***Two Covenants And Two Kinds Of Children***

Gal. 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one of the maidservant and one of the free woman.

Gal. 4:31 So then, brothers, we are not children of the maidservant but of the free woman.

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**TWO SONS**

We have seen that in 4:8-20 Paul spoke in an affectionate manner and appealed to the personal feeling of the Galatians. He did this for the purpose of ministering Christ to them. But in verse 21 Paul goes back to the tone he used in chapter three. In fact, he speaks to them in an even stronger way. In verses 22 and 23 Paul continues, “For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one of the maidservant and one of the free woman. But the one of the maidservant was born according to flesh, and the one of the free woman through the promise.” To be born according to flesh is to be born by man’s fleshly effort, whereas to be born through the promise is to be born through God’s power in grace, which is implied in His promise. Ishmael was born in the former way, but Isaac in the latter. According to the context, the law goes with the flesh, and grace goes with the promise. The child born of the maidservant was born according to the flesh, whereas the one born of the free woman was born according to grace. Because grace goes with the promise, to be born through promise is to be born through grace.

**TWO WOMEN**

Speaking of the two women in verse 22, Paul says in verse 24, “Which things are an allegory; for these are two covenants, one from Mount Sinai, bringing forth children unto slavery, which is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the Jerusalem which now is, for she is in slavery with her children.” Of the two covenants mentioned in verse 24, one is the covenant of promise to Abraham, which is related to the New Testament, the covenant of grace, and the other is the covenant of law related to Moses, which has nothing to do with the New Testament. Sarah, the free woman, represents the covenant of promise, and Hagar, the maidservant, the covenant of law.

Mount Sinai was the place where the law was given (Exo. 19:20). The slavery spoken of in verse 24 is the slavery under the law. Hagar, the concubine of Abraham, signifies the law. Hence, the position of the law is like that of a concubine. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, symbolizes the grace of God (John 1:17), which has the right position in God’s economy. The law, like Hagar, brought forth children unto slavery like the Judaizers. Grace, like Sarah, brings forth children unto sonship. These are the New Testament believers. They are no longer under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14). They should stand in this grace (Rom. 5:2) and not fall from it (Gal. 5:4).

In verse 25 Paul mentions “the Jerusalem which now is.” Jerusalem, as the choice of God (1 Kings 14:21; Psa. 48:2, 8), should belong to the covenant of promise represented by Sarah. However, because it brings God’s chosen people into the bondage of law, it corresponds to Mount Sinai, which belongs to the covenant of law represented by Hagar. Jerusalem and her children were slaves under the law at Paul’s time.

Paul’s word in verses 24 and 25 was clear and strong. No doubt, the Judaizers must have been offended by it.

**THE UNVEILING OF GOD’S DESIRE**

The promise given to Abraham was the unveiling of God’s desire. When God made the promise to Abraham, He opened His heart and unveiled the desire of His heart. Although man had fallen and was under the curse, God’s desire was to bless all nations. His desire was to give Himself as a blessing to the nations. God had told Abraham that in Him all nations would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). This promise was given over against a certain background. At the time the promise was given, all the nations were under the curse. No doubt, Abraham realized this. Then, suddenly, the God of glory appeared to him and promised that in him all the nations would be blessed. What a tremendous word this was! When the God of glory appeared to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was attracted. He was charmed. Because he was attracted by God, Abraham could follow Him out of Chaldea. Then, when Abraham was sojourning in the land of Canaan, God promised to give the land to Abraham’s seed. Therefore, with God’s promise to Abraham there are two main aspects: the aspect of the nations being blessed and the aspect of the good land. On the one hand, the nations would be blessed through Christ’s redemption. On the other hand, Christ, typified by the good land, is the embodiment of the Triune God as the all-inclusive life-giving Spirit as our enjoyment and bountiful supply. God’s promise to Abraham with these two aspects was the unveiling of the desire of God’s heart.

God’s promise to Abraham involves much more than justification by faith. Yes, we are told that Abraham believed God and that it was reckoned to him as righteousness (3:6). However, we need to see that God’s dealing with Abraham involved much more. The gospel preached to Abraham was actually the unveiling of God’s heart.

**THE COMING OF CHRIST AND OF GRACE**

Two thousand years after the desire of God’s heart was unveiled to Abraham, Christ came. When Christ came, grace came. Grace is the Triune God processed to become our enjoyment. Such a grace is the fulfillment of God’s promise, the fulfillment of God’s desire.

Before the coming of Christ, we are not told in the Scriptures that God was happy or pleased. But when Christ was baptized, the Father declared, “This is My beloved Son, in Whom I delight” (Matt. 3:17). When the Lord was with three of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, the Father spoke the same words (Matt. 17:5). God was happy to see the fulfillment of His desire by grace, which is actually a living Person, Christ, the Son of God, the embodiment of the Triune God. This living Person is the fulfillment of the desire of God’s heart. It is correct to say that the fulfillment of God’s promise is both by grace and by the living Person of Christ, for this living Person is Himself the grace.

**THE LIFE-GIVING SPIRIT**

Today we are enjoying this grace, this living Person, who is now the life-giving Spirit within us. If Christ were not the life-giving Spirit dwelling in us, we could not be one with Him, and it would not be possible for Him to work all the riches of the Godhead into our being. How could Christ live in us and be formed in us if He were only an objective One sitting in the heavens at the right hand of the Father, as One separate from the Father and the Spirit? It would be impossible! Such a Christ could not be revealed into us, live in us, or be formed in us. In order for all this to become our experience, Christ must be the life-giving Spirit. Praise the Lord that the grace we enjoy is Christ, and Christ is the life-giving Spirit!

**CHILDREN ACCORDING TO SPIRIT**

Because we have grace, Christ, and the life-giving Spirit, we are children according to Spirit. How blessed we are to have the hearing of faith and by it to receive grace! We have seen that the desire of God’s heart, the promise given to Abraham, is fulfilled by grace and that grace is Christ as the life-giving Spirit. This Spirit is now in our spirit and makes us children according to Spirit. This is the revelation in Galatians 3 and 4.

As those who are children according to Spirit, we should lay aside the law, the flesh, slavery, and the children according to flesh. We need to bid farewell to these things and refuse from now on to be entangled by them. Instead, we should remain in the fulfillment of God’s desire, enjoying grace, Christ, and the all-inclusive Spirit as the blessing of the gospel.

**OUR CHOICE**

In 4:21-31 we see two women, two covenants, and two Jerusalems. We can choose between Hagar and Sarah, between the earthly Jerusalem and the Jerusalem above, and between the covenant of law and the covenant of promise, which is the testament of grace. Furthermore, we may choose to be children according to flesh or children according to Spirit. Praise the Lord for showing us the two covenants and the two kinds of children! Chapters three and four of Galatians are crystal clear to us, fully transparent. We praise the Lord that we are of the Jerusalem above, children of the free woman! Praise Him that we are children according to the Spirit enjoying the all-inclusive Spirit as the blessing of the gospel!