

GALATIANS: IDENTIFYING AND OVERCOMING LEGALISM
Part VI: Discerning and Handling Legalism's Persecuting Disposition
(Galatians 4:21-5:1)

I. Introduction

- A. Perhaps the most painful challenge that legalism offers is its tendency always to persecute one who is godly in belief and action, cf. Gal. 4:29! A legalistic party can make life miserable for the upright.
- B. Paul identifies the cause of this nature in legalism so that we can understand and discern the persecution when it comes, and then he reveals how to handle it in Gal. 4:21-5:1.

II. Discerning and Handling Legalism's Persecuting Disposition, Galatians 4:21-5:1.

- A. To portray the cause-effect relationship of legalistic views to persecution actions, Paul draws an analogy by way of allegory to the Old Testament account of Ishmael's conflict with Isaac, 4:21-24a.
- B. On the one hand, Ishmael was the son of a bondwoman, Hagar, who was produced by way of self-help efforts by Abraham and Sarah to help God out in producing the promised seed, Gal. 4:23a with Gen. 16:1-4a. This son grew up to belittle the son of promise, Isaac, who had been given by God through faith, Gal. 4:27-29a with Gen. 21:9. This Ishmael Paul allegorizes to be like the Judaizers who try to use human effort by way of circumcision to gain God's salvation, and bind themselves to the Law, Gal. 4:24b-25.
- C. On the other hand, Isaac was the son of the free-woman, Sarah, given by God's provision contrary to human self-help, Gal. 4:23b, 26-28 with Gen. 17:15-19; 18:9-15; 21:1-3. This son grew up to be belittled on his bar mitzvah by the older Ishmael who saw Isaac's honor as a threat to his gaining Abraham's promised blessing and inheritance as he was the older son **by way of human effort!** (Gen. 21:9) Paul likens all believers who are saved and live by grace to be in this category of being attacked by the belittling aggression of others who try to gain spiritual blessings by self-help effort through keeping the Law, Gal. 4:29. This persecution comes out of a jealousy rising out of feeling impotent to gain blessing as the legalist has tried to use futile means to gain what only comes through faith, cf. Gen. 4:3-7.
- D. The response of the godly believer to such persecution must be twofold: (1) he is to remove himself from close fellowship with the legalist if it means preserving his walk with God, Gal. 4:30-31 with Rom. 16:17-18; (2) he must refuse to give in to the bondage of self-help effort and regulations pushed upon him by legalists and continue living by grace, Gal. 5:1.

Lesson: (1) *If relating with other parties leaves us "feeling small" for blessings we experience with God, or for the WAY we live by trusting or obeying God, we are being persecuted by a legalistic party, Gal. 4:29 with Gen. 21:8-9. (2) The cause of this persecution arises from the difference between legalistic and grace-based thinking: (a) the legalist tries to gain blessing through self-help effort that violates Scripture, which effort is only doomed to fail (Ishmael's production via Abraham's union with Hagar); when this effort fails to produce what the legalist sees the grace-oriented person gaining by expending no such self-help, the legalist thinks it isn't FAIR! "Why should the guy who does nothing be blessed and I miss out when I work so hard?!" is his question. Consequently, still operating by way of self-help, he persecutes the grace-based believer to bring him down to his not-so-blessed level to MAKE things more FAIR as HE views them! (Cain vs. Abel) (b) The grace-based believer operates by grace and sees God provide APART FROM SELF-HELP! Since he operates by faith and NOT self-help, he is left humanly defenseless to being persecuted by the self-help legalist who pushes his own weight around! (3) The godly believer accordingly needs to (a) separate from the self-help mentality of the legalist and continue living by grace if he wishes to keep being blessed (Gal. 5:1). Otherwise he can fall prey to reacting to the legalistic persecution by self-help defensiveness and lose God's blessing! (b) He needs to part fellowship with legalists to the degree needed to avoid persecution and temptations to self-help defensiveness, Gal. 4:30-31 with 2 Thess. 3:14-15.*