

Children Of Promise? Galatians 4:21-31

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our Epistle lesson assumes you know how Abraham ended up with two sons. It has to do with a promise God made to Abraham. God promised Abraham that through a son, that he'd have many descendants, and through one of his descendants all would be blessed.

Sarah had her own ideas. If you remember, she was old, and in terms of what physically should be possible, she knew she was past the years of child bearing. Sarah told Abraham to take her servant Hagar so that he could have a child – according to the natural order of things.

Hagar gets pregnant, gives birth to a son, and of course, there are problems in the household. Sarah wanted Hagar and child gone, Abraham is spending too much time with the child and mother. Hagar is very happy that she is now so highly favored by Abraham, and Sarah is extremely jealous.

Finally, fourteen years later, when Abraham is 100 years old, Sarah gives birth to a son who they name Isaac.

Why were there problems? When the promise of God was not trusted and Sarah attempted to take God's promise into her own hands and tried to fulfill it according to the laws of nature, things fell apart. When Abraham doubted God's promise and submitted to his wife's idea of following the law, things blew up pretty fast.

It is amazing how many people are just like Sarah, "pastor, why do you always have to preach repentance and forgiveness? Why can't you just tell us how to be good Christians? Why don't you just tell us what we need to do? Basically people are good; they just need to be told what to do."

What happened in Wausau? The news has reported some of it. Does that event restore hope in humanity? Is this the evidence of the good in people? From what I am hearing, it was a family squabble gone bad – really bad.

Such tragedies make it all the more interesting to think how much people love the law. It is amazing how many claiming to be Christians want to use the law in regard to their eternal relationship with God. We want to be the masters of our own lives and the keepers of our own salvation. We want to do our part to make sure we gain heaven, for we know that nothing is free.

Of course, that brings to light an even bigger problem. Most people do not like God's Law. Oh sure, people want to be obedient to God, but they want a manageable Law – not the Law as God gives it. And why is that? Like I said, they want a manageable law.

What do I mean by "manageable law"? People want a Law that they can do, rules that they can keep. We do not want things so difficult that we cannot accomplish them, we want manageable

law. We give out participation awards, for we are afraid to let someone fail in their attempts. When it comes to pleasing God, we want the same thing – manageable law.

How does that work out in our lives?

As long as I get to church once in a while, that's good enough. God understands that life is busy and that sometimes life gets in the way of my time with Him. I can manage to do that. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy – not sometimes, but always. God says we are to love the Lord our God with ALL our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Nothing is supposed to come before God. Jesus even said that if we love father or mother, or son or daughter more than Him, then we are not worthy of Him. Do we let Him speak to us, or do we excuse our lack of opening our Bibles to, "It's too hard to understand it!"

We try to understand that law so we can accomplish it. I have never committed murder – as long as the definition of murder is whether or not I have taken the life of another person – that's manageable. But God's Law says that I am not supposed to hate someone, or call them fool, that is also murder. Christ tells me that I am supposed to love even my enemies, and if I cannot forgive, that is like murder; and then God will not forgive me.

The Law is not easy! As Jesus says, we are to be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect. We want to do it our way, but when we try to do it our way it is no longer God's way.

It is amazing how many people want to be Christians, who claim to be followers of Christ, but they follow their own rules – they make up their own guidelines – they claim, "I know what I believe in my heart." That is all well and good; people are free to believe whatever they want to believe. But they cannot then claim to be Christians. Such people are idolaters; they are worshippers of self, those who make up their own religion. They are not children of promise, slaves born according to their flesh – captive to their own desires.

What is so scary is that those who are trusting their works, those who have their own manageable law, are still always wondering, "have I done enough." They are always a bit uneasy about their eternal salvation and place in heaven. They are never completely sure that everything is accomplished, for they have doubts if they are truly good enough – if they have truly done enough. Doubt is always a part of their lives, for they cannot get away from the guilt – for they know they are not perfect.

Dear friends, you are children of promise. God has accomplished it all in Christ Jesus, on the cross Christ proclaimed, "It is finished!" Trust the promise!

You can go the route that brought about Ishmael. You can look at your flesh, you can look at the way things work in the world, you can trust what you see with your eyes, and trust what **YOU THINK** you should be doing. You can do it right according to the world's standards. Go for it!

Of course, God's demands will still be there waiting, and despite what you **try** to tell yourself, you know that you will still have to answer this question, "Are you perfect?"

There is that doubt, isn't there?

Step away from the Law. Trust the promise, for you are children of promise!

How can you trust the promise? How can you be sure when you know promises are always broken?

The promise is based upon God, the promise keeper.

As God promised Eve, her seed came into the world – the virgin conceived and bore a son. Conceived of the Holy Spirit, it was God who came to earth in human flesh.

As promised in the garden, He crushed Satan's head. That is, He destroyed Satan's power. He resisted temptation – for you.

He allowed Himself to be crucified – for you.

In that work, Satan's power, his head was crushed.

Three days later, just as He had promised His disciples, Christ was raised from the dead. He gives us the picture of our resurrection.

In the waters of baptism, you became a child of promise. You were united to the death of Christ – Satan's power defeated in you. You are raised to new life, the life Christ lives within you today and forever.

It is this same Jesus who commanded your pastor to proclaim to you that your sins are forgiven. Just as He promised, He gives you His own body to eat and His own blood to drink – for the forgiveness of your sins.

It is Christ's Word, Christ's own resurrected flesh, Christ's own precious blood shed for you as promised that make you children of promise. Christ makes His dwelling within you! That, dear friends, is your reality as children of promise.

Yes, you and I are to love God with all our heart, soul, and strength. And yes, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. And that is exactly what Christ does in us and through us, for we are His children by promise. Amen.