

**Galatians 4:21-31**  
Gospel Family  
*Jonathan M. Romig*

Pastor Jonathan preached this message at Immanuel Church in Chelmsford MA on 8/2/2015.

## Introduction:

1. In Boston there is a Memorial to Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th MA Volunteer Infantry Regiment.
2. The 54th was one of the first official African-American regiments to fight in the Civil War.
3. I recently watched the movie “Glory” that depicts this units fight for freedom.
4. At the beginning of the war Colonel Shaw read Jefferson Davis’s proclamation to his soldiers.
5. It stated that any runaway slaves serving in the military would be shot along with their white captains.
6. Shaw gives his solders and officers the opportunity to leave but the next morning they’re all there.
7. These soldiers go onto lead one of the most dangerous attacks on Fort Wagner near Charleston SC.
8. Colonel Shaw, played by Matthew Broderick, says it would be the 54th’s honor to lead the attack.
9. His men are fighting not to just win a war, but to win the freedom of all fellow enslaved people.
10. Today, as followers of Jesus, you and I also fight a daily battle for our freedom.
11. The greatest threat to religious liberty is not a politician, but the heart.
12. In Galatians, Paul tells us that we can either live a free life or an enslaved life.

(In Galatians 4:21-31, we read that Abraham had both free and enslaved descendants.)

(This story starts with his two wives, Hagar and Sarah, and his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac.)

## I. Abraham had two sons born two different ways. (**Read 4:21-23**)

### A. Abraham had two sons born two different ways.

1. In this letter Paul is countering false teachers in Galatia.
2. Their argument is simple; “If you don’t obey the law, you’re not a true child of Abraham.”
3. Paul’s argument is just the opposite: “God’s children are those who trust God over themselves.”
4. Timothy Keller, in *Galatians For You*, phrases Paul’s argument this way:

*“Paul’s basic point is: The moment you believed in Christ, you were the children of Abraham, the heirs of all the promises of God! And the moment you start thinking you have to obey the whole law, you are not the children of Abraham at all! (pg 119)*

5. To make his point Paul goes back to the story of Genesis and retells it in a new way.
6. Abraham became the father of the Jewish people, but he wasn’t always that way (no kids).
7. In Genesis 12:1-3 God promises Abraham that he will be the father of a great nation.

*“The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household 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. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”” (Genesis 12:1–3, NIV)*

8. Abraham, like any authentic believer, struggles to trust God.
9. He considers adopting one of his servants to which God replies in Genesis 15:4-6:

*“Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.” (Genesis 15:4–6, NIV)*

(Abraham believes God that he can give him a son, but he still doubts.)  
(Now Abraham can either bring this promise about through his effort or God's effort.)

B. Ishmael, the first son, was born by human effort.

1. V. 23 tells us that Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn, was "Born in the ordinary way."
2. To understand what this means, we need to go back and read Genesis 16:1-4.

*"Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, 'The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; 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 slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress." (Genesis 16:1-4, NIV)*

3. Abraham doubted God's promises and does it his own way by sleeping with his servant girl.
4. Sarai was about 75 years old at the time, and Abraham 86 years old.
5. Hagar was probably a young teenage woman able to conceive and bear children.
6. Through their own effort, Abraham and Hagar conceive and have a son named Ishmael.
7. God let Abraham try to do it his way, but Ishmael and Hagar only bring pain.

(But God chooses "the weak things of the world to shame the strong." 1 Cor 1:27)

C. Isaac, the second son, was born by God's effort.

1. V. 23 also tells us that Abraham's "son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise."
2. Even though Abraham disobeys God, God still promises to give him a son.
3. In Gen 21:1-5, 14 years later, God gives Abraham and Sarah a son when he is 100 and she is 90.

*"Now 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 gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him." (Genesis 21:1-5, NIV)*

4. Abraham struggled to believe that God would fulfill his promises in God's way.
5. He had dead seed and Sarah a dead womb; this is what we call *resurrection hope* (Gen 15:6)<sup>1</sup>
6. Abraham's son Isaac was a *resurrection baby* born out of a biological impossibility. (Mary)
7. Like Abraham, the Galatians need to trust in God's effort instead of their own.

D. We can either trust in our effort or God's effort.

1. *Immanuel Church* is planting a new daughter church called *Cornerstone Congregational Church*.
2. The temptation for Cornerstone is to trust in our own plans and works for a successful launch.
3. The temptation for Immanuel is to trust in your programs and numbers to restore what you lose.
4. We at Cornerstone need to take Hagar to heart, that we're not better because we're younger.
5. God doesn't care about age, he cares about those who are willing to follow and trust him.

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Carol Kaminski used the term "resurrection hope" to explain this concept. See CASKET EMPTY.

6. Both Cornerstone and Immanuel must remember to trust in God's effort instead of our own.

(Abraham had two sons born two different ways.)

## II. Abraham had two wives that represent two different paths. **(Read 4:24-27)**

### A. Path #1: Trusting in self (leads to slavery)

1. Hagar represents Mount Sinai where God gave Israel the Mosaic Covenant (allegory).
2. Hagar is actually an Egyptian, so it would have been insulting to align her with Sinai.
3. Paul is saying that to return to Sinai is return to bondage in Egypt.
4. Sinai is the "present Jerusalem" or those Jews that trust their own works.
5. They'll never be good enough or perfect enough (enslaved to self).
6. Path #1 is "Trusting in self" and self will always lead to slavery.

### B. Path #2: Trusting in God (leads to freedom)

1. Sarah represents heaven, a heavenly city we already belong to if we trust God.
2. There's nothing you can do to get on this path but trust in God's promises.
3. V. 27 uses three commands to tell Sarah to trust God, "Be glad! Break forth! Cry aloud!"
4. In v. 27 Paul quotes Isaiah 54:1, which was a promise of restoration for the exiles.
5. This verse comes right after Isaiah 53, which is all about Jesus the "suffering servant."
6. We can only trust in God through trusting in his promise to save us through Christ.
7. Path #2 is "Trusting in God" and God will always lead to freedom.

### C. We can either trust in self or God.

1. When Monica and I were dating at GCTS, we went to the Gordon Globes (film festival).
2. One of the videos was of a girl going through their outdoor program and doing a "trust fall."
3. A trust fall is when you stand high up and fall back into the arms of those waiting to catch you.
4. She loves trust falling so much she begins to trust fall everyone (classmates, friends, cute boy).
5. She ends up falling down and stumbling over pretty much everything.
6. This is what we do when we trust self... Will you catch me, good behavior, good grades, etc.?
7. Instead of trusting in these things, God calls us to fall into his arms.

(When we trust in our good works, we become slaves of doing good—we earn our salvation.)

(But when we belong to God, he sets us free to do good out of gratitude instead of necessity.)

## III. God's family is a free family. **(Read 4:28-31)**

### A. Those born under law fight those born free.

1. I can't preach on this topic without at least one reference to the 1966 lion movie "Born Free."
2. It's about a lion that grew up in captivity and was trained to live in the wild.
3. You and I are also born in captivity and have to be trained to really get the gospel.
4. The gospel is that Christ went into slavery so that we might be set free.
5. Cecil the Lion was lured from a Zimbabwe wildlife sanctuary and killed recently.
6. In my home town, a hunter shot Samson the Elk with a bow and arrow on YMCA property.
7. Scripture warns us that those who trust in themselves will "poach" our freedom in Christ.
8. V. 29 says "the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit."

9. Law people can't stand grace people because they make them feel bad.

(We're all either an Ishmael or an Isaac.)

B. How do I know if I'm an Ishmael?

1. Do you look down on others for not reading their Bibles or praying as much as you?
2. Are you always judging others for not acting as a proper Christian should?
3. Do you make your family members feel miserable for not living up to your expectations?
4. Are you constantly disappointed with your own walk with God?
5. Us Ishmaels sound like religious bullies that just need God's grace.

C. How do I know if I'm an Isaac?

1. Do you love God and know he loves you even when you don't obey perfectly?
2. Do you live for Christ not to earn God's pleasure but because you know God is pleased already?
3. Do you give your family members and friends grace when they make mistakes?
4. Can you receive God's love, joy, and satisfaction?
5. None of us are Isaac in our own strength—we're all Ishmaels, which is why we need God.

D. It's hard to separate Ishmael from Isaac. (4:30)

1. Most of us struggle with living like Ishmael one day and Isaac the next.
2. V. 30 says "the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son."
3. That's a warning for those that love the order, control, and happiness of a works-based life.
4. But it's also a promise for those that need to know God won't leave you like this forever.
5. Our God is the one who takes Ishmaels and makes them into Isaacs.

Conclusion:

1. God's family is a free family.

Benediction: Ephesians 6:24 (NIV) "Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love."