

The Great Divide

“It is the measure of Christ that God is after, not to cut in between the good and bad in us, but to cut between what is Christ and what is ourselves.... The realm of God... is none of self and all of Christ.” T. Austin Sparks

“What He has already divided from Himself through the death of Christ needs to be divided out of our hearts and minds by faith. “Do I want to be free from the wretched man that I am or not?” It’s not a matter of what still needs to be done in us, it’s a matter of choosing to see, believe, walk and rest in what God HAS done.” Julie Guggenbiller

In Gn.15 God promises Abram land for his descendants to inherit. In Ch. 16, we read that Sarai, Abram’s wife, still has no children. She decides that maybe God means to give them children through her servant and maid, Hagar. Hagar does get pregnant and have a son, Ishmael. This child is the son of a slave, but Abram is the father and plans for him to be the heir to God’s promises. In Ch. 17, God appears again to Abram. He gives him a new name, *Abraham*, and He gives Sarai a new name, *Sarah*. He also establishes a covenant or promise with them. Then God tells Abraham that Sarah, who is 90 years old, will give him a son. You would think that Abraham’s first reaction might be, “That’s wonderful!” But Abraham says, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you.” He is asking God to recognize the slave son. Abraham was trying to make God’s promise come true by doing it himself- by finding another wife and having a son. But God would not recognize this son. Vs. 19 “Then God said: ‘No, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him...’” Of course Dads love their children, and it is natural that Abraham would want his son Ishmael to be part of God’s covenant, and the reason God said no is not because He has better promises for some people than for others, or that He loves some better than others. No. This, like ALL of the Old Testament scriptures, was a type and shadow of Christ. What is God rejecting and what is God accepting?

God made a promise to Abraham- a son. But God did not need any help at all to make that promise come true. Still, Abram and Sarai got it into their heads that they could “help”; that they could accomplish something; that their plan could receive God’s approval and blessing. Even as Christians, there is nothing that we can offer to God from our own life that can please Him. Not even our goodness, or good intentions. I’m sure Abram and Sarai had good intentions. They were trying hard to do something right. Why isn’t that good enough for God? Because there is only One who pleases God- His Son, Jesus. But there is good news- what God requires, He also provides. God had promised Abraham a son, and God provided him that son. God gave Abraham Isaac. And what God provided, He also required. Isaac was the only son that God recognized; the son of promise; the son of covenant. That meant that Ishmael had to be out.

We said that God is only pleased with His Son- and the good news is that He has given us His Son, the One that He desires. We have Jesus; He lives in us. And what does God ask of us? To give to Him the One He has given us. To LIVE by Him, the One He requires and provides. He gave us Life, so let’s live by that Life.

Let me see if I can give you a little story to help explain what I mean when I say that God requires something, but also provides it. If I told you that I wanted you to bring me a loaf of fresh bread from the bakery, you might try to figure out how you were going to pay for it. But if I give you the money for it, it would be easy for you to get the bread- I provided (gave you money for) the thing that I asked you for. (I'll even drive you to the bakery). So you have what you need to get it, but I am also going to require that bread that I provided for; I am going to ask you to give back to me what I gave you provision for. God gives us what we need to be in relationship with Him- His Son, Jesus. And He requires us to live by Him in order please Him, and to enjoy the benefits of that relationship. He cannot accept anything else. He cannot accept our good intentions or our good deeds- His holiness requires a Life other than ours.

Here's the rub. Sometimes we are like Abraham. We want God to accept what we have done on our own. We are kind of proud of it, or attached to it, or maybe just used to doing things our way. Or maybe we don't like God's plan- we don't want to let go of our hurts and let God work His forgiveness through us to that mean old brother. Maybe we don't want to let God work His obedience through us, or His peace, or His love to someone who has been mean to us. We would rather hold on to our own feelings. When we do this, we believe a lie that we are still alive. But when Jesus died, He crucified us with Him and we are dead to our own selves. When we know and understand and believe that when He died, we died with Him, and that His is the only Life that God raised from the dead, and that God has given us this Life to live by, and that we have no Life but His- then we embrace this over and over each time our own selfish nature wants to rule us and wants us to believe that we are still alive. Remember the song (scripture)? I am crucified with Christ, Nevertheless I live. Yet not I but Christ liveth in me, Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.

God told Abraham, 'No! You cannot have two sons in one house.' (Gen. 21:10) In the same way, we cannot have two natures ruling in our heart- ourselves AND Jesus. God does not recognize two, and He put both to death at the cross, but raised only One- and it wasn't you! God requires Jesus, and He provided Him. As we walk in the light and truth of Jesus' death on the cross, we will live by that Life and see the Lie of self as the Lie that it is.

Activity: Use an empty container to represent a heart or soul. Using two different colors of playdough, show how some believe that we have two natures warring in us- like a good dog and a bad dog fighting to win. They say that the dog you feed is the dog who will win. But God says that He took all of mankind to death with Jesus at the cross, and only one life was raised. Mankind stayed dead. We are dead in our sins, but alive unto God in Christ. Now we are vessels of His life and not of our own (only one color of playdough in the container). When we behave like that old is alive, it is because we believe a lie and the remedy to "bad" behaviors is turning to see the truth- over and over, time and time again.