

# Who's Your Mother?

## **Galatians 4:21-31 (ESV)**

<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. <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."

<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.

### **Context:**

The false teachers were misleading the Galatians to come under the law, so that the Galatians can be like them who are the 'true' children of Abraham.

Paul in his theological and biblical arguments since chapter 3, has been repeatedly saying that the Galatian Christians are *already* sons of Abraham, heirs according to promise. Entry into Abraham's family is to have faith just as "Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness" (cf. 3:6).

Paul clearly states this here in 3:7:

*"Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham."*

### **DISCUSS**

#### **1. The History (v.21-23)**

Paul starts off by addressing those Galatians who "desire to be under the law" (v21). This indicates that complete apostasy to Judaism has not taken place. Although some have begun following calendar feasts and holy days, and were persuaded toward circumcision.

Paul wants them to “listen” to the law – the Torah. And he begins by reminding a familiar story of Abraham-Hagar-Sarah.

That since the Judaizers pride in being children of Abraham, in fact Abraham had two important sons: Ishmael born by the *slave* woman Hagar, and Isaac born to the *free* woman Sarah. Their births were also very different. One was according to the human effort and plan, giving Hagar as a wife so that Abraham can have an offspring. The other was according to the promise of God and *his* plan, where God brought forth a child by miracle.

**Abraham and Sarah tried to “help God” by making their own plan of an offspring through Hagar.**

**In what areas of your life do you find it hard to wait for God’s timing, and are tempted to take matters into your own hands?**

## **2. The Interpretation (v.24-27)**

Paul had just stated the facts of history. Now he gives his surprising interpretation.

Paul uses a form of interpretation that the Judaizers themselves likely employed: allegory. The Judaizers likely argued that they were the true children of Abraham because Sarah was their mother. Therefore, Hagar’s children (Gentiles) need to come under their Jewish family lines, by becoming Jews.

Paul reverses their interpretation.

He says that both women *represent* two covenants.

The first is Hagar, who “bears children for slavery” (v.24b). Hagar is Mount Sinai (v.24a,25) which is the covenant where God gave Moses the law on Mount Sinai. He further adds that this corresponds to the present Jerusalem – Jews who relate to God on the basis of law-keeping performance.

The other woman is Sarah, the “free” woman (v.26). Paul tells the Galatians that “she is *our* mother”. And that they, as Christians by faith, belong not to the present Jerusalem but the heavenly Jerusalem. He then quotes Isaiah 54:1, showing that these children by faith will be more numerous than the children of the law (v.27).

Paul's point was to show that Galatian Christians, who relate to God by faith and not obedience to law, already *are children of Abraham*. They are *free* from the law and its slavery. We don't need to go under the law anymore.

**Those who relate to God on the basis of law-keeping are like children of slavery.**

**What are some modern ways Christians might fall into this “performance-based” mindset today?**

### **3. The Application (v.28-31)**

Paul here gives his main point twice... We are like Isaac, children of promise (v.28), children of the free woman Sarah, and not the slave woman (v.31).

Yet, since we are like Isaac, we must expect to be treated like him (v.29). Paul reminds them Ishmael persecuted Isaac, Christians will be persecuted by our half-brothers. We must expect the same, to be mocked by those closest to us in the church who aren't true children of promise. Jesus received it, so did Paul and the Galatian Christians, and so will we.

*As we walk in glory and freedom, we should expect to be mistreated by those who do not.*

Paul gives a practical application in v.30: we are to “cast out the slave woman and her son” because they do not share in our inheritance. The Galatians were commanded to cast out the Judaizers (not all Jews, but the false teachers) from the church. They are *not* part of the family of promise because they taught a false gospel. The church must guard the gospel with the same vigilance, refusing anything that distorts the promise of God.

**In our context today, what would it look like for us to ‘cast out the slave woman and her son’? How do we guard our church and our own hearts from slipping back into a works-based mindset?**

**Pray For:****1. Patience in Waiting**

Pray that we would trust in God's perfect timing instead of rushing ahead with our own plans. Ask for faith to rest in His wisdom and to grow in dependence on Him while we wait.

**2. Faith over Law**

Pray that our daily walk with God would be rooted in faith, not legalistic striving. Ask Him to help us keep grace at the center of our devotion.

**3. Casting out Slavery**

Pray that we would identify and cast out any works-based mindset from our hearts. Ask for strength to rely fully on God's promise, not our performance.