

## Free Sons through Faith

Galatians 4:21–31

Let's begin with some honest confession in light of some big theology.

We are prone to take what God says and think of it as good ideas and above average suggestions, then tweak and improve and bend what he says to our comfort and conceptions. We do this because our pride delights to put us in the place of wisdom and authority. "I know. I know what works for me. I've figured it out." We believe ourselves to be the ultimate wisdom and authority on ourselves and our lives. *What other authority could there be?* Consider that, if there is another authority -- if the problem is actually *inside* us and the solution is *apart* from us -- if there is an external, objective authority, then our internal, self-realized authority and wisdom collapse. As Tim Keller said, "Jesus' claims are particularly unnerving because if true there is no alternative but to bow the knee to him." Jesus says we need a new heart. The popular notion is follow your heart. Jesus claims to be Lord. If he is, that means I am not, but I've been told to be whoever I want to be. These are problems for us, and the solution is found in subjecting our thinking and believing to what God says, not tweaking it.

Now, considering where we are in Galatians, since the Law was given to **increase transgression** — to expose sin as exceedingly sinful — and **not to deliver from it**, and since **Christ's atonement was to deliver from transgression and not minimize it**, then our souls and minds must be subjected this truth which brings freedom from both sinful immorality and sinful morality (which is no morality at all). It means that efforts to return to the Law are foolish and silly; they leave us in the chains of exceedingly sinful sin. Returning to the Law means that the sin-bearing work of Christ on the cross was not adequate and needs help to accomplish my salvation. That's blasphemous.

Embracing the truth of being made right with God by faith destroys pride, because it requires us not only to repent of our unrighteousness, but also repent of our self-righteousness — which is as filthy rags. We don't merely turn from our wrath-accruing immorality — let's stop doing bad stuff — but from our wrath-accruing morality — I'll do some good stuff to wipe out the bad stuff. No, we are justified by faith, not by works. The sin of self-effort must be cast out.

Well, that's a long preamble that reminds us of the overarching thrust of the letter, and keeps us thinking about where we are headed. But frankly, that's kind of a heady, academic statement, and we need to get a little more concrete if we are going to understand the conclusion to a long argument the

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Apostle began in chapter 3. This last part of the argument that the Law cannot save is the most difficult section to interpret in Galatians, and one of the more difficult passages in the New Testament. We feel Peter's pain in **2 Peter 3** when writes of Paul's letters and says, "There are somethings that are hard to understand..." So we are going to ask God to help us focus our minds on the truths here that are able to make us wise unto salvation. God has given us godly scholars who helped me through their writing and preaching this week. As I used a portion of Alistair Begg's outline to last week's passage, I am using a modified form of his outline this morning. It's not his sermon, but he has a wonderful ability to bring order and structure to things that give us handles to understand what is happening. So if you're helped this morning, thank Alistair Begg. If you aren't, blame him.

**PRAY:** Illumine our minds, make the book live, overcome unbelief, show us ourself, show us our Savior, and make the book live.

Note there are 3 sections as we read. Look at them in your bible, and mark them if you wish.

**The first section** in vvs. 21–23 is HISTORICAL — the history of Hagar, Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac.

**The second section** in vvs. 24–27 is FIGURATIVE — he recounts who and what these real historical women and their children stand for, what they represent. It begin with the word *allegorically*.

**The third section** is vvs. 28–31 is PERSONAL. It tells us how we respond to truths that Sarah and Hagar point to of being either enslaved under the Law, or being free through faith in Christ.

**Galatians 4:21–31, noting the sections as we go** — <sup>21</sup> Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup> For it is written [*Historical*] that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup> But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. [*That's the Historical; Now to the figurative*] <sup>24</sup> Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup> Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup> But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup> 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."

[*Now from the Figurative to the Personal*] <sup>28</sup> Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born

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according to the Spirit, so also it is now. <sup>30</sup> 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.” <sup>31</sup> So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

[Lord, bless unto us the reading of your Word.]

#### **1. Historical vv. 21–23**

First note, in v. 21, that he is addressing those who desire to return to the rituals and festivals and ceremonies of the Law for salvation. These certainly were the Judaizers, the false brothers, but also the Galatians who have been led astray by the Judaizers. He is building a foundation to give an illustration about how salvation comes through faith by beginning with a history lesson.

God promised Abraham, the father of those who believe God and it is counted to them as righteousness, a son through whom the nations would be blessed. It was going to take God’s intervention for this to happen because he and his wife Sarah were way past childbearing years. His body was as good as dead, being about 100 years old. And so they waited for the promise: a month, a year, 6 years. At that point Sarah gave her female slave, Hagar, to Abraham to make things happen. So not of faith, but of human contrivance and natural procreative biology, Hagar does bear a son, Ishmael. But he is not of faith, but of contrivance and human effort. He is of human effort.

Then God does act, fulfilling his promise, and Sarah conceives through God’s intervention, overcoming her barren condition. She, the free woman, bears Isaac, the free son. Both were from the loins of Abraham, but the first was not of faith, but human effort, and was born a slave. The second was of God’s work to overcome the incapacity of their human condition, and Isaac was born a free son. That is the history. Now, let’s take this real history and understand how the Apostle uses the slave woman and the free woman, the slave son and the free son, as pointers to slavery to sin under the Law, and freedom from sin through faith placed in God’s work.

#### **2. Figurative vv. 24–28**

Keeping in mind that Paul is establishing faith in Christ as the means of salvation; not ceremonies, rituals, or circumcision under the Law. He is forming a linear argument using Hagar and Sarah as stand-ins that represent where the Law takes you, and where faith takes you. Begg was very helpful here, simply presenting these two figures, or allegorical stand-ins, in 2 columns that make his point clear. Let’s look at the two women in columns and follow his figurative illustration.

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<b>Hagar:</b> Stands for slavery to sin under the Law	<b>Sarah:</b> Stands for freedom from sin by faith
Ishmael	Isaac
Slave	Free
Birth by process, according to the flesh	Birth by promise, according to the Spirit
Covenant based on Law	Covenant based on Promise
Earthly Jerusalem	Heavenly Jerusalem
Judaism	Christianity

Why is it useless for you to return to the Law, Galatians? Why is this a threat to the Gospel itself? Let's follow the column of Hagar, who stands for slavery under the Law.

Hagar, a slave, gave naturally conceived and gave birth to Ishmael, who was a slave. The image of the slave figures slavery to sin under the Law. The Law does not free from sin, but exposes and magnifies sin, leaving you in its chains.

Let's also note that it is not natural birth that makes one a child of promise. Ishmael was Abraham's son, conceived through the natural procreative act of human effort, not one of faith. Watch: Biology does not save. Ishmael was born of Abraham, the father of faith, but was still a slave to sin. Being born to Christian parents does not make you a Christian. Being born human means being born in sin and in slavery to sin. One must be born again, believing in Christ, to be free from the condemnation of sin. Faith is what unites us to the Promised One, who is Christ, the sin-bearer.

Next, Hagar represents the Covenant based on Law. That's what the two mentions of Mt. Sinai represent. Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai, and it becomes shorthand for the Law.

So we see Paul's figurative argument starting to take a little more shape. If you want to go back to the Law, you are going back to Ismael and Hagar, who are slaves to sin. This will not save you, but only accentuate your sinfulness.

Hagar is the earthly Jerusalem, the city of the Jews made out dust. It is earthly, It is passing. It is the domain of those enslaved to sin.

Are you seeing Paul's imagery come into focus? Returning to the Law leaves you in the grip of sin, separated from God. This is lostness. It is anti-Gospel. This is wickedness that cannot save.

Now let's turn to Sarah and see how Paul figuratively leads us to the Promised Messiah.

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Sarah is free. The picture of freedom represents our being delivered from, set free from the penalty and curse of the Law. The Law exposes sin, but does not forgive or liberate from the heart's depravity. It does not give life, but pronounces death. Freedom from the Law means forgiveness, the power of sin broken, and a new heart that loves God and his commandments, producing Christ likeness rather than sinful wickedness.

Sarah bore the child of promise, Isaac, through God's work. The Spirit of God was at work to overcome the natural death of Sarah and Abraham's bodies. You see that in verse 29. So being born as a Child of promise is a work of the Spirit, just as Jesus said in **John 3:5-7** — Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. <sup>6</sup>That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. <sup>7</sup>Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' It is spiritual birth, birth by the Spirit of God, that places us in the Child of Promise. This is in contrast, as we have already noted, to biological birth, which does not produce spiritual life. You must be born from above through faith.

Isaac represents the covenant based on promise: God will bless the nations — give life to the nations — through the child of promise, who comes from Abraham: Jesus Christ. God's blessing is through faith in Christ, not trust in the Law.

Next, Sarah and Isaac represent the heavenly Jerusalem, the dwelling of God not made of dust and tied to the earth. The heavenly Jerusalem is those who live in Christ; they are the body of Christ, the church, who will dwell with him forever. He then quotes Isaiah 54 pointing to the prophesy's fulfillment in Christ. Rejoice, O barren one!

This is Christianity! Freedom and life in Christ! If you return to the Law, you leaving the body of Christ, leaving the blessing of eternal life in Christ based on God's promise, and entering into slavery.

And now what do you do with that, Galatians? What do we do with that Redeemer's Grace?

### **3. Personal vv. 28-31**

Now you, brothers, are children of promise! You cannot, will not, must not go back to the Law. We are of faith, born in freedom because Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death!

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Those who want to return to the Law, those who want to make much of themselves and virtue-signal and show how self-righteous they are... They may trouble you, and persecute you, and try to get you to return to rules, and ceremonies, and cutting, and rituals. Don't do it! Cast them out! Their way is the way of death! Your soul hangs in the balance. They will not inherit life in Christ because they have never trusted Christ. They remain in slavery to sin because Christ has shattered their sin chains. Their faith is in what cannot save — whether their works, their ceremonies, their rituals... Only Christ can save. They will not inherit the Kingdom. They will not live in Christ. Cast them out!

One might be asking, OK, pastor, I believe... and since we are no longer under the Law, I can do whatever I want because I am trusting Christ and he paid the price for sin. I'm never going to pay any attention to the moral demands of the Law again. Oh! You must be warned! Have you not read **Romans 6:1–4** — What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? <sup>3</sup>Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?<sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For freedom from not only the penalty of sin, but also the power of sin, Christ set us free. The work of regeneration, new birth, does not just forgive, but frees; it is not merely release from God's wrath, but repentance from rebellion. The difference between Hagar and Sarah is that Hagar is doing things in human effort, attempting what can never be done. Sarah, as evidence of saving faith, walks the power of the Spirit that causes both new birth and resurrection living. If you hear a rejection of the Law that reveals God's holiness as a license to sin, let these words pierce your soul: Without holiness no one will see God. If you treat your sin as a light thing, then be dispatched to 1 Corinthians 13:5 — **Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith.** The evidence of faith is a growing conformity to Christ and love of holiness until Christ is formed in you. What is being formed in you? Love of God, or tolerance for sin? In Chapter he writes: Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Beloved, is there any application for us this morning? Is there anything here that speaks to our hearts? Oh, my, yes. Of which woman are you born, to use Paul's allegory. Are you seeking to be

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counted a son of God through self-effort, or rules, moralism, or by biological heritage from your parents? Consider modern rituals and ceremonies. Are you trusting your church attendance, some aisle-walking experience, a baptism, or tithing? None of this will save. It's all slavery. At this moment your soul is in danger and the moral law you are attempting to fulfill is doing nothing but exposing and condemning your sin. It reveals your slavery to sin. Look away from yourself and self-righteousness. You have none. Believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved. Today is the day of salvation. Now is the accepted time. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your heart.

Further, as we prepare for the July mission trip, consider this. Utah has a population of 3.2 million people. About 62% of that 3.2 million people are Mormons. At the core, Mormons embrace self-effort, works salvation on steroids. They have both an inadequate view of Christ, the uncreated, eternal Son of God, and an inordinate confidence in themselves and their wearing of the right underwear, having their marriage blessed in a particular piece of real estate. Can circumcision save? Can underwear? Can baptism? No. Those are evidences of slavery. Pray for the nearly 2 million Mormons in slavery on the broad road to destruction who are trusting in their good works to pay off their unrighteousness. Pray for us, that we will be protected from the enemy, and that we would be given boldness and strength to proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that freedom from sin and freedom from self-effort are found in him who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Christ all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. He has reconciled to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Let your faith be in him. And let your faith in him produce conformity to him.

PRAY

GOSPEL THREAD