

Big Idea - Union with Christ makes you a child of the free woman, not the slave woman

Opening Illustration - Leaving behind Egypt

Before we jump back to Genesis to look at Paul's own allegorical reading of Abraham's two sons, let's think about Abraham's descendants a little later in the story — specifically Israel in the wilderness after they have been freed from the bondage of Egypt.

Numbers 11:5 “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.”

The Israelites spent over 200 years enslaved in the land of Egypt, and as we know were delivered by God through a series of plagues, delivered from the hands of Pharaoh's

chariots by crossing through the Red Sea on dry land, and provided for by God as they wandered in the wilderness. Yet as they sojourned in the wilderness, as they wandered this barren land, they longed for the slave master that they could see and resented the invisible, spiritual master who set them free.

How often do you long for your old master? It could be cigarettes, alcohol, pornography, or career progression — slavery wears many masks. How often have you desired to find your comfort and freedom in something material and meaningless instead of in the freedom bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. Like the Israelites in the Exodus, we must cross through the waters of baptism into the new life of Christ. Unlike the Israelites in the Exodus, we must resist the fleshly urge to return to our former masters and cling to the person of Jesus Christ to equip us for freedom in the Spirit!

Galatians 4:21–5:1 ESV

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in

slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 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 you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 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. 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.” So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

A typological allegory

This week, I want to begin by discussing the literary device that Paul utilizes in this section: allegory. Or more accurately for our modern language, Paul utilizes typological allegory. Let me explain:

Allegory is a literary device that utilizes “the expression of truths or generalization about human existence by means of symbolic figures and actions.” It is:

Dictionary of Theological Terms *Allegory*

a figure of speech in which a description of one thing is

given under the image of another

How do we know that Paul is reading Genesis 16 allegorically? Well, he directly states “Now this may be interpreted allegorically.”

What we must note, however, is that Paul’s allegory does not function like allegorical interpretation that we see within the Alexandrian school of hermeneutics, but instead we see Paul interpret Hagar and Sarah as types of those who are children of the flesh or children of the promise. Baker’s Dictionary of Theology defines a type as:

Dictionary of Theological Terms Type, Typology

“A type is a shadow cast on the pages of OT history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the NT revelation”

On the one hand, this passage is an analogy as it takes one thing that has a clear meaning in context and separates it from the text to apply a new meaning. On the other hand, Paul’s applied reading is rooted in the Old Testament and fits perfectly within redemptive salvation history. For this reason, it is best to understand the text as typological allegory.

The Typology

Galatians 4:21–23 ESV

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

Galatians 4:28–30 ESV

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 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. 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.”

Paul clearly defines the types in the Genesis 16 narrative revealed in the new covenant of grace through the Gospel of Christ:

Child of the slave woman

The child of the slave woman is a child born according to the flesh. Let's unpack that:

Abraham is 75 years old when he first receives the promise in Genesis 12. He is 85 years old when God makes a covenant to seal that promise with him in Genesis 15. After a decade of waiting, Abraham is a bit anxious about the

fulfilment of the promise, because his wife Sarah is 10 years younger than him and well past the age of bearing children. So, Abraham and Sarah utilize an ancient near eastern custom for couples in this situation without an heir. Sarah takes one of her servants and gives that servant to her husband as a concubine. Her servant's name was Hagar, and she bears Abraham a son named Ishmael. Instead of trusting God in the promise, Abraham and Sarah try to take measures into their own hands.

This is a shadow of the reality of what the false teachers in Galatia are trying to convince the Galatians to do. Turn away from the promise and receive the inheritance of the promise through the law — through works of the flesh.

Child of the free woman

On the other hand, we have the child of the free woman, who is born according to the promise:

At the age of 99, God gives Abraham the covenant sign of circumcision with a renewal of the promise in Genesis 17. God says, at this time next year, you will bear a son by your wife, Sarah. Abraham and Sarah, at the age of 100 and 90 respectively, had a son named Isaac. He was the son according to God's promise. In the same way, all who are born of the Spirit by faith are children of the promise and not of the flesh.

Cast out the slave woman and her child

This brings us to a culturally difficult text to read: Galatians 4:30 “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.””

This echoes the words of Sarah in Genesis 21:10 “So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.””

The words of Sarah become a type of the words of God. Sarah tells Abraham to get this other woman and her son out of her house. Something that Abraham finds difficult to do, going back to the ancient near eastern customs that forbid casting out your concubine and children of a concubine. Yet these words point forward to the word of God to his children of promise: Only those born of the free woman may receive the inheritance. In other words, only those born of the Spirit by faith will receive eternal life.

This may sound harsh, especially for Hagar and Ishmael, but let me reassure you that God promised Hagar to provide for her and Ishmael, and He did!

The Allegory of two covenants

Galatians 4:24–27 ESV

Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. 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.”

Paul breaks these types into two allegorical covenants. The first one is the Mosaic covenant at Sinai, and the second is the new covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem.

The covenant of Sinai

The Mosaic covenant was the law, which enslaves and condemns. If you need more about this idea, refer to the previous two weeks.

The law enslaves and had the purpose of increasing sins in order to point one to the need for the promise — the need for grace, mercy, and Jesus Christ. To those Jews who proclaimed the need for circumcision’s horror, Paul lumps them in with Hagar, the slave woman, instead of Sarah, the freed woman. The Jewish people who take pride in being

the offspring of Isaac now take offense as Paul points out that they are spiritually offspring of Ishmael who persecuted Isaac.

The covenant of the heavenly Jerusalem

The true children of the free woman are the ones who were born according to promise, that is by faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ sealed with new birth in the Holy Spirit. These children do not belong to the earthly Jerusalem but the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal city of God!

Therefore

Galatians 4:31 ESV

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

Wrapping up Paul's typological allegory, Paul grabs his audience's attention with a "therefore."

Many of you may know the popular rule of reading Scripture: "Whenever you see the word therefore in Scripture, you should ask yourself: what is it there for?"

Paul brings together his entire argument into this inference: we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

You have two options: You can either be the child of the free woman by being born of the promise, or you can be a child of the slave woman by being born of the flesh.

You can either receive the free gift of the promise by grace through faith or you can give it all you got to find yourself damned to hell enslaved to sin.

But you were freed to be free!

Galatians 5:1 *ESV*

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

You were not left to your own effort or works, but you were bought by an immeasurable price. You were purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ!

You were not set free to long for the cucumbers, leeks, and melons of Egypt like the Israelites in the wilderness. You were not set free to remain in bondage to shame or guilt, or remain enslaved to addiction or trauma. No! Jesus Christ has set you free so that you may stand in the freedom of the cross! This does not mean that you will not continue to struggle with sin. Martin Luther taught that Christians are simultaneously justified and yet still sinners. We will not escape from sin completely in this life, but we are freed from

the bondage of sin in this life.

By the work of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are freed to stand in Christ on this journey of sanctification. Do not return again to a yoke of slavery by giving yourself over to a life of sinfulness in the name of grace.

All of your sins have been paid for in Christ, so stand in the freedom of Christ, but know that if you use Christ as the reason that you give yourself fully over to your sin, then you are not standing in Christ at all. You are enslaved to sin and need to repent, cry out for God's deliverance, and live in the freedom of Christ.

Freedom does not mean you have the license to do whatever you want. What appears to be an act of freedom often becomes a willful submission to the yoke of slavery. Cigarettes, alcohol, pornography, gambling, and the list goes on and on. All begin with an act of liberty to do what you want, yet each can become a slippery slope into addiction and slavery.

In this life, you won't enjoy perfection. Every one of us will struggle with sin of one kind or another, but we do not have to be enslaved to it for we live by grace for God's purposes. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Live under the banner of grace and fight back against temptation and live in the freedom of knowing that you are forgiven and a child

of promise regardless of whether you had a good day or a bad day.

Union with Christ makes you a child of the free woman, not the slave woman. You have been freed to be free.