

**Galatians 4: 17-31** “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you *from us*, so that you may be zealous for them. <sup>18</sup>It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. <sup>19</sup>My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, <sup>20</sup>how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you! <sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup>His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>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.’ <sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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.’ <sup>31</sup>Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”

- The basic reason why Christian faith meets with opposition in the world and even finds resistance in our own hearts is that true saving faith always brings with it the reshaping of our heart and mind so that it is no longer we who live but Christ in us.
- An intense and powerful love for the praise of men. Just as naturally as apples fall downward, human beings gravitate toward ideas and actions which make them look great, and resist ideas and actions which make them look small.
- **John 5:44**, “How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God”? Our love for the praise of men hinders us from trusting Christ because the purpose of Christ is to remove every ground of boasting in us and put it all in God (1 Corinthians 1:29–31; Ephesians 2:8–9; Galatians 6:14).
- The very theology the Judaizers propagate is rooted in pride, since it urges people to depend partly on God and partly on themselves.

**Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you *from us*, so that you may be zealous for them.**

- **Galatians 6:12** “Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Gresham Machen notes, “In some respects the Judaizers were simply following the line of least resistance. By upholding the Mosaic law they would escape persecution and even obtain honor. We have seen that it was the Jews who instigated the early persecutions of the Church. Such persecutions would be avoided by the Judaizers, for they could say to their non-Christian countrymen: ‘We are engaged simply in one form of the world-wide Jewish mission. We are requiring our converts to keep the Mosaic law and unite themselves definitely with the people of Israel. Every convert that we gain is a convert to Judaism. The cross of Christ that we proclaim is supplementary to the law, not subversive of it. We deserve therefore from the Jews not persecution

<sup>18</sup>It is fine to be zealous, provided the purpose is good, and to be so always and not just when I am with you. <sup>19</sup>My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you,

- *Calvin*: “If ministers with to do any good, let them labour to form Christ, not to form themselves, in their hearers.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>20</sup>how I wish I could be with you now and change my tone, because I am perplexed about you!

- Faith is the *assurance* that what God will make of you, as Christ is formed in your life, is vastly to be preferred over what you can make of yourself. Faith is the confidence that the demonstration of Christ’s work in your life is more wonderful than all the praise you could get for yourself by being a self-made man—or woman. Faith is a happy resting in the all-sufficiency of what Christ did on the cross, what he is doing now in our heart, and what he promises to do for us for ever.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under the law,

- If the Galatians (or us) understood the true nature of the law we wouldn’t be so anxious to bring ourselves under its yoke.
- *James 2: 10-11*—“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.”

are you not aware of what the law says? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. <sup>23</sup>His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>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.’

- Simply put, the passage predicts a time when the spiritual descendants of Abraham will vastly exceed his physical descendants.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>

but honor.” See J. Gresham Machen, *Notes on Galatians: Notes on Biblical Exposition and Other Aids to the Interpretation of the Epistle to the Galatians*, ed. John H. Skilton (Birmingham: Sold Ground Christian Books, 2006), 217.

<sup>2</sup> As quoted in John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 226.

<sup>3</sup> John Piper, “O, That Christ Would Be Formed in You!,” May, 1983, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/393\\_O\\_That\\_Christ\\_Would\\_Be\\_Formed\\_in\\_You/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/393_O_That_Christ_Would_Be_Formed_in_You/).

<sup>4</sup> See John Brown, *An Exposition of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians* (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 233. Brown writes, “In plain terms, the passage is a prediction that a period was coming when the spiritual descendants of Abraham should be far more numerous than his merely natural descendants ever were—when the true children of God should be more numerous than the nominal children of God, the Israelitish people, had been,” (233).

**2 Peter 1:3-4**—“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his *very great* and *precious promises*, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

**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.** <sup>30</sup>**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.’** <sup>31</sup>**Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.”**

- What is Paul’s purpose in using this allegory?
  - The allegory of Hagar and Sarah is written to persuade the Galatians (and us) not to follow the Judaizers into slavery with Hagar and Ishmael, but to follow Sarah and Isaac into freedom.
  - So the issue is freedom.
- Full freedom is what you have when there
  1. No lack of opportunity,
  2. No lack of ability, and
  3. No lack of desire that prevents you from doing what will make you happiest in a thousand years.<sup>5</sup>
  - In order to be free in the fullest sense you have to have *opportunity*, *ability*, and *desire* to do what will *make you happy* in a thousand years.
  - Another way to say it would be that there are four kinds of freedom, or better, four stages of freedom on the way to the full freedom all of us long for:
    - a. the *freedom of opportunity* to do what we can,
    - b. the *freedom of ability* to do what we desire, and
    - c. the *freedom of desire* to do what will bring us *unending joy*.
- ***Let’s take sky-jumping, for example.***
- Suppose you are on your way to the airport to go up for your first real jump, but your car hits a pothole on the road, you have a blowout, and run into a telephone pole. You are no longer free to jump whether you have the ability or not, because the opportunity passes while you wait for the tow truck. You lack the freedom of opportunity.
- Or suppose you do make it to the airport, but you have no ability at all—
  - You’ve never studied sky-diving and your don’t know the first thing about how a parachute works. The opportunity is there, but you don’t have the freedom of ability—you are in bondage to your own ignorance.
- But suppose that you make it to the airport, you’ve been to school and been trained and have all the abilities needed, and you take off for your first jump. But as soon as you look down, all your desire vanishes and in its place comes a tremendous fear. The opportunity is there, the ability and know-how are there, but you don’t have the freedom of desire.
- ***The interesting thing about the freedom of desire is that you might be able to go ahead and jump without it, but it won’t be a free act.***

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<sup>5</sup> The following section is taken, almost in its entirety, from John Piper, “Hagar and Slavery Vs. Sarah and Freedom,” May 22, 1983, [http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/394\\_Hagar\\_and\\_Slavery\\_Vs\\_Sarah\\_and\\_Freedom/](http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByScripture/7/394_Hagar_and_Slavery_Vs_Sarah_and_Freedom/) [accessed 10/27/2007].

- For example, you might feel so humiliated in front of your instructor (or girlfriend) that the desire not to be humiliated overcomes the desire not to jump. So you jump. But the emotional experience is not what we call freedom. You are acting under very uncomfortable external constraints.
- You are like Herod when his step-daughter asked for the head of John the Baptist. He didn't want to kill John, but he wanted even less to be shamed before his guests. So he acted, but not with the freedom of desire.
- You have the freedom of desire when you do what you love to do.
- That's the way a lot of professing Christians try to keep the commandments of Christ. ***They don't really delight to do them, but they feel some uncomfortable constraints like social pressures or fear of hell or desire to impress someone. So they go through outward motions of obedience, but the desire of their hearts is fixed somewhere else.*** They do not enjoy the freedom of desire which Christ gives when he is being formed in the heart (Galatians 4:19).
- But there is one last requirement for full freedom. Suppose you get to the airport with no obstacle; you have all the know-how necessary; you look out the door at the tiny clusters of silos and barns and farmhouses and just can't wait to jump. You have freedom of opportunity, freedom of ability, and freedom of desire. So you jump. And as you free fall, unbeknown to you, your parachute malfunctions and will not open. Are you free? In three senses, yes. But in that critical fourth sense, no.
  - What you are doing so happily, so freely, is going to kill you.
  - Whether you know it or not, you are in bondage to destruction.
  - It would be a mockery to exult in the freedom of an exhilarating free fall if you knew it was leading to destruction.
  - In order to be fully free, it is not enough to have opportunity, ability, and desire to act. The acts you desire and perform have to lead to life, indeed, eternal life, not destruction.
    - This is why it is naïve for a Christian young person to envy the so-called freedom of those who pitch themselves out the window of sin and exult for a season in the exhilaration of free fall sex or free fall greed, or free fall drugs or free fall luxury.
- True freedom is not just the opportunity and ability to do what you desire to do. It is the opportunity, ability, and desire to do what will make you happy in a thousand years.
- Therefore, true Christians are the freest people in the world. And Paul is fighting with all his might in Galatians to expose the teaching of the Judaizers for what it really is: slavery.
- The experience of freedom is not icing on the cake of Christianity. Freedom in Christ *is* Christianity.
- So getting back to the passage, God rejects what Abraham was able to produce on his own and promises again that in spite of Abraham's age, he will have a son by his own wife.
- The key question here is: how is Hagar and her affair with Abraham and their son Ishmael like the covenant of Mt. Sinai
- Abraham and Hagar tried to get God's promised blessing by their own strength without relying on God's supernatural enablement.
  - That's also what happened when the law was given at Mt. Sinai. Instead of humbling themselves and trusting God, Israel says confidently, "All the words which the Lord

has spoken we will do” (Exodus 24:3; Deuteronomy 5:27). But Hebrews 4:2 says that their hearts were not inclined to trust in God.

- So Paul’s point is pretty straight forward: don’t follow these false teachers—they may show you how to become sons of Abraham, but beware! With them you will be an Ishmael, not an Isaac. A slave, not an heir.
- Then verse 30 assures us that *not* the Ishmael-types—*not* the Judaizers—but the Isaac-types will inherit the blessing of Abraham, even though they may be persecuted.
- Freedom is what you have when there is opportunity, ability, and desire to do what will make you happy in a thousand years.
- Surely everyone here wants this full freedom—to have occasion and ability to do what you love to do with the result that you live in perfect joy forever. If that’s what you want, then this text is crucial for you, because Paul says the Ishmael-types don’t have this freedom but the Isaac-types do.
  - When it comes to saving faith, Ishmael-types do not have the freedom of desire. They do not want it.
- It’s not that they desire to reject God. They simply want him on their own terms.
  - Abraham and Hagar wanted God’s blessing, but not on *his* terms.
- The hallmark of the Isaac-types is that we have been changed, transformed at the center of our lives, so that we *desire* to rest in God’s sovereign grace.

### Application

- It seems to me that one of the most obvious applications of this passage relates to our theme of prayer. Simply put, we should, all of us, call out to God for exactly this desire—the desire to rest in God’s grace. That is, so that it will be truly from desire and not from some kind of outward pressure. I said earlier that some “Christians” *don’t really delight to obey God’s commands, but they feel some uncomfortable constraints like social pressures or fear of hell or desire to impress someone. So they go through outward motions of obedience, but the desire of their hearts is fixed somewhere else.* Ask God specifically to change your desires so that they conform to his desires. This, as you can see, brings us back full-circle to the subject of conformity to the image of Christ. “Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’” **Hebrews 10:7.**