

THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR

The synagogue at Corinth, and there was also a house next door. The Jews worshipped in the synagogue, and the Christians worshipped in the house next door. Both the Jews and the Christians read from the same Bible, and sang the same psalms. Both were evangelistic, and both baptized by immersion. Both had elders and deacons, and both gave money to God and alms to the poor.

These two groups which seem similar on the surface, were *radically* different. The word “radical”, as you know, comes from the Latin “radix” which means “root”. Their very essence of their being was so diverse and distinct that like new wine and old skins, they could never be combined.

Consider, for example, the way these two groups thought about “gifts”. In the synagogue they gave gifts, and in the house next door they received them. This difference between Christianity and Judaism is foundational and should not be ignored. The one focusses on works which we do for God, and the other focusses on what God has done for us. The one involves the earthly Jerusalem which produces bondage. The other involves the heavenly Jerusalem which brings freedom. Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift.

Paul wrote much about gifts to the house next door. (See 1 Cor. 12 - 14) What Jesus began to do in the Body, The Body continues to do in Jesus. The Head of the Body is in heaven, and the church is the expression of His energy on earth. Every true believer had received a gift and was to use that gift for the benefit of others (1 Cor. 12:7). As the Spirit of Jesus energized them to do His will, they were even encouraged to eagerly desire even greater gifts (1 Cor. 12:31).

Ishmael and Isaac are used in Scripture to help us understand this difference. (See Gal. 4:21 - 31). The name “Ishmael” means “God hears”. He was so named because God heard his mothers’ cry (Gen. 16:11). The name is also appropriate because Ishmael was perpetually contentious (Gen. 16:12). He was forever bitter and resentful that his younger brother was “*given*” what he felt was legally his. Therefore he was constantly crying out to God for justice. Ishmael was born after the flesh and he and his mother are an allegory of a carnal covenant. Ishmael would have been right at home in the synagogue.

The name “Isaac” means laughter. His birth was miraculous. His mother was past the age of bearing. She had a dead womb. Consequently, he is said to have been born of the Spirit. (Gal. 4:29). When Abraham died, Isaac inherited everything his father owned (Gen. 25:5). While Ishmael was complaining, Isaac was laughing. Isaac and his mother are an allegory of a spiritual covenant. Isaac would have been right at home in the house next door.

When you entered the synagogue you met people with frowning faces. They were constantly afraid that something they would touch, taste, or handle would render them unclean. They were constantly appealed to the law and focussing on themselves. When you entered the house next door you met people with smiling faces. Their focus on God and what He has done, gave to them a sense of security and peace. Like Isaac, they had received an inheritance they did not deserve.

Crispus was the ruler of the synagogue, but believed the Good News about Jesus and took his family to the house next door. Sosthenes took his place as the ruler of the synagogue and decided to teach Paul a lesson. He brought Paul before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. But Gallio cared for none of this and had them ejected from his court. Then the Jews expressed their root nature by beating Sosthenes in front of the court (See Acts 18:12 - 17).

Then Sosthenes apparently also believed the Good News and went to the house next door. His name is found but twice in the Holy Bible. Once in Acts 18:17 when we are told of his beating. The other time in 1 Cor. 1:1 where he joined with Paul in sending greetings to the church of God at Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy. They thanked God that their brethren in Corinth came behind in no spiritual gift as they prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.