. Regarding the children of promise and the children of the flesh Paul represents it as two covenants. Paul represents these two covenants here by recalling two of Abraham's sons and their mothers.
Galatians 4:24 NAU - "This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants"
15. Paul takes us back to the Old Testament and sets forth three historical facts:
- A. The two sons of Abraham. Abraham actually had eight sons. One from Sarah, one from Hagar, and six from Keturah after Sarah's death. Only the sons of Sarah and Hagar are of importance here: Isaac and Ishmael. These two sons represent the two lines of descendants from Abraham.
 - 1. **Genesis 25** tells us Ishmael had 12 sons who became the ancestors of the Arab tribes. In time these descendants became identified with the Gentiles in general.
 - 2. The sons of Isaac through Jacob were regarded as the holy seed, God's possession chosen above all the nations of the earth. Paul writes of them:
Romans 9:4-5 NAU - "who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises, ⁵ whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."
 - B. The status of the two mothers. They are Hagar and Sarah. Hagar was an Egyptian slave and Sarah was a free woman. Paul uses them here to contrast between freedom and slavery.
 - C. The circumstances of the two births. In **Verse 29** we read that the son of the slave woman was born "according to the flesh," while the son of the free woman was born "according to the Spirit." Ishmael was born apart from any word or command of God while Isaac was born according to promise.
16. Paul uses two other pairs in his allegory.
 In **Verse 24** Paul refers to two covenants represented by the two women. And he speaks of "Mount Sinai." This would be in contrast to Mount Zion or the Jerusalem above.
 From Mount Sinai came a covenant only capable of producing slaves.
 From Mount Zion comes the Covenant of Grace fulfilled by the blood of Christ which gives liberty and freedom.
17. Paul will maintain this parallel dualism into **Chapters 5-6**. In **Chapter 5** we'll see the great contrast between the works of the flesh and the works of the Spirit.
18. What are some truths we can glean from this passage?

- I. It is an infinite blessing to be one of the children of promise – **Verses 26-28**
- A. God gave to Abraham a promise
Genesis 22:17-18 NAS - "indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.
¹⁸ "And in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed"
1. This promise would be fulfilled in Christ.
Galatians 3:16 NAU - "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ."
 2. The promise was but a shadow which would be progressively revealed until it burst into brilliance in Christ. Abraham didn't understand its fullness but he believed.
Galatians 3:6 NAS - "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."
 3. The true heirs of this promise have always received it by faith
Galatians 3:7 NAS - "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham."
Galatians 3:9 NAS - "So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."
 4. Abraham's children of flesh could not accept this
Romans 9:30-32 NAS - "What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, attained righteousness, even the righteousness which is by faith; ³¹ but Israel, pursuing a law of righteousness, did not arrive at *that* law. ³² Why? Because *they did not pursue it* by faith, but as though *it were* by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone,"
 5. Paul is stating that the unbelieving Jews are the spiritual offspring of Hagar. What a blow to these proud Judaizers.
Galatians 4:25 NAU - "Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."
 6. Those who are of the faith of Abraham are the true children of promise born from above.
Galatians 4:26 NAU - "But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother."
- B. In Christ we enjoy a new age – heavenly Zion has come down
1. We haven't yet received it in its fullness but we have tasted it and are assured that it is ours.
 2. God has sent forth His Spirit as the earnest of our inheritance while we look forward with expectation
 3. Paul records a passage from **Isa 54**
 - a. The city of Jerusalem was compared to a barren woman covered in sackcloth because her husband has been carried off into captivity and she has no children to care for her in her old age.

- b. In the midst of her sorrow and desolation God speaks
Isaiah 54:1 NAS - "Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no *child*; Break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; For the sons of the desolate one *will be* more numerous Than the sons of the married woman," says the LORD."
- c. Christians have cause to rejoice. The church is not barren but fruitful. Jesus has fulfilled the promise.
Genesis 22:17 NAS - "indeed I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies."
- 4. We live in this present evil age with warfare all around us and the flaming arrows of the evil one filling the sky, yet we hear clearly the song of victory.
- 5. We are not of this world. Our true home is above and we can see it shining in the distance.
Colossians 3:1-4 NAS - "If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."

- II. The children of promise will always be hated and persecuted by the Ishmaels – **Verse 29**
 - A. Paul writes of the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael
Genesis 21:8-9 NAU - "The child grew and was weaned, and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking."
 - 1. But Paul doesn't speak of them by name in **Verse 29**. Instead he continues to maintain the dualism.
Galatians 4:29 NAU - "he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit"
 - 2. And then Paul adds: "so it is now also."
 - B. The children of God, the heirs of promise—Christians should expect to be hated by the people of this world.
 - 1. While we never court persecution it has always followed God's people.
 - a. Jesus Himself said He did not come to bring peace but a sword.
Matthew 10:34-36 NAS - "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶ and a man's enemies will be the members of his household."
 - b. Jesus declared that He came to send fire upon the earth.

2. Timothy George – “Believers who are faithful to the gospel have no reason to believe that they will be exempted from such assaults. Jesus died on a rugged cross at the age of thirty-three, not in a retirement center surrounded by family and friends. Paul was hounded from one end of the Roman Empire to the other only to finish his course before an executioner’s sword.”
3. Martin Luther, writing on this passage: “Whoever is born and lives in Christ, and rejoices in this birth and inheritance of God, has Ishmael for his enemy and persecutor. Whoso will not suffer the persecution of Ishmael, let him not profess himself to be a Christian.”
Luther continues: “As soon as the Word of God is brought to light, the devil is angry, and uses all his forces and subtle sleights to persecute it, and utterly to abolish it. Therefore, he cannot do otherwise but to raise up infinite sects, offenses, cruel persecutions, and murders. Not only our enemies, which are manifestly wicked, shall persecute us, but also such as were at first our dear friends, with whom we were familiarly conversant in one house, who received from us the doctrine of the gospel, shall become our deadly enemies and persecute us extremely.”

III. We must continue to live in strict distinction from the Ishmaels – **Verses 30-31**

- A. We must continue to bear the distinction as the children of promise
Galatians 4:31 NAU - "So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman."
 1. We are the children of promise. We are separate, distinct, different. We trust in Jesus Christ alone. We have no confidence in the works of the flesh.
 2. We are not of the flesh but of the Spirit. We are not of the darkness but of the light.
 3. We are not to be in union with those who cast themselves against the people of God.
Paul wrote to the Corinthians
2 Corinthians 6:14 NAS - "Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?"
2 Corinthians 6:17-18 NAS - "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸ "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty."
- B. In **Verse 30** Paul recounts Sarah telling Abraham to send Hagar away
Genesis 21:9-11 NAS - "Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. ¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac." ¹¹ And the matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son."
 1. Paul is reiterating this division –
"Cast out the bondwoman and her son, For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman."

2. Not only does this speak of the Judaizers in Paul's day but to all who seek to destroy the people of promise by dragging them back under the yoke of the Law.
 - a. Every religion except Christianity ultimately is a slave religion. They seek to gain God's favor through human works. Even some who call themselves Christian are slave religions – Roman Catholicism, Mormonism. They are based upon what they can do for God rather than what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.
 - b. As F.F. Bruce put it, "Legal bondage and Gospel freedom cannot coexist."
 - c. Cast out all who would pervert the Gospel of Christ by adding to it the works of men. The Law cannot condemn us, it must not terrify us. We must not try by human strength to meet its demands.