

**GALATIANS - SERMON 21**  
**GALATIANS 4:21-31 — COMPARISON BETWEEN FREE & BOND**  
Pastor Max Doner, Sovereign Grace Bible Church Lebanon, Oregon  
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INTRODUCTION:

Read Galatians 4:21-31

Paul exposed the false teaching of the Judaizers in chapter 3 and early in chapter 4. He also exposed and corrected their false method in the second part of chapter 4. The false teachers not only propagated false doctrine, they also employed cultic methods in their dealings with the Galatians. They sought to isolate the Galatians from any teaching but their own. Having accomplished these two things Paul now sets out to correct the false esteem the Galatians had for the old covenant. This had caused them to award the old covenant supremacy over the Abrahamic covenant and its ultimate expression and fulfillment in the Lord Jesus Christ as the new covenant.

Paul's argument is that if the Galatians understood the true nature of the old covenant they would not be so eager to be brought back under its yoke. The old covenant functions by means of human effort resulting in bondage and rejection.

In contradiction to the old covenant the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant flow from the promise of God and are obtained by faith resulting in freedom and acceptance. Paul uses an allegory based upon an historical event in order to make his point, Abraham and his two wives.

OUTLINE:

- I THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THIS PASSAGE, vv 21-23.
  - II THE COVENANTAL APPLICATION OF THIS PASSAGE, vv 24-31.
- CONCLUSION

I THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THIS PASSAGE, vv 21-23

*Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise. . .*

The word *law* can be used in various ways. Paul has largely used it in this epistle in relationship to and equivalent to the old covenant. In verse 21 Paul is asking those who wish to be back under the old covenant whether they hear the *law*, but here the word refers to the whole of the Old Testament writings. The reason for this assumption is because in the subsequent verses Paul makes reference to the books of Genesis and Isaiah. Verse 21 could be appropriately read - *Tell me, you who desire to be under the old covenant, do you not hear the Scriptures?*

In verses 22-23 Paul writes - *For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise. . .*

Paul is saying that the beliefs and teachings in which the Galatians are engaging clearly contradict the Scriptures themselves. Paul will use the very Scriptures used by the Judaizers in order to disprove their false doctrine which had to do with the elevation of the old covenant above the Abrahamic covenant / new covenant.

The events recited in Galatians 4:21-23 are recorded in Genesis 15-21

Abraham was married to a barren wife Sarah though He had promised that Abraham would have many children (numerous and the sand by the sea).

In Genesis 15 Abraham expresses concern for his childless state in light of God's promise. God re-affirms His promise of a lineage to Abraham. Yet time went on and Abraham still had no children by Sarah.

In Genesis 16 Sarah devises an alternate plan for a lineage via Hagar her maidservant. Subsequently Ishmael was born to Abraham through Hagar.

In Genesis 17 God does not sanction or approve of this method used by Abraham and Sarah of begetting a lineage through Hagar. In verse 15 God changes Sarai's name to Sarah and re-affirms that she will bear a son through whom Abraham will have a lineage. Abraham actually laughs at this and pleads that God would permit Ishmael to be his heir. But God determines that Abraham through Sarah, not Hagar/Ishmael will have an heir.

In Genesis 21:1-3 Sarah conceives and bears a son in the set time. The son is named Isaac. In this chapter is the record of Ishmael mocking Isaac and Sarah observing this. Sarah asks Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael.

This is the history to which Paul refers in Galatians 4. These two sons illustrate to the two states into which men are born; bondage to sin or the state of sonship and inheritance with respect to those born of God. Ishmael was born of men and Isaac of God - figuratively.

One son was born by the work and plan of people. The other was born by the power and plan of God. This is to serve as an illustration of two methods of salvation, the one devised of man involving servitude (ultimately failing) and the other of God involving promise. This is the contrast between human gospel and human birth leading to human bondage the result of sin - and - the God-given gospel and a divine birth that leads to divine inheritance and sonship.

This is the point that Paul is making in verses 21-23. It is the historical background.

- II THE COVENANTAL APPLICATION OF THIS PASSAGE, vv 24-31.
  - A Paul contrasted the condition of the women.

Galatians 4:24-25

*. . . which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar; for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. . .*

In these verses Paul links three things together, calling them equivalent. Hagar, Mount Sinai (the events that occurred there), and the present city of Jerusalem (in Paul's day) are equivalent and illustrative of one another. Hagar illustrates the old covenant made at Mount Sinai under which Israel in its temple and life in the present Jerusalem still functioned.

These arrangements Paul associates with bondage, *which gives birth to bondage and is in bondage.*

#### 1 Hagar

The bondage of the old covenant consisted in its inflexible demands of *do and live* or the *soul that sinneth it shall die*. There were only two alternatives; perfectly keep the law of God and live or break the law of God and die. The old covenant brought with it a curse (Galatians 3:10). Peter said that the yoke of the old covenant was one that neither we nor the fathers could bear. It was a covenant based upon performance. Hagar is symbolic of the old covenant. Ishmael is symbolic of those who are under the old covenant. Both Hagar and the old covenant produced people who were slaves.

#### 2 Sarah

Galatians 4:26-27

*. . .but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: "Rejoice, O barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband."*

Here is the contrast to the old covenant. The *mother* referred to in these verses is Sarah. The condition of Sarah's son was freedom. Isaac was not born a slave but an heir and a freeman.

The quotation Paul cites in verse 24 is from Isaiah. Sarah, the free woman is linked to heaven which is the Jerusalem above and to the Abrahamic covenant which finds its fulfillment in all the nations of the earth being blessed by means of Jesus Christ in the new covenant.

Isaiah 54:1-3

*"Sing, O barren, you who have not borne (Sarah)! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman (Hagar - as the one who took the role of the married wife)," says the LORD (to Sarah). "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations (Gentiles), and make the desolate cities inhabited."*

Paul, by the Holy Spirit, is telling us that this quotation is a reference to Sarah and Hagar. Isaiah is prophesying through these two symbolic women. Sarah is the widow through her barren condition and Hagar is the married woman through her child. But under the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, part of which was

world-wide gospel blessing to Gentiles, Sarah would, in the end, have more children than Hagar.

In Galatians 4:27 Paul quoting from Isaiah states that the *desolate has many more children than she who has a husband . . .* Referring not to the physical seed of Abraham through Sarah, but the true seed through Christ and His offspring by spiritual birth.

Under the Abrahamic covenant in which world wide gospel blessing was to be realized through Christ the promised Seed, liberty, freedom, salvation, sonship, inheritance, and heaven which is the Jerusalem above is all the result.

Hebrews 12:18-24

*For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.*

In light of the contrast, which covenant do you Galatians want to be under? Do you wish to be under the old covenant which places you under bondage or the new covenant which brings freedom and entrance into the heavenly Jerusalem.

B Paul contrasted the condition of the children.

Galatians 4:28-31

*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*

Paul is saying that we, believers by faith alone, stand in the similar place and condition as did Isaac. We are saved by promise, born from above, and we are the recipients of blessings and inheritance. This is accomplished by us becoming Abraham's seed through Jesus Christ.

1 Believers are like Isaac. Believers are born of Christ similar to Isaac's birth to Sarah, by promise and by miracle.

Galatians 4:29

*But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now.*

- 2 As Isaac was persecuted so also are believers. In the Genesis account it is recorded that Ishmael mocked Isaac. The word *persecuted* (*mock*) is a negative term involving hatred and perhaps some physical harm. It is the same word found in Judges 16:25 where Samson was brought out for public humiliation.

Paul parallels the persecution of Isaac by Ishmael with the Judaizer's teaching among the Galatians. It is a form of persecution and mockery to return to the old covenant. The Judaizers are mocking Paul by teaching contrary to his true gospel

- 3 Mutually exclusive and incompatible systems of salvation cannot exist side by side. One of them must be cast out.

Galatians 4:30

*Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman."*

Abrahams could not have two heirs. One had to be cast out with respect to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant.

Paul is saying that we cannot have grace and works together as the means to salvation. One of these two methods must be cast out. Sarah as representing the new covenant demanded the ejection of Hagar who represented the old covenant (according to Paul use of the analogy).

When the Lord Jesus Christ raised the cup at the Lord's supper and called it the new covenant in His blood, at that time the old covenant was abrogated and cast out.

Galatians 4:31

*So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.*

#### CONCLUSION:

Galatians 5:1-5

*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.*

This is the final blow to the argument of the Judaizing heretics. Paul has struck down the idea that to reintroduce circumcision and the keeping of the law as a means of entrance into gospel blessing is a return to the old covenant and is a failure. The fundamental thrust of Paul's presentation is that our relationship with God is based upon grace, upon spiritual birth, and upon freedom from a performance based relationship.

We are not accepted with God upon the basis of how well we have done, but upon the basis of what Christ has done. Our liberty is a liberty from trying to find acceptance with God based upon our performance and labor. We are free to obey God as an expression of our liberty because our obedience has not justified or saved us (Galatians 5:13).

When we understand the true nature, bondage, limitations, and short-comings of the old covenant then we will not be anxious to bring ourselves under its terms and conditions. It is by God's promise and by faith that we are born from above through Jesus Christ who is that ultimate descendant of Isaac through Sarah.

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