



## LESSON

# 9

### GRACE TO THE BARREN

Galatians 4:21-31

#### 1. SERMON & JOURNALING NOTES

Write down truths that jump out at you during the sermon or in your journaling. Spend time each day journaling through this passage in preparation for your small group discussion. Circle keywords. Underline key phrases. Put an "!" by words or phrases that are convicting or challenging. Put a "?" mark by words or phrases that you have questions about.

Galatians 4:21-31

[21] Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

[22] For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman.

[23] But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

[24] Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar.

[25] Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

[26] But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

[27] For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."

[28] Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

[29] But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now.

[30] But what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman."

[31] So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

## 2. OPENING QUESTION

Have you ever worked really hard at something and it completely failed? How did you feel?

## 3. BIG IDEA

True freedom comes not through human effort but through God's promise fulfilled in Christ.

## 4. SCRIPTURE MEMORY

So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. **Galatians 4:31**

## 5. BIBLE CONVERSATION

The Apostle Paul is going to argue that there is a danger in mixing law and grace. He gives us an illustration, provides an interpretation of that illustration, and then shows its implication. He concludes with an invitation that every single one of us must respond to.

1. The Illustration (v. 21-23)
2. The Interpretation (v. 24-27)
3. The Implication (v. 28-31)
4. The Invitation

Paul writes to believers who are tempted to go back under the law. They thought spiritual maturity came through rule-keeping—through circumcision, rituals, and external performance. Paul pleads, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?" (v. 21) In other words, if you really want to live under the law, you need to understand what it actually says! The very story of Abraham's two sons reveals that bondage always comes through human effort and freedom only through God's promise.

**READ:** Galatians 4:21-23 (Take a moment to journal through this text before discussing it.)

### The Illustration (v. 21-23)

Paul uses an illustration that is powerfully poignant for his first-century readers. He takes them back to Abraham's family once again, using their own argument against them. Paul points to Abraham as a way to show that when it comes to salvation, the formula is simple: JESUS + NOTHING. I fear that for our twenty-first-century ears, it lacks the punch it had for its first-century hearers. So my prayer is that the Holy Spirit will pound this truth into our hearts.

Here is Paul's illustration: he goes back to Genesis 16–18 and 21, where we are told that Abraham had two sons—Ishmael, born to Hagar (a slave), and Isaac, born to Sarah (a free woman). Both were Abraham's sons, but they represent two radically different ways of relating to God. Hagar represents

human effort—Abraham trying to fulfill God’s promise by his own plan. Sarah represents divine grace—God doing the impossible, bringing life out of barrenness.

Have you ever tried to “help God out”? Maybe you believed His promise, but when it seemed delayed, you took matters into your own hands. That’s what Abraham and Sarah did. They believed God would give them a son—but they couldn’t see how. So Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham, and Ishmael was born “according to the flesh.” Later, God fulfilled His promise through Sarah, and Isaac was born “through the promise.”

Paul writes in verse 23, “The son of the slave was born according to the flesh, but the son of the free woman through promise.” To be “born according to the flesh” is to depend on what you can do. It’s self-salvation. It says, *“If I obey enough, if I serve enough, if I prove myself, then God will bless me.”* That’s the essence of legalism. It’s not that we stop believing in grace—it’s that we start trying to earn it.

But the flesh always produces slavery. Ishmael was born into a house of bondage. Hagar was a slave, and her child inherited her status. That’s what happens when we live by performance—we end up enslaved to it. You can be in church and still be in chains. You can know doctrine but live like an orphan. You can say “Jesus saves” but still act like “I must save myself.”

Paul uses this story in Galatians 4 to illustrate two ways of living:

- One based on human effort (law, flesh, self-reliance).
- The other based on divine promise (grace, faith, Spirit).

Paul’s point is simple yet profound: there are only two ways to live—by human effort or by divine promise. Every person in this room is living out one of those stories. Either we’re trying to achieve God’s blessing through our own effort, or we’re receiving it by grace. So let me ask you this question up front: Are you living out of self-reliance or from a deep dependence on God’s promise?

**Take a moment to answer the following questions:**

- *What might “living according to the flesh” look like for a modern Christian? How might it disguise itself as spiritual maturity?*
- *Have you ever found yourself trying to earn God’s favor rather than resting in His grace? What did that produce in you?*

### **The Interpretation (v. 24-27)**

Paul calls this story an allegory. He’s not twisting Scripture—he’s revealing the deeper meaning behind the events. Every story we read in the Old Testament points to the ultimate story fulfilled in the New Testament, and Paul is helping us make that connection. According to verses 24-26, “These women are

two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery... the other corresponds to Jerusalem above; she is free."

- a. Hagar → Mount Sinai → The Law → Slavery.  
The law is good, but it was never meant to save. It only exposes sin. Those who rely on the law become enslaved to an endless cycle of striving and failing.
- b. Sarah → The Heavenly Jerusalem → The Promise → Freedom.  
The gospel doesn't say "Do and live." It says "It is finished—now live."

Paul then quotes Isaiah 54:1—"Rejoice, O barren one... for the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband."(v. 27) In other words, God brings fruitfulness out of emptiness. Grace triumphs where effort fails. The barren woman becomes the mother of nations. The gospel always surprises us like that—it brings life out of places that once seemed dead.

You might feel barren today—empty, spiritually dry. You may be struggling to believe that God loves you. But grace does its best work in barren places. That's where the promise of God begins to grow. In fact, Paul is arguing that until you reach that barren place, you can never fully experience the promise. You must be emptied in order to be filled. You must come to the end of yourself—of your self-reliance and your attempts to fulfill the law on your own to earn God's love. Only then will you begin to experience the fruit of the promise: the blessings of salvation given to us in Christ Jesus.

**Take a moment to answer the following questions:**

- *Where in your life are you tempted to rely on self-effort instead of God's promise?*
- *Can you think of a "barren place" in your life where you've seen God bring unexpected fruitfulness?*
- *What would it look like this week to "come to the end of yourself" and rest in grace rather than striving?*

### **The Implication (v. 28-30)**

If this is true—and I absolutely believe it is—then the implications are vast. Paul says something that, if we truly believed its implications, would bring profound transformation to every facet of our lives. He writes, "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise." (v. 28)

This is who we are in Christ. We are not slaves struggling to earn approval—we are sons and daughters living from it. Let this truth sink in for a moment. Most of us approach life with a slave mentality. Let me help you see what that looks like in your own life.

Paul continues, "Just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, so it is now." (v. 29) Those who live under law often mock those who live under grace. Legalists always feel threatened by freedom. Performance-based people can't understand those who rest in what's already done.

Paul's instruction is clear: "Cast out the slave woman and her son." (v. 30) He's not being harsh—he's being pastoral. He's saying, *Don't give the law a room in your heart*. Don't let legalism move back in. It will always try to enslave you again.

**Take a moment to answer the following questions:**

- *Paul says, "Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise." What does it mean to live from promise instead of for performance?*
  
- *Where might God be inviting you to "cast out" patterns of legalism, self-reliance, or performance in your heart?*

### **The Invitation (v. 31)**

This leads us to the most important invitation you will ever receive. It's an invitation not only for those who have never trusted in the gospel, but also for those of us who have forgotten to live every day in the truth of the gospel.

The gospel invites you to leave Mount Sinai and come to Mount Zion—to move from slavery to sonship, from performance to promise, from fear to freedom. The only way you can move from Mount Sinai (the law) to Mount Zion (the promise) is through Mount Calvary (the gospel). Only grace—and grace alone—can move you to the promise.

Ultimately, this passage points us to Jesus—the true Son of Promise. He is the One who was born miraculously, who fulfilled every promise of God, and who frees us from the slavery of sin and law. Because of Him, we can say, "We are not children of the slave but of the free woman." (v. 31)

So live like it. Stop striving for what's already yours. Stop trying to earn what Christ has already secured. You are known, loved, chosen, and free—not because of what you've done, but because of what Jesus has done for you.

**Take a moment to answer the following questions:**

- *Think of one practical step you can take this week to live more like a child of promise rather than a slave to performance.*
  
- *How can our group help one another resist drifting back into legalism and continue walking in gospel freedom?*

**Prayer:**

*Father, We thank You for the freedom that is ours in Christ—the freedom purchased not by our performance but by Your promise. Thank You that through Jesus, the true Son of Promise, we are no longer slaves but sons and daughters, no longer bound by the law but brought near by grace.*

Forgive us for the times we’ve tried to “help You out,” for the moments we’ve trusted our own strength instead of Your Spirit. Teach us to rest—not in what we can do—but in what Christ has already done.

Lord, drive out the spirit of slavery that still lingers in our hearts. Cast out the fear, the striving, the endless proving—and fill us with the joy and confidence of those who know they are loved, chosen, and free. Empower us to live this week as children of promise—walking in freedom, resting in grace, and rejoicing in Your unshakable love.

In the name of Jesus, our Redeemer and our Righteousness, we pray.  
Amen.

**6. MISSION**

Have you ever wondered why God has you living in Fort Lauderdale? In Broward County? This is your mission field. It’s where God has called you to make His name known. I want to help you answer that call. It’s called the Great Commission, not the Great Suggestion. God is calling you. Who’s your PLUS one? Who is the one person God is calling you to share the Good News of the gospel with? Write their name down now. Don’t run from this assignment.

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Here are 3 simple steps of obedience to answer God’s call to be on mission with Him:

- **Intercede** - Who is ONE person that you can be praying for that needs to know the saving grace of Jesus Christ?
- **Invest** - How can you invest in them relationally?
- **Invite** - Begin praying for courage to invite to them church.

Don’t say, “But God, you don’t know my neighbor.” Answer God’s call. Join Him in this great redemptive mission of rescuing sinners so that they may know the riches of God’s grace, mercy, and salvation.

## 7. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRAYER

- What is one thing you need to remember from this lesson that you can apply to your life this week?
  
- How can your group pray for you personally?
  
- How can you pray for your group members

