

LESSON EIGHT (4:17-31)

True and False Concern (4:17-20)

17 They make much of you, but for no good purpose; they want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. 18 For a good purpose it is always good to be made much of, and not only when I am present with you. 19 My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you! 20 I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.

Paul has taken a break in his series of logical arguments to make an impassioned person appeal. They are his children, they are in danger, and he cares! Finally the chapter will close with one last grand argument: the allegory of Abraham's two sons.

V. 17 They Make Much Of You - False teachers, then and now, will literally "bubble over" in their enthusiasm for their converts. They will smother a person with attention and concern, until that person is convinced that no one in the world cares about them like this new teacher of new truth. Especially is this the case when the convert is well-known and prominent. Indians collect scalps, and cowboys notch their guns, but none is so proud as a proselyter with a new conquest.

But For No Good Purpose - It is selfish pride, rather than sincere concern, that motivates the false teacher to make converts. What is your motivation for making converts? Are you even motivated at all?

They Want to Shut You Out - The Judaizers wanted to shut out the Galatian Christians from God's grace and from fellowship with God's whole family. They wanted to draw a tight little circle of believers in their own sect. We must take warning from this that we do not accept any dividing lines except those drawn by God Himself.

That You May Make Much Of Them - The real reason for the missionary zeal of the false teacher is his own selfish pride. The concern is false.

V. 18 For A Good Purpose It Is Always Good To Be Made Much Of - People like to be appreciated and loved. It is only natural and right that we should want people to care about us. It is in this good sense that we should "outdo one another in showing honor." However, all this attention can be perverted. When one comes to expect or demand attention because he is a big shot, or when one craves attention because he feels so inferior, it is no longer a healthy thing.

Not Only When I Am Present With You - The sharpness of this rebuke is thinly veiled. The Galatians had been guilty of double-dealing duplicity. In Paul's presence they had honored him and respected his authority. Behind his back, they rejected him and turned to other teachers.

V. 19 My Little Children - It was appropriate in two ways that Paul should address the Galatian Christians as "my little children." First, they were won to Christ by Paul's preaching and were thus his children in the faith. Second, they were acting in a very immature fashion, being "carried about by every wind of doctrine." (Eph. 4:14).

With Whom I Am Again In Travail - The word "travail" is a translation of the specific Greek word for labor pains at the birth of a baby. With great spiritual and physical anguish Paul had brought these people to the new birth into Christ. In a sense, however, their birth was incomplete. Now Paul is again in that same anguish to bring their conversion to completion. This would be accomplished when they let go of legalism and efforts to save themselves, and yielded completely to Christ, to let Him live His life through them.

Until Christ Be Formed In You! - The only ultimate deliverance from the bondage of the law is to be re-created in the image of our Creator (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). So long as we operate on the level of sinful self, we will need constant restraint to keep us out of trouble. It is

only when we die to self and are reborn in the nature of Christ that we can experience real freedom. This conversion process does not occur instantly, but over a lifetime. The problem in Galatia was that the process had ceased to occur at all.

V. 20 I Could Wish To Be Present With You Now - Paul here expresses regret that he must deal with their problem by epistle, rather than by a personal visit. We do not know exactly what circumstances prevented such a visit.

To Change My Tone - Much of the preceding letter has been stern, even harsh. Paul fears that the sharpness of his pen has not adequately conveyed the emotion of his heart. If only the Galatians could look into his face, his eyes, and know what he felt toward them!

For I Am Perplexed About You - Paul was at his wit's end. The Greek word originally meant "not having a way to cross a river." Just as a man who looks helplessly across the river he cannot ford, Paul felt a sense of despair. He was so far away, and they were so misled, that the situation at this moment looked grim.

The Allegory Of Two Sons (4:21-31)

21 Tell me, you who desire to be under law, do you not hear the law? 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave and one by a free woman. 23 But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, the son of the free woman through promise. 24 Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, being children for slavery; she is Hagar. 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. 27 For it is written,

*"Rejoice, O barren one that does not bear;
break forth and shout, thou who are not in
travail; for the desolate hath more
children than she who hath a husband."*

28 Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now. 30 But what does the scripture say? "Cast out the slave and her son; for the son of the slave shall not inherit with the son of the free woman. 31 So, brethren, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

V. 21 Tell Me, You Who Desire To Be Under Law - Paul has one last grand argument for the would-be legalists. He invites those who are so enthusiastic for law (any law) to listen to a beautifully drawn allegory from law (the law - the one revealed by God to Moses).

The allegory is an extended parable or metaphor. It says, "This is like that in the following points . . ." It lists point by point the similarities between two things, drawing a conclusion or moral at the end. This form of argument was popular in the ancient world, and would probably have had great persuasive power among the Galatians. (If the point you are making is true, some form of illustration may help people see the reasonableness of your assertion. However, a good illustration does not prove anything. The point must first be proved true, then illustrated. This is what Paul has done in Chapters three and four.)

V. 22 For It Is Written That Abraham Had Two Sons - You will want to read Genesis 16:1-16 and 21:1-10 to review this part of Abraham's life. Several points in each passage will be selected for comparison.

One By A Free Woman - The son of Sarah, Abraham's wife, was named Isaac. Isaac's name appears in verse 28, but Ishmael's name is not used.

V. 23 Born According To The Flesh - When Abraham and Sarah saw no indication of a fulfillment to the promise of offspring, they decided to take matters into their own hands. Sarah gave her handmaid to Abraham to conceive children in her place. (See Genesis 16.) It was precisely this action which made the birth of Ishmael like the attempts of the Judaizers to justify themselves. Lacking faith in God, they try to do it their own way.

The Son Of The Free Woman Through Promise - The birth of Isaac stood in sharp contrast to the birth of Ishmael. Read carefully Gen. 21:1 and notice where the emphasis is placed. "THE LORD visited Sarah AS HE SAID, and THE LORD did to Sarah AS HE HAD PROMISED. And Sarah conceived . . ." (Emphasis mine.) This wording in Genesis even led some Jewish theologians to construe this as a "fatherless birth!" The essential point, though, is clear. Ishmael was born as a result of human effort; Isaac was born as a result of the promise of God. Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God blessed Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac was conceived.

The application of the whole allegory is dependent upon this verse. When Abraham tried to do it for himself, the result was ultimately cast out. When Abraham trusted God's promise and waited for God's blessing, the heir was born. Such is the picture of works versus faith.

V. 24 Now This Is An Allegory - In contrast to many ancient allegories, this one is quite simple and direct. The main points of contrast may be seen in the following chart:

TWO SONS

ISHMAEL

Born according to flesh
 Mother - Hagar
 Slave
 Mt. Sinai
 Present Jerusalem
 Is in slavery
 Born for slavery
 Persecutor
 Born according to flesh
 Cast out

ISAAC

Born through promise
 Mother - Sarah
 Free
 Mt. Zion
 Jerusalem above
 Is free
 Born for freedom
 Persecuted
 Born according to Spirit
 Made heir

These Women Are Two Covenants - Long before the time of either Moses or Jesus, the two covenants were pre-figured in the lives of Hagar and Sarah. When the Galatian people choose which covenant they will come under, they should notice the ultimate outcome assigned to their choice. Legalists cast their lot with Ishmael; true Christians trust God for forgiveness and cast their lot with Isaac.

One Is From Mount Sinai - God gave the Law to Moses at Mt. Sinai in the midst of thunder, lightning, and smoke. At the blast of a trumpet the mountain quaked and the people trembled. (See Exodus 19:16-21 and Hebrews 12:18-24.) The obvious contrast, Mt. Zion, is not mentioned.

Bearing Children For Slavery - Just as Hagar's son became a slave, so all children of the law are doomed to slavery and fear. Notice how well this illustrates the principles of Gal. 3:10 - 4:9.

V. 25 Now Hagar Is Mount Sinai In Arabia - Although there are certain traditions that *Hagar* was another name for Sinai, or the name of a nearby city, or a word meaning "rock," I think it best to understand simply that Paul arbitrarily connected Hagar and Sinai. He was justified in making this connection by the clear application shown in verse twenty-three.

She Corresponds To The Present Jerusalem - Paul draws a line from Sinai to Jerusalem, connecting the origin of the law with the present headquarters of the legalists.

She Is In Slavery With Her Children - The temple in Jerusalem, with its sacrifices and rituals, represented the essence of the law. (The fact that Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple was torn down in 70 A.D., less than twenty years after the writing of this epistle, only serves to underscore the inferiority of the covenant law.) Legalists do not have much to look forward to.

V. 26 But The Jerusalem Above Is Free - Christians are citizens of the heavenly kingdom (Phil. 3:20). Through the church we already participate in it (Heb. 12:22-24), while we

also await the final consummation pictured in Rev. 21:2. We belong to this kingdom, and she is our mother, by virtue of our faith in the promises of God.

V. 27 For It Is Written - The quotation is from Isaiah 54:1. In that context it refers to the restoration of Judah following her captivity in Babylon. She is pictured as a forsaken or widowed wife, who is not wed to her Creator. The same sentiments fit very well in the case of Sarah, after she had been held in contempt by Hagar.

The Desolate Hath More Children - She who could produce no children by her own ability has been blessed by God in such a way that now she out-produces her competitor. So we, who could not achieve our own righteousness, are blessed by God to have greater righteousness than legalistic law-keepers (Matt. 5:20).

V. 28 Now We, Brethren, Like Isaac - All those who take their stand on the promise of God's grace are truly "brethren" to Paul. They, like Isaac, are children of promise.

V. 29 But As At That Time - When Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast in his honor (Gen. 21:8-10). Ishmael, Isaac's half-brother, was around fifteen years of age and was mocking the whole thing. At the request of Sarah, and with the approval of God, Abraham cast out this son with his slave mother.

The feeling of hostility persisted between the descendants of Ishmael and those of Isaac. In much the same way, Abraham's descendants according to the flesh (the Jews) were persecuting his descendants according to the Spirit (the Christians).

V. 30 But What Does The Scripture Say? - Paul has shown many points of comparisons between Genesis and Galatia. (Review the chart with verse 24). Now he is ready for the conclusion of the matter - the conclusion stated in the scripture itself.

Cast Out The Slave And Her Son - This course of action was suggested by Sarah (Gen. 21:10) and confirmed by God (Gen. 21:12). The son of the slave was disinherited and the child of promise inherited all things. Paul affirms that this same verdict will apply to those in slavery under the law and those who trust God's promise.

V. 31 So, Brethren - This is the third time in this chapter that Paul has referred to his Galatian readers as "brethren." It is especially true in the light of our common ancestry through faith in Abraham's God that we are brothers and sisters in the same family.

Not Children Of The Slave But Of The Free The Jews had always placed great stock in being the offspring of Abraham (Cf. Matt 3:9). Their reliance upon this physical ancestry was now, ironically, the very thing that made them not his heirs. Legalists, whatever their family tree, are descended in attitude and spirit from Hagar the slave.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Why are false teachers sometimes so very zealous? (See verse 17.)
2. Is the process of new birth completed at the point of conversion and baptism? (Verse 19)
3. How can Paul call the Galatians both his "children" (v. 19) and his "brethren" (v. 28 and 31)?
4. What is the background of the word "perplexed"?
5. Why might the allegory of Isaac and Ishmael be persuasive to the Galatians?

6. What is the key contrast regarding the birth of these two sons?
7. How do we earn the right to be citizens of the “Jerusalem above”?
8. Read 4:27 again and consider this question: Why does God always seem to favor the underdog?
9. Whose child are you? Are you trusting in yourself or in God?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is the danger of “priding oneself” in the number of people one leads to Christ?
2. Answer the textbook writer’s questions: “What is your motivation for making converts? Are you even motivated at all?”
3. What is meant by Paul’s words, “they want to shut you out” in Gal. 4:17?
4. Why was it appropriate for Paul to refer to the Galatians as “My little children”?
5. Explain the word “travail” in Gal. 4:19.
6. “It is only when we ____ to self and are _____ in the nature of _____ that we can experience real _____.”
7. Explain the meaning of the word “perplexed” in Gal. 4:20.
8. What is an allegory and how was it used in the ancient world?
9. What is the name of Sarah’s handmaid, and what is the name of that handmaid’s son?
10. What is the name of Sarah’s son? How many years separated the birth of the handmaid’s son and Sarah’s own son?
11. “_____ was born as a result of human effort; _____ was born as a result of the promise of God.”
12. What was the result of Abraham trying to produce a son through his own efforts?
13. What was the result of Abraham trusting and waiting for God to produce an heir?

14. Refer to the chart under verse 24 and list 10 points of contrast between the two sons. Be careful not to confuse which point belongs to each son!

15. How were the two covenants pre-figured in the lives of Hagar and Sarah?

16. “Just as Hagar’s son became a _____, so all children of the _____ are doomed to _____ and _____.”

17. What is the connection between Hagar and Mt. Sinai?

18. In what year was Jerusalem destroyed and the temple torn down? How does this illustrate the inferiority of the law?

19. Where is the quote in Gal. 4:27 located in the Old Testament?

20. Explain the meaning of “the desolate hath more children” (Gal. 4:27).

21. “The son of the slave was _____ and the child of promise _____ all things. Paul affirms that this same _____ will apply to those in slavery under the _____ and those who _____ God’s promise.”

22. Explain the comment, “Their reliance upon this physical ancestry was now, ironically, the very thing that made them not his heirs.” (Gal. 4:31).