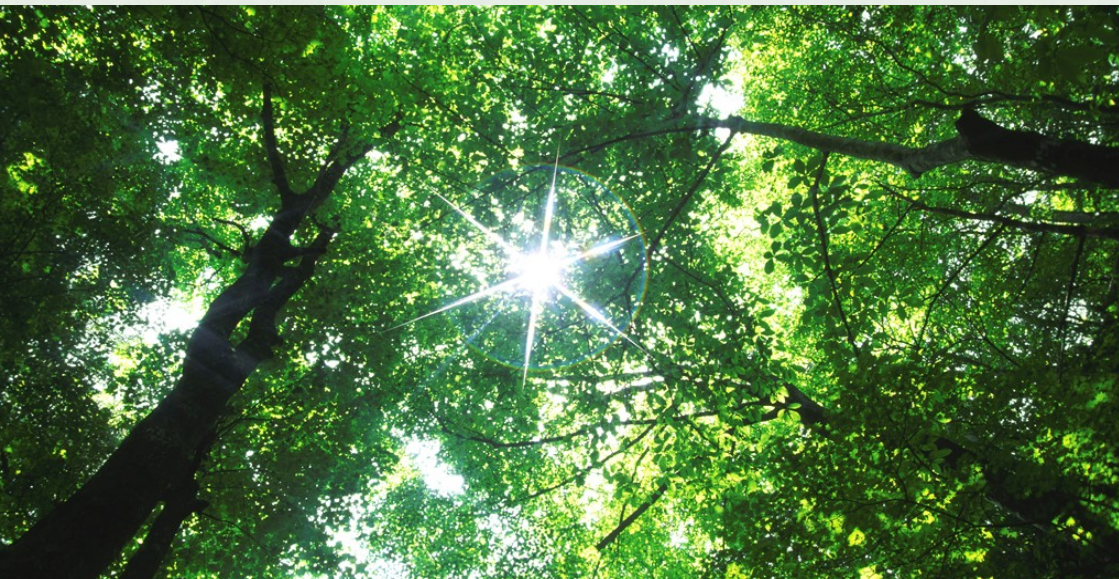


ACCORDING TO PROMISE



Part One

C. H. Spurgeon



According to Promise

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C. H. Spurgeon

1. A Sieve Needed

It is very important to be able to distinguish between things that differ, for appearances are not to be relied upon. Things which seem to be alike may yet be the opposite of each other. A scorpion may be like an egg, and a stone like a piece of bread; but they are far from being the same. Like may be very unlike. Especially is this the case in spiritual things, and therefore it behooves us to be on our guard.

It would be very difficult to say how far a man may go in religion, and yet die in his sins; how much he may look like an heir of heaven, and yet be a child of wrath. Many unconverted men have a belief which is similar to faith, and yet it is not true faith. Certain persons exhibit pious affections which have the warmth of spiritual love, but are quite destitute of gracious life. Every grace can be counterfeited, even as jewels can be imitated. As paste gems are wonderfully like the real stones, so sham graces are marvellously like the work of the Spirit of God. In soul matters a man will need to have all his wits about him, or he will soon deceive his own heart. It is to be feared that many are already mistaken, and will never discover their delusion till they lift up their eyes in the world of woe, where their disappointment will be terrible indeed.

The dead child of nature may be carefully washed by its mother, but this will not make it the living child of grace. The life of God within the soul creates an infinite difference between the man who

has it and the man who has it not; and the point is, to make sure that we have this life.

Are You sure that you have it?

It will be an awful thing to cry, “Peace, peace,” where there is no peace, and to prophesy smooth things for yourself, and make your heart easy, and lull your conscience to slumber, and never to wake out of the sleep till a clap of the thunder of judgment shall startle you out of presumption into endless horror.

I desire to help my reader in the business of self-examination. I would have him go further than examination, and attain to such abundance of grace, that his holy and happy state shall become a witness to himself.

The first part of this little book is meant to be a sieve to separate the chaff from the wheat. Let my friend use it upon himself; it may be the best day’s work he has ever done. He who looked into his accounts and found that his business was a losing one was saved from bankruptcy. This may happen also to my reader. Should he, however, discover that his heavenly trade is prospering, it will be a great comfort to him. No man can lose by honestly searching his own heart.

FRIEND, TRY IT AT ONCE.

2. The Two Seeds

“It is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise” Galatians 4:22, 23.

Abraham had two sons. Ishmael and Isaac were beyond all dispute veritable sons of Abraham. Yet, one of them inherited the covenant blessing, and the other was simply a prosperous man of the world. *See how close these two were together!* They were born in the same society, called the same great patriarch “father,” and sojourned in the same encampment with him. Yet, Ishmael was a stranger to the covenant, while Isaac was the heir of the promise. How little is there in blood and birth!

A more remarkable instance than this happened a little

afterwards; for Esau and Jacob were born of the same mother, at the same birth, yet is it written, “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.” One became gracious, and the other profane. So closely may two come together, and yet so widely may they be separated! Verily, it is not only that two shall be in one bed, and the one shall be taken, and the other left; but, two shall come into the world at the same moment, and yet one of them will take up his inheritance with God, and the other will for a morsel of meat sell his birthright. We may be in the same church, baptized in the same water, seated at the same communion table, singing the same psalm, and offering the same prayer; and yet we may be of two races as opposed as the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Abraham’s two sons are declared by Paul to be the types of two races of men, who are much alike, and yet widely differ. *They are unlike in their origin.* They were both sons of Abraham; but Ishmael, the child of Hagar, was the offspring of Abraham upon ordinary conditions: he was born after the flesh. Isaac, the son of Sarah, was not born by the strength of nature; for his father was more than a hundred years old, and his mother was long past age. He was given to his parents by the Lord, and was born *according to the promise* through faith. This is a grave distinction, and it marks off the true child of God from him who is only so by profession. *The promise* lies at the bottom of the distinction, and the power which goes to accomplish the promise creates and maintains the difference. Hence *the promise*, which is our inheritance, is also our test and touchstone.

Let us use the test at once by seeing whether we have been wrought upon by the power which fulfils the promise. Let me ask a few questions, — How were you converted? Was it by yourself, by the persuasion of men, by carnal excitement; or was it by the operation of the Spirit of God? You profess to have been born again. Whence came that new birth? Did it come from God in consequence of his eternal purpose and promise, or did it come out of yourself? Was it your old nature trying to do better, and working itself up to its best form? If so, you are Ishmael. Or was it that you, being spiritually dead, and having no strength whatever to rise out of your lost estate, were visited by the Spirit of God, who put forth his divine energy, and caused life from heaven to enter into you?

Then you are Isaac. All will depend upon the commencement of your spiritual life, and the source from which that life at first proceeded. If you began in the flesh, you have gone on in the flesh, and in the flesh you will die.

Have you never read, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh?" Before long the flesh will perish, and from it you will reap corruption. Only "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit;" the joy is that the spirit will live, and of it you will reap life everlasting. Whether you are a professor of religion or not, I beseech you, ask yourself — *Have I felt the power of the Spirit of God?*

Is the life that is within you the result of the fermentation of your own natural desires? Or is it a new element, infused, imparted, implanted from above? Is your spiritual life a heavenly creation? Have you been created anew in Christ Jesus? Have you been born again by divine power?

Ordinary religion is nature gilded over with a thin layer of what is thought to be grace. Sinners have polished themselves up, and brushed off the worst of the rust and the filth, and they think their old nature is as good as new. This touching-up and repairing of the old man is all very well; but it falls short of what is needed. You may wash the face and hands of Ishmael as much as you please, but you cannot make him into Isaac. You may improve nature, and the more you do so the better for certain temporary purposes; but you cannot raise it into grace. There is a distinction at the very fountain-head between the stream which rises in the bog of fallen humanity, and the river which proceeds from the throne of God.

Do not forget that our Lord himself said, "*Ye must be born again.*" If you have not been born again from above, all your church-going, or your chapel-going, stands for nothing. Your prayers and your tears, your Bible-readings and all that have come from yourself only, can only lead to yourself. Water will naturally rise as high as its source, but no higher: that which begins with human nature will rise to human nature; but to the divine nature it cannot reach. Was your new birth natural or supernatural? Was it of the will of man or of God? Much will depend upon your answer to that question.

Between the child of God and the mere professor there is a distinction as to origin of the most serious sort. Isaac was born

according to promise. Ishmael was not of promise, but of the course of nature. Where nature's strength suffices there is no promise; but when human energy fails, the word of the Lord comes in. God had said that Abraham should have a son of Sarah; Abraham believed it, and rejoiced therein, and Isaac was born as the result of the divine promise, by the power of God. There could have been no Isaac if there had been no promise, and there can be no true believer apart from the promise of grace, and the grace of the promise.

Gentle reader, here let me inquire as to your salvation. Are you saved by what you have done? Is your religion the product of your own natural strength? Do you feel equal to all that salvation may require? Do you conclude yourself to be in a safe and happy condition because of your natural excellence and moral ability? Then you are after the manner of Ishmael, and to you the inheritance will not come; for it is not an inheritance according to the flesh, but according to promise.

If, on the other hand, you say, — “My hope lies only in the promise of God. He has set forth that promise in the person of his Son Jesus to every sinner that believeth in him; and I do believe in him, therefore I trust and believe that the Lord will fulfil his promise and bless me. I look for heavenly blessedness, not as the result of my own efforts, but as the gift of God's free favour. My hope is fixed alone upon the free and gratuitous love of God to guilty men, by the which he has given his Son Jesus Christ to put away sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness for those who deserve it not,” — then this is another sort of language from that of the Ishmaelites, who say “We have Abraham to our father.” You have now learned to speak as Isaac speaks. The difference may seem small to the careless, but it is great indeed. Hagar, the slave-mother, is a very different person from Sarah, the princess. To the one there is no covenant promise, to the other the blessing belongs for evermore. Salvation by works is one thing; salvation by grace is another. Salvation by human strength is far removed from salvation by divine power: and salvation by our own resolve is the opposite of salvation by the promise of God.

Put yourself under this inquiry, and see to which family you belong. Are you of Ishmael or of Isaac?

If you find that you are like Isaac, born according to the promise, remember that your name is “Laughter;” for that is the interpretation of the Hebrews name Isaac. Take care that you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. Your new birth is a wonderful thing. If both Abraham and Sara laughed at the thought of Isaac, you may certainly do so concerning yourself. There are times when, if I sit alone and think of the grace of God to me, the most undeserving of all his creatures, I am ready to laugh and cry at the same time for joy that ever the Lord should have looked in love and favour upon me. Yes, and every child of God must have felt the working of that Isaac nature within his soul, filling his mouth with laughter, because the Lord hath done great things for him.

Mark well the difference between the two seeds, from their very beginning.

Ishmael comes of man, and by man. Isaac comes *by God’s promise*. Ishmael is the child of Abraham’s flesh. Isaac is Abraham’s child, too; but then the power of God comes in, and from the weakness of his parents it is made clear that he is of the Lord, — a gift according to promise. True faith is assuredly the act of the man who believes; true repentance is the act of the man who repents; yet both faith and repentance may with unquestionable correctness be described as the work of God, even as Isaac is the son of Abraham and Sarah, and yet he is still more the gift of God. The Lord our God, who bids us believe, also enables us to believe. All that we do acceptably the Lord worketh in us; yea, the very will to do it is of his working. No religion is worth a farthing which is not essentially the outflow of the man’s own heart; and yet it must beyond question be the work of the Holy Ghost who dwells within him.

O friend, if what you have within you is natural, and only natural, it will not save you! The inward work must be supernatural; it must come of God, or it will miss the covenant blessing. A gracious life will be your own, even as Isaac was truly the child of Abraham; but still more it will be of God; for “Salvation is of the Lord.” We must be born *from above*. Concerning all our religious feelings and actions, we must be able to say, “Lord, thou hast wrought all our works in us.”

3. The Two Lives

“Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise. At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son” Romans 9:7, 8, 9.

Ishmael and Isaac differed as to origin, and hence there was a difference *in their nature* which showed itself in their lives, and was chiefly seen in their relation to *the promise*.

According to the birth so will be the life which comes of it. In the case of the man who is only what he made himself to be, there will be only what nature gives him; but in the case of the man who is created anew by the Spirit of God, there will be signs following. “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” There will be in the new-born man that which the new life brings with it: in the natural man there will be nothing of the kind.

Ishmael exhibited certain of the natural characteristics of Abraham joined with those of his slave mother. He was a princely man like his father, and inherited the patriarch’s noble bearing; but Isaac had the faith of his father, and was in the succession as to holy inward spiritual life. As the heir of the promise, Isaac remains with his father Abraham, while Ishmael is forming camps of his own in the wilderness. Isaac seeks alliance with the olden stock in Mesopotamia; but Ishmael’s mother takes him a wife out of Egypt, which was very natural, since she came from Egypt herself. Like will to like. Isaac meditated in the field at eventide, for his conversation was with sacred things; but Ishmael contended with all comers, for he minded earthly things. Meditation is not for the wild man, whose hand is against every man, and every man’s hand against him. Isaac surrendered himself as a sacrifice to God; but you see nothing of that kind in Ishmael. Self-sacrifice is not for Ishmael; he is rather a killer and a slayer than a lamb that presents itself to God. So you shall find, that if you are religiously trained and tutored, and become “pious,” as they call it, and yet are not

renewed in heart, nor visited by the Holy Ghost, you will not live the secret life of the child of God. You may show many of the outward marks of a Christian; you may be able to sing, and to pray, and to quote Scripture, and perhaps to tell some little bits of imaginary experience; but you must be born again to know in very deed and truth the fellowship of the saints, communion in secret with the living God, and the yielding of yourself to him as your reasonable service. The child of the promise abides with God's people, and counts it his privilege to be numbered with them. The child of the promise feels that he is in the best company when no man can see or be seen, but when the Great Invisible draws near to him and holds converse with him. The child of the promise, and he only, is able to go up to the top of Moriah, there to be bound upon the altar, and to yield himself up to God. I mean by this last, that only he who is born of the Spirit will yield himself wholly to God, and love the Lord better than life itself. Your nature and conduct will be according to your origin; and therefore I pray that you may begin aright, so that as you profess to be a child of the kingdom, you may prove to be a true-born heir.

Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, the child of the bond-woman, must always bear the servile taint. The child of a slave is not free-born. Ishmael is not, cannot be, what Isaac is — the child of the free woman. Now mark: I do not say that Ishmael ever desired to be like Isaac; I do not say that he felt himself to be a loser by differing from Isaac; but, indeed, he was so. The man who is labouring for self-salvation by his own doings, feelings, and self-denials, may be proudly ignorant of his servile state; he may even boast that he was born free, and was never in bondage to any; and yet he spends his whole life in servitude. He never knows what liberty means, what content means, what delight in God means. He wonders when men talk about "full assurance of faith." He judges that they must be presumptuous. He has scarcely time to breathe between the cracks of the whip. He has done so much, but he must do so much more; he has suffered so much, but he must suffer so much more. He has never come into "the rest which remaineth for the people of God;" for he is born of the bondwoman, and his spirit is ever in bondage. On the other hand, he that is born of the free woman, and understands that salvation is of the grace of God from

first to last, and that where God has given his grace he does not take it back, for “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” — such a man accepting the finished work of Christ, and knowing his acceptance in the Beloved, rests in the Lord, and rejoices exceedingly. His life and his spirit are filled with joy and peace, for he was born free, and he is free, yea, free indeed.

Does my reader understand the freedom of the child of God? or is he still in servitude under the law, afraid of punishment, afraid of being sent away into the wilderness? If you are in this latter case, you have not received *the promise*, or you would know that such a thing could not be. To Isaac, the child of *the promise*, the heritage belongs, and he abides for ever, without fear of being cast out.

Those that are born as Ishmael was, according to the flesh, and whose religion is a matter of their own power and strength, mind earthly things, as Ishmael did. Only those that are born from above *through the promise* according to faith will, like Isaac, mind heavenly things. See how the naturally religious man minds earthly things. He is very regular at his place of worship; but while he is there he thinks of his business, his house, or his farm. Does he enjoy the worship of God? Not he! There is a sermon. Does he receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save his soul? Not he! He criticizes it as if it were a political harangue. He gives his money to the cause of God as others do. Of course he does; for he feels that he has to quiet his conscience, and to keep up his good repute: but does he care for the glory of God? By no means. If he did he would give more than money. His heart’s prayers would go up for the progress of the kingdom. Does he sigh and cry because of the sins of the times? Do you find him alone with God pouring out his heart in anguish because even in his own family there are those that are not converted to God? Did you ever see in him a high and holy joy when sinners are converted — an exultation because the kingdom of Christ is coming? Oh no, he never rises to that. All the service of God is outward to him: into the core and heart of spiritual things he has never entered, and he never can. The carnal mind, even when it is religious, is still enmity against God, and it is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can it be. There must be a spiritual mind created in the man, he must become a new creature in Christ Jesus, before he can

appreciate, understand, and enjoy spiritual things.

To come back to where we started: “Ye must be born again.” We must be born of the Spirit: we must receive a supernatural life by being quickened from our death in sin. We cannot bear the fruit of the Spirit till we have the inner life of the Spirit. Ishmael will be Ishmael; and Isaac will be Isaac. As the man is, such will his conduct be. The man of sight, and reason, and human power, may do his best as Ishmael did; but only the child of the promise will rise to the life and walk of faith as Isaac did.

“*Hard lines*,” says one. Sometimes it is a great blessing to have those hard lines drawn, and drawn very straight, too. By this means we may be set on the right track for eternity. One said the other day to a friend of mine, “I once went to hear Mr. Spurgeon, and when I went into the Tabernacle if you had asked me about myself I should have judged that I was as religious a man as ever lived in Newington, and as good a man, certainly, as ever made part of a congregation; but all this was reversed when I heard the gospel that day. I came out of the place with every feather plucked out of me. I felt myself the most wretched sinner that could be on the face of the earth, and I said I will never go to hear that man again, for he has spoiled me altogether.” “Yes,” he said, “but that was the best thing that could have happened to me. I was made to look away from myself, and all that I could do, to God and to his omnipotent grace, and to understand that I must pass under my Creator’s hand again, or I could never see his face with joy.” I hope my reader knows this truth for himself: a solemn truth it is. Even as first of all God made Adam, so must he make us over again, or else we can never bear his image, nor behold his glory. We must come under the influence of *the promise*, and live upon the promise, or our lives will never be guided by right principles, nor directed to right ends.

4. Differing Hopes

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year”
Genesis 17:20, 21.

It is not at all wonderful that two persons, so different in their birth and nature as Ishmael and Isaac were, became very different in *their hopes*. To Isaac the covenant promise became the pole-star of his being; but for Ishmael no such light had arisen. Ishmael aimed at large things, for he was the natural son of one of the greatest of men; but Isaac looked for still higher objects, because he was the child of the promise, and the inheritor of the covenant of grace which the Lord had made with Abraham.

Ishmael, with his high and daring spirit, looked to found a nation which should never be subdued, a race untamable as the wild ass of the desert; and his desire has been abundantly granted: the Bedouin Arabs are to this day true copies of their great ancestor. Ishmael in life and death realized the narrow, earthly hopes for which he looked; but on the roll of those who saw the day of Christ, and died in hope of the glory, his name is not entered. Isaac, on the other hand, saw far ahead, even to the day of Christ. He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

Ishmael, like Passion, in “Pilgrim’s Progress,” had his best things here below; but: Isaac, like Patience, waited for his best things for the future. His treasures were not in the tent and in the field, but in the “things not seen as yet.” He had received the great covenant promise, and there he found greater riches than all the flocks of Nebaioth could minister to him. Upon his eye the day-star of promise had shone, and he expected a full noon of blessing in the fullness of the appointed time. The promise so operated upon him as to direct the current of his thoughts and expectations. Is it so with you, my reader? Have you received and embraced the promise of eternal life? Are you, therefore, hoping for things not seen as yet? Have you an eye to that which none can behold except believers in the faithfulness of God? Have you left the rut of present sensual perception for the way of faith in the unseen and eternal?

No doubt the reception of the promise, and the enjoyment of its hopes, influenced the mind and temper of Isaac, so that he was of a restful spirit. For him there were no wars and fightings. He yielded the present, and waited for the future. Isaac felt that as he was born after the promise it was for God to bless him, and to fulfil the

promise that he had made concerning him; and so he remained with Abraham and kept himself aloof from the outside world. He both quietly hoped and patiently waited for the blessing of God. His eye was on the future, on the great nation yet to come, the promised land, and the yet more glorious promised seed in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. For all this he looked to God alone, wisely judging that he who gave the promise would himself see to its fulfilment. Because of this faith he was none the less active; yet he manifested none of the proud self-reliance which was so apparent in Ishmael. He was energetic in his own way, with a calm confidence in God, and a quiet submission to his supreme will. Year after year he held on in the separated life, and braved unarmed the danger which arose from his heathen neighbours — dangers which Ishmael confronted with his sword and with his bow. His trust was in that voice which said, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm.” He was a man of peace, and yet he lived as securely as his warlike brother. His faith in the promise gave him hope of security, yea, gave him security itself, though the Cananite was still in the land.

Thus does *the promise* operate upon our present life by creating in us an elevation of spirit, a life above visible surroundings, a calm and heavenly frame of mind. Isaac finds his bow and his spear in his God, Jehovah is his shield and his exceeding great reward. Without a foot of land to call his own, dwelling as a sojourner and a stranger in the land which God had given him by promise, Isaac was content to live upon the promise and count himself rich in joys to come. His remarkably quiet and equable spirit, while leading the strange unearthly life of one of the great pilgrim fathers, sprang out of his simple faith in the promise of the unchanging God. Hope, kindled by a divine promise, affects the entire life of a man in his inmost thoughts, ways, and feelings: it may seem to be of less importance than correct moral deportment, but in truth it is of vital moment, not only in itself, but in that which it produces upon the mind, heart, and life. The secret hope of a man is a truer test of his condition before God than the acts of any one day, or even the public devotions of a year. Isaac pursues his quiet holy way till he grows old and blind, and gently falls asleep trusting in his God, who had revealed himself to him, and

had called him to be his friend, and had said, “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee and bless thee, and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.”

As a man’s hopes are, such is he. If his hope is in the promise of God, it is, it must be, well with him.

Reader, what are *your* hopes? “Why,” says one, “I am waiting till a relative dies, and then I shall be rich. I have great expectations.” Another hopes in his steadily growing trade; and a third expects much from a promising speculation. Hopes which can be realized in a dying world are mere mockeries. Hopes which have no outlook beyond the grave are dim windows for a soul to look through. Happy he who believes the promise, and feels assured of its fulfilment to himself in due time, and leaves all else in the hands of infinite wisdom and love. Such hope will endure trials, conquer temptations, and enjoy heaven below.

When Christ died on the cross our hopes began, when he rose they were confirmed, when he went up on high they began to be fulfilled, when he comes a second time they will be realized. In this world we shall have pilgrim’s fare, and a table spread in the presence of our enemies; and in the world to come we shall possess the land which floweth with milk and honey, a land of peace and joy, where the sun shall no more go down, neither shall the moon withdraw herself. Till then we hope, and our hope layeth hold upon *the promise*.

5. Persecution Consequent on the Promise

“Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now” Galatians 4:28, 29.

When brothers differ so greatly as Ishmael and Isaac, it is not surprising if they fall out, and indulge unkind feelings. Ishmael was older than Isaac, and when the time came for Isaac to be weaned, his mother, Sarah, saw the son of the bond-woman mocking her child: so early had the difference of birth and condition begun to display itself. This may serve us as an indication of what we may expect if we possess the God-given life, and are heirs according to the promise. Those who are under the

bondage of the law cannot love those who are free-born by the gospel, and in some way or other they soon display their enmity.

We are not now thinking of the hostility between the wicked world and the church, but of that which exists between men of a merely natural religion, and those who are born of God. We speak not of the Philistines opposing Isaac, but of his brother Ishmael mocking him. Keenest of all is this opposition of the externally religious, to those who are born from above and worship God in spirit and in truth. Many precious children of God have suffered bitterly from the cruel hatred of those who professed to be their brethren.

Probably the motive of Ishmael was *envy*; he could not endure that the little one should have preeminence over himself. He seemed to say, "This is the heir, and therefore I hate him." Perhaps he mocked Isaac's *heir-ship*, and boasted that he had as good a right to the estate as ever the child of the promise could have. Thus do mere professors envy the condition of believers, and reckon themselves to be quite as good as the best of those who hope to be saved by the grace of God. They do not desire the grace of God themselves, and yet, like the dog in the manger, they cannot bear that others should have it: they envy the saints their hope, their peace of mind, and their enjoyment of the favour of God. If any of you find it so, be not in the least surprised.

The envy of Ishmael displayed itself most at the great feast which had been made at his brother's weaning; and even thus do formalists, like the elder brother in the parable, become most provoked when there is most occasion for rejoicing in connection with the Father's beloved child. The music and dancing of the true family are gall and wormwood to proud base-born professors. When full assurance is weaned from doubt, and holy delight is weaned from the world, then the carnal religionist puts on a sneer, and calls the godly mad, or fanatical, or murmurs with sullen sarcasm, "Poor fools! let them alone; they are a sadly deluded crew." People who are religious but not truly regenerated, who are working and hoping to be saved by their own merits, usually exhibit a bitter hatred towards those who are born of the promise.

Sometimes they mock their *feebleness*. May be Ishmael called Isaac a mere baby, just weaned. So are believers a feeble folk, and

exceedingly likely to excite the derision of those who think themselves strong-minded. Isaac could not deny that he was weak, neither can believers deny that they are faulty, and are subject to infirmities which may put them under just censure: but the world makes more of this than justice will allow, and mocks at saints for weaknesses which in others would be overlooked. We must not think it a strange thing if our insignificance and imperfection should set proud and self-righteous Pharisees jeering at us and our Gospel.

Frequently the sport is raised by the believer's *pretensions*. Isaac was called "the heir," and Ishmael could not bear to hear it. "Look," says the legalist, "yonder man was not long ago a known sinner; now he says he has believed in Jesus Christ, and therefore he declares that he knows himself to be saved and accepted, and sure of heaven. Did you ever hear of such presumption?" He who hugs his chains hates the presence of a free man. He who refuses the mercy of God because he proudly trusts his own merits, is angry with the man who rejoices to be saved by grace.

Perhaps the little Isaac, the child of such aged parents, seemed *odd and strange* to the young half-bred Egyptian. No person is so much a foreigner to his fellow-men as a man born from above. To live by faith upon the promise of God ought to seem the most proper and natural thing in the world; but it is not so esteemed: on the contrary, men count those to be strange beings who believe in God, and act upon such a belief. Wretched boys in the streets still hoot at foreigners, and men of the world still jest at true believers, because of their unworldly spirit and conduct. To us this is a testimony for good, for our Lord said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

In a thousand ways, many of them so petty as to be unworthy of mention, the believer can be made to bear "trials of cruel mockings," and he ought to be prepared so to do. After all, it is but a small matter to be persecuted nowadays; for the fires of Smithfield are quenched, the Lollards' tower contains no prisoners, and not even a thumb-screw remains in use. Courage, good brother! Even should you be ridiculed, no bones will be broken;

and if you are brave enough to despise contempt, even your sleep will not be disturbed.

Ishmael's mocking Isaac is only one among ten thousand proofs of the enmity which exists between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. The mixture of these two in Abraham's household came about through his going down into Egypt and acting in an unbelieving manner towards Pharaoh. Then the Egyptian bond-woman was given to Sarah, and the evil element came into the camp. Sarah, in an evil hour, gave the bondwoman to her husband; hence ten thousand tears. No association of the unregenerate with the Church of God will avail to alter their nature: an Ishmael in Abraham's encampment is Ishmael still. Today, the fiercest enemies of the truth of God are the aliens in our communion. These are they who make believers in sound evangelical teaching look like strangers in the Churches which were founded on the basis of scriptural doctrine.

They make us foreigners in our own land. They are lenient to all manner of heresy; but the believer in the doctrines of grace they sneer at as old-fashioned and bigoted — a belated mortal who ought studiously to seek out a grave and bury himself. Yet will the man who trusts his God and believes in his covenant, be able to survive all mockeries; for he counts the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. It is by no means shameful to trust God: on the contrary it is a point of honour with good men to trust in Him who is faithful and true; and if they have to suffer for it they do so joyfully. Gird yourselves, therefore, with a holy courage, you who are learning through grace to live upon *the promise* of God by faith. Was not the great Head of the family despised and rejected of men? Must not the rest of the brotherhood be conformed to the Firstborn? If we are made partakers of Christ's sufferings, we shall be partakers of his glory; wherefore, let us take part and lot with the Crucified heir of all things.

6. The Parting

“Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bond-woman and her son: for the son of the bond-woman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman” Galatians 4:30.

Isaac and Ishmael lived together for a time. The self-religionist and the believer in the promise may be members of the same church for years, but they are not agreed, and cannot be happy together, for their principles are essentially opposed. As the believer grows in grace and enters upon his spiritual manhood, he will be more and more disagreeable to the legalist, and it will ultimately be seen that the two have no fellowship with one another. They must separate, and this is the word that will be fulfilled to the Ishmaelite: "Cast out this bond-woman and her son: for the son of this bond-woman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." Grievous as the parting may be, it will be according to the divine will, and according to the necessities of the case. Oil and water will not mingle, neither will the natural man's religion agree with that which is born of *the promise*, and sustained by the promise. Their parting will be only the outward result of a serious difference which always existed.

Ishmael was sent away, but he soon ceased to regret it; for he found greater freedom with the wild tribes of the country, among whom he soon became a great man. He prospered much, and became the father of princes, He was in his proper sphere in the wide world; there he had honour and gained a name among its great ones. Often it happens that the carnally religious man has many excellent habits and ways about him; and having a desire to shine, he goes into society, and is appreciated and becomes notable. The world is sure to love its own. The aspiring religionist usually forsakes his first friends, and openly declares, "I have given up the old-fashioned style of religion. The saints were all very well while I was poor, but now I have made a fortune I feel that I must mix with a more fashionable set of people." He does so, and has his reward. Ishmael had his portion in this life, and never expressed a desire to share in the heavenly covenant and its mysterious blessings. If my reader would feel freer and more at home in society than in the church of God, let him know assuredly that he belongs to the world, and let him not deceive himself. As his heart is, such is he. No measure of force-work can turn Ishmael into Isaac, or a worldling into an heir of heaven.

Outwardly, and in this present life, the heir of the promise did not appear to have the best of it. Nor, indeed, should this be

expected, since they who choose their heritage in the future have, in fact, agreed to accept trial in the present.

Isaac experienced certain afflictions which Ishmael never knew: he was mocked, and he was at last laid on the altar; but nothing of the sort happened to Ishmael. You, who like Isaac are the children of the promise, must not envy those who are the heirs of this present life, though their lot seems easier than your own. Your temptation is to do so; even as the Psalmist did when he was grieved because of the prosperity of the wicked. There is in this fretting a measure of running back from our spiritual choice: have we not agreed to take our part in the future rather than in the present? Do we rue the bargain? Moreover, how absurd it is to envy those who are themselves so much to be pitied! To lose the promise is practically to lose everything; and the self-righteous have lost it. These worldly professors have no spiritual light or life, and they desire none. What a loss, to be in the dark and not to know it! They have enough religion to make them respectable among men, and comfortable in their own consciences; but this is a sorry gain if they are abominable in the sight of God. They feel no inward fightings and wrestlings; they find no contention of the old man against the new; and so they go through life with a jaunty air, knowing nothing till their end come. What wretchedness to be so besotted! Again, I say, do not envy them. Better far is the life of Isaac with its sacrifice, than that of Ishmael with its sovereignty and wild freedom; for all the worldling's greatness will soon be ended and leave nothing behind it but that which will make the eternal world to be the more miserable.

Yet dream not that believers are unhappy. If in this life only we had hope we should be miserable indeed; but *the promise* lights up our whole career, and makes us truly blessed. God's smile beheld by faith gives us fullness of joy. Put the believer's life at the greatest possible disadvantage, paint it in the darkest colours, take away from it not only comforts but necessities, and even then the Christian at his worst is better than the worldling at his best. Let Ishmael have the whole world; ay, give him as many worlds as there are stars in the midnight sky, and we will not envy him. It is ours still to take up our cross, and to be strangers and foreigners with God in this land, as all our fathers were; for the promise,

though it seems far off to others, we do, by faith, realize, and embrace, and in it we find a heaven below. Abiding with God, and with his people, we count our lot far better than that of the greatest and most honoured of the children of this world. The prospect of our Lord's second coming, and of our own eternal glory in fellowship with him, suffices to fill us with content while we wait for his appearing.

This difference on earth will lead to a sad division in death. The child of the bond-woman must be cast out in eternity as well as in time. None can enter heaven who claim it by their own doings, or boast that they have won it by their own strength. Glory is reserved for those who are saved by grace, and none who trust in self can enter there. What a terrible thing it will be when those who laboured to establish their own righteousness, and would not submit to the righteousness of Christ, shall be driven out! How will they then envy those lowly ones who were fain to accept pardon through the blood of Jesus! How will they discover their folly and wickedness in having despised the gift of God by preferring their own righteousness to that of the Son of God!

As the persons who are represented by Ishmael and Isaac are ultimately parted, so the principles upon which they rest must never be mingled, for they can by no means be made to agree. We cannot be saved in part by self, and in part by the promise of God. The principle and notion of earning salvation must be expelled from the mind. Every degree and form of it must be "cast out." If we are so unwise as to place our dependence partly on grace and partly on merit, we shall be resting one foot on a rock and the other on the sea, and our fall will be certain. There can be no dividing of the work or of the glory of salvation. It must be all of grace or all of works, all of God or all of man; but it cannot be half of one and half of the other. Cease from the vain attempt to unite two principles which are as adverse as fire and water. *The promise*, and the promise alone, must be the foundation of our hope, and all legal notions must be sternly dismissed as irreconcilable with salvation by grace. We must not begin in the spirit, and hope to be made perfect in the flesh. Our religion must be all of a piece. To sow with mingled seed, or to wear a garment of linen and woolen mixed, was forbidden to the Lord's ancient people; and to us it is

unlawful to mingle mercy and merit, grace and debt. Whenever the notion of salvation by merit, or feeling, or ceremonies comes in, we must cast it out without delay, though it be as dear to us as Ishmael was to Abraham. Faith is not sight; the spirit is not the flesh; grace is not merit; and we must never forget the distinction, lest we fall into grievous error and miss the heritage which belongs only to the heirs according to promise.

Here is our confession of faith:-

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” Galatians 2:16.

Here also is the clear line of distinction as to the method of our salvation, and we desire to keep it plain and manifest:-

“Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of work: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” Romans 11:5, 6.

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