

MBC – 7/3/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Who’s Your Mother?”
(The Gospel in the OT)
Galatians 4:21-31

Let’s jump right into our study of Galatians. In this letter, Paul is not just contrasting two different ways to be saved – he is contrasting two different ways to *live* – one is by law, the other is by grace. One is in the power of the flesh, the other is in the power of the Holy Spirit. One is all about your efforts, your performance – the other is all about Jesus, and what He did for sinners. One lives in bondage, guilt, and fear – the other lives in sweet Gospel freedom! In our passage this morning, Paul goes back to Genesis and finds a story that illustrates this contrast—

- Galatians 4:21–31 ²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For 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.” ²⁸Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰But 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.” ³¹So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. And—
- Galatians 5:1 ¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

* * *

The greatest question in the world is this: “If you were to die tonight and stand before God, how do you know He would let you into heaven?” There are only two ways to answer this question: one is to point to yourself and what you have done – the other is to point to Jesus and what He has done, and that is the only answer God will accept!

Trusting in Jesus Christ *alone* connects us to God--apart from any good things we have done. And we can go further: we must *renounce* all good works, and any self-effort or self-achievement, to trust in Jesus alone. That’s what Paul said about his own conversion—

- Philippians 3:8–9 . . . For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things (all his religious achievements) and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Beloved, God accepts and forgives – those who trust in His Son. And He adds no asterisks, or fine print. He doesn’t consider one good deed you have done, or all the years of ministry and sacrifice that might

follow your initial faith, and neither does He consider any of your sins that follow. He only looks at His Son's obedient life, and death on the cross, and if you trust in Jesus, God makes you His child!

*So here in Galatians, Paul is so passionate when he says to his dear brothers and sisters: "Do not listen to anyone who says, "Oh, yes, believe in Jesus. But also, you must _____." No! Trust in Jesus, period. And keep living in that sweet Gospel freedom – don't let anyone squinty-eyed legalist put you in bondage again to man-made rules!

Paul says to these false-teaching legalists, "You want to put others back under the law? Well let me take you to a story in Genesis that illustrates the contrast between law and grace. It's the story of Abraham and his two sons." Let's look at it—

I. Two mothers and two sons.

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

Let's refresh our memories here: God called Abram back in Gen.12. He told him to leave his country and go to the promised land. God promised to give this land to his descendants, and He promised to bless all the peoples with salvation, through him. But this was a promise with a problem: Abram was childless, and Sarah was unable to have children.

This was a very painful trial for this couple. Gen. 13:2 says that "*Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold*" but no kids, and in that culture, wealth was measured by the size of a man's family. And to add insult to injury, his *name* was a constant reminder that the promise was not fulfilled. Abram means "father of many!" One writer described it like this—

When the caravans of the rich merchants came into the land, either from the north or from the south, they stopped at Abram's wells. The servants of Abram took care of the needs of the camels and the servants of the traders. Food was sold to the travelers. And in the evening time the merchants would have come to Abram's tent to pay their respects. The questions would have followed a set pattern. How old are you? Who are you? How long have you been here? When the trader had introduced himself, Abram would be forced to name himself: *Abram, father of many.*

It must have happened a hundred times, and each time more galling than the time before. "Oh, Father of many! Congratulations! And how many sons do you have?" "Well, none." And, there must have been the half concealed snort of humor: "The Father of many is the father of none!"

Abram and Sarah couldn't imagine how God was going to fulfill His promise. In ch.15, Abram offers God a solution—

- Genesis 15:2–3 "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus (his servant)?" ³And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."

He's saying, "Lord let me help You outta this jam: Let my servant, Eliezer, be the son of the promise! Make *him* the heir!" So God said, "Let Me be more specific"—

- Genesis 15:4 "This man will *not* be your heir; but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."

Remember, Sara can't have kids, but the heir will be Abe's own son. What God is saying is: "I'm going to fulfill My promise My way – supernaturally – so that I get the glory!" You can almost hear what Jesus said about salvation: "*With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible!*"

- But Abe and Sara are still thinking in earthly, fleshly terms. To Sara, who is barren, the idea that she would have this child of promise was *inconceivable* (get it?) In ch.16. Sara comes up with *her* idea to help God out. She says to her hubby: "Lookit, God said it would be *your* son, He didn't say it had to be *mine*—go into my maid, Hagar, and have a son through her!"

Bad plan. Fleshly thinking. I would never give this as marriage counsel! But Abe did it, and the result was **Ishmael**. Abe assumes that he will be the heir and the child of promise.

But in ch.17, God gets even *more* specific, and says to Abe, "No, it won't be Eliezer, or Ishmael, I'm doing things *My* way – the son of My promise will come through you and Sarah. It will be a miracle baby!" Listen to Abe's reaction—

- Genesis 17:17–19 ¹⁷Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" (Let's get serious here God – it's Ishmael, right?) ¹⁹God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. *I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his seed after him.*

So Abe's firstborn son – the one who would normally be the heir, was Ishmael, born through Sarah's servant, Hagar. But God said that the heir, the child of promise, would be Isaac, born through Abe's wife, Sara. And back to Galatians, here is the point that he is making: These two boys from two different mothers, had—

II. Two different conceptions.

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

Ishmael was the result of human reasoning. Fleshly self-reliance. *Abe tried to bring down the blessing of God by his own efforts!* But God said, "That's not the way My promise will be fulfilled." He fulfilled His promise to Abe miraculously – *supernaturally* – so that there would be no ground for human boasting.

- Now you see how this story is an illustration of two ways to seek salvation: You can lean on your own fleshly reasoning, and your own efforts – or you can renounce your own efforts and trust *wholly* in God to do what you cannot do.

*Beloved, salvation is not the result of human effort, or a human decision: it is a miracle of God! Your new birth was a miracle, like Isaac's birth – like Jesus' birth. You were "*born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.*"

You had *nothing* to do with your salvation—

- The Trinity worked it all out without consulting you: before creation, the Father chose you to be His child, the Son paid the price of your redemption, before you were born; and the HS grabbed you and gave you the new birth before you even knew what hit you! So the next time you look into a mirror say to yourself, “I am a Christian and I had nothing to do with it!”

Back to our fascinating story—

God brought about His promise to Abe (a promise of salvation for the world), through Isaac, the miracle child, through his descendant, Jesus Christ (another miracle child!) – all to show that salvation is a supernatural act of God – apart from any human reasoning, or effort. And Paul sees something even deeper in this story—

III. Two different covenants.

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

You can't understand your Bible until you understand these two covenants – your Bible is divided into the OT and NT, which means, OC and NC. The OC was the contract God had with His people (the Law of Moses). It was based on Law, and all the responsibility was put on man: “Thou shalt, thou shalt not. . .” 633 laws. And the purpose of the Law was to confront God's people with their sinfulness and their need for His mercy. It couldn't bring salvation because no one could keep it perfectly. It showed what God required, but offered no help to do it.

But the NC was predicted by Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it pointed to Jesus Christ, who came and fulfilled the OC on behalf of those who would trust in Him. In this NC, God says, “You couldn't keep your part of the bargain, but My Son kept it in your place. Instead of “Thou, shalt – thou shalt not,” in the NC, God says, “I will, I will, I will . . .” We heard it earlier in Heb.8—

- Hebrews 8:10 I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . ¹²For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”

What's our part of this covenant? *Trust in Jesus Christ!* Beloved, that is the contract God has with His people until Jesus returns. So how are Hagar and Sarah like the OC and the NC?

Hagar and her son, Ishmael, represent what happens when you rely on your own power to please God – it doesn't work, does it? When God gave the Law to Moses on Sinai, what was the people's response – do you remember?—

- Exodus 19:7–8 ⁷So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do!”

Really?? All 633 laws, perfectly? “Yeah, we got this God, no problemo. . .” That's where they went wrong. They should have said, “Oh Lord, You are holy and we are not! Have mercy on us and don't

impute our sins to us!” And some did say that! God had His remnant people in the OT who trusted Him for their salvation. But as a whole, the nation of Israel were the *spiritual children of Hagar* – children of the flesh instead children of the promise. They trusted in themselves instead of trusting in God—

- And back to Galatians, the Judaizers were just like those Israelites – they were those “*who still desired to be under the Law*” – instead of under grace. Their spiritual mother was Hagar and their older brother was Ishmael!

Sarah’s spiritual children are those who say, “It’s all God! I can’t birth myself. I can’t save myself. Oh God be merciful to me, the sinner!” Beloved, NC living is living by the Spirit! It’s a life of gratitude, and it is a life of Gospel freedom: what do I mean by **Gospel freedom**? I mean the freedom that comes from knowing that Jesus has fulfilled our covenant obligations, in our place! That frees us from the bondage of guilt and fear that comes from looking at our own spiritual performance. Instead we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ. Moses never said “Follow me!” But Jesus says, “Follow Me – and I will come and live in you and through you! I will give you a new heart and a new desire to obey Me and please Me.” And I’ve said before that “**You are truly free when you desire to do what you ought to do.**”

And Paul gives a final comparison and contrast—

IV. Present Jerusalem and Jerusalem above.

- ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; (that’s where Moses received the Law) she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.

So Hagar’s descendants through Ishmael eventually became the Arab peoples, including the modern-day Palestinians. They are sons of Abraham through Ishmael. But Paul says that the present Jerusalem – the unbelieving Jews at his time (physically, the children of Isaac) but they were the *spiritual children of Hagar* because they were still relying on their own works to get to heaven – and the result was that were enslaved to the Law and their own failure to keep it.

And this would include the Judaizers – who claimed to be Christians – but were still living under the Law. There were still in spiritual chains. They were the spiritual children of Hagar.

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

“The Jerusalem above” are the spiritual children of Sarah – children of grace, children of promise – like Isaac was. Sarah’s spiritual children all had a supernatural birth too. The writer of Hebrews sees this same contrast between the place of the Law – Mt. Sinai, and the spiritual Jerusalem, called Mt. Zion—

- Hebrews 12:18–24 ¹⁸For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” ²¹Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” ²²But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

And I know this is deep stuff, but God is telling us this morning that Abraham and Sarah's spiritual children *are* this new, heavenly Jerusalem—

- Revelation 21:9–11 ⁹Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." (That is the church – God's people, right?) ¹⁰And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me *the holy city Jerusalem* coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (Beloved, we are that glorious city!)

Back to Galatians, Paul quotes Isaiah to say that says that Abe and Sarah will have many, many spiritual children—

- ²⁷For it is written, "Rejoice, O barren one (like Sarah) 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."

The reason this heavenly family will be so large is that it will include Gentiles: "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." And not one of them will be there because they kept the law, but because they trusted Christ.

So this story of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac, and Hagar and Ishmael has some personal, practical applications—

V. The personal applications.

1.) We are recipients of God's promise.

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

Christian, you are a miracle child, like Isaac. You had a supernatural birth through the Spirit of God. And that makes you a child of the *promise* God gave Abraham, 4,000 years ago – the promise of salvation and eternal life in the new heaven and new earth. You live under a glorious New Covenant, sealed with the blood of Jesus. So remind yourself of who you are when you are tempted to act like your spiritual *step-brother*, Ishmael, and fall back into legalism!

2.) We should expect persecution.

- ²⁹But 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.

In Genesis, Ishmael persecuted Isaac, and we still see it today, don't we? The descendants of Ishmael – modern day Arabs and Palestinians have never gotten along with Isaac's descendants, the Jews! But Paul is talking here about the *spiritual* descendants of Ishmael and Isaac: Christians have always been persecuted by our spiritual step-brothers – legalists who still live under rules and external performance as their path to righteousness – and they can't stand to see people who are free in Christ—

- Luther saw this in his day in the RC Catholic church, persecuting and burning at the stake, true Christians for holding to the Gospel of grace.

And Ishmael still picks on Isaac: legalists are everywhere, judging, criticizing, finding fault. They tell us that grace leads to sin:

- “You can’t tell people that God doesn’t keep track of their sins anymore! They will go wild. You have to threaten people with hell and judgment. It’s fear and guilt that keep people in line. And you can’t trust the Holy Spirit to lead His people! That’s too heeby-jeeby. They need rules for everything – and the rules need to be the same for everyone – don’t talk about “grey areas.” And stay away from that Romans ch.14 about weaker and stronger Christians and letting people follow their own conscience! Make everything black and white. Tell people what to do, that way they don’t have to think!”

And some of you know that I’m not exaggerating! Legalists insist that you follow their rules or you aren’t spiritual. Someone said a legalist is the person who would have rebuked the Apostle Paul for not using the KJ Bible! And they get very upset when Christians are having too much fun—

Years ago, when Janice and I were involved in the College ministry down at Grace Community Church there were two brothers who started coming – from a very fundamentalist Baptist church. BTW – some people wonder what a **fundamentalist** is: It’s a person who has no **fun**, too much **damn**, and not enough **mental**.

Anyway, we tried to be nice to these two brothers even though they were so grim in their leisure suits with the KJV under their arms. They looked like they had been weaned on dill pickles. One Sunday it was announced that there would be a bowling and pizza night – everyone was invited. Well these two brothers came unglued: “Bowling is a sin, just like playing cards and going to movies! If you go bowling, you don’t love Jesus!” Seriously. So they went to the College pastor and complained to him. How did he respond? He told them, “Repent of your legalism, we’re going bowling!” Right answer.

Beloved, when the legalists come after you, you just keep living in the freedom of the Gospel!

3.) We will receive the inheritance.

- ³⁰But 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.”

Don’t cave in when you are judged and criticized by pinhead legalists – “*if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise,*” you will inherit salvation, and they won’t. You will spend eternity in the new heaven and new earth – and the way things are lookin’, it won’t be too long!

4.) We need to fight to stay free!

- ³¹So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (Who’s your mother this morning? Did you receive the new birth through all of your working and trying to be good and religious – anyone? Or were you born of the Spirit, through faith in Christ alone?) Who’s your

mother? Then Paul says: ¹For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Paul goes all Braveheart here, doesn't he? "*Freedom!*" But he meant what he said: When legalists judge you and intimidate you, don't 'go along just to get along.' "Well, I suppose I can give up my freedom and submit to their rules if that will make everyone happy in the church." No! That's what Peter did in Antioch when the Judaizers showed up and he stopped fellowshiping with his Gentile brothers and sisters. Maybe he thought he was just keeping the peace, but Paul rebuked him publicly for caving into legalism.

Here's the thing with legalists: once you give in to them, they want more and more of your freedom. They are never satisfied: "Well now that you have joined us, you should start dressing like this, and stop doing this and that, and change your diet and your entertainment – and your pastor is nice, but he doesn't really understand how Christian families should live, so start listening to *our* teacher and reading *his* books. . ." And again, I'm not exaggerating. . .

- The gold standard for legalism in Jesus' day was the Pharisees. They tried to put their rules and their guilt on everyone, and Jesus put them in their place, big-time – He called them: hypocrites, sons of hell, blind guides, fools, robbers, self-indulgent, white-washed tombs, serpents, vipers, persecutors and murderers. He pronounced 7 woes on them, and He said that they were headed for hell and taking multitudes with them.

Wasn't Jesus *much* harder on Pharisees than He was on prostitutes? Both were sinners, but the Pharisees added the sin of hypocrisy: they tried to *hide* their sinful hearts with a façade of self-righteous religion. And Jesus said

- Matthew 23:13 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.

Who's your mother this morning? Are you a child of the slave woman or the free woman? Do you live in bondage to rules and regulations because of guilt and fear, always worried about what people think of you? Or do you live in the freedom of the Spirit because the Lord Jesus has paid for your sins, and satisfied the demands of God in your place? Do you sense a new desire to love and please God out of gratitude instead of fear? Paul said in—

- Romans 8:2 ²And because you belong to Him, the power of the Spirit of life has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.

The Gospel is your spiritual *Emancipation Proclamation* – so live like it! Charles Wesley wrote about it—

My chains fell off, my heart was free. I rose, went forth, and followed Thee!
Amazing love, how can it be? That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?