

When Opposition Comes From Unusual Places

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The Book of Galatians Series

Galatians 4:11-31

This evening [morning] I want to talk about opposition that you will face if you sincerely try to follow Jesus Christ in this world. As we have been looking at the book of Galatians we have seen the apostle Paul underline over and over again the message of grace. That God's acceptance of us could not be any greater than it is right now. It doesn't matter how much more you pray, how much more you fast, God will not accept you one drop more than he does at this moment, if you have trusted in Christ for salvation.

And it doesn't matter what sin you have sinned. God won't accept you one drop less than he does right now, if you have trusted in Christ for salvation. See, when we hear the message of grace – God's unmerited favor – the fact that it all hinges on what Christ has done, not what we do, we want the message of grace to also mean that life for us will be a bowl of cherries. That basically what the Christian can look forward to is a day at the beach. That the person who encounters Christ will have nothing but blue skies, smooth sailing, and a sunny day.

And then we encounter this text where the apostle Paul says in verse 16, "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" We could have enemies? When we are under grace? And in verse 29 the apostle Paul adds these words; "At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit." Not only might we have enemies, but also we might be persecuted?

Apart from the message of grace, I would venture to say that there is nothing more clear in the New Testament than that a Christian believer who endeavors to follow Christ will encounter opposition. Let me right from the start tell you that the opposition that the New Testament discusses is not the fact that this last week you have had a terrible head cold or a lingering illness. The opposition is not bad medical treatment you might have suffered or shoddy workmanship on a roof that you had replaced just two years ago and it leaking again. The opposition that the New Testament speaks of has nothing to do with the struggle you had to make ends meet, the fact that your job is unsatisfying, doesn't earn you enough to provide decently for you and your family. We are not talking about the annoyance of having your car break down, or problems with your rebellious teenagers, or breaking up with your boyfriend, or even a lack of satisfaction in your marriage.

All of the things I listed certainly are part and parcel of the various trials that we encounter in this world. This world is not as God created it to be. As a result of our first parents' sin, as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve, a curse was put on the world, and a curse was put on everything in the world. There was a curse on work so that work doesn't ever quite satisfy. There are going to be difficult clients and problems collecting. Frustrations with your boss and gossip from co-workers, low pay, a lack of genuine gratitude, a lack of sympathy and care. There is a curse on marriage so that we often will experience dissatisfaction. There will be an area of our marital lives that doesn't

work the way it ought. There is a curse on our bodies so that our bodies don't function the way that God created them to function.

But the opposition that the New Testament speaks of is not the general frustration of all people, Christian or not, with a fallen world. There is a unique opposition that followers of Christ alone face because of their faithfulness to Jesus. Listen to what Jesus said awaited his faithful followers in Matthew 10. "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and the servant like his master. If the head of the household has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household." In other words, we are following a Messiah that experienced enormous opposition and persecution. Since people treated Jesus so badly, called him Satan, why do we think it would be any different with us if we walk in his footsteps? The apostle Paul said in 2 Tim. 3:12, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Now, we must admit that it is possible in America today to escape persecution or opposition in any significant way due to our faith. It is possible to be raised in a sheltered Christian home, to be sent to Christian school, or be homeschooled where you face no opposition to your faith. Go to Christian high school and then on to Christian College. Marry a Christian spouse and then work for a Christian institution. It is possible in America to escape the prediction of Jesus and the apostle Paul that we are going to face opposition. But I think that we must admit that our sheltered existence was not contemplated by Paul or Jesus as the normal Christian life. The book of Acts was probably closer to the normal Christian life that Jesus intends than preceding from Christian school, homeschool, Christian high school, college to work in a Christian institution.

You might say, "Rich, what does this have to do with the message of grace that you have been preaching over the last several weeks?"

Again, I think we would like to believe that Christ's suffering for us means that we escape suffering as a reason of opposition from the world. It would be easy for us to make a mistake about the death of Christ. Since Christ suffered for me, I don't need to suffer at all. Since Christ died for me, I don't have to give up my own life. In other words, if Christ's death really is a substitutionary atonement, why would I have to also have to suffer? If Christ died for me, why would I or anyone else ever have to be martyred?

Of course, the answer is Christ suffered for us so that we wouldn't have to suffer for sin – not that we wouldn't have to suffer at all. Christ bore the punishment of our sin so that our suffering would never be understood as a punishment from God for sin. When the New Testament tells us that as Christians are going to pay a price, it isn't the price for our sins that has been paid by Jesus Christ. But Christ's suffering is not only a substitutionary suffering in death, Christ's suffering was also meant to be a pattern for the Christian life.

In 1 Peter 3:20 Peter says, "What credit is it if when you do wrong and are beaten for it, you take it patiently. But if when you do right and suffer for it and you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps."

Peter says, "Christ also suffered for you." That is the substitutionary atonement. That is Christ taking our place and doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. He

took our sins on his body and died to bear the punishment that we due to us. Christ's atonement is a work that no one else can do, nor does anyone else need to add to it. Christ's atonement cannot be imitated. It cannot be duplicated. It cannot be added to. It happened once for all. It is the basis for our hope, our joy, our contentment, and our peace of God. That Christ's once and for all bloody death has reconciled us to God. As a result of his death and our trust in his bloody death, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

But Christ not only died for us, Christ also died as an example. Peter says in 1 Peter 2:21, "Jesus left you an example that you should follow in his steps." He is not asking us to suffer or to endure opposition to make atonement for our sins. He is not asking for us to suffer or to endure opposition so that we can somehow earn our way into God's approval. He means that we are called to love like Jesus, to live like Jesus, and when you love and live like Jesus you are going to endure pain.

See, the gospel of grace that we have been going through in the letter to the Galatians guarantees us that through the cross we would receive absolute and full acceptance of God. But the gospel of grace does not promise us full and complete acceptance from people. We have a great acceptance from God. But often we encounter great opposition from people as a reason for our faith. The reason we need to keep this in mind is so often I talk with folks who say, "My parents are really upset with my decision to go into ministry, or my switching of churches. I wonder if I'm doing something wrong or I'm really getting jumped on in class. Maybe God is mad at me. No, opposition for your faith is part of the package."

Now it ought not be surprising, if you are in touch, with the spirit of our time to understand why Christians receive incredible opposition from the larger society. We live in a society that values above all things tolerance, what philosophers call pluralism, the idea that no position, no viewpoint, no religious stance is absolutely right; or, and especially, no position, no viewpoint, no religious stance has the right to declare another viewpoint as wrong. We want everyone to be able to speak so long as no one criticizes anyone else's viewpoint.

That is the general idea in real life, if you have been at a real university that advocates pluralism. Or watched a real TV show that advocates pluralism and tolerance, you realize very quickly that pluralists, the advocates of tolerance, are themselves surprisingly intolerant and that there are absolute non-negotiables, one of which is that anyone who stands up and says that there is a truth, an absolute truth, to which all of us must subscribe; anyone who stands up and says that certain things are wrong; like adultery and it doesn't matter how many presidents have committed it, and it doesn't matter what the polls say, anyone who draws a hard and fast line in our society will be immediately labeled a fanatic, a bigot, narrow-minded, intolerant.

Christianity is really at odds with our culture. Christianity runs head long into the teeth of our culture because Christians are people who stand up and echo the words of their Lord and Teacher. It was Jesus who declared the absoluteness of his claims when he said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I didn't say that, Jesus did. Jesus didn't say, "I am a Way to God. There are many other ways, but I am a way." Jesus didn't say, "I am the best way to God. Although there are other ways to God that you can find." Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Christians encounter opposition because of our commitment to Christ as the Way. And I will tell you friends; it is easy to hedge your bets. You are a nice, loveable Christian person who has gone out of your way to show yourself to be open-minded, generous, fair, and kind. You are in a workplace situation where there is another Christian who is a bit obnoxious, a little too vocal, who says indiscreet things at indiscreet times. And one of your co-workers is complaining to you and says, "You know, what I really appreciate about you and how you differ from Fred is the fact that you are tolerant. Fred is so intolerant. You don't go around pushing your religion down people's throats – particularly when Fred said the other day [and I know you don't buy this] but Fred said his religion is really the only true religion. He said that unless you follow Jesus, you are going to go to hell. You don't believe that do you?"

And there are you – a nice, tolerant, fair-minded Christian who has gone out of your way to build bridges and embrace others and to be an encouragement. What do you say?

You say, "Well, at the bottom, Fred and me are exactly the same in our viewpoints. Even though he is a little obnoxious, I believe exactly the same things he does." Or do you hedge?

If you want to understand opposition to the Christian message, just get in touch with the media. Michael Medved, a movie critic, wrote a book several years ago called Hollywood vs. America, in which he frankly discussed Hollywood's attack on traditional values of family and morality, but also its particularly virulent attack on Christianity. In one shocking passage in Medved's book, he describes the extraordinary lengths to which Hollywood has bent over backwards to accommodate the concerns and sensitivities of Native Americans and Native American religion, how they rewrote the scripts of several movies at the last moment in order to accommodate Native American sensibilities. How Hollywood rewrote the scripts in several movies involving animals to accommodate the sensitivities and sensibilities of animal rights advocates. How they did the same for gay rights groups.

But when 135,000 Christians signed a petition asking Universal Studios to reconsider their portrayal of Christ in "The Last Temptation of Christ" do you know what the head of Universal said? One of the spokespeople who collected these 135, 000 signatures asked for five minutes with the head of Universal Studios. The head executive said, "Not only will I not meet with you, but I have instructed the guards that when you come with the petitions to take them and throw them in the garbage which is where I believe you ought to be thrown."

The Christian who lives a grace-based life, friend, will face opposition. Today, the apostle Paul is talking with us about opposition not from the world. Maybe we could deal with that. But Paul is talking to us about opposition from unusual places; from places we least expect it – from family, from those we have invested in spiritually, and from other religious people. I have called today's talk, "When Opposition Comes from Unusual Places." Let's pray.

Let's look at Galatians 4:12-20:

I plead with you, brothers, become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong. As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an

angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me. Have I now become your by telling you the truth? Those people are zealous to win you over, but for not good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may be zealous for them. It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you.

Where is the opposition coming from in this particular text? I think that one of the things that followers of Christ is that on a more frequent basis than we would like, we experience some degree of opposition from those we have spiritually invested in. The people, to whom Paul was making his plea to, were his spiritual children, folks that he paid a price for. We will consider the price in just a moment. But one of the reasons I love this text so much is that it shows Paul's pastoral heart. Over against the popular caricature of Paul, that he is this cold, academic theologian or that the apostle Paul is some gospel machine, or some Marine who is able to take the hill for Christ, some macho guy, or even over against the current pastoral model of the laid back, very professional, very aloof, corporate executive who isn't ruffled by anything, a manager, Paul is a loving, passionate pastor.

Listen to what he says in verse 19, "My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you." Talk about intensity. This is not a California laid-back kind of guy. I am in the pains of childbirth until Christ being formed in you. Can anything be more intense than a woman going through labor? And what an appropriate illustration for the investment a pastor or leader must make in order to bring about spiritual maturity. You know, children are not brought into the world without a lot of pushing, without an incredible effort, without lots of pain. The apostle Paul was saying, "I can't reach my goal which is not just to have you accept Jesus in some sort of cheap way, but to have Christ formed in you, so that Christ shines through your life, that there is real maturity. I can't have Christ shine through you without me doing lots of intense labor."

When you put out that kind of intense labor to bring a child into the world, your heart is knit to that child. You can't pay that kind of price and then say, "Well, whatever happens, happens, just so long as you are happy." You can't have that kind of attitude when you have made that kind of investment a mother makes in the life of her child or the investment a true pastor or leader makes in the life of a church or individual. And when you are a loving parent or pastor and you have spent lots of energy in bringing up a child or spiritual child and you watch them walk away from all that you have invested, throw it all away, it is very painful.

It is a great temptation to protect ourselves from the hurt of opposition from people we have invested in by just saying, "I won't make that sort of investment." I won't get that tied into anyone. I will just invest my life in collecting little china dolls and putting them up on shelves all over the place. Or I will invest my life in fixing up old cars or gardening or building our dream kitchen or climbing the corporate ladder or moving from sport to sport throughout the year or improving my golf game. Nothing outside of investing in real people and real relationships will ever hurt you. You can be frustrated

in lots of realms of life that are not personal, but nothing outside of real people will ever hurt you. And yet, following Jesus means that you spend your life investing in people – not in collecting things, not in tinkering with something, not in fixing up your home. Following Jesus means that you spend your life investing in people, because Christians are folks who understand that people matter to God. That God gave up his son for people.

Honestly, friends, you can't work with people very long as a leader without being personally hurt and disappointed when your investment seems to have been wasted. I think of a man I personally disciplined, spent months meeting with him and praying with him, teaching him the Bible and trying to model the Christian life. I became his friend. The last time I saw him he barely talked to me. He took some offense at something the church did and left the church bitter. He is now divorced. Just by chance I ran into him somewhere in the city. And every time I think of him or when I ran into him, it causes me pain. I spent hour after hour after hour trying to form Christ in him.

I think of a woman who was in a Bible study that Marlene and I led some years ago. Her husband was a close friend and was dying in the hospital. And so I went to visit him and when I inquired of this dear woman how she was doing spiritually, whether she had received prayer, whether her husband had received prayer, she became bitter. She had a mutual friend call after my visit to tell me that when her husband died, she wanted me to stay away from the funeral because she didn't need Billy Graham at this time in her life. After the investment we had made in her and her husband, she felt that prayer and the gospel message really was irrelevant to what she was going through.

I think of the pain that Jesus must have felt having invested in the life of Judas Iscariot and watching that investment go down the drain. I think of the plot of Samuel in the Old Testament, spending the night weeping as he saw that all of his investment in Saul went for nothing and he watched a spiritual son, King Saul, walk away from obedience to God.

And then I think of the apostle Paul here, who labored so hard to communicate the message of grace with these Galatian believers only to have them sink back into old legalism and become subject to old demonic powers again. Leaders, you are a small group leader or oversee a ministry, you are discipline someone, you are a counselor in this church or a children's ministry worker, you are influencing the life of another toward Christ, listen to me. I want to plead with you to have Paul's level of intensity for another. To not pull back if you have been burned by someone. Part of the surprising suffering that we followers of Christ need to endure is the pain of investments that don't pay off. So we call and call again. We pursue and keep pursuing. When a person is running, we are after them. There is an occasional night where we will stay up late to pray for someone. There is. It is occasionally the case that we will be taken advantage of financially. That happens. That doesn't mean that you have no boundaries. It means that you have a heart of mercy and are following Jesus who was occasionally taken advantage of. Who occasionally lost his investment.

And leaders, I want to challenge you personally by asking you if you see that sort of intensity in your life. Christian leadership is no place for someone who has a laid back, indifferent approach to people.

We have considered Paul's pastoral heart; let's look at his model. His model was very simple. "I plead with you brothers, become like me." This is the basis of all

leadership. That the leader actually has experienced in their own person much of what they are talking about. When someone gets up to talk, what I am listening for is whether they have lived in the house they are speaking from. Did they really drink the water they are asking me to drink? Is that what satisfies their soul or do they have a secret stash somewhere else that they aren't telling me about. Did this person actually do what they are saying?

Paul did not believe that he was sinless. He was urging the Galatian believers to be like him, not in every single respect, but to be like him in his apprehension of grace, and to be like him in his liberty from legalism. To be like him in his reliance on Christ and Christ's death alone. Paul was laying out a very basic principle of ministry and investment in another's life. The power of your ministry comes out of who you are, your own personal experience of God, not just ideas you read in a book or second hand opinions that you pass along cheaply.

Paul's method is "as I became like you." It says, "I plead with you brothers, become like me as I became like you." You are seeing the heart of a missionary here, the heart of a pastor, who draws near to the people he is ministering to, becoming like them. Not like them in their sin, not like them in their legalism, but like them in their culture, their need. Paul's ministry style was to not stand on one side of a river and shout across it, "You guys, if you want what I have, if you want Jesus Christ, come and swim across the river to my side." Paul's ministry style was to build a bridge between his side and the other person's side and then walk across the bridge and take them by the hand to walk them over to his side.

1 Corinthians 9 Paul says this and I am quoting from the paraphrase of the New Testament called The Message, by Gene Peterson, which I think is very helpful for devotional reading. "Even though I am free of the demands and expectations of everyone, I voluntarily have become a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people – religious, non-religious, meticulous moralists, loose living immoralists, the defeated, the demoralized – whoever. I didn't take on their way of life, I kept my bearings in Christ, but I entered their world and tried to experience their point of view. I have become about every sort of servant there is in my attempts to lead those I meet into a God saved life. I did all of this because of the message. I didn't just want to talk about it; I wanted to be in on it. I entered your world. I walked a mile in your shoes."

You know you have made an investment when you have opened your heart enough to begin to experience life from the perspective of the person you are ministering to. You have the kind of empathy where you really are touched by the fact that this person lying in a bed is dying of AIDS and is afraid. One of the most wonderful things that we have going here at the Vineyard is Project Compassion, that involves Christians in our congregation who are committed to minister to people in the community with AIDS. You invest in someone's life that is dying and your heart is broken a lot. We have a prison ministry. You can't say to a prisoner, "Our church is up here in Westerville. You ought to visit sometime." Enter their world.

And so it is with the person in your small group who may be divorced. A person you are praying for who may have been the victim of sexual abuse. A person who has blown it big time in terms of sin that destroyed their family or marriage. Paul's pastoral method is to open his heart by entering the world of the people he was ministering to.

Paul paid a price to enter the world of people he was ministering to. One of the prices Paul paid was illness. Verse 13, "As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself. What has happened to all your joy? I can testify that if you could have done so, you would have torn your eyes out and given them to me."

We don't know what sort of illness the apostle Paul suffered from. Lots of theories have been proposed for his particular ailment. Back in the 1800's one famous scholar, William Ramsey, proposed that the apostle Paul may have gotten malaria and terrible headaches and eye problems as a result of having to traverse some of the swamps in southern Turkey in order to minister in Galatia. There might have been mosquitoes that carried malaria. They still do to this very day in the swamps so that Paul came to Galatia sick and in great pain, with great weakness. But we don't know if Ramsey's theory is true or not.

Some people seize upon this statement "You would have plucked your eyes out and given them to me" as an indication that Paul was suffering from an eye problem. But I think it has been convincingly shown that the phrase, "you would have plucked your eyes out for me" is just a statement of the willingness of the Galatians to sacrifice for Paul. It was a colloquial expression like; "You love me so much you would have cut off your right arm for me." "You love me so much you would have given me the shirt off your back." If we said that someone cared about us so that they would have cut off their right arm, it doesn't mean that I had an arm problem. Or that they would have given me the shirt off their back doesn't mean that I don't have a shirt. It just means they would have made a great sacrifice for the apostle Paul.

We don't know the sort of illness that the apostle Paul endured. But what we do know is that Paul was willing to experience illness in making an investment in his spiritual children's lives. He was willing to allow himself to be sick for the sake of the gospel.

I think of Kathy Saperstein from our congregation, who along with her husband and their three young children were serving the Lord in Pakistan in order to reach Muslims who had never heard the gospel with the saving message of Jesus Christ. Kathy was suddenly stricken with viral meningitis and almost died. She went deaf in one ear for a year or two. She had a terrible fever. She had to be brought back to the United States.

Brothers and sisters, the message of embracing grace does not in any way mean that we followers of Christ pay no price in declaring this message. Let me tell you about a missionary named Henry Martin. He was born in England in 1781. His father was well to do and sent his son to a fine prep school and then to Cambridge in 1797 when he was 16. He took the highest honors in mathematics. A year later he took first prize in Latin composition. He had turned his back on God when he was younger, but when he got all these academic achievements, he said in his journal, "I attained my highest, but was surprised to find that I grasped a shadow." Everything that he had prized in this world was turning to rust in his hands. As the result of the death of his father, and the prayers of his sisters, he bowed his knee in submission to Jesus Christ. In 1802 he left his position at Cambridge University, the life that was guaranteed to bring him academic prestige and ease. He devoted himself to becoming a missionary. He understood that

Jesus was the pear of great price and that he had no treasure in his life more precious than Jesus. There was nothing that Henry Martin hung on to. Not his health. Not relationships, not any thing, so that he might gain Christ.

The price he paid communicates to us that the gospel of grace does not mean in any way that we won't encounter opposition or suffering in this world. Listen to Henry Martin's journal on his way to India. This is what he wrote; "I found it hard to realize divine things. I was more tried with the desires after this world than for the past two years. The seasickness, the smell of the ship made me very miserable. The prospect of leaving all the comforts and my fellowship with the saints in England to go forth to an unknown land and endure such illness and misery with ungodly men for so many months weighing heavily on my spirits. My heart was almost willing to break."

On top of this illness and seasickness, there is love story. Martin was in love with a woman named Lydia. He didn't feel right taking her along, but two months after he got to India he wrote to her asking her to join him and to marry him. He waited 15 months for the reply and here is what he wrote: "An unhappy day. Received at last a letter from Lydia in which she refuses to come because her mother will not consent to it. Grief and disappointment threw my soul into confusion at first, but gradually as my disorder subsided, my eyes were opened. Reason resumed its office. I could not but agree with her that it would not be for the glory of God nor could we expect his blessing if she acted in disobedience to her mother."

For five years they wrote back and forth. He finally was planning a return visit to England. His last recorded letter to his beloved Lydia read, "Shortly we shall have occasion for pen and ink no more, but I trust I shall see you again face to face. Believe me to be yours ever most faithfully and affectionately, Henry Martin." Henry Martin never saw her again on this earth. He died of an illness that he contracted in India translating the Bible into Hindustan, so that millions of Indians could learn the saving message of Jesus Christ.

Why do I tell you these kinds of stories, friends? It is not to make us feel guilty. Not to try to motivate you by shame. But to inspire you, to encourage you to understand that Christian history has not been about Christians trying to live as comfortably as possible in this world. Our history is one of people who made supreme investments in others, who gave themselves totally, trusting in Christ to provide, and who at the end of the day, at least from the perspective of this world, sometimes look like losers. But we know they have only increased their position in glory. They are willing to wait for a reward later.

The apostle Paul goes on and tells the story of Hagar and Sarah. Verse 21-31. Now, I must quickly talk to you about Paul's interpretive method. He says here in verse 24, "These things may be taken figuratively," actually he uses the word "allegorically". Allegory generally means that you are transcending the historical particulars of a certain event, so that you go way beyond the author's intention and you discover a deeper meaning, free from the historical particulars. For example, the great St. Augustine when he read the parable of the Good Samaritan said, "Well, you know the man who was beaten in the road, that is the Gentiles. The Levite and the Priest who walked by, that is the law and the prophets. And the Samaritan was clearly Jesus and when he took him to the Inn, the Inn is the Catholic Church." He had a deeper meaning for all of the

players in the story. One person sarcastically commented, "Well, I see all of that, but who is the donkey in the story who carried the Samaritan."

The whole process of allegorizing can become ridiculous. It is very rare for Paul to use it, even though the Rabbis used this method all the time. Because the problem of allegory is that you are reading into the text things that aren't there rather than reading out of the text what God was saying through this particular author or event. Allegorizing substitutes the imagination of the reader for the intention of the author. Allegorizing reminds me very much of Alice in Wonderland's encounter with Humpty Dumpty where Humpty Dumpty says, "Only one birthday present you know. There is glory for you."

"I don't know what you mean by glory," Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously, "Of course you don't until I tell you. I mean there is a nice knock down argument for you."

"But glory doesn't mean a nice knock down argument," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean. Neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is the master?"

In other words, do you the reader make up meanings for words and grammar or do you allow the author and the text and the context and history determine the meaning? Throughout Christian history this has been a big battle. Certain prophetic teachers have claimed to see all kinds of meanings in the text that have nothing to do with the grammar, the context or the intention of the author. But I think the battle has been won on the side of those who say that we should try as much as possible to read out of the text the intention of the writer and to not read into the text our own imagination. Because when you start with allegory, our own imagination, we don't hear God's word, we hear the mind of man.

Well you know when the priest went into the Temple and he had on the bottom of his garment the pomegranates, the little bells, and the Lord has shown me that I am the priest and all of you are the little pomegranates that I am carrying into the presence of God.

You say, "Rich, was Paul wrong and we are right when we say you shouldn't use the allegorical method? Was Paul wrong in using it?"

No, Paul wasn't wrong. I believe the apostle Paul was actually responding to his opponent's use of this method. See, his opponents were allegorizing the scriptures. His opponents were saying, "Listen Galatians, you remember that Abraham had two children, Isaac and Ishmael. Only one of the children was a child of the promise, Isaac. And you Galatians, you Gentiles, you are children of the slave woman until you get circumcised and then you become a child of the promise, like Isaac."

The apostle Paul on hearing that argument says, "Well, two can play this game. Let me tell you something. You have all of your metaphors wrong. Ishmael or his mother Hagar stands for Mt. Sinai and bondage to the Law of Moses. But if you really want to get attached to Isaac and be a child of promise, you are going to live free from the law and live as a person subject to grace." Because it is the only time Paul uses allegory in the whole New Testament, I don't think he was advocating the method. I think he was responding to his opponents saying, "okay, two can play this game." You want to play

tennis, handle this serve. And true children are not those who are circumcised, but those who live under grace.

Being a child of promise.

You say, "Rich, where might we experience opposition?"

Well, certainly from the world. We are going to experience opposition from those in whom we have invested, our spiritual children, and a surprising source of opposition for many believers is their families.

Verse 28-29, "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are the children of promise. At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now."

As you read the Old Testament story of Isaac and Ishmael, you read of Ishmael, son of a slave woman, persecuting Isaac, the son of Sarah, the son of promise. I think that one of the great surprises to many believers is the discovery that they are experiencing incredible opposition, not out there in the world, but from their own families. I don't think we underline this enough for new Christian believers that you may find the greatest amount of pressure against your Christian life coming from your very own family. Jesus prophesied this when he said in Matt. 10:34, "Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be the members of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not yet worthy of me. And anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 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."

Following Jesus sometimes brings great disruption and opposition from one's family. In the 1st Century, families were even tighter than they are now. So that when Jesus spoke these words that he was going to divide families, it created a real shock in his hearers. The worst thing you can do in many cultures is bringing shame to your family. If you are in a Muslim or Japanese family and you bring them shame, you have created a cardinal sin. In some countries, when a person becomes a Christian, they are liable to be killed by their own family members. As Ishmael persecuted Isaac, in some countries and in some situations, people encounter violent responses from their own family.

Our dear friend, A. Stephen, a pastor in India, was repeatedly beaten by his own family when as a Hindu, he converted to Christ. His brothers threatened to kill him. The other men in his village were going to murder him. His own father threw him out. He didn't see him again for almost a quarter of a century. They have been alienated because of Christ.

We don't generally encounter that sort of violence to coming to Christ in this country by our families. But boy the opposition is still there. There are many Roman Catholics who have a personal experience of Christ and go home and tell their families about what it means to be born again and meet a storm of opposition, particularly when they say to their parents, "You know, I am thinking of going to another church where the Bible is taught and where I can grow in my new found faith."

I know of lots of young Jewish believers who have encountered incredible opposition from their families when they discover Jesus as their Messiah. One young man was not

only disinherited from his parents, but his father held a funeral for him. Because he received Christ, his family pronounced him dead. I know one English friend who was raised in a very proper English family who upon finding Christ found extraordinary opposition from her family. It was like she was saying to her family, "You didn't raise me properly. You are not good enough" even though she never said any of that.

I know people who have been disinherited by their fathers when they decided to go into the ministry rather than follow the course of life that their fathers had prescribed for them. They gave up lucrative businesses and lucrative careers in order to go into the ministry and met with tremendous opposition.

Of course, the issue is not that Christians turn against their family members. It is that family members turn against Christians, because the Christian has adopted an entirely different goal in life. The Christian has a new loyalty. When someone becomes a Christian they are saying, "My primary loyalty has shifted away from my family. My primary loyalty is to Jesus Christ and the spread of the kingdom of God. I am going to give my life to that as fully as I possibly can."

And of course, the family, not sharing their priorities, not sharing their agenda, even warm loving and caring families can be profoundly unchristian in their essential value system. The family's essential value system may be the pursuit of their own material success or the pursuit of prosperity or the pursuit of family cohesion or the pursuit of a career. For the Christian, every time their family values run against the values of Christ, the Christian is going to be alienated from their family. They are going to encounter opposition from their family. It is part of the price of following Jesus.

And the final surprising source of opposition is not from the world, not from those spiritual children we made investments in, not even from our family. The most surprising source of opposition is from the church, from those who are religious. That is really what Paul is getting at in verse 29 when he says, "At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit." Hagar, the slave girl, was fertile. She had the slave child, Ishmael, through the normal process of insemination and conception. But Sarah, the mother of the free child Isaac, was barren. She was an old woman. It took a miracle of God's power to bring forth Isaac. Ishmael is the child born by what men and women can produce. Ishmael was the child born by human engineering, human planning, what people could do on their own without God. Isaac was the child born only because God intervened.

Now, listen. Paul is saying that religious groups who are working by human engineering and human planning will often persecute those who are experiencing the miraculous intervention of God. How dare you call our Christianity into question by experiencing things that we never have experienced? How dare you go beyond human planning and engineering, by claiming to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit? How dare you do something beyond what reason and strategizing and planning can produce?

Churches can be really orthodox in their theology and be persecutors of those who are experiencing the power of the Spirit. Jesus' problem with the Pharisees was not their theology. They had fantastic theology. Jesus agreed with the Pharisees on 99% of their theology. But the Pharisees could not open themselves up to the idea that God might do a surprising work in their day, an unanticipated sort of thing. Nor could they buy the idea that the Holy Spirit might be working through Jesus of Nazareth. When the

Pharisees looked at the miracles of Jesus, because they didn't fit their particular containers, they said, "These are the works of Satan."

During the Great Awakening, Chalmers' Chauncey, when he saw the Revival going on in Jonathan Edwards' church, spent years of his life opposing it. He hated the idea that people were worshipping. He hated the notion that folks were staying up late to pray. It disgusted him that people were saying they were getting visions and dreams – some were clapping their hands, some were singing, some were lifting their hands, and some were weeping. He thought the whole thing was indecent.

Friends, let me tell you something. If you go hard after this person named Jesus, you will experience opposition and some of it will actually come from other religious people who you think should be your allies. Vineyard has been bashed by ultra-conservative radio personalities because there is a liberty in our worship, because people do experience the presence of the Spirit, and Vineyard has been bashed by liberals who are really upset by our insistence that Christ is the only way to God. Opposition. Opposition. Opposition. Even when we are children of grace.

Let me give you two words of hope here. Verse 27 contains one of them. "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

It is by enduring through opposition – not quitting, not giving up – and recognizing that there is price to pay in following Jesus, not a price for our sins, but a price to spread this message, that spiritual children are brought into the kingdom. Friends, I will tell you something. You can have no greater joy in this life than bringing forth a spiritual child – becoming a reproductive Christian by sharing your faith with someone who doesn't know Jesus. If you would just come before God today and say, "God, if you will help me, I will pay the price to become a reproductive Christian. I want to introduce one other person to you. I want to fulfill my purpose here on earth by reproducing myself." I believe God would bring you into the joy of seeing another come to know Jesus. Can you dream big enough? Is your God big enough to use someone like you in pulling another from the pit of hell and saving them eternally?

Why pay the price? So that we might have spiritual children. Why pay the price? So that we might have a glorious inheritance. Verse 30, "But what does the Scripture say? 'Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son.'"

We have a glorious inheritance, friends. The Bible teaches that the bigger the price that is paid, the bigger the inheritance. So many of us have bought the lie of the American dream that says when we get to be 60 or 65 that is the time we just retire, kick back, buy an RV and travel the country and spend 20 years of our life in selfish self-indulgence. But lots and lots of older Americans along with lots of younger Americans are saying "no" to the American dream. They are saying that there is treasure more precious than affluence and self-indulgence. Lots of American Christians are saying, "I will take mine later. I will let Jesus Christ reward me. Now is the time to get to work."

Let's pray.