



"The Prestige in the Gospel"

Galatians 4:21-5:1

Theme: The freedom provided by grace is better than the shame produced by the Law.

Introduction: The divergence between the Spirit and the flesh is blatant in this passage. The Galatian believers are part of the age to come ... by grace. They have the Jerusalem above as their "mother." They are men and women of the Spirit. Therefore, they must resist the pressure of the Judaizers, who are spiritually dead and who want to impose the slavery of the law and circumcision on them.

I. THE MEMORY OF PRESTIGE – 4:21-24

A. **The Reminder of the Law – vv. 21-22**

1. The previous section left off with Paul somewhat exasperated and perplexed on how to get the Galatians to see the devastation of their desire to "be enslaved all over again" by "turning back" to subjugation under the Law.
2. As Paul struggles with how to help them, under the direction of God's Spirit, he is directed to draw an analogy – a metaphor providing an illustration between the legalistic adherence to the Law and the delight of being set free by the grace of God.
3. He essentially says, "Let's turn to the Law itself!" – "Tell me, you what want to be under law, do you not listen to the law?"
4. This is rich in irony – as those who advocated for the law weren't paying too close attention to what the law taught.
5. Paul reminds them of what the law says: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman."
6. This historic event was well known by them all – having been the point of division between the children of Ishmael [from Hagar] and Isaac [from Sarah] that even continues through until today.

B. **The Recognition of the Rivalry – vv. 23-24**

1. These two sons illustrate the difference between the fleshly efforts to gain salvation through legalism and self-righteousness and the actual salvation gained through grace and faith in the promise.
2. Paul stated the facts of the historic persons he is using to make the analogy – "**but the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh**" – a reference to the sinful, faithless decision by both Abraham and

Sarah to take matters into their own hands and provide for themselves an heir.

3. However, “... *the son by the free woman [was born] through the promise.*” – a reference to the supernatural work of God whereby Abraham’s faith was honored with the gift of the promised heir – ***Hebrews 11:11; Romans 4:18-21.***
4. In referencing the rivalry that existed between Ishmael and Isaac, Paul seeks to establish the basis for the correlation to his argument against legalism and self-righteousness – “*This is allegorically speaking ...*” [*ἀλληγορέω*] – to use an analogy or illustration;
5. This is the only use of this term in the entirety of the NT or LXX and demonstrates the uniqueness of the practice.
 - a) *It must be remembered that this was something the Holy Spirit directed the Apostle Paul to do amid his perplexity in how to help the Galatian believers and ought not to be viewed as prescriptive for the development of our hermeneutic.*
 - b) *There is an entire segment of Christendom that sees an allegorical interpretation to be a norm for the proper way to handle Scripture.*
 - c) *However, “Paul’s use of the OT does not represent the kind of arbitrary allegory that we find in Philo or that we find later in Origen or Clement of Alexandria”¹ – the fathers of the hermeneutic that was popularized by Augustine and became the foundation for Covenant Theology and Amillennialism.*
 - d) *Hence, this is not a pattern for how to interpret the Old Testament.*
6. Paul continues: “... for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.”
7. As different are Hagar and Sarah, and are Ishmael and Isaac, so are the two covenants they represent:
8. “*from Mount Sinai*” represents the Mosaic Covenant or the “Law” that produces bondage and slavery under the law – a slavery that results in death.
9. This “*covenant*” is represented by Hagar the “*slave*” [*δουλεία*].
10. In this statement, Paul is seeking to get the Galatian believers to see in a fresh way the liability of the Sinai Covenant and the regulations and rituals of the Law (“Sinai Covenant”).

II. **THE METAPHOR OF PRESTIGE – 4:25-27**

A. **The Metaphor for Fleshly Effort – v. 25**

1. Paul now fully develops the analogy – “Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem ...”

¹ Thomas Schreiner, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Galatians*, p. 300.

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2. This ties together everything that Paul is seeking to emphasize.
3. “*Hagar*” the slave is a fitting personification of “*Mount Sinai in Arabia*” where the Law was given that brought Israel under such bondage of legalism that is seen in the “*present Jerusalem*” – the seat of legalism through Judaism.
4. “Just as God chose **Mount Sinai** as the geographical location to give the Old Covenant to Moses, He chose **Jerusalem** as the geographical location where the Old Covenant would be upheld, propagated, and exemplified.”²
5. This represents those who are seeking to establish their own righteousness through the arm of the flesh by means of keeping the Law.
6. It is possible that the reference to “*in Arabia*” is intended to indicate that those who were under the bondage to the Law are still in the wilderness – having failed to enter the rest of grace.
7. The Judaizers or the “party of the circumcision” that Paul has been battling throughout the book of Galatians were seeking to seduce those who have been saved by grace back into the bondage to the works of the flesh that legalists endure as they seek to establish their own righteousness – something Paul had indicated had never been the purpose of the Law – cp. *Galatians 3:23-24*.

B. The Metaphor for Faith – vv. 26-27

1. Paul now contrasts legalism with grace – “*But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother*” – a reference to how the spiritual state of those who are saved by grace through faith is consistent with the eschatological consummation of God’s promises.
2. The earthly Jerusalem represents legalism and the “*Jerusalem above*” represents the state of grace belonging to those who have faith in Christ without reliance on the law.
3. Instead of being in bondage, the “*Jerusalem above is free*” – from works, bondage, and from the flesh.
4. “*Jerusalem above*” is a reference to heaven - cp. *Philippians 3:20; Hebrews 12:22-24* – the foretaste of heaven that exists in the church.
5. The consummation of this foretaste will be in the eternal state – *Revelation 21:10ff.*
6. Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1 – “*For it is written, ‘Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear’ ...*” – a reference corresponding to the joy of Sarah who gave birth to the Promised One.

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 126.

7. The joy is evident: “break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.”
8. In Isaiah, it is a reference to the return from exile and here it refers to those who come out of exile from sin to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

III. THE MAINTAINING OF PRESTIGE – 4:28-5:1

A. The Position of Prestige – v. 28

1. Paul now applies the analogy – saying that “you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise.”
2. His point is that we are not the children of bondage, slaves of the law, but freeman sons of promise.
3. Our spiritual lives are such that we have been redeemed – set free from the sin brought on by the law.
4. We are sons to whom all has been given as an inheritance – joint heirs with the Son of God Himself – cp. [*Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 4:7*](#).

B. The Persecution of Prestige – vv. 29-30

1. Our privileged position causes hostility from those who are enslaved – “But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also.”
2. The legalist or Judaizer is intolerant of those who are reliant on Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone.
3. The hostility is so great that the two cannot dwell together as was demonstrated by Sarah’s insistence that Abraham cast out Hagar and Ishmael because of their treatment of them both – *“But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.’”*
4. Those who put themselves under the covenant of Sinai will not receive the inheritance at all.
5. *“So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.”* – this is the conclusion of the matter – the Galatians were born of the Spirit instead of the flesh and were therefore children of promise.

C. The Perseverance of Prestige – 5:1

1. Finally, given that they are sons of the freewoman, *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free ...”*
2. Jesus liberated us from the bondage of Sinai (Law) by fulfilling the Law altogether so that we could enjoy *“freedom.”*
3. Understand that going back and behave like Ishmael in bondage, excluded from the freedom of the Promise and striving according to the flesh is inexcusable considering what Christ has done for us.
4. The Galatians must stand fast in their freedom to honor Christ –

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“therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.”

5. Those who are redeemed through the work of Christ are able to “*keep standing firm*” in the grace of Christ.

The freedom provided by grace is better than the shame produced by the Law.

