

Galatians

Lesson 8

Chapter 4:21-31

Leader Guide

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Lesson 8
Galatians 4:21-31
Children of the Promise

Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. (Galatians 4:28)

Prayers

Introduction

In chapter 4, Paul uses an allegory of Hagar and Sarah in his teaching on freedom from the law. Allegories, parables and fables are short stories that reveal a deeper meaning. Parables and fables are fictional, but allegories can be either fictional or real. The lives of Sarah and Hagar are both literal and figurative illustrations of what it means to live under the covenant of the law versus living in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Following are Paul's illustrations of justification by faith rather than by obedience to the law. In this lesson, we will focus on Paul's sixth illustration, the lives of Hagar and Sarah.

1. We receive God's Spirit by faith, not through observing the law (Galatians 3:1-5)
2. Abraham was declared righteousness by faith, not through the law (Galatians 3:8-9)
3. Redemption through Christ and life in the Spirit is through faith (Galatians 3:10-14).
4. God's covenants have beginnings and endings like human contracts. God established a new Covenant of faith in Christ. Christ fulfilled the Old Covenant of the law and God's promises to Abraham to bless all nations through him (Galatians 3:15-25).
5. We are sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ; as sons, we are heirs to an eternal inheritance (Galatians 3:26-4:7).
6. Hagar and Sarah, Hagar the slave to the law and Sarah, the mother of the promise of freedom in Christ (Galatians 4:21-31).

In Chapter 3, Paul wrote that "all who rely on observing the law are under a curse" because the law does not save; only faith saves. In Chapter 4, Paul writes that all who want to be under the law are slaves and have a slave's inheritance. Paul's logic in calling those under the law "slaves" contrasts his calling those in Christ "free," sons of God with an eternal inheritance.

Read Galatians 4:21-31, An Illustration of the Law from Hagar and Sarah

Gal 4:21 Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says?

Gal 4:22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.

Gal 4:23 His son [Ishmael] by the slave woman [Hagar] was born in the ordinary way; but his son [Isaac] by the free woman [Sarah] was born as the result of a promise.

Gal 4:24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar.

Gal 4:25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children.

Gal 4:26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother.

Gal 4:27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband."

Gal 4:28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

Gal 4:29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now.

Gal 4:30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."

Gal 4:31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

1. The accounts of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar are found in Genesis 16 and 21. Refer to the passages in Genesis and discuss why Paul describes Ishmael's birth as "in the ordinary way" and in what way Isaac's birth was "the result of a promise."

- a. Ishmael and Hagar (Genesis 16:1-4)

Ge 16:1 Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar;² so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

Ge 16:3 So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

Ge 16:4 He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

Ishmael's birth through Hagar, the maidservant, was ordinary because Ishmael was conceived through the union of Abraham and Hagar.

- b. Isaac and Sarah (Genesis 21:1-7)

Ge 18:10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him.

Ge 18:11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.

Ge 21:1 Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised.

Ge 21:2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.

Ge 21:3 Abraham gave the name Isaac [meaning "he laughs"] to the son Sarah bore him.

Ge 21:4 When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him.

Ge 21:5 Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Ge 21:6 Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me."

Ge 21:7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age [90 years old]."

Isaac's birth through Sarah and Abraham was miraculous because Sarah was too old to have children naturally. Isaac was the child of God's promised covenant with Abraham: to be his God and the God of his descendants (Genesis 17:8) and to bless all people on earth through him (Genesis 12:3).

2. Abraham loved both his children, but jealousy between Hagar and Sarah forced him to send Hagar and Ismael away. How did God reassure Abraham?

Ge 21:10 and she [Sarah] said to Abraham, "Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac."

Ge 21:11 The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son [Ishmael].

Ge 21:12 But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.

Ge 21:13 I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring."

God told Abraham not to be distressed because he would bless Ishmael, but Isaac was the child of the Covenant.

3. The most surprising aspect of Paul's allegory is that Hagar, an Egyptian, represents the law. How does each object in Paul's allegory illustrate slavery?

- a. Hagar – **Hagar was Sarah's slave and bears children born into slavery. She represents all people in bondage to sin without Christ.**
- b. Mount Sinai – **Mount Sinai was where Moses was given the law**
- c. Jerusalem – **the city of the Jewish Pharisees, who look to salvation through the law**
- d. Jews under the Law – **the Jews rejected Christ and remain under the law.**

4. What is Paul's point in saying those who want to be under the law are slaves?

Everyone is born a slave to sin. Only through faith in Christ are we saved from sin and become united with God as his children, heirs to his eternal kingdom. In Paul's analogy, a slave remains outside his master's inheritance, God's salvation.

Slaves cannot free themselves to escape the consequences of their captivity. Only Christ can free us from being slaves to sin.

Slaves have no choice but to obey their master. By making the law their master, they must obey all of it. In Paul's earlier argument, those who rely on observing the law [for their righteousness] are under a curse (Galatians 3:10) because the law cannot save, only faith saves.

5. What are the symbols of freedom in Christ (verses 4:28-31)?
 - a. New Jerusalem – **heaven, eternal life with God**
 - b. Isaac – **the child of the Covenant promise that leads to Christ**
 - c. The Galatians – **children of God who accepted Christ as their righteousness**
 - d. All believers – **children of God who inherit the Covenant of faith made to Abraham**

6. What are some of the benefits of having freedom in Christ revealed by the symbols in **We receive God's promise of faith, salvation, and eternal life in heaven.**

7. Summary question Freedom from the law. Does this mean Christians do not need to obey the Ten Commandments?

Being led by the Holy Spirit is not a license to sin. Christians are led by the Spirit of God, and the Spirit does not lead them to do anything contrary to the will of God. We grieve the Spirit when we do not follow his guidance and sin.

8. The Galatians were new believers swayed between Paul's gospel and the false teachings of the Judaizers. Why is it impossible to live with both views, hope in justification through the law and faith in justification through Christ?

We place our faith, hope, and assurance in Christ. We can add nothing more to our standing before God; Christ did it all. Christ redeemed us from sin, atoned for our sins, reconciled us to God, and is our holiness and sanctification so that his righteousness is our justification to God. Christ's sacrifice for us is perfect; we can't add to it.

Paul preached a gospel of grace, faith, and love. If the Galatians gave God their love and expressed it through faith in his Son and love for others, would He really care about a piece of skin, a sacrificed animal, or strict ceremonial observances? It is such a ridiculous thought; no wonder Paul was so angry with the false teachers. Sometimes Christians also adopt strict rules to live by, hoping to please God. Their rules become their religion. The resulting behaviors are meaningless if they are out of fear or guilt and not love for God.

9. Can you think of ways we unconsciously try to live by both the law and faith in Christ?

Legalism can creep into good and right actions depending on our attitude. If our action is motivated by love for God or others, it is led by the Spirit. If our actions are motivated by

pride, seeking the acclaim of others, trying to appease God for sins we committed, or guilt, or seeking God's favor by our actions, it is legalism.

If we give to the church to have greater influence over decisions, that is legalism.

If we give to the church by percentages of income rather than joy and in anticipation of what our gifts can do, it is legalism.

If we give with an expectation to receive, it's bargaining with God and is legalism.

If you find yourself saying I really should pray or read my Bible more often out of a sense of guilt, duty, or obligation rather than joy, it is legalism.

If you think it is more important to be right than kind, you are struggling with legalism.

If we judge others by our own standards or are offended by the worldview of others, we are struggling with legalism.

If we serve our neighbor begrudgingly or as a project, that is legalism.

If you think you need to do more for God to love you, you are struggling with legalism. God's love for you has been unconditional since before creation!

If we carry a burden of guilt and cannot accept God's forgiveness and unconditional love, we are acting as our own judge; that is legalism.

Closing Prayer