

APPEAL THREE: LISTEN TO WHAT THE LAW REALLY SAYS GALATIANS 04:21–31

Introduction

The way to heaven is not by works nor by the law. A person cannot do enough works nor keep enough laws to become *perfectly good*. And for a person to live in God's presence he has to be perfect. What then is the way to heaven? If a person cannot be good enough nor do enough works to make it to heaven, how can he get there? By faith in the promise of God. God has promised heaven to those who believe on His Son — to those who genuinely trust Jesus Christ to save them.

However, most people in the world do not believe the promise of God. They still think they have to earn and work their way into the favour of God — that they have to build up a long list of *good works* that will force God to accept them. They think that they have to make themselves righteous by being good and doing religious things in order to enter heaven. Therefore, they place themselves under the rules and regulations of the law and of religion, and they do the best they can to make it to heaven. This is the appeal of this passage; the person who approaches God through the works of religion and law must listen to *what the law really says*.

- I. Hearing the law is absolutely essential for the legalist or religionist (v. 21).
- II. Legalism emphasizes the difference between Abraham's two sons (vv. 22-23).
- III. Legalism emphasizes the difference between two covenants, two mothers (vv. 24-28).
- IV. Legalism persecutes and enslaves believers (v. 29).
- V. Legalism is to be cast out — receive no inheritance (v. 30).
- VI. Legalism has no claim upon the children of grace (v. 31).

I. *Galatians 04:21 Law and Religion*

Hearing the law is absolutely essential for the legalist or religionist. The legalist or religionist is the person who approaches God by the law or by the works of goodness or religion. The legalist and religionist need to hear and really understand what they are doing, just how they are approaching God. They need to understand the implication of what they are doing.

II. *Galatians 04:22–23 Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael*

Legalism emphasizes the difference between Abraham's two sons. Remember that the way to become acceptable to God and to enter heaven is not by law nor by the works of goodness, but by the promise of God. Paul uses the illustration of Abraham to prove the

point (see Genesis Chapters 16, 17, and 21). Briefly and simply, Abraham had two sons. One son had been promised by God to Abraham through his wife Sarah; however, many years passed without Sarah ever having a child. She seemed incapable. She became discouraged, so she sent a slave girl, Hagar, in to Abraham. Hagar bore a son, Ishmael. Sometime later, however, God kept His promise and the impossible happened: Sarah, well beyond childbearing years, bore a son and his name was Isaac (Rom. 4:10).

1. Note the facts about Ishmael. He was...

- born after the order and process of nature
- born into slavery, being born of a slave girl
- born because of the work, effort and will of Sarah
- born because of the fleshly impulses, urges and attraction of Abraham

2. Note the facts about Isaac. He was...

- born as a free man, born of a free woman, Sarah.
- born by the promise of God alone. God had promised Abraham that Sarah would bear a son, and when Isaac was born, Abraham and Sarah were both well beyond the years of childbearing — one hundred years old. Isaac was a miracle child, born miraculously by the working of God — all because God had promised Abraham a son. Isaac was, therefore, a promised child.

The point is this and it must be remembered: Ishmael, the child born by human ingenuity, energy and effort, was born into slavery. But Isaac, the child promised by God, was born miraculously by the promise of God — by His love and power alone — all because He alone had made the promise.

III. *Galatians 04:24–28 Covenants of Law and Grace*

Legalism emphasizes the difference between two covenants, two mothers. Note: Paul says that these things are an allegory, that is, an illustration of truth can be seen and drawn from the event. When looking closely at the story, we can see how the mothers, Hagar and Sarah, represent the two covenants — the covenant of law and the covenant of God's grace or promise.

1. Hagar was a type of the old covenant between God and man — the law. Two things are said about the law.
 - a. Hagar, that is, the law, bears children in slavery. The law says do this and don't do that. It demands and insists on obedience. It enslaves a person to do exactly what it says. Therefore, if a person hopes to approach God in his own goodness, merit, virtue, morality and righteousness, he is in bondage to the law. He must keep it in order to be good and moral and righteous and to earn the favour of God. The law, the rules, and,

regulations of goodness and righteousness, enslaves him. (Keep in mind, Paul is not saying the law is not good. We are to live righteously and morally, but we are not acceptable to God because of our goodness and self-efforts. We do not save ourselves; we are not to be praised because of our works and goodness. Praise belongs to God. God is the One who saves us. This is what is being discussed.)

- b. Hagar, the law, represents the very centre of a religion of law and works which was Jerusalem of that day (v. 25). Note that Paul makes two connections to stress the point:
 - => Hagar stands for Mt. Sinai, the Mount in Arabia where the law was given.
 - => Hagar and Mt. Sinai both picture the very centre of a religion of law and works, the Jerusalem of that day. Of course, Hagar also pictures any religion, church, people or person who seeks to be righteous and acceptable to God and heaven through works and law.
2. Sarah was a type of the new covenant between God and man, the covenant of grace or of promise. Two things are said about the grace and promise of God to man.
 - a. Sarah, that is, grace, is seen in the Jerusalem which is above, the heavenly Jerusalem. Heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual and eternal city which God has promised to those who approach Him through faith.
 - b. Grace and the promise of a heavenly city are both free. Any person who accepts God's promise of a heavenly city which is eternal — who accepts His promise enough to believe it with all his heart, basing all he is and has upon that promise — is acceptable to God. God takes the man's sheer faith — the faith that has cast itself totally upon the promise of God — and counts it as the man's righteousness. Therefore, the man becomes acceptable to God: he is given the promise of God freely — without price — without having to work for it by keeping rules and laws.
 - c. Note a second result as well: the covenant of grace ends up with more children than the Jewish legalist. This is a prophecy which simply predicted that more Gentiles would believe the grace of God than Jews (Isa. 55:1).
3. The point is forcefully stated: "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise." Believers — all those who have believed in Jesus Christ — have been given birth by God — a spiritual birth. We receive the promise of God. God freely takes our faith and counts it as righteousness.
 - => Our faith is credited, imputed and counted as the righteousness which we lack within ourselves.

This is the glorious promise of God's grace, the covenant of grace which God has now made with man. Man can now inherit the promised land (Canaan, the heavenly Jerusalem or city of God) and live eternally with God. (See Heb. 12:18-24.)

Rom 4:13-14 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.*

Heb 11:8-10 *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

Heb 11:13-14, 16 *All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.*

Heb 12:22-23 *But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.*

Heb 13:14-15 *For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name.*

Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Rev 21:1-2 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

Rev 21:10-11 *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.*

Rev 22:19 *And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.*

IV. Galatians 04:29 Law, Legalism and Persecution

Legalism persecutes and enslaves believers. Ishmael ridiculed, mocked and persecuted Isaac. Paul draws upon this fact to show why believers are persecuted. It is because men try and try to approach God in the flesh, that is, by their own energy and effort in trying to be good and righteous.

1. The person in the flesh consciously or subconsciously is trying to secure credit, recognition, esteem, approval, acceptance and praise from God — all by his own energy and effort. Therefore, he mocks, ridicules and persecutes the believer who says that self-effort and self-righteousness are not enough and will not make a person acceptable to God.
2. The person in the flesh has to confess human weakness and inadequacy — that he cannot make himself acceptable to God because he is...
 - too sinful
 - too polluted
 - too short of God's glory
 - too hopeless
 - too unrighteous
 - too helpless
 - too unholy
 - too undeserving

The person in the flesh refuses to accept this fact. He wants to think highly of himself and place himself on a level close to God. Therefore, when a believer comes along and says that a person has to be born again by the Spirit of God, the natural man reacts. He refuses to accept the fact that his flesh, his own energy and effort, is unable to earn, win and merit God's approval.

Mat 5:11 *“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.”*

Mat 10:22 *“All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”*

Mat 10:38-39 *“And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

Phil 1:29 *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.*

2 Tim 3:12-13 *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

V. *Galatians 04:30 Legalism and Inheritance*

Legalism is to be cast out and has no inheritance with God. The law cannot coexist with the grace of God. The son of Hagar, the law, shall not be heir with the son of Sarah, that is, grace. The fact of the coming judgment could not be illustrated any clearer: Ishmael was cast out so that he would not share in the inheritance with Isaac (Gen. 21: 10f).

God never will accept anyone who approaches Him by law or by works. Why? Because the person has to stand before God saying, “God, here are *my* works, *my* goodness, *my* righteousness, a list of laws *I* have kept, a list of *my* contributions.” Such a claim is merely deceptive boasting. Such a profession presents to God only human effort and energy, works and deeds. God is perfect; therefore, only perfection can exist with Him. No matter how much good and how many good works a person presents to God, they are not enough, for they do not make him perfect. Therefore, he must be cast from God’s presence. But not the person of promise. The person of promise approaches God saying:

“Father, you are my Saviour and Lord. You have loved me so much that you sent your Son to die for me. I *believe* with all my heart that Christ did die for me, and I surrender all I am and have into His keeping. I cast myself totally upon His righteousness and His death for my sins.”

God has promised that the person who sincerely believes in His Son will never perish but will have eternal life. He shall inherit the promise of God. God will accept his belief and count it as righteousness, and the man will inherit the promise.

Rom 4:13 *It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

Rom 8:15-17 *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

Gal 3:29 *If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

Titus 3:4-7 *But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

VI. Galatians 04:31 Legalism and the Children of Grace

Legalism has no claim upon the children of grace. The fact is clearly seen in all that has been stated above. Believers — yea, all men if they would only accept the fact — have so much for which to thank God. God has so loved the world and demonstrated His love beyond anything any person could ever ask.

John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

John 5:24 *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*

Rom 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Eph 2:4-10 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. ■*