

The Apostle Paul was shocked that the church he planted in Galatia had turned from grace to works. This letter was an attempt to get them to come to their senses. He shared his testimony of how grace captured him while on the way to persecute Christians. He showed from the Scriptures how salvation has always been by grace. He explained that the promise to Abraham that his descendant, Jesus, would bless the world preceded the laws of Moses and was never overridden by the law. And in this chapter, he explained that the law was a guardian until the Jesus came to bring them into full sonship making them heirs of God. Now no longer under the tutor, the law, they are free to follow the Holy Spirit and let Christ live in them.

Pastor Todd Wilson introduces this passage with the following comments. *Freedom... comes to those who hear God's Word and respond with obedient faith. Jesus puts it this way: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31,32).*

Christians, however, easily forget this truth. We may affirm a love for the Bible yet fail to listen to what it says; or we articulate a desire to obey Scripture, yet remain ignorant of its teaching.

As a result, a very sad and potentially dangerous situation can develop. A person can think he's gaining greater and greater freedom because of his fidelity to the Bible when actually he is plunging himself deeper and deeper into the bondage of self-deception because of his ignorance of the Bible.

This was the mistake of the Pharisees. Presuming to be mighty in the Scriptures, they were pseudo-Biblical at best. Recall how Jesus chided them for their dutiful observance of the Law that was little more than a sophisticated effort to downplay, if not altogether avoid, the real heart of the Law (Matthew 23:23ⁱ). To be sure, the Pharisees could strain out exegetical gnats with the best of them. The problem is, in the process they swallowed camels whole!ⁱⁱ Instead of this legal obedience to the Word, we need a knowledge of God's Word that is directed and illuminated by the Holy Spirit.

Our text today continues Paul's argument from Scripture but in an allegorical way. While this was a common Hebrew way to preach from Scripture, it is probably the most abused method of preaching when it is not inspired by the Holy Spirit. Paul's knowledge of the Scriptures and willingness to let the Holy Spirit teach him gave him rich insights.

Jesus' parables are a form of allegory, from fictional stories, though sometimes based in actual events, to practical applications in real life. We can be sure they were inspired from biblical themes as they came from Jesus who only spoke what the Father told Him (John 8:28ⁱⁱⁱ). In a similar way, Paul was so steeped in the Scriptures and filled with the Spirit that we can be sure his allegory was inspired. He took the Biblical account of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate a point he saw throughout Scripture. That is the important point in making an allegory from Scripture; it must give the same message that is clearly seen in other Scriptures. Only then we can be sure we are being accurate and not doing violence to the intended meaning.

My book on Jesus Concealed in the Old Testament has numerous allegories of Old Testament characters that prefigured the life of Jesus. I was comfortable making the point

because Jesus said the law and prophets were written about Him (Luke 24:44^{iv}). Paul is sure that this analogy is faithful to God's Word, because of the Scriptural proofs he has given in this letter and in his letter to the Romans.

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

Galatians 4:21 Paul used an allegorical reading of Sarah and Hagar to teach the Gentiles who were considering being circumcised in an effort to please God. He was trying to help them see that we are only free from the laws of Moses when we receive the promise by faith. He started out by saying, "Okay, you want the law, then listen to what the law teaches us." When Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he realized he had previously missed the very heart of Scripture, that the Messiah would suffer for our sins, and that faith in God's provision is the only means of being right with God. Now he sees the Galatians missing this same truth and desires for them see what he saw in God's Word.

²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. Galatians 4:22 To understand Paul's allegory we need a basic understanding of the account of Abraham and Sarah. God promised Abraham an heir who would multiply into a great nation (Genesis 12:2^v). But as he grew older and Sarah was past the time of conceiving, she resorted to a common practice in the world at that time. She asked for a child through her slave Hagar. He would be considered Sarah's son and be the heir of Abraham. Instead of trusting God to bring about the promise, Abraham agreed and had a son through Hagar (Genesis 16:2,3^{vi}). Years later, God told Abraham that it was Sarah who would have the son of promise. Sarah was listening from inside the tent door and laughed. God said the last laugh would be on her having a son at the age of 90. Then God asked if anything is too hard for Him (Genesis 18:9-14^{vii}).

As an aside, the Lord in this passage, who is recognized as God (Genesis 18:10^{viii}), is the pre-incarnate Christ. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God who is an unseen spirit (Colossians 1:15^{ix}; John 4:24^x). Even Jews recognize that God is invisible but was somehow seen in this being. They call Him the Prince of the Countenances.

Sarah did have a son and named him Isaac. The son of the slave woman Hagar, whose name was Ishmael, was years older than Isaac. He mocked little Isaac during a party that celebrated Isaac being weaned. Sarah witnessed this and insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be sent away (Genesis 21:9,10^{xi}). Abraham reluctantly agreed. While God blessed Ishmael, the son of promise was Isaac. With that background let us continue our passage for today.

²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Galatians 4:23 The conception of Ishmael was completely natural, but that of Isaac was miraculous - by faith in God's promise (Hebrews 11:11^{xii}). It came about by divine initiative and not man's efforts. In Matthew 3:9^{xiii}, John the Baptist refutes natural heritage being anything special since God could raise up from stones sons of Abraham. In other words, God could take the dead womb of Sarah and bring forth an heir. That was shocking to the Jews of John's day, for they believed all the natural descendants of Abraham would be in the kingdom of God. Jesus declared that even natural born Jews can be sons of the devil (John 8:44^{xiv}; Romans 4:16^{xv}).

Natural heritage has nothing to do with our relationship with God. Everyone is born into this world in a fallen condition. We all inherit the fallen nature of Adam (Romans 5:12^{xvi}). Jesus said the one who practices sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34^{xvii}). This sets up the allegory Paul is using. Ishmael was born naturally and represents fallen man. Isaac was miraculously born and represents those who are born again through the promise, which is the promise God gave to Abraham to bless the world through one born in Isaac's lineage, which is Christ (Genesis 26:4^{xviii}). One was born a slave. The other was born free.

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. Galatians 4:24,25 Paul extrapolates from the two kinds of sons. One was a physical natural birth as a slave, and the other through a promise by grace through faith. One the work of natural man and the other the work of God.

Paul then makes another analogy. Hagar as a slave is used as a symbol of the law given on Mount Sinai, which was considered to be a yoke which required human effort, and is what we all are naturally born under. Slaves are told what to do and not do. That is what the law does. The Mount Sinai area was inhabited by sons of Ishmael who were known as sons of Hagar. We are all born like Ishmael. We all start off as slaves under the law of do's and don'ts. Paul then connects that with Jerusalem of that day in bondage to the old covenant, obligated by human effort to obey the civil and religious rules.

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. Galatians 4:26 Human initiative only produces human results. Try as we may we will fail to live to God's standards and therefore we will never be right with God and have inner peace. But there is also a city of peace for those who are born-again according to the promise by faith, the heavenly Jerusalem. Like Isaac their birth is supernatural. It includes the people of faith who have gone before us. This is the church, our mother so to speak. In this allegory She is the princess, Sarah. As the bride of Christ, we love Jesus (spiritually of course) and that results in new believers whom we are to nurture to maturity in Christ.

I've been asked by a feminist, "Where is the mother in the godhead?" Well, she is not a part of the godhead but is the helpmeet by marriage. She is still being prepared for the wedding, sanctified, and conformed to the image of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-27^{xix}). The world doesn't like the word "submission." But followers of Jesus know the joy and fulfillment found in submitting to Christ our loving Lord. Paul explained in the letter to the Ephesians that marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, which consists of all who believe by faith (Ephesians 5:31,32^{xx}).

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." Galatians 4:27 Isaiah 54:1 is quoted to show that the people of faith are reproducing others of faith. They may have died without a husband or physical children, but they are spiritually productive. There are two women in this quote. The barren one ended up with more children. It was partially fulfilled in the return to the Promised Land, but there is a greater fulfillment under the new covenant.

Who is your mama, the world or the church? Are you a slave or free? In our submission to our Lord and His words we find real freedom. Jesus' last words on earth instructed us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey everything He commanded them (Matthew 28:19,20^{xxi}). Life in Jesus obeying His words brings freedom from their old nature, freedom from the bondage of sin and fear of judgment. It is also freedom from the Jewish laws to do God's will at the leading of the Spirit, and to lead others to that freedom.

²⁸ *Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.* Galatians 4:28 Here is the application for the Galatians and for all of us who try to be right with God merely by doing good works. We can be like Isaac, born spiritually, miraculously, by faith in God's promise into new life, the life of Christ in us. The promises throughout the Old Testament came to pass in Jesus and the new covenant in His blood. By faith we accept the truth of those promises, receive forgiveness, and are miraculously born anew, children of the promise. In saying this, Paul was expressing faith that the brothers and sisters in Galatia, though presently misled by false teachers, were going to receive what he was writing to them and return to faith in the all-sufficiency of what Jesus has accomplished for us.

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.* Galatians 4:29 Ishmael persecuted Isaac. The Jews who lived under the law were persecuting those born of the Spirit, the Christian community. It was the Jews who used Rome to kill apostles and harass them. They would have killed them themselves if allowed, and sometimes did anyway. Remember Paul's old life as Saul and his execution of Stephen, as well as his mission to round up Christians and drag them to prison. Ishmael was the half-brother of Isaac. So also, our half-brothers, religious people, the nominal church, attack us.

The greatest threat to the gospel today comes from denominational leaders and seminaries that have turned faith into merely good works of man while denying the inspiration of Scripture and salvation through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross. They inoculate people against true faith in Christ by presenting a watered-down gospel that basically says, "Be good and if there is a heaven God will probably let you in along with everyone else." They call us fanatics, radicals, literalists, Bible thumpers, and uneducated (because we don't follow their criticisms of Scripture). I am glad to be called a Bible-thumper, because it means that the Word of God has made them aware of the sin they don't want to give up. That is the first step toward salvation. I am not implying that we should be harshly confrontational. We should always speak the truth in love as led by the Holy Spirit with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15^{xxii}).

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."* Galatians 4:30 Though Ishmael is loved, God allowed him to be cast out with Hagar as Sarah wished, for he was not to have any of the inheritance God promised to Isaac. Paul is calling for the Galatians to remove the false teacher from their fellowship. This is a warning to us to see that our faith in what Christ has done for us is genuine. None of us wants to hear, "Depart from me; I never knew you!" -Matthew 7:22,23^{xxiii} Those to whom Jesus spoke those words said they had done mighty works in His name, but that is where religious works end up on that final day (See also Genesis 17:18-21^{xxiv}; 21:12,13^{xxv}.)

The Jews applied the casting out of Ishmael to that of Gentiles, but Ishmael was a son of Abraham. Paul made a new application by saying it applies to all who are not born again of faith- a miraculous, supernatural birth, which includes many Jews. In other words, the believers in Galatia needed to cast out the Judaizers who proclaim works as a means of salvation. If they do not, the Judaizers will prevail in influencing the church to rely on works rather than faith and man's initiative rather than God's.

This problem will always be with us. Men and women have what they think are good ideas that everyone must do if they are REAL Christians. Pastors come up with methods that they call their vision and try to get the church on board to do some "good" thing. But what can come out of the works of the flesh but fleshly results? It may look good on the outside, but there is no fruit that remains. There is busyness and sacrifice, but if it is not the direction of the Spirit, it is a temporal thing and therefore meaningless at best. Only things brought about by God's initiative, led of the Spirit moving in the hearts of believers will produce fruit that remains.

³¹ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. Galatians 4:31 We are like Isaac, a child that is a product of faith, persecuted and mocked but destined to inherit all things (Romans 8:17^{xxvi}), seeking a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:16^{xxvii}). We have inherited the promises to people of faith and are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22^{xxviii}; Revelation 3:12^{xxix}; 21:2^{xxx}). Later in this letter Paul calls us the Israel of God (Galatians 6:16^{xxxi}). This all boils down to works *or* grace through faith. **Every other religion is focused on works, which is man dependent. True Christianity is Jesus dependent.** We are free in Christ to be led of the Spirit! We walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7^{xxxii}). We count on the accomplished work of Jesus on the cross and not our own goodness. But then we also experience the good works that God in advance had planned for us to do by the power of the Spirit (Ephesians 2:10^{xxxiii}). *He* does those good works through us. We operate in the strength of the Lord and the power of His might (Zechariah 4:6^{xxxiv}).

Freedom that Jesus and Paul are talking about is knowing the truth and letting it guide us. It is letting the Holy Spirit lead us and Christ live in and through us. It is the assurance that our sin debt is paid. It is being who God created us to be as we mature into the likeness of our Savior and Lord, Christ Jesus!

Questions

- 1 What is Pastor Wilson's definition of freedom? Jesus?
- 2 What is the danger of preaching by allegories?
- 3 Why would Paul be sure it was a faithful allegory?
- 4 Review the account of Ishmael and Isaac?
- 5 What analogy is made regarding Hagar and Sarah?
- 6 What saying of John the Baptist relates to this?
- 7 Which mother relates to which covenant?
- 8 Who is the mother of the follower of Jesus?
- 9 What is the analogy of Hagar being cast out?
- 10 How do works sneak into the church today?

11 What is Jesus and Paul's definition of freedom?

ⁱ **Matthew 23:23 (ESV)**

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.

ⁱⁱ Todd Wilson, Preaching the Word- Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living (4:21)

ⁱⁱⁱ **John 8:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ So Jesus said to them, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me.

^{iv} **Luke 24:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."

^v **Genesis 12:2 (ESV)**

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

^{vi} **Genesis 16:2-3 (ESV)**

² And Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife.

^{vii} **Genesis 18:9-14 (ESV)**

⁹ They said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "She is in the tent."

¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him.

¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah.

¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

¹³ The LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?'"

¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son."

^{viii} **Genesis 18:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ The LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. (LORD in this verse is YHWH!)

^{ix} **Colossians 1:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

^x **John 4:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

^{xi} **Genesis 21:9-10 (ESV)**

⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.

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."

^{xii} **Hebrews 11:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

^{xiii} **Matthew 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.

^{xiv} **John 8:44 (ESV)**

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

^{xv} **Romans 4:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his

offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

^{xvi} **Romans 5:12 (ESV)**

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

^{xvii} **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

^{xviii} **Genesis 26:4 (ESV)**

⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

^{xix} **Ephesians 5:25-27 (ESV)**

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

^{xx} **Ephesians 5:31-32 (ESV)**

³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

^{xxi} **Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)**

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

^{xxii} **1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

^{xxiii} **Matthew 7:22-23 (ESV)**

²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

^{xxiv} **Genesis 17:18-21 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before you!” ¹⁹ God 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 offspring after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year.”

^{xxv} **Genesis 21:12-13 (ESV)**

¹² But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named. ¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.”

^{xxvi} **Romans 8:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

^{xxvii} **Hebrews 11:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

^{xxviii} **Hebrews 12:22 (ESV)**

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,

^{xxix} **Revelation 3:12 (ESV)**

¹² The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

^{xxx} **Revelation 21:2 (ESV)**

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

^{xxx}ⁱ **Galatians 6:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ And as for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱ **2 Corinthians 5:7 (ESV)**

⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight.

^{xxx}ⁱⁱⁱ **Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

^{xxx}^{iv} **Zechariah 4:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.