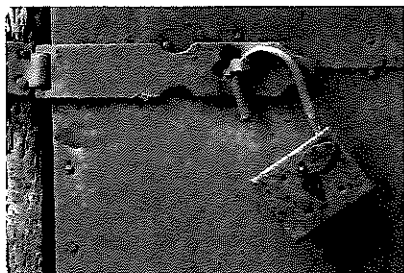


Set Free!



Topic

Liberty in Christ

Theme

Christ has set us free from the law.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will live out the freedom of liberty in Christ.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 11
- Heavy box or container with handles
- Cord or strip of material

Scripture Focus

Galatians 4:21–5:1

Summary

Abraham's two sons illustrate the difference between the Judaizers' teaching and the gospel of grace. Abraham's son Ishmael was born "after the flesh" but Abraham's other son, Isaac, was born "by promise." Since spiritual blessings spring from promise and not from the flesh, the Galatians needed to stand in the liberty Christ had given them.

Outline

I. What the Law Said (Gal. 4:21–23)

- A. Paul appealed to the whole law (4:21)
- B. Paul illustrated works and promise (4:22, 23)

II. What the Law Implied (Gal. 4:24–27)

- A. Hagar represented law (4:24, 25)
- B. Sarah represented grace (4:26, 27)

III. How the Law Applied (Gal. 4:28–5:1)

- A. Expect persecution (4:28, 29)
- B. Abandon Judaism (4:30, 31)
- C. Stand in liberty (5:1)

Memory Verse

"Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Galatians 5:1).

GETTING STARTED

Burden Relief

Have two learners each grab a handle of the heavy box or container and lift it.

ASK: How would you like to carry this burden everywhere you went?

ASK: How would that affect your life?

Have a second pair of learners take the box to feel its weight. Then have one of the two learners take the box to hold himself. Direct questions to the learner no longer holding the box.

ASK: What does it feel like to be relieved of the burden?

ASK: How should you respond to having your burden taken from you?

Paul used an illustration to help us understand our deliverance from the burden of trying to earn God's grace. We will learn in today's lesson that Jesus took that burden for us so we might live free in Him.

My Hands Are Tied

Tie a volunteer's hands together with a cord or strip of material. Have the volunteer attempt to do everyday activities (e.g., write a note, play catch with a ball, comb his hair). Release the volunteer and have him return to his seat.

ASK: How would having our hands constantly tied affect our lives?

ASK: How much would you be willing to pay to get your hands free?

Paul told the Galatians to stand fast in their liberty in Christ. They had purposefully handcuffed themselves to the law. That made their lives difficult and discouraging. Jesus offers us freedom from trying to meet the law's standard. He met it for us so we might live by faith in Him. We will learn more about Christ's work for us in today's lesson.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

The Judaizers influenced the Galatians to submit to the rules of Judaism. Paul used the Jewish Scriptures to prove the folly of the Galatians' submission to the law. He argued that God has always acted to free people rather than enslave them.

I. What the Law Said (Gal. 4:21–23)

A. Paul appealed to the whole law (4:21)

In following the Judaizers, the Galatians declared that they preferred to live by the law rather than by grace. Their appreciation for freedom had slipped badly. Paul argued that the law contradicted the teaching of the Judaizers.

ASK: Why are our desires not always a reliable guide when making important choices (v. 21; cf. Genesis 3:6)? (Q3) *If our hearts are not given to the Lord, our desires will be sinful and selfish.*

READ: Galatians 4:21.

Paul asked the Galatians if they had listened carefully to what the law said. The Jewish law contained more than just the legal regulations; it included the historical records of God's people. The Judaizers concentrated on the laws God had given to Moses. But long before Moses lived, God worked in Abraham's life. Paul challenged the Galatians to consider carefully what they could learn from Abraham's experiences (Gal. 4:21).

B. Paul illustrated works and promise (4:22, 23)

God had promised Abraham a son (Gen. 15:4) even though Sarah was barren (Gen. 11:30). When ten years passed without God fulfilling His promise, Sarah finally decided to take matters into her own hands. Following the custom of the ancient Near Eastern world, she asked Abraham to father a child by her bond-maid, Hagar. Sarah planned to exercise her right as Hagar's mistress and adopt the child as her own. Abraham agreed to the plan, and Ishmael was born (Gal. 4:22; Gen. 16:4, 15).

ASK: Why do we often take matters into our own hands when we should wait on the Lord to fulfill His promises? (Q4) *We act by sight rather than by faith.*

Abraham laughed at God's promise to give him a son in his old age (Gen. 17:17). But fifteen years after Ishmael's birth, God gave Abraham and Sarah a son. This boy, Isaac, was the son whom God had promised to Abraham (Gen. 21:1–3). He was born of the free woman according to God's promise. He came as a matter of faith rather than works.

READ: Galatians 4:23.

ASK: When has God rewarded you for patiently exercising faith in Him? (Q5)

Paul recounted the births of Abraham's sons to point out the different ways to be related to Abraham. Ishmael was related to Abraham in a fleshly way that relied on human works. On the other hand, Isaac was related to Abraham because God had worked graciously in the fulfillment of His promise. In the rest of the chapter, Paul drew a set of parallels between Ishmael, as an example of human works, and Isaac, who represented God's gracious promise. He was using the Old Testament to illustrate his point that the godly life has always developed out of grace, not out of works.

II. What the Law Implied (Gal. 4:24–27)

By reminding the Galatians that Abraham had two sons, Paul was doing more than simply repeating the facts of history. He wanted to draw out what the historical facts implied.

A. Hagar represented law (4:24, 25)

READ: Galatians 4:24.

Because Hagar was a slave, her children were also slaves. In that regard she was like the law God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. It imposed the bondage of rules and regulations. In the illustration, Hagar represented the covenant of law that could produce only bondage (4:24).

READ: Galatians 4:25.

Paul drove his argument further in verse 25. He wrote that Hagar was like the Jerusalem of his time. Of course, Jerusalem was the headquarters of Judaism. Therefore, the Jewish system and all its adherents were in spiritual bondage. The Judaizers were championing a cause that led only to slavery, not to spiritual freedom. Although Paul did not state it, he clearly implied that the followers of Judaism were like Ishmael. The Jewish law could bring only the kind of aimlessness and shallowness that characterized Ishmael. It had no power to produce genuine spiritual life.

B. Sarah represented grace (4:26, 27)

Paul contrasted the Jewish system of law, centered in Jerusalem, with grace, which comes from Heaven, or from the “Jerusalem which is above” (4:26).

READ: Galatians 4:26.

The Jerusalem above is free, for it is not under the bondage of Judaism. This spiritual freedom results from the fact that God’s promise is the foundation for the heavenly Jerusalem. Therefore, the Jerusalem above is like Sarah, whose son was born by the promise of God. As Isaac, the son of the free woman Sarah, was free, so believers—citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem—are spiritually free. The law brought spiritual slavery, but the gospel of grace gives spiritual liberation.

READ: Galatians 4:27.

Paul supported his point in 4:27 by citing Isaiah 54:1. That prophecy came immediately after the foretelling of Messiah’s suffering as the substitutionary sacrifice for sin (Isa. 53).

READ: Isaiah 53:6.

As Paul applied Isaiah 54:1, he indicated that the church was fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy in a remarkable way. Isaiah made the point that what was formerly barren would become more fruitful than its rival. As more and more Gentiles became Christians, they soon would be more numerous than the Jewish Christians, who were the first believers.

Since that was the case, the Judaizers were really working against the prophecy. They were trying to make the church Jewish and keep it bound to the Jewish regulations. To hold on to Judaism would be to insist on barrenness, but God by His gracious promise had made Christians fruitful and free. In Christ, Gentiles who

In writing “which things [the lives of Hagar/Ishmael and Sarah/Isaac] are an allegory” (v. 24), Paul did not deny the historical truth of the Genesis narratives. Rather, he built upon that truth as an illustration of how God works with humans. This allegorical meaning added to the historical meaning of Genesis and harmonized fully with the historical meaning.

This heavenly Jerusalem is the city of the living God (cf. Heb. 12:22; Rev. 21:2). True believers of all ages find their spiritual citizenship in this heavenly city (Phil. 3:20).

Ephesians 2:11–22 supports the truth that in Christ, saved Gentiles have equal footing with saved Jews.

at one time were excluded from the Jewish national promises had been brought to God. This is the joyous message of grace, the good news of the gospel.

ASK: What would you expect the lives of those living free in Christ to be like? (Q6) *Fruitful, fulfilling, full of contentment.*

III. How the Law Applied (Gal. 4:28–5:1)

Paul discussed Isaac and Ishmael for a good reason; he wanted to help the Galatians see the folly of forsaking the gospel of grace. Beginning with the Old Testament Scriptures, which the Judaizers claimed to obey, he presented the spiritual implications of Hagar's representing Judaism and Sarah's representing Christianity. In doing so, he addressed the Galatians directly and challenged them to live in liberty, not in spiritual bondage.

A. Expect persecution (4:28, 29)

READ: Galatians 4:28.

In 4:28, Paul pointed out that believers, including him and the Galatians, were like Isaac in the Genesis account. Isaac had been born by God's gracious and miraculous work, just as the Christians had been born again based on God's grace shown in the death of Christ on the cross. In no way were the Galatian believers like Ishmael, who was born by mere human effort apart from God's plan.

Isaac received hostile treatment from Ishmael. Ishmael, the son of the slave, mocked Isaac, the son of Sarah. Eventually Abraham banished Ishmael and his mother from Abraham's household, because the two boys could not live together in harmony (Gen. 21:8–14).

Paul drew on this historical fact to explain what was happening in Galatia. He wrote in Galatians 4:29, "But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now." In other words, like Isaac, believers could expect to be treated harshly by the Jews. Because the Jews insisted on a system of works to earn God's acceptance, they could not tolerate believers who trusted in God's grace.

READ: Acts 14:19; 17:13. **ASK:** How had Paul been treated the Jews? (Q7) *They incited multitudes against him and even attempted to take his life by stoning.*

B. Abandon Judaism (4:30, 31)

Paul challenged the Galatians to abandon their consideration of Judaism. Just as Sarah insisted that Hagar and Ishmael be cast out, so the Galatian believers needed to abandon the works of Judaism (Gal. 4:30). Drastic action was necessary.

READ: Galatians 4:30.

Isaac and Ishmael could not live together in harmony. Ishmael could not change his status as a slave, and Isaac was always the son of promise. If the two boys had continued to live in the same household, only strife and trouble would have come. Therefore, Abraham had to banish Ishmael.

In the same way, the grace of Christianity and the law of Judaism could not exist together in the Galatian churches.

ASK: How much tolerance do people who believe salvation is based on works have for those who believe salvation is by grace alone? (Q8) *Wars have been fought over the differences. Christians have been persecuted at times for their beliefs.*

ASK: Why should believers neither be tolerant of nor cooperate with false religions? (Q9) *Toleration and cooperation open the door for compromise.*

Grace speaks of God's supernatural work of salvation that He gives to those who trust in Him. Law is a system of works whereby people earn God's favor. Law has no room for grace, and grace rejects the idea that works can bring a person to God. Therefore, Paul drew the logical conclusion for the Galatians in verse 31: "So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free." They could not accept the teaching of the Judaizers without denying their own spiritual identity.

READ: Jude 3, 20. **ASK:** According to verse 3, what should believers do about "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"? (Q10) *Contend for it.*

ASK: According to verse 20, what proactive step should we as believers take to combat false teaching? (Q11) *Build ourselves up in the faith.*

C. Stand in liberty (5:1)

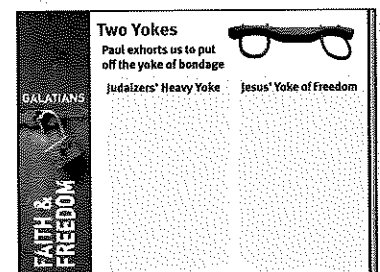
The word "therefore" in Galatians 5:1 indicates that the exhortation flows from what Paul had written before. Because the Galatians were saved by grace, they were spiritually free. Therefore, they needed to stand fast in the liberty Christ had given them and "be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal. 5:1).

READ: Matthew 11:28–30. **ASK:** A yoke is designed to link two animals together for a common purpose, shared power, and a unified direction. Why was it impossible for the Galatians to stand fast in liberty while being yoked with Judaizers? (Q12) *The Judaizers' purpose (to obey the law), power (personal effort), and direction (living under the law) conflicted with those of the Galatian believers.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 11. **ASK:** Why is the Judaizers' yoke burdensome and heavy? (Q13) (Record or reveal answers.) *It demands personal effort; it gives no grace; it condemns all who fail; it leads to despair; its standard is impossible to meet.*

ASK: What does Jesus' yoke give the believer the freedom to do? (Q14) (Record or reveal answers.) *Love and serve others, show joy, display peace, manifest patience, demonstrate faithfulness, exercise self-control.*

The Galatians had entered spiritual freedom through faith in Christ. Now



they needed to stand fast in this liberty. Turning to legalism would lead only to bondage and frustration. They needed to rest the full weight of trust upon the fact that Christ had redeemed them by His blood—once and for all. As the redeemed, believers had the freedom to grow in Christ and display the fruit of the Spirit in their lives.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Freedom Evaluation

ASK: How does your life show your freedom in Christ? Are you peaceful, joyful, patient, and kind? (Q15)

ASK: God's Word is the key to transforming your mind to be like Christ's. What will you do this week to spend more time in God's Word? (Q16)

Lead to Freedom

ASK: How will you use your freedom to share God's Word with coworkers, friends, or family members who are slaves to vain religions? (Q17)

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Live out the freedom of liberty in Christ.

Encourage your learners to memorize Galatians 5:1. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

Living by Faith	
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