

Galatians 4:21-31 ~ Hagar and Sarah ~ Discussion Questions

1. Do you take pride in any ethnic, national, or spiritual ancestor? What effect does that relationship have on the way you live your life?
2. What was the difference in status between Abraham's two sons? (4:22, Genesis 15:17-16:10, Genesis 21:1-13)
3. What parallel did Paul draw between Abraham's two sons and the two covenants between God and man? (4:22-28)
4. What makes this such a powerful message for the Galatians? How did it illustrate a theological truth? How do you think this message made them feel?
5. Which of your own rules or personal standards do you impose or expect of others?

Galatians 5:1-15 ~ Freedom in Christ

6. What is the "yoke of slavery" to which Paul refers in verse 5:1?
7. What does Paul tell the Galatians they will be obligated to do if they comply with the requirement of the Judaizers to be circumcised? (5:2-3)
8. Circumcision made it relatively easy for Jews to identify others who believed as they did. Paul tells them (v. 6) that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value." How, then can they—and we—identify others who hold similar *Christian* beliefs?
9. What is Paul's tone in vv. 5:7-12?

10. We are surrounded by the kind of yeast to which Paul refers in verse 7:9. Give an example—positive or negative—from your own life. How did you respond?

11. Paul tells us that we "were called to be free." Does this mean we can do anything we want to do? (5:13)

12. How does God want us to use the freedom He has given us?

13. In v. 5:14, it seems strange that Paul should introduce the *law* again after emphasizing for 4½ chapters that believers are not under it. Why does he do that?



Galatians 5:14-15. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

Galatians 4:21-31 ~ Hagar and Sarah ~ Leader's Guide

1. Do you take pride in any ethnic, national, or spiritual ancestor? What effect does that relationship have on the way you live your life?

2. What was the difference in status between Abraham's two sons? (4:22, Genesis 15:17-16:10, Genesis 21:1-13)

Ishmael was born to the slave woman, Hagar whereas Isaac was born to the free woman, Sarah.

3. What parallel did Paul draw between Abraham's two sons and the two covenants between God and man? (4:22-28)

Paul uses the story of Hagar and Sarah as a picture of the relationship between God and man. The Jews traced their lineage through Abraham's legitimate son, Isaac, the son of Sarah, and regarded Ishmael, the son of Hagar, as an outcast. Here, Paul tells them that Hagar represents the covenant given on Mt. Sinai, which is the law that the Jews in Jerusalem pride themselves on keeping.

4. What makes this such a powerful message for the Galatians? How did it illustrate a theological truth? How do you think this message made them feel?

The story of Hagar and Sarah is symbolic and has a deeper meaning than first appears. We saw that the two women represent two covenants: Hagar the covenant of the law and Sarah the covenant of grace. The covenant of the law given at Mt Sinai produced slavery; thus Hagar, a slave girl, fitted that covenant. Hagar represents Jerusalem (vs 25), the center for unsaved Israelites who were seeking to keep the law, which would be pleasing to God. (Don't get the idea that this was to earn God's love or a place in heaven—they already had that as a result of God's original covenant with Abraham.). For Paul to link unbelieving Israelites with Hagar rather than with Sarah was a stinging characterization.

He goes on to say that Christ followers are like the son, Isaac, born of Sarah, a free woman. True believers are children of promise (v. 28) but they will often be persecuted and mocked by those born of the flesh, just as Ishmael mocked Isaac (v. 29). (Refers to Gen 21:9) Paul goes on to encourage the Galatians to listen to the verdict of scripture (v. 30) and he quotes from Genesis 21:10—"the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son"—and encourages the Galatians to claim the promise made to their ancestor, Isaac, by shaking off the bonds of slavery imposed by the law.

5. Which of your own rules or personal standards do you impose or expect of others?

Galatians 5:1-15 ~ Freedom in Christ

6. What is the "yoke of slavery" to which Paul refers in verse 5:1?

The yoke of slavery refers to the burden of trying to obey the law to gain God's favor. Christians must stand against those who would enslave us with rules, methods, or special conditions for being saved or growing in Christ. You have been made free by the tremendous sacrifice that Christ has made for you and in gratitude you must stand fast in the liberty with which Christ has made you free.

7. What does Paul tell the Galatians they will be obligated to do if they comply with the requirement of the Judaizers to be circumcised?

Legalism makes Christ of no value. Circumcision to Paul was not a surgical operation nor a religious observance. It represented a system of salvation by good works and obedience to the law. It declared a gospel of human effort apart from divine grace. It was a law supplanting grace; for to add to Christ was to take from Christ. Christ is our only savior—solitary and exclusive. Circumcision would mean exclusion from Christ. Legalism requires men to keep the whole law. If a person attempts to please God by being circumcised, then he is under obligation to keep the whole law. Thus, if he is under the law, Christ is valueless to him.

[Male circumcision is the surgical removal of the foreskin from the human penis. The procedure is most often elected for religious reasons or personal preferences, but may be indicated for both therapeutic and prophylactic reasons. Circumcision is very important to Judaism, with over 90% of adherents having the procedure performed as a religious obligation. The New Testament chapter Acts 15 records that Christianity does not require circumcision but it does not forbid it either. Circumcision is practiced nearly universally by Muslim males. Circumcision has only been thought of as a common medical procedure since late Victorian times (1880s). The positions of the world's major medical organizations range from considering neonatal circumcision as having a modest health benefit that outweighs small risks to viewing it as having no benefit and significant risks. No major medical organization recommends either universal circumcision for all infant males or banning the procedure. In the 1970s, national medical associations in Australia and Canada issued recommendations against routine infant circumcision, leading to drops in the rates of circumcision in both of those countries and much of Europe.]

8. Circumcision made it relatively easy for Jews to identify others who believed as they did. Paul tells them (v. 6) that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.” How, then can they—and we—identify others who hold similar *Christian* beliefs?

Outward identity markers include things like wearing a WWJD bracelet, having a chrome fish on your car, or carrying a Bible. But this is not what makes you a Christian; behavior is what counts. “By the way that you act, they will know you are a Christian.” (adapted from Colossians 4:5-6) God is not interested in rituals or appearances, but in the reality of a Godly life. Faith is not idle; it manifests itself in unselfish service to God and man. Faith works through love; it is prompted by love, not by law.

How do you behave with and toward unbelievers? Do you like them? Do you hate them? Do you tolerate them? Are you concerned about their salvation? Do you act like them when you aren't in Christian company? Do you snub them if they aren't holy? Some Christians think that being kind to unbelievers is like throwing pearls before swine. Then there are Christians who stand on street corners, in malls, and in front of abortion clinics to witness to unbelievers. Others just don't care one way or another. Or they don't care because they're already saved. Where do you fit in? Do you share your faith using hugs or headlocks? Honey or a hammer? Or do you even share your faith at all?

9. What is Paul's tone in verses 5:7-12?

He seems disappointed and perplexed. “Why,” he asks, “are you listening to these Judaizers and their doctrine of legalism? Why are you turning your back on and being disobedient to the truth that you already knew?”

10. We are surrounded by the kind of yeast to which Paul refers in verse 7:9. Give an example—positive or negative—from your own life. How did you respond?

11. Paul tells us in v. 13 that we “were called to be free.” Does this mean we can do anything we want to do?

Absolutely not. Christ came to set us free—not free to do whatever we want because that would lead us back into following our selfish desires. Rather, thanks to Christ, we are now free and able to do what was impossible before—to live unselfishly. The believer’s standard is the life of the Lord Jesus, and the love for Christ impels him to hate sin and love holiness. The Christian is free from the law, but not lawless. Christian liberty does not permit sin; rather it encourages loving service. It is like a river that has the liberty to flow, but only between its banks; without these it would only spread out into a slimy, stagnant pool.

We must not turn our freedom into a base of operations *for the flesh*. Just as an invading army will seek to gain a beachhead and use it as a base of operations for further conquest, so the flesh will use a little license to expand its territory.

12. How does God want us to use the freedom He has given us?

One commentator says, “Make it a habit to be slaves to one another.” True freedom is found in obedience to proper restraint. A river has liberty to flow, but only between its banks. Without banks (restraints) it would only spread out into a slimy, stagnant pool. So it is with God’s law; in a sense it fences us in and fences others out. The restraints which regulate our liberty also insure and protect it. It is not harsh control, but a cheerful obedience which makes the free man.

13. In v. 5:14, it seems strange that Paul should introduce the *law* again after emphasizing for 4½ chapters that believers are not under it. Why does he do that?

Paul is not urging his readers to go back to the law. Rather he showing that what the law required but could *not* produce is the very thing that results from the exercise of Christian liberty. He then warns in the final verse of this section (5:15) that legalism invariably leads to quarreling. The law requires that people love their neighbors yet the very reverse had happened. They have been backbiting and devouring one another.

Do you ever find this happening today? Not just with God’s law but man-made laws as well. Looking for loopholes in the law? Angry because someone is getting away with something that you’re not because you’re obeying the law? Looking at and perhaps obeying the letter of the law and forgetting about the spirit of the law? Angry because some people consider themselves above it?

Scripture from Genesis 15:17-21 – 16:1-11 – 21:1-13

Genesis 15:17-21

¹⁷ When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates— ¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, ²⁰ Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, ²¹ Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

Genesis 16:1-11 – Hagar and Ishmael

¹ Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; ² 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. ³ 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. ⁴ He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. ⁵ Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.” ⁶ “Your servant is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her. ⁷ The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered. ⁹ Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel added, “I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count.” ¹¹ The angel of the LORD also said to her: “You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery.

Genesis 21:1-13 – The Birth of Isaac

¹ Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. ² Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. ⁴ When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

⁸ The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned Abraham held a great feast. ⁹ But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, ¹⁰ and 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.” ¹¹ The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son. ¹² But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned. ¹³ I will make the son of the maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”

Galatians 4:21-5:15 ~ Scripture Verses

Hagar and Sarah

²¹ Tell me, you who want to be under the law, are you not aware of what the law says? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 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.

²⁴ 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. 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. ²⁶ But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷ 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.”

²⁸ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 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. ³⁰ 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.” ³¹ Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.

Freedom in Christ

¹ It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

⁷ You were running a good race. Who cut in on you and kept you from obeying the truth? ⁸ That kind of persuasion does not come from the one who calls you. ⁹ “A little yeast works through the whole batch of dough.” ¹⁰ I am confident in the Lord that you will take no other view. The one who is throwing you into confusion will pay the penalty, whoever he may be. ¹¹ Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. ¹² As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!

¹³ You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. ¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” ¹⁵ If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.