

## Lesson 19 – Galatians 4:21-31

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### Review/Introduction

Paul is writing to the Galatian churches who are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is correcting the heresy of the Judaizers who are disturbing the Galatians with a different, distorted gospel, which is really not another since there is only one gospel of Christ.

Main Point of Galatians – Salvation is NOT by good works, moral living, religious ritual or observance, heredity, or organizational membership, but by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!!!** All attempts to insert works as the means of salvation or sanctification are a perversion of the true gospel.

### Chapters 1 and 2

Paul begins in chapters 1 and 2 by presenting the authentication of the gospel through the source (God) and its power to change lives (persecutor/murderer to preacher; slave of sin to slave of Christ). That same authentication is true for the follower of Christ today.

### Chapters 3 and 4

Paul defends justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He shows the things that the Law cannot do: bring about Spirit baptism (3:1-5); justify (3:6-9); deal with its own curse (3:10-14); set aside the previous covenant of promise (3:15-18); eliminate cultural, ethnic, racial, past religious, financial, or social distinctions; and overcome slavery (4:8-11). But the Law does take us by the hand and lead us to Christ (3:23-29).

Paul then displayed his pastoral heart in fearing for the Galatians that they revert to slavery, to a works mindset and/or practice and begged them to not turn away from the pure gospel.

Today, Paul gives the Judaizers an OT picture of the difference between law and grace.

### Paul's defense of justification by faith – Biblical allegory of slavery and freedom (4:21-31)

#### 1. The well-known account (4:21-22)

<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. <sup>23</sup>But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

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<sup>21</sup>Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? <sup>22</sup>For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. <sup>23</sup>But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. (ESV)

Paul just finished saying in 4:20 how he was perplexed with the Galatians.

<sup>20</sup>but I could wish to be present with you now and to change my tone, for **I am perplexed about you.** (Galatians 4:20)

“Perplexed” means to be at a loss, to be dazed and confused, to be disturbed, to be at wits’ end. Paul is at a loss to understand the Galatians’ desire to become slaves of law again and abandon grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

“Tell me” continues his state of being perplexed. This is emphatic in the text and an imperative. It is like he grabs them by the shoulders and looks into their eyes and with a begging/pleading voice and says, “Tell me! Don’t you listen to what you are espousing.” He is addressing both the in-danger Galatians and the heretical Judaizers.

Why would anyone “desire to be under law”? Some want a list of dos and don’ts that can be checked off. Some want to compare themselves to others and come away feeling successful. Still others want to be under law because they are unable to give God the credit for their salvation and instead must work their way to God. Perhaps basically it comes down to pride.

Paul had given them multiple OT evidence that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Yet the Galatians do not listen to the Law. Now Paul will give them another OT example. If they really did understand the Law, then they would get that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

#### ❖ **Do you desire to be under law or under grace? Which does your life demonstrate?**

So now Paul will show how this account illustrates that law and grace are incompatible and cannot co-exist. v22-23 is referring to the well-known OT account of Abraham and his two sons. “For it is written” points to this account being inspiration, not a made-up story to demonstrate a truth.

The account begins in Genesis 15, when Abram (“exalted father”) (renamed later to Abraham meaning “father of a multitude”) is promised a son. Since he is married to Sarai (“my princess”) (renamed later to Sarah meaning “noblewoman”), the promise is for Sarai to give birth to a son.

<sup>2</sup>But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” <sup>3</sup>Abram also said, “Since You have given me no son, one who has been born in my house is my heir.” <sup>4</sup>Then behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This man will not be your heir; **but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.**” <sup>5</sup>And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” <sup>6</sup>Then he believed in the Lord; and He credited it to him as righteousness. (Genesis 15:2-6)

But Sarai and Abram were impatient and took things into their own hands. Culturally, the child born in this way would have become Sarai's not his mother's. It is almost like forced adoption. This is the son by the "bondwoman". That son was born according to the flesh. Abram was 86 yrs. old when Ishmael was born.

<sup>1</sup>Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no *children*, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. <sup>2</sup>So Sarai said to Abram, "Now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing *children*. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I will obtain children through her." And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. <sup>3</sup>After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. <sup>4</sup>He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. (Genesis 16:1-4)

In Genesis 17, God reiterated His promise to Abraham to give him a son through Sarah.

<sup>15</sup>Then God said to Abraham, "As for your wife Sarai, you shall not call her *by* the name Sarai, but Sarah *shall be* her name. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother of* nations; kings of peoples will come from her." <sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, "Will a child be born to a man a hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, give birth *to a child*?" <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before You!" <sup>19</sup>But God said, "No, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But I will establish My covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year." <sup>22</sup>When He finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. (Genesis 17:15-22)

In Genesis 18 when the Lord appeared to Abraham before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, God again reiterated the promise to provide a son through Sarah.

<sup>9</sup>Then they said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." <sup>10</sup>He said, "I will certainly return to you at this time next year; and behold, your wife Sarah will have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. <sup>11</sup>Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. <sup>12</sup>So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, am I to have pleasure, my lord being old also?" <sup>13</sup>But the Lord said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I actually give birth *to a child*, when I am *so* old?' <sup>14</sup>Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." <sup>15</sup>Sarah denied *it*, however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Genesis 18:9-15)

When Abraham was 100 yrs. old and Sarah 90/91, she gave birth to Isaac. This is the son who was born by the free woman through the promise.

<sup>1</sup>Then the Lord took note of Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as He had promised. <sup>2</sup>So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. <sup>3</sup>Abraham named his son who was born to him, the son whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac. <sup>4</sup>Then Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. <sup>5</sup>Now Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. <sup>6</sup>Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup>And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have given birth to a son in his old age.” <sup>8</sup>And the child grew and was weaned, and Abraham held a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. (Genesis 21:1-8)

❖ **In what ways do you become impatient and act according to the flesh and ignore God’s promises?**

The account continues in Genesis 21.

<sup>9</sup>Now **Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian**, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking. <sup>10</sup>Therefore she said to Abraham, “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.” <sup>11</sup>The matter distressed Abraham greatly because of his son. <sup>12</sup>But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named. <sup>13</sup>And of the son of the maid I will make a nation also, because he is your descendant.” <sup>14</sup>So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave *them* to Hagar, putting *them* on her shoulder, and *gave her* the boy, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered about in the wilderness of Beersheba. (Genesis 21:9-14)

Verse 9 is important. Culturally, “the son of Hagar the Egyptian” should have been called “Sarah’s son” or the “son of Abraham”. Culturally, Ishmael was not Hagar’s but Sarah’s. This demonstrates that Ishmael was never viewed as a son of promise. Also, Hagar was most likely an Egyptian slave. Since Ishmael was not considered a child of promise, then he was a child of slavery.

In this first section, Paul provides two contrasts. The first contrast Paul draws between grace and works is the contrast between freedom and slavery. The descendants of Abraham who are born according to promise are free. The descendants of Abraham who are born according to the flesh are in slavery.

❖ **Are you free or in slavery?**

The second contrast Paul draws between grace and works is between promise and the flesh. The true spiritual descendants of Abraham come about through the promise. The false descendants who are in slavery are made so by a commitment to works.

❖ **Where does your commitment lie, grace or works and how is that demonstrated?**

## 2. The Judaizers Refuted (4:24-27)

<sup>24</sup>This is allegorically speaking, for these *women* are two covenants: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>For it is written, “Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; For more numerous are the children of the desolate Than of the one who has a husband.”

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<sup>24</sup>Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. <sup>25</sup>Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. <sup>26</sup>But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. <sup>27</sup>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.” (ESV)

Interpretation has to do with discovering what the Scriptures say by applying “hermeneutics” or the art and science of Biblical interpretation. There are three general types of hermeneutical systems: allegorical, semi-allegorical/semi-literal, and literal.

Allegorical hermeneutics assigns symbolic senses to words which results in a different meaning to the text which the author never intended to convey. If the allegorical method were applied consistently, the Bible would be reduced to fiction, with the meaning of the text replaced by whatever representation the reader gives to the words.

Evangelicals who use an allegorical hermeneutical system do so usually in the area of prophecy while using the literal or normal hermeneutical system for the rest of Scripture. It may be accurately regarded as inconsistent (semi-allegorical/semi-literal).

Literal (or plain or normal) hermeneutics takes the plain literal sense while understanding the historical, immediate, and wider contexts; uses of figures of speech; and the type of Biblical literature. This is also called the plain, literal, grammatical, historical method of interpretation. Literal hermeneutics adheres to the golden rule of interpretation, “if the plain sense makes good sense, seek no other sense”. We believe this is the correct method of interpretation.

Reasons why literal hermeneutics is the correct method of Bible interpretation.

1. Linguistic Reason – The purpose of language requires the literal method of interpretation. If God originated language for the purpose of communication, it follows that the normal use of language will accomplish that purpose. The Bible does not demand a deeper or hidden sense of language which deviates from its normal use. To employ such a unique linguistic device for the Bible would not aid communication but only add to confusion.
2. Biblical Reason – All of the 300+ OT prophecies concerning the coming of Christ were fulfilled literally in the NT. In none do we find the allegorical method of interpretation. Of the rest of the prophecies that have been fulfilled all were fulfilled literally.

3. Logical Reason – All objectivity is lost when the literal method of interpretation is not consistently applied. Literal interpreting limits the reader from making assertions without a clear support from the text itself. To deviate from the literal approach opens a Pandora's box of possible meanings of the text.

❖ **Do you strive to be diligent to handle God's Word accurately?**

There are a couple of ways to think about what Paul is doing here with “this is allegorically speaking”. Remember, interpreting the Bible allegorically assigns symbolic senses to words which results in a different meaning to the text which the author never intended to convey. The result is that different meanings are assigned for every person who interprets the Bible.

But, there are no places in the Bible where there is a hidden meaning that the reader is free to interpret in an allegorical way (assigning hidden meaning to elements). So whatever Paul is doing here, he is not showing his readers a valid method for interpreting the Bible.

If Paul himself were using a valid method of interpreting the OT allegorically, then he would most likely have just said “blank is blank” or “blank represents blank” instead of saying “here I am employing an allegory”.

Paul has just made his ironclad biblical arguments. In fact, he anticipated the Judaizers objections and answered that too biblically. The most reasonable understanding of what Paul is doing here is now employing the Judaizers own method of interpretation (perhaps a rabbinical method) but doing it cultural-literally and in a way that is refuting the Judaizers own arguments. In doing so he is showing the Galatians that they are in danger of joining the descendants of slaves who are enslaved to the Law.

❖ **Are you careful to interpret the Bible literally?**

These women (Sarah and Hagar) are two covenants.

One is represented by the slave-girl Hagar, proceeding from Mount Sinai (i.e., the Law, or the old covenant). These are slaves, under bondage to the Law. This slavery to the Law is seen in the religious leaders of Paul's day, Jerusalem. Paul is unmistakably applying this to the Judaizers also.

The “Jerusalem above” is contrasted to the “present Jerusalem” which is in slavery, so this refers to grace. And connects us to Sarah (“our mother”). Those who are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are connected to Abraham through the promise.

Here is Paul's third contrast between grace and Law – heaven and earth. The free children originate from heaven, the slave children originate from earth.

“For it is written,...” quotes Isaiah 54:1 from 54:1-9 which Isaiah penned to encourage the captives. Paul applies it to Sarah (the covenant of Grace) who will have more descendants than Hagar (the covenant of Law).

Here is Paul's fourth contrast between grace and Law – grace will impact more people.

### 3. The Application (4:28-31)

<sup>28</sup>And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him *who was born* according to the Spirit, so it is now also. <sup>30</sup>But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, For the son of the bondwoman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.” <sup>31</sup>So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

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<sup>28</sup>Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>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.” <sup>31</sup>So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. (ESV)

Paul now applies the allegory to the current situation of the Galatian true believers (brethren) and the Judaizers.

v28 – Like Isaac, all true believers are children of promise. We are supernaturally born-again like Isaac was born supernaturally according to God’s promise.

#### ❖ Do you live like a child of promise?

v29 – Paul’s statement here refers to a particular part of the account of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael.

<sup>9</sup>**Now Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, mocking.** <sup>10</sup>Therefore she said to Abraham, “Drive out this maid and her son, for the son of this maid shall not be an heir with my son Isaac.” (Genesis 21:9-10)

Verse 9 says that Ishmael was “mocking”. Since children were weened between 3-5 yrs old, at this time, Ishmael was 17-19 and Isaac most likely was ~3-5 yrs. old.

“Mocking” doesn’t seem all that “persecuting”, so what is happening here? The word for “mocking” can mean to laugh, mock, play or to jest or to make sport of or to toy with and takes on different meanings depending on the context.

Here it means to laugh... <sup>12</sup>So Sarah **laughed** to herself, saying, “After I have become old, am I to have pleasure, my lord being old also?” <sup>13</sup>But the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah **laugh**, saying, ‘Shall I actually give birth *to a child*, when I am *so* old?’ <sup>14</sup>Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” <sup>15</sup>Sarah denied *it*, however, saying, “I did not **laugh**”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh.” (Genesis 18:9-15)

Here it takes on the idea of sexual play... <sup>7</sup>When the men of the place asked about his wife, he said, “She is my sister,” for he was afraid to say, “my wife,” *thinking*, “the men of the place might kill me on account of Rebekah, for she is beautiful.” <sup>8</sup>It came about, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out through a window, and saw, and behold, Isaac was **caressing** his wife Rebekah. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Isaac and said, “Behold, certainly she is your wife! ... (Genesis 26:7-9)

Here Potiphar's wife uses the word to describe Joseph's supposed attempted rape... <sup>17</sup>Then she spoke to him with these words, "The Hebrew slave, whom you brought to us, came in to me **to make sport of me**; <sup>18</sup>and as I raised my voice and screamed, he left his garment beside me and fled outside." (Genesis 39:17-18)

Here it describes corrupting acts of idolatry, most likely idolatrous sexual acts... <sup>1</sup>Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." <sup>2</sup>Aaron said to them, "Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." <sup>3</sup>Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought *them* to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took *this* from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt." <sup>5</sup>Now when Aaron saw *this*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *shall be* a feast to the Lord." <sup>6</sup>So the next day they rose early and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and **rose up to play**. <sup>7</sup>Then the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*." (Exodus 32:1-7)

So, whatever the "mocking" was in Genesis 21, it was not a simple "making fun of". Ishmael was treating Isaac very badly.

Those who are born according to flesh, who have a mindset of works, the unregenerate, persecute those who are born according to promise. Unbelievers treat believers badly. Here is Paul's fifth contrast between grace and Law – legalists are the persecutors, but gracers are the persecuted.

This should not be a surprise.

<sup>20</sup>Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. (John 15:20)

<sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

### ❖ In what ways are you persecuted?

v30 – The ones who call themselves heirs, but are slaves to sin, rely on the flesh, and persecute believers will be cast out and not inherit the kingdom of God.

<sup>15</sup>"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn *bushes* nor figs from thistles, are they? <sup>17</sup>So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>So then, you will know them by their fruits.



<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven *will enter*. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’ (Matthew 7:15-23)

Here is the last contrast that Paul draws between grace and Law. Those who are children of promise inherit all and those who are children of the flesh will inherit nothing.

v31 – Paul now drops the hammer on the Judaizers. They are children of the bondwoman. They are not true spiritual descendants of Abraham. They are slaves to sin. Paul also encourages the brethren who have been justified by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, that they are the true spiritual descendants of Abraham and are free; free from sin and its eternal consequences and free to walk in a way that glories God.

❖ **Are you encouraged or warned today?**

**Summary**

The Galatians were in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Those that surrender their life to Christ, exercising true saving faith are true spiritual descendants of Abraham. Those that rely on the flesh are descendants of a slave woman. Which are you?

**Questions to Ponder**

1. In what ways do you become impatient and ignore God’s promises?
2. When you read the Bible, are you careful to understand the context in order to not claim unwarranted promises? (e.g., Joshua 1:7; 2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Psalm 37:4; Jeremiah 29:11; Romans 8:28)
3. As Christ’ life is lived through you as you are walking in the Spirit desiring to live godly, in what ways are you experiencing persecution?
4. Do you live as saved by grace or by law?