

## Hebrews 4:21-31

**Bottom Line:** The Jewish Christians were teaching bad theology. The people following them, while doing what they thought was right, were in jeopardy of trusting works over faith for salvation.

### The Situation:

You have Gentile Christians who feel like the kid no one wants to hang out with because they aren't sure what to do with Jewish laws and customs. Jewish Christians are stuck in the old ways of doing life. They have a huge emphasis on the OT laws (Torah), dietary customs, and still are considering circumcision a necessary act. The Jewish Christians are trying to win converts to get the hand clap from their leaders, but the problem was they were teaching works over faith for justification.

### Verse 21 – “The Freedom Issue”

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

They misunderstood the Gospel, which meant they misunderstood Christian freedom.

**Complete Freedom** – What you have when no lack of opportunity, no lack of ability, and no lack of desire prevents you from doing what you choose to do.

**Illustration:** My 30<sup>th</sup> Birthday my wife got me a present to go skydiving. Imagine, if you will, different scenarios affecting my freedom to skydive.

- **Scenario 1** – On the way to the jump zone – my car has a blowout and I hit a ditch. My opportunity passes me by as I wait for a tow truck. I lost the freedom of opportunity.
- **Scenario 2** – I make it to the jump zone. No one shows up to lead my instruction class on what to do. I have no ability because I have no idea what I am doing. The opportunity is there, but I have lost the freedom of ability.
- **Scenario 3** – I make it to the jump zone. I took my instruction class and met my tandem buddy. As I sit on the edge of the plane at 13,500 ft. up I look down and lose ALL desire due to fear. Will I die? Will I pee myself a little? The opportunity is there, the ability is there, but I have lost the freedom of desire.

- **Scenario 4** – I make it to the jump zone, I take my instruction class, and I look down and see all the tiny stuff below and cannot wait to jump. I just experienced freedom of opportunity, ability, and desire. I choose to jump. In my instance, this choice led to a great time. It was awesome and I made it back to my loving family. But my choice could have also brought about my destruction. I had the freedom to jump, but also understood the consequences.

This is the tension the Galatians were living within. They had the opportunity to respond to the Gospel. They had the ability to grow and mature as Christians. They had the desire to please the Lord. The problem was that they were given some really poor instruction from other believers on how to do these things and they had a choice to make. Choices that could lead them down a road toward slavery and not freedom.

### Verses 22 and 23 – “The Background”

“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.”

#### Backstory: Genesis 15:1-6

- Abraham and Sarah have no kids, which means no heir to fulfill the promises of becoming a great nation (12:2).
- There is Eliezer the slave, but God tells them in (15:4) that he shall not be the heir, but that your OWN son will be the heir.
- Abraham and Sarah decide to go rogue and make their own plan. Sarah gives Hagar (her handmaid) to Abraham to give them a son.
  - Genesis 16:15 – **It worked!** “Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son whom Hagar bore to him Ishmael.”
  - Galatians 4:23 – Ishmael was born “according to the flesh.” Abraham was relying on self instead of the Lord’s power.

#### Backstory: Genesis 17

- 14 years later (17:16-19), God tells Abraham that Sarah will have a son. Abraham falls on his face laughing (I do not recommend this approach to the Lord’s wisdom). Shall God give a man who is 100 and his wife who is 90 a

child? God says, "Yes, and you shall call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as a covenant for his descendants after him."

### Verse 24-27 – "The 2 Covenants"

- Paul sees an allegory (illustration that depicts a general principle). Paul shows how the truth in the story of Hagar and Ishmael show us better the truth of what happened at Mt. Sinai and is continuing to happen in the present Jerusalem.

2 Covenants:

1. Hagar's son Ishmael representing slavery // Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai // This Jerusalem ALL points toward slavery.
  - a. Question: How is Hagar and her act with Abraham and their son Ishmael like the covenant of Mt. Sinai—the giving of the law through Moses?
  - b. Answer: Hagar's giving birth to Ishmael is done "according to the flesh." When the law was given at Mt. Sinai, Israel responded by saying "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exodus 24:3). **The problem** was that they trusted themselves too much and the Lord too little.

**The Result**: Abraham and Hagar produced a son who would not be the heir to the covenant. Israel produced a vow to keep the law which resulted into works based legalism.

### Verse 25

- Paul ties the past and the current together. Paul says, "She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children."
- Directed at the Judaizers (Jew-D-izer). Slaves to the law, leading others to be a slave to the law.

**Mather Luther** says, "*For men of every age do not see any other righteousness than that of the Law. Therefore if they follow the Law and perform its outward works, they think they are righteous. All such men are slaves and not free men, because they are sons of Hagar, who gives birth to slavery. Therefore, they remain under the curse of the Law, under sin, death, and the power of the devil, under the wrath and judgment of God.*"

## Verse 26

"But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother."

2. Sarah (Isaac) AND Jerusalem above = Freedom
  - The heavenly Jerusalem is for all those who believe on Christ!
  - Jerusalem above can be seen in Colossians 3:1-3

## Verse 28-31 – "The Decision"

"Now we, brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise."

- God fulfilled His promise to make for Himself a people (Gen. 12:1-3).
- God put His Spirit within us (Ezekiel 36:27).
- God wrote His law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

## Verse 29

"But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit (through promise), so it is now."

- Just like Ishmael (born according to the flesh) gave Isaac (born according to the Spirit) trouble the Jewish Christian are giving Gentile Christians the same troubles.
- The difference between Ishmael-types and Isaac-types is the work of the Spirit of God in their life.

## Verse 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.'"

- The Isaac-types will inherit the blessing of Abraham, even though they may be persecuted.
- It doesn't mean it's easy.  
Abraham loved Ishmael (Gen. 17:18) and was reluctant to send him away (Gen. 21:10-11). Sarah's stance and God's direction to do what his wife said prompted Abraham to send Ishmael away.

## Verse 31

“So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.”

**Back to the start** – Freedom is what you have when there is opportunity, ability, and a desire to do what we choose to do.

- Why aren't the Ishmael-types free? They lack the desire to rest in God's promises. It's not that they desire to reject God, they simply want to approach Him on their own terms. They live in a system of check boxes and legality.

### **We aren't so different:**

We all have opportunity, ability, and desire in our Christian walk. Do we do things because we have to check off a list? Because we want to look good? Or maybe we do things because God gifted us so we feel we have to. It goes back to our heart motive in whether or not we're free. If we do things out of fear or because we have to do it or because we want the attention - that is not freedom. Freedom is when your desires change to wanting to do those things. Your motivations changed. You are living in the Spirit. We are called to be holy, but we are also free. These go together in that freedom is when you choose the holiness.

If we are not careful we can become a slave to good intentions. Meaning, we can do all the right things to experience the joy of the Lord, yet be completely miserable.

My prayer tonight is that you surrender to be free. To be free we have to set aside our desire to be in control and simply say yes to what the Lord has desired for us all along. Freedom in Christ does not mean we get a free pass to keep on living in the flesh; it means that we give up the flesh to live in the Spirit instead.