

## CHILDREN OF THE FREE WOMAN

Galatians 4:8-31

Key Verse: 4:31

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

In this present age and time, we are all here sitting on American soil, the land of the free and the home of the brave. Many of us, including myself, have not experienced what is like to live in a slave family, or to be a slave. Slavery ended here in America in 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, but in other countries in the world slavery might still be practiced. There are different forms of slavery – there was the forced, involuntary slavery of free people in Africa who were kidnapped and smuggled to America and sold as slaves. The type of slavery presented here in this chapter is a different kind of slavery, this one was like indentured servitude, where a person, usually a poor person, would voluntarily become a bond slave to someone else for a limited number of years, in exchange for some form of payment. Before the kidnapped slaves came from Africa, America actually brought in a number of indentured servants, or bond slaves from Europe. They would hire themselves out to work four years without wages in an unbreakable contract, in exchange for their transportation to America, meals, a place to stay, training, and when they’re done, freedom along with 50 acres of land.

The most important part of the agreement was the contract. It was a document laying out the exact terms of the servitude, what requirements and benefits are offered, and it was signed and sealed with the promise or guarantee to carry out what was written. This is similar to what we see in the Bible as the covenants of God, and these covenants define our relationship with God. Why is this necessary? Because it tells you exactly what God wants to give to you, signed and sealed in writing in front of many witnesses. It is a commitment of what you can expect to receive from God, and the conditions of receiving what was promised. This week we’ll talk about two mothers, not literal mothers, but mothers that are symbolic of two covenants of God. Mothers through which, we are either children of the slave woman, or children of the free woman. Today we’ll learn through this passage to distinguish which mother we belong to. Are you a child of the slave woman, or the free woman?

### Part I: The Illustration of Two Mothers

Abraham is considered to be the father of our faith (Rom 4:11). Out of everyone in the world at that time, God called one man Abraham, and said, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing (Gen 12:1-2).” Abraham and his wife Sarah were well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of child-bearing. Sarah must have also heard the promise, and believed, but it had been ten long years and still no sign of a baby, so she might have thought to herself, perhaps I can build the family through my maidservant. So Sarah gave her Egyptian maidservant Hagar to Abraham as a wife, and she conceived, but this distressed her. She had made a mistake by acting too rashly. But around 12 years later, God said “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son.” Sarah laughed, but the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for the

Lord?” (Gen 18:13-14). What a great confidence we can take in the Lord when we hear, “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” With God, nothing is impossible.

In Gen 21, we read that the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him. The child grew and on the day he was weaned, Abraham held a great feast – but Sarah saw that Hagar’s son was mocking him. She 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.” Abraham was distressed, but God comforted him and he sent Hagar and her son off.

Coming back to our passage, please look at v.24, “These things [the mothers and their sons] 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.” Once again, covenants are promises that establish a relationship between two parties. Covenants are important in all of our lives. When you were little, did you ever make someone agree to do something with you, and seal that promise? When I was a kid I used to make my friends pinky swear with me. “You promise you’ll come over to play video games tomorrow? Pinky swear?” (or a spit-handshake) This covenant from Mount Sinai establishes the relationship between God and his people. Mount Sinai is where God gave the Ten Commandments, and said to his people, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Exd 19:5). This covenant is very similar to a marriage, just as we commit that out of all people you will be my wife, God commits that out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. On Mount Sinai God gave the Law, and bound everyone to obey His commands. Like the pinky swear that confirms the oath between two little kids, this covenant was sealed with a confirmation. In Exd 24, Moses sacrificed the young bulls, took their blood, and sprinkled it on the people, saying, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” It was sealed by the blood of bulls.

Sarah represents the new covenant, a different covenant. Her son Isaac was born in impossible circumstances to show that he was a child of a promise, and not born in the natural way. This new covenant was prophesied by God in Jer 31:31-34, “The time is coming ...when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers ... because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time ...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more.” How was this new covenant established?

The old covenant was sealed by the blood of bulls, but this new covenant was sealed by the blood of God’s one and Only Son, Jesus Christ, who gave himself as an offering for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus told his disciples in Matt 26:27-28, “Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant,

which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” This is the new covenant, it is not the covenant of the Law, but the covenant of the Gospel. The first covenant brought slavery and death, because it revealed to us that we cannot fulfill the requirements of the Law. So why was it even given? It was given to lead us to the second covenant, the covenant of the grace, which says, I, the Lord, have provided the fulfillment of the Law, now come to me, not the Law, and be saved! This covenant has similarities to a marriage, where God says, “I will be their God,” but also has similarities to a last will and testament. A last will, or testament, is a covenant which lays out an inheritance, given to a benefactor – and is set into action once the testator (the author of the will) dies. There is nothing the beneficiary does to receive the inheritance, they can either accept or reject it, but there is nothing else they need to do. The new covenant is like a will, set into motion when our Lord died for our sins. The new covenant is the God’s testament and will, the new covenant is the New Testament. Now notice how your Bible is divided: you have the Old Testament and the New Testament – the Bible is God’s book, laying out his covenants with us.

## Part II: Children of the slave woman vs. children of the free, or, the Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant

Let us now examine the difference between the children of the slave woman vs. the children of the free woman. This is the same as looking at those who are living under the old covenant and comparing them to those living under the new. Look at v.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.” Hmmm, who could those born under the ordinary way be? Do we have any cyborgs or androids in here (not the phones)? Any Frankenstein monsters? Anyone from another dimension? All of us were born in the ordinary way, everyone here was born by one male and one female – therefore everyone was born as a slave. However, the child born under the free woman was not born in the ordinary way. This child was born as a result of a promise, and this was the promise: “No longer will anyone have to teach, ‘Know the Lord,’ for everyone will know God, great or small.” Gal 4:6 says, “Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’” We are all born once, but Jesus said, “You must be born again.” We are born again as children of the free woman, children under the new covenant, as a result of a promise.

Now what are the children of the slave woman slaves of? Look at v.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.” The present city of Jerusalem was the stronghold of the law, this was the capital city that ruled and administered the Law of Moses. The old covenant said, “If you obey and keep my commandments, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” What a great promise – only, the Law is designed to do one thing: show us that we cannot obey it. But because of our pride, we think that we can obey it and somehow earn the satisfaction of God, and then become enslaved by it. This was what happened to the Galatian church. Look at v.9, “But now that you know God – or rather are known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” Before they met Christ, they tried to appease their own gods by following certain rituals. After they met Paul and met Christ, they gave these observances up. But now, a few years later, after the Judaizers show up, they are turning back to trying to appease God by

following the same rituals. By thinking that they can obey the Law, they set themselves up in a trap to follow every requirements of the Law, which they obviously cannot do. They become slaves again to law. The children of the free woman are free from the law, in fact, they are under grace. This is because they do not trust their own merits, but trust in the merits of Jesus Christ, who was able to fulfill all of the law to the letter.

Those born under the old covenant are also slaves to sin. Jesus said in John 8:34, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin." I can confess from personal experience that the law teaches me that I am a sinner of the worst kind. This week I had to work into the late hours of the night because of a project deadline, but the temptation was so great to avoid the responsibility. Urges would come up, "Hey check for some facebook updates." "Hey, read the latest news." "Browse some pictures of Israel in Jesus' time." These things are not bad in and of themselves, but when I should either be working or sleeping, my heart is in rebellion to what is right. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. There are secrets sins of the heart I cannot mention, but I am not the only one, all of us have sins within us that we would never ever want someone to know. The law brings these things to light. And God's laws are written on everyone's hearts, but people refuse to pay attention to them. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, these are obvious to everyone that they are wrong. But the law is even deeper than that. Jesus says if you hate, that is equal to murder. If you lust with your eyes, you have committed adultery. Even if you so much as gossip, you have spoken slander against your neighbor. My friends, who can control these things? Who can watch these things within themselves? We are slaves to sin. But those born to the free woman are free even from this, because Jesus paid the costly price for our sins, ALL of our sins for ALL time, through his precious blood. The law cries out, guilty! Guilty! But grace says, "Your sins are forgiven, because Jesus paid it all."

What else are we a slave to? Because we were slaves to sin, then we are slaves to death. And this is not hidden anywhere. Because all have sinned, then all die. The fact that we die is very proof that we have sin. And who does not fear death? The one born under the slave woman is a slave to the fear of death, but the child born under the free woman is free even from the fear of death. This can be proven by the persecution they suffer. Look at v.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." One thing almost guaranteed by the Lord for those born again are persecutions. Why? Jesus says in John 15:19, "If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." Those born in the ordinary way will persecute those born of the Spirit, because they hate the Spirit of God. If they persecuted Jesus, they will persecute us also, but just as we share in his sufferings, we will also share in his glory (Rom 4:17). Those who are born of the free woman are free from the fear of death, even in the face of intense persecution – because they know that they have inherited eternal life.

In the 1500s, Thomas Bilney, a professor of civil law at Cambridge, was brought before the bishop of London. He was threatened with being burned at the stake several times, and was forced to renounce his faith. He gave into this temptation, but afterwards he repented severely. For this he was brought again to the bishop, and condemned to death. Before he went to the stake, he smiled and said, "I have had many storms in this world, but now my vessel will soon be

on shore in heaven.” He stood unmoved in the flames crying out, “Jesus, I believe”; and these were the last words he was heard to utter (Foxes Book of Martyrs, Ch.14).

In v.30 Paul writes, “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.’” Here is the final result of the two covenants. Those who are born under the old covenant are born under law. The law makes them a slave, and reveals their slavery to sin and death – the law can only point to death. They will be cast out, and cannot share an inheritance with the free woman’s son. The old covenant brings death, but points us to the way out – the new covenant. Those born again under the new covenant are under grace. They have seen their depravity and helplessness, therefore their only hope and trust is not on their works, but in the saving work of God through His Son Jesus Christ. The new covenant is the last testament and will of God – an inheritance set forth by the death of His Son.

Now what can we expect from this new covenant? God has promised that we will truly know Him, by sending the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. We have become free from slavery to the law, through the merits of Jesus Christ. We receive the forgiveness of sins because Jesus died in our place. We are freed from the fear of death, because the Spirit within us rose from the dead, and through that Spirit we have received adoption as sons and an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade. Now what part did we have in all of this? None. It is all of God’s grace, 100% completely the gift of God, for those who believe. And this is a guarantee to us, because it was set forth in a covenant, signed, sealed and delivered by the blood of Christ.

So why do we try to add our own work on top of all the work that God had already done? By doing this we are saying, no God, your grace is not enough, let me help – and we defile the gift of God by our own blood stained hands. When we add our own work to God’s work, we have compromised the faith we have in what God had declared: that we are sinners in need of a Savior. But this is what the Galatians were doing. They were backsliding into weak and miserable principles. So let’s go back and examine in

### Part III: Practical applications from the Galatians

Look at v.8-9, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God – or are rather known by God – how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again?” We can backslide from the grace of God in 2 ways – either we turn back to our sin, or we turn back to the law. It is human nature to fall back into our old patterns, it’s hard for us to accept salvation on faith, we want to take salvation into our own hands. Remember what happened when Sarah could not wait on God’s time, she took matters into her own hands, and Hagar’s son, Ishmael was produced. When we go back to our sin, or try to earn God’s favor our own way, we end up producing more children of slavery.

Paul pleads with the Galatians, “Become like me, for I became like you. You have done me no wrong.” Paul was saying that he had nothing personal against them, but saw that they were hurting themselves by embracing the law, the old covenant slavery, once again. Paul had become like them. Paul was once a rising star in Judaism, but he gave it all up, considering it all a loss for the sake of knowing Christ. So he became like a Gentile, not enslaved to the Law, but

he really was a Christian, living by faith. He reminds them of their faith in v.13-14, “As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ himself.” Our faith comes from hearing the preaching of the word, and the Spirit of God enabling us to receive it. I don’t mean all preaching has to come from the messenger at the pulpit, but all of us preaching the gospel, in season and out, to those around us. When the Galatians heard the good news, they transformed, they were changed, overjoyed, and welcomed Paul, even though he may have had some fault which could cause them to despise him. They loved him so much that if they could have done so, they would have torn out their eyes and given them to him.

But after being enslaved, they have lost their joy. “What has happened to your joy?” Sometimes this happens to us. Can anyone remember a time, 4 years ago, when we were overjoyed when we first started here. We came on time, we all wore suits, we had joy when meeting with one another. Granted, that may have been a honeymoon phase, and I believe we have the same love for one another – but wasn’t that time special? Even though we might not have that same exuberant joy at first, let us just take a warning from this passage not to let ourselves become burdened, but remember to refresh ourselves through remembrance of the grace of God.

Paul says, “Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?” And when we become enslaved to the law, when we have not been born under the new covenant, isn’t this what will happen? When are slaves to sin, we oppose God, we oppose truth, and when someone tries to tell us the truth we become bitter. That’s how the Galatians were now acting towards the father of their faith, Paul. They saw him as an enemy. The Judaizers had won them over, but not for a good reason. These people had enslaved the Galatians, deceived them and alienated them from Paul.

Now see the heart Paul has for his people, in v.19, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed in you.” He labored and prayed earnestly for them, to the point of anguish. Paul’s concern was for their souls – he did not labor to get them to follow him, but he labored so that Christ would be formed in them. Let that be our labor for one another – to pray for one another, to help one another, to encourage one another, to love one another, that Christ would be formed in each of us. When I read this verse, this became my prayer for some of those I pray for.

But finally, let this be a goal for ourselves, that Christ be formed in us. What this means is that we labor until we have a mind and life in complete harmony with the mind and life of Christ. Let us increase in our faith and knowledge of Jesus Christ. In John Bunyan’s catechism, the question is, does faith come only by hearing? The answer: It is usually received by the word preached, after that, it is increased several ways: by prayer, by Christian conference, by reading, by meditation and by remembrance of experiences. When we have received the gift of Christ, let us endeavor to develop it. Can we read v.31 together: “Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.” May Christ be found in us, and formed in us, and may our faith and knowledge of him increase, not by our own efforts, but by faith and the grace of God. 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. (2 Pet 1:3) May you grow as

children of the free woman and one day receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.