



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Galatians 4:21-31

"Throw Out Those Legalists"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Scripture reading for today is found in Galatians chapter 4, and verse 21 through verse 31. The Apostle Paul is continuing, and really concluding the argumentative section of the epistle in which he defends the doctrine of justification by faith. The 3rd chapter is really his defense, and then in the 4th chapter it is primarily an illustration and appeal, but illustration and appeal in order to support the things that he has said in the 3rd chapter in an argumentative way. And he has used the illustration of a passage of a child from immaturity to maturity, as he has discussed adoption. And then after a rather significant appeal he gives us the final illustration, a typological illustration. And we're going to read that section beginning with verse 21 now,

"Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory,"

Let me stop for just a moment and say just a word about this. In the original text what the apostle says, if I were to try to put it in literal fashion would be, "which things are being allegorized. But the word that is used here for "allegory" it is the Greek word from which we get our English word allegory. But that is really confusing, because through usage, this term does not really mean allegory. It really means something very similar to what we mean when we speak of a biblical type or an illustration. An allegory is a story which has a second significance, often a spiritual significance or a moral significance. But the story, the fundamental story is one that is not historical. Now, in the case of something like Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* the story is unhistorical. And so that is a true allegory. I think we could call it, probably, the greatest Christian allegory. But in the case of this story, as you will see, it is grounded upon history, and since it is grounded upon a historical series of events, it is much better to speak of this as a typical illustration. And the ancient fathers, Theodore, Theodorit, Chrysostom, and the modern commentators, even the most modern generally agree. So when we read, "Which things are an allegory," we really probably should say, "Which things are being treated typically."

"For these women are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, bearing children for bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written (Now the apostle illustrates this with a passage from the Book of Isaiah.) For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband."

Paul, incidentally, I won't say anything about this in the message. This passage has been argued and discussed in great detail, you cannot consider everything in a brief message such as I give you. I know you don't think it's brief, but it really is a brief

message. What the apostle has done here is to take a passage from the Old Testament that refers to the future, and he has said that the Gentile salvation in the present time is an illustration; an illustration, it's true, in a smaller amount, but nevertheless an illustration of what shall take place in the future as a result of the work of the suffering servant of Jehovah. Then in verse 28, he begins his application.

"Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the Scripture? 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."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful and thankful for the ministry of the word of God to us, as we reflect upon the way in which the Scriptures have unfolded for us the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are indeed grateful. For where would we be did we not know of him and his magnificent saving work, the ground for the forgiveness of our sins and justification, and the ground of our hope that one day we shall be in the presence of the triune God and worshiping and praising Thee with the saints of the ages. We give Thee thanks this day for all of the blessings of life to us, both material and physical, and above all spiritual. And we pray, Lord, that as the day unfolds, it may be a day of spiritual blessing for each of us.

We commit to Thee the ministry of the word of God through Believers Chapel, thanking Thee, Lord, for its elders, and its deacons, and its members, and friends, and the visitors who are here with us today. We ask, Lord, that Thy blessing may be upon each

one of them. May, in all of their concerns, the hand of our triune God be seen in his marvelous way of helping and sustaining and blessing us. We give Thee thanks for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ over the radio, through the pulpit in the Bible classes, and through the written ministry. We pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon it. May Jesus Christ be honored and glorified through it.

We thank Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ, and not simply the Chapel. We thank Thee and praise Thee for all who are members of that one body, which is the church, of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the head. We thank Thee for every member of that body. We long for that day when we shall come to know them and appreciate all that Thou hast done in them as well. We commit also our country to Thee. We pray for our President, and for those associated with him in government.

And Father, we would also pray for our fellow believers who are suffering, who need the ministry of the saints in prayer and supplication. We ask, Lord, for them, that Thou will sustain them, give healing where it should be Thy will for healing to take place. Give encouragement, give consolation, give wisdom to those who minister to them. We commit them to Thee.

We thank Thee now for this day, and we pray, Lord, that we may have the sense of Thy presence with us in this meeting and in all of the meetings of the day. We pray for the Sunday School, and for all of the teachers, and for the children, and young people, and adults. May it be a time of spiritual growth and development. For Jesus' sake.
Amen.

[Message] Our subject for this morning in the continuation of our study of the letter to the Galatians is "Throw Out Those Legalists." This is probably the most difficult passage in the Epistle to the Galatians. And it is due to two things. In the first place, it requires a knowledge of the Old Testament, which not too many of us who do not attend Believers Chapel, have today. For example, we have to know the facts of Abraham's life.

We have to know the facts of Sarah's life. We should know the facts of Hagar's life, as well as who she was. We need to know the truths about Ishmael and Isaac and Mount Sinai. What is the Jerusalem that is below? And what is its corresponding Jerusalem? That's one of the reasons that it's difficult.

And then, it's difficult also because of the typological argument. I guess this type of argument would be difficult for anyone who was not a biblical student or a rabbi. And consequently, this passage has had a great deal of discussion. It has raged over it, because the meaning of the term allegory. And also, because of the use of the Old Testament texts. It deals, however, with one of the major problems with Christians today, so we have been told by a modern student. Now, that is no overstatement, because it is fair, I think, to say. Because the problem of legalism is a problem that has been with us since the beginning, and shall be with us as long as we are in the flesh. As long as there are men in the flesh. Through Adam's fig leaves, through the perversion of circumcision by the Judaisers among the Galatians to modern sacramentalism. Legalism has flourished.

What are the marks of legalism? What are the main marks of legalism? One of my professors at the University of Edinburgh, a number of years ago wrote a book in which he pointed out the marks of legalism for him. These are not the only marks, but they are interesting, and I think, relatively true statements. In the first place, legalism propounds a doctrine of redemption by human merit. Now, we know, of course, what that means. That is that by our own good works, or our own works, we can earn our way to heaven. That directly contradicts one of the simplest and probably most familiar texts of Scripture here. "For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourself. It is the gift of God; not of works lest anyone should boast." We are saved by grace, not by human merit. Legalism propounds a doctrine of redemption by human merit.

Furthermore and secondly, legalism imports a mercenary spirit into the Christian faith or into religion." There is a multiplication of achievements. There is a multiplication of regulations, and we are supposed, by the following of these

regulations to gain eternal life. Now Augustine, when he came to an understanding of the fact that faith was a gift, came to an understanding of it through 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 7. And in that text, the apostle wrote, "For who maketh thee to differ from another, and what hast thou that thou didst not receive." And Augustine, as he looked at this text, realized that if he had faith, it was because that faith had been given to him. Paul continues, "Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" So we have then the importation of a mercenary spirit, the setting up of regulations and the attempt to gain salvation by the things that we do, in such a way that we seek to make God our debtor.

Well, that brings me to the third thing that Professor Stewart says is characteristic of legalism. It has a "fondness for negatives." We think immediately of the Ten Commandments and "Thou shalt nots" that characterize the commandments. And then, when we turn to Christianity in the age in which we are living, we know that in the Christian church, there has grown up an excess of our own taboos, our own, "Thou shalt nots." Now, we don't observe them too much in the southern part of this United States of America, but there are taboos that pertain to almost every part of this country, which are not written in the word of God. And these taboos frequently, are measures of spirituality among Christians in evangelical churches. The Apostle Paul speaks against this fondness for negatives in Colossians chapter 2, verse 20 through verse 23. For he says there, in a passage that I think is rather important, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, Touch not; taste not; handle not."

Now, I don't want to create the wrong impression, and I know that some of you who have listened to these studies in Galatians might say, "Well, Dr. Johnson did you not, in one your messages previously, speak about the necessity of looking at things negatively." Yes, I did. And there is a place for negation in the Christian faith. I tried to point out at that time that the first thing that God said to Adam and Eve in the garden was

a negative. He said, "You may eat of all of the trees that are in the garden, but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, thou shalt not of it. Eat not." So it is perfectly all right to have a negative. But fondness for negatives is something else.

But generally speaking, legalism is characterized by a fondness for the negative. It is not contrary to the teaching of the Bible to have spiritual standards, and so in the New Testament we have many exhortations, and we have many imperatives. But the apostles made it crystal clear that the imperatives of the New Testament can never be carried out in our own strength. That is the essence of legalistic thinking, to think that we can fulfill the commandments of our Lord of God in the power of our own nature. And the Bible makes it very plain that we cannot fulfill the imperatives of the New Testament, the exhortations, apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This, we shall be taking up in one of our next studies.

Paul's solution to legalism is found in the Epistle to the Galatians, and specifically in these chapters that we have been looking at. Chapter 3, with its argumentative section, and chapter 4 with its illustrations. The illustration of the custom of adoption, and now the illustration of the typical story of Ishmael and Isaac. And I want to begin our study this morning by turning to verses 21 through 23, which give us the historical situation, which lies at the background of the typical truth that the apostle wishes to get over. Now, since the Galatians were the recipients of the ministry of Judaizing false teachers who had come from Jerusalem. I don't think that we are wrong in thinking that they were probably well schooled in rabbinic exegesis, and rabbinic arguments. Very fine points were often made on very slender evidence among in rabbinic exegesis. And we probably are safe in saying that the Galatians had been exposed to some of that type of argument. So it's almost as if the apostle is saying to them implicitly, are you Galatians fascinated by rabbinic exegesis. Well, then try this on for size. And he turns to the Old Testament, extracts from the Book of Genesis the story of Ishmael, and Isaac, and Abraham, and

Hagar, and Sarah. And legitimately, for his exegesis is legitimate, legitimately makes a point that bears on the trouble that the Galatians had been having.

Now, we need to remember, I think too, that the Judaisers with their rabbinic type of exegesis had probably been exposed to a principle of interpretation that the rabbis followed. The rabbis, just as the students of the Bible in Alexandria, were accustomed to finding more than one meaning in a passage. In fact, they did not feel that you had adequately studied a passage until you found four types of meaning in the passage. They looked at a passage and they looked for the meaning, *parshat*, which has to do with the literal sense of the passage. That was the first sense. But then having said that, they went on for other meanings. They went on to discover a meaning, in which they spoke of as "arrived at after intensive investigation." They spoke of another kind of sense, and finally they spoke of the fourth sense as "sod" or the allegorical meaning. And this meaning, they thought of, as really a kind of climactic understanding of a passage. In fact, the four principles of interpretation, which they followed, or the four meanings that they sought, one began with the word P, another began with the word R, another began with the word D, and a fourth began with the word S. The last "so" the allegorical sense. And PRDS were the letters that made up the word paradise, so that when a person had some to understand the four senses of a particular Scripture he was therefore introduced into the joy of paradise, because he fully understood a passage of Scripture. I can imagine that the Galatians, as they faced this interpretation that the apostle puts on Genesis, might well have thought of some of those things that they had been taught by the Judaisers.

Now, if we are to understand this, it is important for us to know the facts of the life of Abraham and his relationship to Sarah, and his relationship to Hagar, and Ishmael, and to Isaac. So let me, just for a few minutes, review some of the facts of Abram's life. Remember that about the age of seventy-five, God had appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees had received some unconditional promises from him. He had been told that God would make his name great. That he would give him a land, and furthermore, that

in him all of the nations, or families, of the earth would be blessed. And so Abraham had left Ur for Canaan. He received the assurance from God that he would be blessed by through Sarah.

Now, one of the most significant verses in all of the Bible is Genesis chapter 11, in verse 30, for that text says, "But Sarah was barren, and had no children." In fact, if that text were not in the Bible, humanly speaking, we would not have any Arab and Israeli conflict today. Because the Arab and Israeli conflict today arises out of the fact that Ishmael was born of Abraham, and the struggle has continued down through the centuries, and is reaching a climax in the 20th Century, and we may see the consummation of it in the lifetime of some of you. And I guess also, possibly of me, although it will have to hurry. [Laughter] But nevertheless that text was important. God called Abraham out, he gave him this promise, and he said, "You are to have a seed, and through this seed will come the blessing of God upon the nations." Abraham was about seventy-five.

Well Sarah, when Abraham reached the age of 85, and everybody wondered, who is impotent, is it Abraham, or is it Sarah? Sarah finally became impatient and she came to Abraham and she said, "Abraham, I want to give you my maid Hagar for your wife. And through the union of you two, perhaps we shall have a son and the promises of God shall be ours through that seed." And you know, in the east, in those days, every body knew everything else about a person's life. They lived in tents. There were no homes as we know them, no privacy. Everybody knew what was happening, a tent was prepared, and Abraham went in unto Hagar, and all of the camp knew what was going to come to pass or not going to come to pass. Well, anyway, something did come to pass, and Hagar became pregnant. The Bible tells us immediately that two things happened; Hagar despised Sarah, because it became evident that the problem rested with Sarah, and not with Abraham. Abraham was potent after all, and she was the impotent one. And so she

despised Sarah. But Sarah also reacted in jealousy, and she sought to send Hagar away, but God interrupted that, and brought Hagar back. That was age eighty-five.

At age eighty-six then Hagar had become pregnant and Ishmael was born. That son was born and was called Ishmael. Now, I say that everybody knew what was going on, and for thirteen years, Ishmael lived and still there was no seed from Sarah, and perhaps they had lost hope of having a seed through Sarah. I know this, that when God appeared to Abraham again, when he was ninety-nine years of age, Abraham said, "Oh that Ishmael might live before thee." But God said to him as he announced that a child would be born of Sarah, he said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." So at age ninety-nine God again spoke to Abram. Now, you know that must have been an interesting breakfast, the morning after this revelation came to Abram.

Abram, incidentally, is an interesting name. Abram means "exalted father" or perhaps "father or many." And the Arabs or the eastern people are a very courteous and a very sociable people. They still are. They have the same nature that we have, but on the outward they are very courteous. In those days, Abram lived right across the trade routes of the east. He entertained group after group of people who passed his way; rich men, poor men, they came in to eat with Abraham. They said, "What's your name?" They asked questions about each other, all kinds of personal questions. Incidentally, it's often true today, that they will ask the most personal questions, "How old are you? What kind of house do you live in? How many rooms does it have? Do you have a wife? Is she pretty? How many children do you have?" They always get around to that, because children mean a whole lot. And then, meant a tremendous amount. So you can just imagine the opening amenities that took place between Abram and all of these men, as they all thought so highly of having a family.

And incidentally, we've lost something when we've lost that as one of the goals of life when we marry, one of the most important things is that two people should think about a family. "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth" is still in the word of

God. And they asked their questions, and the questions began with Abram, or as they addressed, "Sir what is your name?" "Abram." "Ah, what a wonderful name, exalted father of many. How many children do you have?" "None." You can just see, Abraham must have gotten irritated literally scores of times. He got so, I'm sure, that he did not want them to ask his name. "What's your name?" "Exalted father." "What a wonderful name. How many children?" And he just knew what would happen.

Well, I read once from one of my teachers that certain names are things that some people have to live with. He told me that he knew a man named Wrench, and this man said that he had constantly questions, "Are you the left-handed wrench? Are you Monkey Wrench?" [Laughter] And he said also, that he knew a man whose name was Meek, and this man divided all of the people that he met into two classes, those who would ask him, when was he going to inherit the earth, and those who did not. [Laughter] Well, names meant a lot. Abram, exalted Father.

Well, at age ninety-nine the revelation comes from God to Abraham again. "Abram, Ishmael is not the promised seed. In Isaac shall thy seed be called. Sarah is going to have a child." Now, Paul tells us in Romans that in the thirteen years that had transpired since the birth of Ishmael, Abraham had become impotent, too. Paul speaks in Romans chapter 4 about the "deadness of Sarah's womb" and that "Abraham believed God" but looked at his own body and saw that it "was an impossible thing for him to have children." But now, God has said to him that "I am going to give you a child of Sarah." So breakfast comes. The family is gathered around, the servants are there, and the head of the family has an announcement to make. "From now on I don't want you to call me Abram, for God gave him a new name then. I want you to call me Abraham." What does Abraham mean? Father of a multitude. Can you not just imagine the snickers that went around? Here is a man, who had one child thirteen years ago, and now he's an old man, ninety-nine years of age, and he's beginning to get idea. [Laughter] He's gone completely around the bend. But he stuck to his word, and it was not long before the

child of promise was born, born to a man who was impotent and to a woman who was impotent. The child Isaac, the child of promise, the child of the grace of God, the supernatural child.

Now, there is one last incident that we must comment upon. At age one hundred and three Isaac is just a little boy. He's the promised child. Ishmael now has come to understand that all of Abraham's pleasure and Sarah's pleasure, and also perhaps the pleasure of God, rests on this little boy who is three. And his older brother, his half brother, thirteen years of age. At the time of Isaac's weaning, Ishmael mocks Isaac. Incidentally, a rabbinic tradition says that he took up an arrow, bow and arrow, and shot arrows playfully at the three year old boy, but it was not really playfully, it was really with hateful intention. That's only tradition. All that the Bible says in the Old Testament in Genesis chapter 21 is that he mocked the child. But the state of the verb there suggests that it was something that was going on repeatedly. He was scoffing at the child repeatedly during that time of weaning.

Well now, that's the story, and with that in the background we look now at these verses beginning at verse 22 and 23. Listen to what he says, "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid," for Hagar was a bondmaid, "the other by a freewoman," Sarah. "But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh." Now that is very important, because you see, what he is saying is that Ishmael was the child of the scheming of Sarah and Abraham. He was born after the flesh. It was attempt on the part of man to accomplish the promises of God. It was an attempt on Sarah's part and on Abraham's part to have the child that would be the promised seed. It was to do God's will that they engaged in that act of intercourse. But the Bible calls this, as Paul does, to be born after the flesh. "And he of the freewoman was by promise."

Now then, he goes on to say, "Which things are being allegorized," or being understood typically." Now, the important thing, and if you get nothing else, be sure to get this. What Paul is saying is that if you will look at the story of Abraham, and Sarah,

and Hagar, and Ishmael and Isaac, you will see that long back in the history of Israel there is an indication of the providence of God of the latent superiority of the grace of God as over against fleshly law-works. In other words, the scheming that we do by the flesh cannot please God. Now, that is a principle that pertains not only to our salvation. It pertains also to the accomplishment of the work of God to our Christian service. It pertains to all of the activity of the church of Jesus Christ. All of the schemes which the Christian church has manufactured to accomplish the will of God come under the condemnation that is set forth here.

For example, I give only one illustration for the sake of time. The way that the church of Jesus Christ is to carry on its work is by voluntary support by the children of God, not by prayer letters, not by appeals, not by begging, but by the power of God and the grace of God. But the Christian almost universally has resorted to scheming in order to support the work, and frequently takes steps out of the will of God, it does seem to be that way because they have to engage in unscriptural practices to support them, take steps out of the will of God to do a good thing. It was a good thing for Abram and Sarah to have an heir, but it was not a good thing to have it contrary to the will of God. It is a most important principle. It pertains to our Christian life. It pertains to the life of the church. It pertains to all of our Christian service. I commend it to you for you to think about.

Now, Paul says these things are being taken typically, "For these," that is these two women, for that demonstrative pronoun is feminine. "They two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai." Now, he means that Sarah and Hagar represent the old Mosaic covenant and the Abrahamic covenant. These are two covenants, the one from Mount Sinai. "Bearing children for bondage, who is Agar. For this Agar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is." That is, the Jerusalem of Paul's day where legalism reigned supreme in Judaism. He goes on to say, "And is in bondage with her

children." For those who were in bondage to Judaism were in bondage to a principle of salvation by works. "But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all."

Now, let me just briefly, some of you have the Bible study, Believers Bible Bulletin, and so I don't have to deal with this in detail. But the apostle is saying that what we have in the descent from Abraham is two lines. There is the line of Hagar, and there is the line of Sarah. If you can just think for a moment of Abraham at the top of the page, the one who has received the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, grace promises. Promises, not legal, but grace promises. And then if you can think of the left side of your page and put at the top of it Hagar, and the right side of the page Sarah. Now, you'll notice that the apostle uses the term "these are" he means by that "are" represent. And then in verse 25, he says, "And answereth to." That's a word that means literally to stand in the same line or row with. And so what we are doing is just doing that. We are having two rows, one the row of fleshly effort. And the other the row of gracious dealing of God. We have then Hagar on the one side, Sarah at the other. Under Hagar we have Ishmael, the child of fleshly self-effort. Then we have under Sarah, Isaac, "laughter," the child who was the result of the gracious promise of God, a supernatural child born of the Spirit. Then we have under Ishmael, Mount Sinai. And then we have under Isaac, well Paul doesn't say this here. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews adds this, "Mount Zion." But not the Mount Zion of the earth, the Mount Zion of heaven. "We've come to Mount Zion the city of the heavenly Jerusalem."

Then under Mount Sinai, the Mosaic Law, for it was at Mount Sinai that the Mosaic Law was given. And over against the Mosaic Law, we have the Abrahamic promise. Now, these two things are contrasted. Incidentally, there are some theologians who believe that the Mosaic Law was an unconditional kind of covenant. It was a gracious covenant. I think Paul's argument here is to the contrary. It is not a gracious covenant. He puts Mount Sinai and he puts the old covenant in the line of fleshly works, as over against Abrahamic promises. We have Jerusalem below on the left side; that's the city of

Jerusalem, which is bound up in Judaism. And then over on the other side we have the church of the Gentiles, saved by the grace of God. The Galatians who had been saved, Paul, and others. Then we have bondage, for the Law always brings men into bondage. And then on the other side, we have the freedom of grace.

Then finally, at the bottom of the row, on the left side under Hagar, we have persecuting, and then over the other side, persecuted. For it is always true that the legalist persecutes the man of grace. It is not the other way around. It is always that way. The legalist is disturbed over a man who believes in grace. The reason he is, is because it suggests to him very directly that the things that he does do not have any merit before God. And he's trusting in the things of merit. He's trusting in his works, in the means by which he thinks he can win God's favor. So when a person says, "No, we're not justified by the things that we do, but by the gracious promise of God related, ultimately, to the cross of Jesus Christ." It stirs up his old sin bound heart in rebellion and rejection of the idea that he cannot please God by what he does. And if you know anything about testifying to the grace of God, you know exactly what I mean.

But Paul says, in the grace line, the Jerusalem above is the place of our birth. It is the mother city of us. It is our home; it is our place of citizenship. Our names are there. Our citizenship is there. And our life is there. And he doesn't say this now, but he implies it, soon we shall be there. It's a free city, the city of the resurrection removed from the sphere of the Law. It is a magnificent treatment of the Old Testament in typical fashion, and then he illustrates it with a passage from Scripture.

For the sake of time, I want to come to the personal application in verse 28 through verse 31. Here he makes his identifications, he says, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise." We are Isaac's. We are born of grace. And we are born through faith. Now, this is extremely important. For he's saying, in effect, that if you have been brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are an Isaac. It is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. It is not something that we have done by virtue

of our good works. It is something that has been done for us, and in us. The Holy Spirit has come to us, when we were dead in trespasses and sins, has communicated life to us, has brought us to faith in the Lord Jesus. And we are children of the promise of God, being the results of the electing grace of God in ages past. And consequently, we are children of grace. We, like Isaac, are the children of the eternal promise. For the promise of life, given in Christ Jesus before the age began.

If you are here this morning, and you are a member of the church of Jesus Christ, you are a child of grace, a child of promise; the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. So we are Isaac's, he's saying. We are not Ishmael's produced by fleshly works, by what we have done; joining the church, praying through, being baptized, having the right kind of culture, having the right kind of education. All of this is the scheming of men to gain God's acceptance. When he says he accepts only those who come to him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he says in verse 29 and 30, "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the Scripture?" And if you'll go back to Genesis chapter 21, you will find that Abraham was a little disturbed when Sarah wanted to send Hagar and Ishmael away, but God said, "No Abram, do exactly as Sarah has said." Good advice, I guess to all husbands. And then the words of God are the words that Paul quotes here, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." Or as God would have put in our language today, "Throw out that legalist, and the child." That is the verdict of God upon the legalist.

Now, this is a most important thing. Will you notice that it was Ishmael who persecuted Isaac, not Isaac who persecuted Ishmael? But it is the legalist who persecutes the man of grace. Now, another thing, I've already said that, I'm leading up to this. Did you notice this; it was a persecution that came, not from a stranger, but from a relative? It was a persecution that came from a half brother, for Ishmael was the half brother of Isaac.

In other words, the persecution comes from those who are the closes. Persecution often comes from the religious people. In the Christian church, persecution comes often from the members of the Christian church. It is they who persecute the man of grace. "Cast out the bondwoman."

And the persecution of the Christian church is kind of a history of this down through the years. Our Lord Jesus was persecuted by the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the religious people, the fiercest opponents of the Apostle Paul were the Judaisers and others who were giving professing allegiance to the Christian church. The fiercest opponents of Luther and Calvin were those who were in the established church of the time. The fiercest opponent of the grace of God today is not the world. The fiercest opponent, though the world is very unhappy with the things that we say, the fiercest opposition comes from those who are closest to us, who are in the same company of fellowship often, who are so angry with the things of the grace of God.

Now, if you know nothing about this, I just suggest in order for you to catch a little flavor of it, that you say to one of your Christian fiends, "I do not believe that the Bible teaches that there is a free will." And see what happens. Because the moment that you speak about the free grace of God, you will discover that there are those who have been professing Christians, often for a lengthy time, who will rise up in antipathy to that. I have even heard people say with reference to me, that "That doctrine that Dr. Johnson proclaims has come from the pit of hell." In fact, all over the southeast at the present time, there are some who say that. That doctrine of the bondage of the will comes from the pit of hell. It is the doctrine of Augustine. It is the doctrine held by Luther. It is the doctrine held by Calvin. And I think, I thoroughly think, it was the doctrine held by the Apostle Paul. But if you say to people that the will is in bondage to sin, when they've believed very strongly that their decision is traceable to the act of their free will. It destroys the last refuge that they have, that their salvation has come from themselves. Whereas, the word of God speaks so plainly that salvation is of the Lord.

So if you want to taste a little bit of what Isaac had to taste from Ishmael, I suggest that you study the Scriptures, come to the conviction, through the Holy Spirit that the salvation of God is truly a salvation of grace, and that decision by which we are brought to Christ, is a decision produced by the Holy Spirit of God. And then, you will find that you will be in the heat. And you'll enjoy the kitchen. Now, if you can't stand the kitchen, wasn't it President Truman that said it, "If you cannot stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." But if by the grace of God you've been brought to the conviction that salvation is truly of grace, then you will remember that this is the line of the men of grace from the day of Abraham on through the whole of the New Testament, down through the Reformation to the present time.

Finally, the apostle says in verse 31, "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." That's the death knell of Judaism in the apostle's teaching. Let me say this in conclusion. Paul regarded, it is evident, the Law and its reign as temporary. He saw that the legal system was to go. And second, spiritual bondage originates in a wrong view of the Law. Freedom is in grace. The religion of Ishmael is a religion of the fleshly nature; what man can do by himself. Man's attempt to scheme and make God accept what he had done. Whereas the religion of Isaac is one of grace. What God does by his mighty, powerful, Holy Spirit in the lives of men. So if you think that salvation is by your good works, Ishmael; if you think that salvation is by joining the church, Ishmael; if you think that salvation is through education, Ishmael; if you think that salvation is through culture, Ishmael. But if you think that salvation comes through the cross-work of the Lord Jesus Christ who has died for sinners, and the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men to the knowledge of their own sin and need, and of Christ. Then Isaac, the child of promise. The child whose name meant laughter. And you'll come to understand the joy of the freedom that we have in the Lord Jesus.

The legalist always persecutes grace, because Christianity is, as Alan Cole has put it, "Incurably narrow-minded." Christians proclaim the truth that there is only one way of

salvation. It is on the principle of grace, through the instrumentality of faith, in our Lord and his finished work. Yes, legalism is one of the major problems of the Christian church today. It is a great problem in the lives of Christians. May the Lord deliver us from its error. And may he enable us to stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has set us free.

If you are here this morning, and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting in your own fleshly works. The day will come when you shall have to stand before the great white throne judgment. And the question shall be asked you, "Upon what do you stand?" And if you should say, "I stand on the basis of my good works." You shall be lost forever. Ishmael, Ishmael is no place to stand. And so we invite you to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who has offered this atonement for sinners. And that encompasses each of us. We are sinners. May God so speak to our hearts that we are brought to the conviction of our sin, and to conversion to Jesus Christ. I invite you to come, come to Christ. Come to the finished work. Trust in what our Lord has done. Reject all trust in yourself. Rely only upon Christ, there is no other way. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our Father, we are so grateful to Thee that the Apostle Paul has given us this rich illustration of the superiority of grace to the legal fleshly works system. We know that the Scriptures are true when they speak of our sin and inability, we are dead. We are blind. We are deaf spiritually. We cannot resurrect ourselves. We cannot give ourselves eyes or ears. We are hopelessly lost apart from the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit. And so, Oh Father, we do pray that if there are some here who have never come to Christ, Oh God, by the work of the Holy Spirit, reveal to them their need and bring them to the Savior that they too may trust in the free grace of our great God. May grace, mercy, and peace go with us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.