

Born Free

Galatians 4:21-31

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law?
²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. ²³ But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, ²⁴ which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar - ²⁵ for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children - ²⁶ but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. ²⁷ 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.” ²⁸ Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. 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. 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.” ³¹ So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.”

Here is tonight’s question: How can a God given desire cause such ungodly trouble? The answer is when we try to accomplish God’s purpose with a human plan. The story in our text tonight about Hagar and Sarah is about exactly that kind of trouble.

Since the Judaizers appealed to the Law, Paul accepts their challenge and uses the Law to prove that Christians are not under the Law. He takes the familiar story of Ishmael and Isaac, found in Genesis 16-21, and draws from it basic truths about the Christian’s relationship to the Law of Moses. At the same time he illustrates the problems and consequences of our trying to short circuit God’s promises and how it relates to us today.

Look first of all at the historical facts. Verses 19-23 give us this insight, “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you. 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.”

Paul points out **two problems with trying to accomplish God’s purpose with a human plan:**

The first is that we tend to substitute our human schedule for God’s. Genesis 16:1-4 gives us this insight, “Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 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. 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. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.”

Abraham understood that God’s plan was to make bless the world through his offspring. That was a good plan as far as Abraham was concerned. He wanted a family and he wanted a heritage. **There was just one problem as far as Abraham was concerned, God didn’t seem to be keeping his end of the deal.** Abraham decided that his wife’s suggestion was a good one primarily, I think, because God’s timing didn’t match up with Abraham’s timing. I’m sure that none of you have ever felt that God was taking a little too long to accomplish the things you wanted in life.

For example, in most of our lives (but certainly not all of our lives) God has a plan that includes marriage and ultimate romantic and sexual fulfillment. It’s easy to get impatient and try to short-circuit the path to pleasure. It’s easy to allow that God-given desire to

give way to something ungodly. I am convinced that most of us really want what God wants for us, but when we get impatient with God's timing and try to fulfill God's purpose for our lives ourselves, is when we find ourselves in unbiblical and hurtful relationships. The problem is that when we do not wait on God to fulfill our God given desires and needs for happiness, significance and intimacy, often what is not from God begins to look appealing and acceptable.

Like chicken fried by an impatient cook in a pan too hot, what looks crispy and delicious is raw and bleeding when we bite into it. So the first problem that arises when we try to accomplish a godly purpose with a human plan is that we get impatient and run ahead of God. And that causes problems.

The second problem is trying to accomplish a godly purpose in our human strength. Paul says in verse 23, "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."

When Abraham tried to take the short road to God's plan he did so in his own power. He knew that there wasn't anything he could do to make Sarah conceive and so he settled for what he could accomplish in his own power, he got the slave girl pregnant, and Abraham became a dad. Funny though, it wasn't very satisfying, why? Because it didn't fulfill the longing God had put in his heart. He knew it wasn't God's plan, it was man's attempt to manufacture something that looked like God's plan. It wasn't done in God's power but in man's weakness.

And here is the application of the illustration to what Paul has been teaching us these last few weeks in Galatians. This is the weakness and the slavery of the law. It doesn't really satisfy because it's not the same thing as Christ being formed within you through the work of the Holy Spirit transforming your heart, transforming your desire. Slavery to the law amounts to our looking at what God wants

for our life and trying externally to make our life look like that by following a set of rules.

Oh, to others around it may look very spiritual, you may be faithful in church attendance, you may give and help those in need, and you may serve on committees, and do all kinds of religious activities. Your life may look crispy and delicious, inside though it's still raw chicken, because you don't have the strength to accomplish all that God wants for you. He wants you to give up trying to make yourself good enough. He wants you to recognize that He's paid the price, he wants you to hand it over to Him, so that your transformation comes from him, by the renewing of your mind, from the inside out.

What I'm talking about here is a quantum leap, a major shift, a new understanding of what spirituality and Christianity is. Not being obedient to a set of rules, but trusting in the one Who paid for all your broken rules.

The Bible makes it plain that once we make this leap of faith that a change takes place from the inside out, freeing us to want God's will in God's way. So you see it's not that I'm set free *from* God's plan, but I'm set free *for* God's plan, to desire to do what makes *Him* happy because I understand that that's really what makes *me* happy.

Now let's take a look at the consequences of doing God's work in man's way.

The first consequence of trying to do God's work man's way is separation. Look at verses 29-30, "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. 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."

Immediately when Sarah and Abraham attempt to take the shortcut to God's plan, there is broken fellowship. Hagar begins to despise her mistress, later the child of that union, despises his younger brother. Why? Because they understand the difference between the promise and the placebo. Abraham and Sarah are dissatisfied with the outcome of their plan too.

And the same thing happens to us when we take the path that led Abraham to Hagar's tent. Whether it be to the camp of *slavery to sin* or *slavery to law*, we experience *dissatisfaction* and *separation*. When we go the path of sin to short circuit God's plan we are racked with *guilt* and *guilt is a powerful isolator*. Because we feel separated from God, we very often feel separated from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Why is that so true? Because when we are carrying around a load of guilt we feel that people are looking at us, talking about us, and even that the preacher is preaching at us.

When we are enslaved to the law we are disappointed because we don't experience the full and joyful life God intends for us. Instead obedience to the rules becomes drudgery, because we think of the rules as what God is requiring of us we find ourselves disappointed with God. We aren't united with our brothers and sisters because the law makes us play the comparison game.

Paul quotes Sarah's line from the story in Genesis, "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance." I think this is Paul's way of making it clear that a mix of grace and works such as the Judaizers were suggesting could never work out. We must fully understand that God alone has saved us, there is no credit for us, we have simply come as beggars receiving the gracious gift of Christ.

The second consequence of trying to accomplish God's plan man's way is slavery. Verse 25 says, "Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children."

Slavery to sin causes the desire itself to drive us, to consume us.

What seems to be an exercise in freedom is ultimately the cruelest slavery. The **drug addict on the street** has less freedom than a **convict in the jail**. **Nor has the run of the mill good person outside of Christ any more freedom than either of them.** Each of us lives in **bondage to desires**, desires which **point ultimately to the kind of fulfilled life God intends us to have**, but **left to our own devices we helplessly seek to fulfill them at times, or in ways or degrees which ultimately harm us.**

Slavery to the law is no better. Though we may be working for what seems obviously to be God's will for us, we do it not out of a freedom to fulfill God's best, but out of **constraint**, an **obligation**. Like the **groom** at a **shotgun wedding**, doing what's **right** isn't a **joy** but a **burden**.

Fortunately for us, we don't have to be slaves to either sin or the Law. God's grace has appeared in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in his letter to Titus, that God's grace teaches us to say no to sin, it doesn't force us, it teaches us, the Holy Spirit living in us helps us understand God's best for us, and helps us to fulfill it, not out of fear but out of understanding.

As the final verse of our text says: "Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman." Christ has made us free.