

Spirit-Filled Living Series

We are Given the Promises of God (Gal. 4:28-29)

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

We are Given the Promises of God

I. Introduction

A. Illustration: Using the Wrong Bible

1. While working in my office this week, I saw a truck with an animal trailer behind it pulling into the church parking lot. There were two Mennonite guys in it. One of them got out and quickly walked to the door. I got up to go see what they needed, as I didn't know who this person was. By the time I got to the front door of the church, the man was already back in the truck and they were pulling away.
2. When I got to the front door, I noticed a bright green piece of paper stuck between the two outside doors. While unclear and difficult to understand exactly what the message was, the note was encouraging me to repent of using a corrupted Bible. There was a list of Bible translations that were, on this person's view, a corrupted version of the word of God. The Scriptures being quoted were essentially telling me that I was an enemy of God and I needed to repent to get right with Him.
3. While I won't get into the details of why these gentlemen said I was using the wrong Bible, I know the "problem" they were pointing out made no meaningful difference whatsoever, according to what the Bible teaches. I was easily able to see the errors in their perspective and thinking. Even if the claim they were making was true, it didn't matter. But I also know the claim they were making is false. Unfortunately, I didn't always know enough to be able to respond this way—to my own detriment.

B. When other people try to tell us we are not right with God, it has the potential of having a negative impact on us—mentally and emotionally. Other people claiming we are contrary to and separated from God can even cause panic and a crisis of faith. When I learned that I was condemned by other religions for holding the views I did about Jesus, it greatly disturbed me psychologically for a long time.¹ As I became more familiar with the teachings of other religions, or distorted versions of Christianity, I realized the seriousness of the situation. If a person holds to one viewpoint of God, they will be condemned by several other viewpoints of God. As I held to Biblical convictions, I was condemned by Judaism, Islam, Mormonism, and even Catholicism (among others).

C. When I understood the reality of the situation, I knew I had to be very careful about how I determined my convictions about God. It was unavoidable that if I was wrong, I would be condemned and punished. I had to take what I thought about God seriously. I realized I better work hard at making sure I was correct regarding my convictions about God because the most significant consequences resulted from it. Getting God right is the most important issue I will ever face.

¹ I later realized this happened because I was still spiritually immature, even after growing up in the church and spending years pursuing church related activities (Eph. 4:14). I did not have firm Biblically grounded convictions. I didn't know why I believed what I did. I wasn't really convinced the perspective of the Bible was true even while believing in Jesus. I was tossed around doctrinally because I didn't know the truth. My lack of interest in the life of the mind caused emotional discomfort. I did not yet learn the important lesson that keeping my mind set on God brings the wonderful blessing of peace (Isa. 26:3).

- D. Knowing all this and being aware of the psychological discomfort being experienced by the Galatian disciples, Paul desires to encourage these disciples with the assurance of their identity and standing with God through Jesus. As the false teachers are trying to convince these disciples they are not right with God unless the Law is followed as part of the Christian life, Paul assures the Galatians of their standing before God. The spiritual condition of those who love Jesus is described in Galatians 4:28-29.

II. Our History and Heritage

- A. As these disciples are being tossed around by a new doctrine they were hearing, Paul wants to calm and stabilize them by reminding them of the long spiritual history they are part of. These disciples, who are part of the church, have joined the eternal team of the people of God who receive the blessings of God. Confidence and comfort come from knowing and learning from the history of the way God interacts with and treats His people. This is being emphasized as Paul points to the life of Isaac.
- B. Here is Paul's encouragement:

²⁸ And you, brothers *and sisters*, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹ But as at that time the *son* who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is even now. (Gal. 4:28-29)
- C. The apostle Paul makes a comparison between those in the church and Isaac ("And you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac", v. 28). To understand Paul's point, we need to understand who Isaac is and what is going on in his life. For this, we are going to need a little background information on the life of Isaac. But at the outset, we can understand that disciples who trust Jesus and have the Holy Spirit working in them are in the same spiritual condition and relationship to God as Isaac was when he lived. But to understand what Paul is talking about and referring to, we must understand our history and heritage. Who is Isaac and what happened to him? What is Paul referring to by bringing up Isaac?
- D. Paul is referring to a specific situation in the life of Isaac. God's plan of salvation was set into motion when God separated Abraham out from all the people and promised Abraham that the world would be blessed through his many descendants (Gen. 12:1-3, 13:14-16, 15:1-16, 18:9-11). A critical piece of that promise was the birth of Isaac, Abraham's son and first descendant (Gen. 18:10). It is through the descendants of Abraham (and therefore Isaac) that a special person was going to come to rescue and to rule—called the Messiah (Jesus).
- E. The immediate situation within the life of Isaac being referred to is this:

⁹ Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking *Isaac*. ¹⁰ Therefore she said to Abraham, "Drive out this slave woman and her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be an heir with my son Isaac!" ¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son *Ishmael*. ¹² But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and your slave woman; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. (Gen. 21:9-12)
- F. Abraham had to wait for God to fulfill His promises anywhere between fourteen and twenty-five years (Gen. 12:4, 16:16, 21:5). God first appeared to Abraham when he was seventy-five

years old. Sometime thereafter, Abraham was promised a son. It is unclear when exactly the first promise of a son is given to Abraham because descendants are mentioned before the official promise of a son is recorded (Gen. 13:16, 15:1). Whatever the exact timing was, Abraham was old and the clock was ticking, which is why Abraham eventually tried to fulfill the promise on his own by having Ishmael with Hagar at the suggestion of his wife Sarah.

- G. After God fulfilled his promise to Abraham, Isaac was born and there was a celebration of Isaac's survival past his weaning—typically around three to four years old.² After the initial nursing of a child, the child was old enough to be instructed by others, as their survival needs are no longer as dependent on the mother or nurse. It was at this party that Ishmael was mistreating Isaac, which led to Ishmael and his mother (Hagar) being sent away from Abraham and his family. It is at this point that Abraham had to make a choice between which child he was going to provide for, protect, and who would inherit his resources and blessing.
- H. God explains His perspective and desires in this situation:
 - ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" ¹⁹ But God said, "No, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. (Gen. 17:18-19)
- I. God made a promise, and He was going to work the way He said He was going to. Ishmael and his mother were not included in the promise. The son promised by God through whom God's blessing was going to be given was not Ishmael. The promised blessing God intended only applied to Isaac, not Ishmael. While God would also take care of Ishmael because he is a descendant of Abraham, the plan and promise of God would come through Isaac and his children. In sending Ishmael away, God is correcting the mistake Abraham made, as well as protecting Isaac. God is going to fulfill His plan and promise His way, not Abraham's.
- J. Abraham was a godly person. He stands as a shining example of a person whose heart was set on God. Rightly so, the Jews set him up as a significant positive example to follow. However, even he failed to fully trust God as he should. The whole reason why this situation with Isaac existed was because Abraham started to think God was taking too long to fulfill His promise. Abraham took matters into his own hands and tried to fulfill the promise by his own ability. Waiting for the promises of God to be fulfilled can be difficult. The longer we must wait, the easier it becomes to question and doubt whether God is going to do what He said He is going to do. Abraham tried to bring about God's promise by using his abilities and the resources he had at his disposal.
- K. As the people of God who are going to be given all the promises of God, we need to wait patiently for God to provide what He has promised (Heb. 11:13). God doesn't do what we want on our timeline. Not only this, but for some promises of God, we are forced to wait until this life is over to experience them. To live by faith is to live patiently, waiting for God to do what He said He was going to do. We have confidence in God's promises.

² M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 689, Burton Scott Easton, "[Wean,](#)" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 3076.

III. We are Given the Promises of God

- A. While it took a bit of time to explain the history and situation Paul is referring to, we are now positioned to better understand the point Paul is wanting to use to encourage disciples within the church. God made specific promises to specific people, and not everyone gets to experience and enjoy these promises. However, disciples in the church are among the groups of people who are given and experience the promises of God. God blesses us through Jesus.
- B. The main point Paul uses to encourage these disciples is telling them they:
²⁸ are children of promise. (Gal. 4:28)
- C. As spiritual children of Abraham, those who accept Jesus as the person He claimed to be inherit the promises of God (Gal. 3:6-9, Rm. 2:28-29, 4:12-16, 9:6-9). God's favor and special attention are directed toward us because we are supernaturally born from a promise of God. A promise is a verbal commitment from one person to another, to either do or not do something in the future.³ Certain outcomes are certain for us because God commits Himself to act in specific ways toward us. Since God's character is perfectly good and He always does what He says He's going to do, it is assured that whatever God tells us will happen. Remember, God intended Abraham to be a blessing to the entire world, and that blessing comes through pouring out His Spirit on all humanity—all people groups and nations.
- D. We immediately wonder, what has God promised to us? What promise is Paul talking about? He identifies the promise he is referring to:
¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (Gal. 3:14)
- E. Confirmation that the Spirit is what was promised can be seen in the fact that Paul uses "promise" interchangeably with "Spirit" ("children of promise", v. 28 and "born according to the Spirit", v. 29). There are two elements of the promise Paul has in mind. The first is that non-Jewish people will be blessed by God in a similar way to Abraham ("the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles", v. 14). Abraham is our spiritual predecessor and a model of a person who has trust in God. We can be encouraged by the fact that we are in the same spiritual condition with God. God directs His favor and attention toward us just as He did to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3, 14:19). As Abraham was a friend of God, so, too, are those who trust Jesus (Isa. 41:8, Jn. 15:15). While the outcomes of this blessing will look different for us than they did to Abraham, we live within the same blessing.⁴
- F. The specific part of the blessing of Abraham being referred to is the provision of the Holy Spirit ("that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith", v. 14). The perspective of the Holy Spirit being the promise of God is in full agreement with Jesus (Lk. 24:49) and Peter (Ac. 2:33). God has blessed the church with the blessing of Abraham by providing them the presence of the Holy Spirit. This aspect of the blessing of Abraham, which was promised by God, is summarized in Joel 2:28-29 and fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the

³ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 4:28 "promise"

⁴ Not every disciple is promised many children like Abraham was. Not every disciple is blessed with wealth and possessions as Abraham was. Not every disciple is guaranteed a spouse as Abraham was. Not every disciple is promised ownership of property as Abraham was. Yet, the spiritual descendants of Abraham are promised to be blessed by God just as Abraham was.

early church—called Pentecost (Ac. 2:1-21). This event and new way of relating to God was promised by God and explained in detail as the New Covenant (Jer. 31:27-37, Ezek. 36:22-36). Through Jesus the descendant of Abraham and the provision of the Holy Spirit, the entire world was blessed through Abraham, “and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen. 12:3). Jesus is the person who sent the Spirit, His Spirit, to those who accept Him (Lk. 24:49, Jn. 15:26, 16:7, 20:22).⁵

- G. Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac represent the type of person who is born supernaturally by the Spirit of God (Jn. 3:6). Isaac is a type of spiritual child who is born of God (Jn. 1:11-13).⁶ Isaac was a miracle baby, since Sarah was past childbearing years (Gen. 18:11) and she was infertile (Gen. 16:2). There were two insurmountable barriers against Sarah ever having a child. At this point in her life, at ninety or ninety-one years old, it was impossible for Sarah to have a child. God had to supernaturally intervene if Abraham was going to have a son of his own through Sarah, and that’s exactly what God did. Like Mary, the supernatural power of God through an act of the Holy Spirit contributed to and caused life within the womb of Sarah.⁷ Abraham and Sarah were supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit to have Isaac, as promised by God (Rm. 4:17-21, Heb. 11:11). The Holy Spirit also supernaturally creates spiritual life in those who have faith in Jesus (Rm. 4:23-25, 8:11).
- H. When a person trusts the word of God and accepts Jesus’ invitation to receive spiritual life through Him, they are supernaturally born by the Holy Spirit. Jesus called this being born again. While every person has a physical birth date, only those who trust Jesus have a spiritual birth date. Everyone is born physically, but not everyone is reborn supernaturally. Those who are born supernaturally are given spiritual life because God promised to pour His Spirit out on all humanity through Jesus.
- I. Disciples of Jesus, like Isaac, can depend on the promises found in the word of God. We can trust God to do what He said He is going to do for us, even when we don’t always do what we ought to do for God. The promises of God depend not on our performance, but on God’s. Just as it was impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a child on their own, so too, it is impossible for those who are following Jesus to secure the promises of God by our own abilities and efforts. We must depend on God to do what He has promised for us, even if it seems impossible. Like Abraham, we should believe what God has promised.
- J. Among the many promises of Jesus, He promises to give our souls rest in this life (Mt. 11:29), to forgive every single one of our sins (Mk. 2:6-12), to allow us to avoid the judgment of God (Jn. 5:24), to share His joy with us (Jn. 15:11), to bring us to where He is after this life (Jn. 17:24), and to raise us up to a resurrection of life on the last day (Jn. 6:40). Each of these promises can

⁵ The Holy Spirit is described as being received in different ways: 1) As the wind blowing (Jn. 3:4-8), 2) In the form of a dove (Mt. 3:16, Mk. 1:10, Jn. 1:32), 3) Jesus breathing on His disciples (Jn. 20:22), 4) As tongues of fire resting on the early church (Ac. 2:2-4), 5) Falling on those listening to the word of God (Ac. 10:44-48).

⁶ J. V. Fesko, *Galatians*, ed. Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2012), 133.

⁷ The supernatural birth of Isaac was different from the supernatural birth of Jesus. In the case of Isaac, the Spirit supernaturally overcame all the biological barriers so that Isaac was conceived according to the natural order resulting from both Abraham and Sarah’s contribution. Jesus’ supernatural birth did not include the father’s contribution and/or possibly the mother’s as well (although Mary’s contribution can be debated).

be trusted because Jesus will act this way toward every person who believes in Him in the future. Jesus is perfectly good, and He has never lied. He will do all of this for those who trust Him—each action is guaranteed.

IV. Be Prepared for Persecution

- A. So far, everything Paul is saying about these disciples sounds great! Who wouldn't want to sign up to be a person who is blessed by God and given God's presence to be with them every moment of their life? All this is good, but it also comes at a cost. While disciples being children of promise receive lots of good blessings from God, they also experience difficult hardships from others.
- B. Paul instructs these disciples to have an accurate understanding of the genuine Christian life, so he tells them:

²⁹ But as at that time the *son* who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is even now. (Gal. 4:29)
- C. While those who believe in Jesus are given the promises of God and the Holy Spirit, this doesn't mean the Christian life is without difficulty or challenges ("the son who was born according to the flesh persecuted", v. 29).⁸ Paul correctly observes that persecution was a spiritual reality that was happening all the way back during Isaac's lifetime, and it was still going on at the present time of Paul's day ("so it is even now", v. 29). These spiritual dynamics are also playing out today as well. Persecution is to cause suffering and can be done physically or emotionally.⁹ There is hostility that results from those who live this life on a natural human level, disconnected from God toward those who have spiritual life from God. This animosity leads to the desire to cause harm to those who love Jesus. This spiritual dynamic is so prevalent that Jesus said we will have distress, but we can confidently and peacefully face it (Jn. 16:33). Persecution is promised for those who are faithful to Jesus (2 Tim. 3:12).
- D. There might be hostility between Ishmael and Isaac observed in Genesis ("the son of Hagar...mocking Isaac", Gen. 21:9).¹⁰ Spiritual realities influence people whether they realize it or not. It is impossible for some people to get along because they are part of two different spiritual kingdoms that don't have common ground (2 Cor. 6:14). When we attach ourselves to Jesus, we receive hospitality from God, but hostility from others.
- E. Hagar, Ishmael, and the Law represent the religion of the natural person who attempts to pursue God by their own abilities on their own terms.¹¹ All this flows from an attitude of self-trust and reliance that leads to legalism and self-righteousness. Those who aren't supernaturally empowered by the Spirit to be changed internally to become the type of person who desires to do what God wants convince themselves they are safe with God and doing what God wants on the outside—in their actions. If the façade is removed by the contrary example of those with the Spirit and the teachings of Jesus, fireworks begin to fly. Hostility arises and

⁸ There was also hostility between Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 16:3-6).

⁹ Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 4:29 "persecuted"

¹⁰ Even if there is no hostility recorded in the record of Isaac's life from Genesis, Paul's statement in Galatians is accurate as Scripture inspired by the Spirit. Paul may have had supernatural insight into the life of Isaac that was in addition to what was recorded in earlier Scripture.

¹¹ Daniel Bush and Noel Due, [*Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 140.

persecution follows. Those who pursue God on their own terms don't want to hear what God has to say because it reveals the reality of their true spiritual condition.

- F. Abraham tried to fulfill the promise of God by taking matters into his own hands, using his abilities and resources to produce his own offspring and fulfill God's promise on his own terms. Ishmael represents these efforts as a type of person who operates this way. Isaac is a representative of the spiritual freedom that results from humanity being supernaturally transformed by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fulfilled the promise of God by supernaturally generating Isaac after Abraham's failed attempt to fulfill God's promise. Once the promise was fulfilled, Ishmael was cast out to demonstrate an abandonment of all attempts at self-effort to secure the favor and blessing of God. This is the spiritual lesson Paul wants the church to learn from the situation with Isaac and Ishmael. The Law should be cast out for the sake of grace.
- G. If we are going to receive and live in the supernatural spiritual life Jesus offers to us and become a child of promise, we need to understand it comes at a cost. The world will no longer love us because we are not one of its own (Jn. 15:18-20). Jesus said not only will we not be loved by those who are living a natural, human life separated from the influence of God, we will be hated by them. To them, we represent condemnation and what they do not want. We are a constant reminder of the person they aren't but know they should be.
- H. We must also realize that these types of individuals gather with the people of God on a regular basis at church. The Galatian disciples are being agitated by people who know and have the word of God. They are participating in the life of the church. Not everyone who lives contrary to God is anti-religious. Some are very religious, and we will find them regularly gathering with the church. Jesus had His most heated debates with religious leaders.
- I. Here is an insightful quote:

The greatest threat to believers isn't those outside the church, it's those inside—the unbelieving church...The unbelieving church wants religion and establishment. It doesn't want the gospel, and, ultimately, it doesn't want God.¹²

V. Conclusion

- A. Everyone is encouraged by Jesus to ask for the good of the Holy Spirit being assured that God the Father, in agreement with Jesus, will send the Spirit to everyone who asks for Him. Jesus promised, "How much more will your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Lk. 11:13). Being a spiritually adopted child of God means that we have the Holy Spirit in us, helping us grow into a person who delights doing what God wants.
- B. As people who have the Spirit living in us, we can be confident and secure in our spiritual standing with God, even when others try to tell us we need to do more for God. If we trust Jesus as He is described in the gospels and we are being changed by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are experiencing the genuine Christian life and will receive all the promises of God.

¹² Daniel Bush and Noel Due, [*Live in Liberty: The Spiritual Message of Galatians*](#) (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 144.