

Parson to Person
(Galatians 4 – Part 4)
“The Two Covenants in Typology”

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. 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. 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. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free” (Galatians 4:21–31).

Typology and Allegory in Scripture

Within this section of Galatians 4, we read where Paul used allegory to make his point. He mentioned it specifically when writing, *“which things are symbolic”* (vs. 24a) regarding Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, Mount Sinai and the New Jerusalem.

The Scriptures are loaded with pictures, illustrations, allegory, typology, metaphor, and/or analogy. In fact, there are hundreds of very specific instances in which types and symbols are used.

The use of typology must be carefully guarded. *Forcing* meaning into a text of Scripture is dangerous. Therefore, all typologies must be supported in Scripture. We are not given the freedom to twist the Scriptures into “shapes” of our own design.

When the Plain Sense Makes the Most Sense

One of the rules we embrace in biblical interpretation is, “When the plain sense, make the most sense, seek no other sense.” This rule is extremely helpful. However, there are places in scripture where types (left unexplained) need overall biblical review. For example, leaven is most often used symbolically of sin/pride. However, on at least one occasion it seems to be used to show progressive growth in the spreading out of the principles and effects of the Kingdom (see Matthew 13:33). Therefore, suggesting that leaven in Matthew 13:33 is something good should cause us to carefully place interpretive dogma.

The Promise—Grace

The promise referenced here by Paul is the promise of the regenerative work of God as described in the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36). He wrote, “*as Isaac was, [we] are children of promise*” (vs. 28b). The fact that we are “*born according to the Spirit*” (vs. 29) is an act of grace provided to all believers (Jew and Gentile) apart from the law.

The “*promise*” made in the New Covenant, having its beginning now in the Church Age, has by default nullified the law and its condemning nature. We are saved by grace—not by works (see Ephesians 2:8–18). This was the primary point Paul made within his illustration.

The Works of the Flesh

Paul used the birth of Ishmael to illustrate the works of the flesh in contrast to the birth of Isaac—the son of promise/grace.

Abraham had (at the suggestion of Sarah) “worked” to fulfill God’s promise. He was told he would be a father, but Sarah was old and saw herself as incapable of conceiving and giving birth. Therefore, she encouraged Abraham to have a son via Hagar (her handmaid). This was “the work of the flesh.” It was not God’s plan!

God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son together—even in their old age. Therefore, God rejected Abraham’s “human performance” and provided a son via the miraculous blessings of grace. (About 14 years after the birth of Ishmael, Isaac was born to Abraham and Sarah—as God had promised.)

Illustratively Ishmael demonstrated “the works of the flesh” corresponding to the Old Covenant law, and Isaac demonstrated “the work of God” corresponding to the New Covenant promise—wherein miraculous rebirth (regeneration) is given by faith, as the result of grace.

Cast Out the Bondwoman—The Law—The Flesh

Concluding his thought, Paul wrote, *“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.’ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free”* (vss. 28–31).

The bondwoman and her son represent the law and the Judaizers. They were to be cast out. The Old Covenant law was cast out for it has been replaced by the New Covenant, and the Judaizers were to be cast out from the assembly of true believers as heretics.

I love you all,
Pastor Paul

Summary Points:

- 1) Religious rituals of any kind do not attain, add to, or sustain justification—or sanctification.
- 2) Religious rituals of any kind may be enjoyed by those who are justified—and sanctified.
- 3) Paul desired that the Galatians serve the Lord free from legalism and ritual—he desires the same for you and me.
- 4) Paul desired that believers *“note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine [we have] learned and avoid them”* (see Romans 16:17–18).
- 5) Believers should be prepared for persecution and rejection if and when we expose lies and tell the truth. *“Have I become your enemy?”*
- 6) Paul desired that believers recognize the born-again experience as transformation from within—“Christ being formed in us”—not religion conforming us from without.