

**Title:** Standing Fast and Holding Firm in Grace or “Chose your Mother, Chose your Master”

**Text:** Galatians 4:21-5:1

**Theme:** Our position in Christ has no place for legalism’s bondage.

**Introduction:** In Paul’s theological defense of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone he appeals to the law itself to show the validity of his position. Remember, he has already looked to Abraham (3:6-14), the nature of the Promise (3:15-18) and the purpose of the Law (3:19-29) to show the centrality of Christ and grace. He now turns again to the story of Sarah and Hagar.

“In Galatians 4:21-5:1 Paul uses the authority of Scripture to present an allegorical exposition of the Hagar-Sarah stories dominated by a metaphorical **contrast between two kinds of sonship: sonship characterized by slavery and sonship characterized by freedom**. He does so in order to urge the Galatians not to yield to the opponents, but rather to remain ‘free’. Furthermore, the metaphorical contrast is used to vilify the opponents as their ‘gospel’ is categorized as religious ‘slavery’.” ([emphasis added] Donald Francois Tolmie, 162)

A **simile** is a technique that uses words such as "like" or "as" to compare two ideas. Even though similes and [metaphors](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphor) are both forms of comparison, similes allow the two ideas to remain distinct in spite of their similarities, whereas metaphors seek to equate two ideas despite their differences. For instance, a simile that compares a person with a bullet would go as follows: "John was a record-setting runner and as fast as a speeding bullet." A metaphor might read something like, "John was a record-setting runner. That speeding bullet could zip past you without you even knowing he was there."  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simile>

The following provides some biblical background concerning Abraham’s two sons, “one born by the slave woman and the other by the free woman.”

**Biblical Background:** God first called Abraham when he was 75 years old. At the time, Abraham was living in Haran, located near the northeastern part of present-day Syria. He was married to Sarah and they had no children. God promised to “make Abraham into a great nation.”

Genesis 12:1,2: “The LORD had said to Abram, ‘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.’”

Sometime later, God again appeared to Abraham, promising to give him descendants.

Genesis 12:7: “And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, ‘**To your descendants I will give this land.**’ So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.”

Later, God reiterated His promise by telling Abraham He would give him as many descendants as the “dust of the earth:”

Genesis 13:14-16: “And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, ‘Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. And **I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.**”

This led to the establishment of the “Abrahamic Covenant,” whereby God made it clear that these descendants were to be his biological children, despite Abraham’s advanced age:

Genesis 15:2-5: “And Abram said, ‘O Lord GOD, what wilt Thou give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Since Thou hast given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir.’ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, ‘This man will not be your heir; **but one who shall come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.**’ **And He took him outside and said, ‘Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’**”

However, Abraham and Sarah became tired of waiting for God to fulfill His promise. They decided to take matters into their own hands. As was the custom in that day, Sarah “gave” one of her servants, Hagar, to Abraham so that Abraham could father a child through her.

Genesis 16:1-4: “Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, ‘Now behold, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid; perhaps I shall obtain children through her.’ And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. And after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived...”

Sarah’s and Abraham’s plan worked(!). At age 86, Abraham fathered a son, who was named Ishmael. In this manner, they “helped along” God’s promise to produce biological descendants for Abraham.

Genesis 16:15: “So Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. And Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to him.”

The Bible says of Ishmael that “he will be a wild donkey of a man, His hand will be against everyone, And everyone's hand will be against him; And he will live to the east of all his brothers” (Genesis 16:12). Ishmael became the patriarch of the nomadic tribes that lived in Arabia. According to the Muslim holy book, the Koran, Ishmael is the spiritual forefather of today’s Muslims.

Many years later, when Abraham was 99 years old, God again appeared to him and reiterated His promise of making a great nation out of him. This time, God made it clear that this lineage was to come through Sarah, not Hagar (i.e., the “free woman,” not the “slave woman”). When Abraham tried to redirect God’s attention to Ishmael, God emphasized that the covenant would be through Sarah’s son, who was to be called Isaac.

Genesis 17:1,7,15-21; 21:1-3: “Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; Walk before Me, and be blameless. ... And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.’ ... Then God said to Abraham, ‘As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.’ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, ‘Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?’

And Abraham said to God, ‘Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!’ But God said, ‘**No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac; and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.** And as for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation. **But My covenant I will establish with Isaac,** whom Sarah will bear to you at this season next year.’ ... Then the LORD took note of Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had promised. **So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him.** And Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac.”

Paul is telling these false teachers and fallen brothers that the law is their own worst enemy. The law consistently proves them wrong.

### **THE BIG PICTURE:**

In considering the book of Galatians we can note a three-fold division.

- Chapters 1-2 = Personal/Biographical/ Authorization/Vindication
- Chapters 3-4 = Doctrinal/Biblical/Presentation/Exposition
- Chapters 5-6 = Practical/Behavioral/ Application

**Its Eternal Value:**

God always keeps His promises. He will bring to pass all that He has planned.

**The Problem:**

Because of doubt we have a tendency to do things our way instead of waiting on the Lord.

**The Storyline:**

Jesus is the promised seed through whom the inheritance would be received.

**Questions:**

1. To what does Paul appeal in verse 21?
2. To whom does Paul appeal in verses 22 and following?
3. What persecutes the children of promise?
4. What are we called on to do in verse 30?
5. What is Paul's exhortation to in 5:1?
6. Given your current understanding, what do you think is the main point that the Holy Spirit through Paul is making by comparing Abraham's two sons in Galatians 4:21-23? What are the two sons supposed to represent? As you answer this, remember the entire context of the book of Galatians. Paul is clearly giving an illustration of the same point he has been making all along.
7. Put yourself in Abraham's and Sarah's shoes and consider their "plan" to have a biological child through Hagar, Sarah's servant. Do you think this was a reasonable, sensible thing for them to do?
8. Galatians 4:24 states that "*the women represent two covenants.*" What are these "two covenants?"
9. What significant Biblical event happened at Mt. Sinai? For help on this, look up Exodus 19. Given that insight, what do you think Paul is implying by identifying one of the covenants with Mt. Sinai?
10. What are the distinctive characteristics of the covenant that was associated with Mt. Sinai?
11. Consider the following verses from the Old Testament:

Jeremiah 31:31-34: "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, 'when I will make a **NEW COVENANT** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares the LORD. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares the LORD, 'I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they shall not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'"

Ezekiel 36:25-27: [God speaking] “...I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.”

12. What do you think these verses are referring to? Consider the following verses from the New Testament:

Mark 2:21,22: [Jesus speaking] “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins.”

Hebrews 8:6: “But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.”

Galatians 2:20a: [Paul speaking] “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.”

Do you see any connection between these verses and the Old Testament verses above?

13. Consider the following verse:

Galatians 4:30: “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.’”

What do you think the Scripture means in the context of Galatians when it says “Get rid of the slave woman and her son”?

14. Consider the following interpretation:

When the Scripture says “Get rid of the slave woman and her son,” it means that living by law and living by faith cannot coexist. The Christian who desires to have “Christ formed in him/her” cannot hope to accomplish this goal by adding law-living to a life of faith. In this sense, living by law is like adding regular gasoline to an engine that is designed to run on diesel fuel. It not only doesn't make the car go, it destroys the engine.

15. What would it mean to “Do away with ‘law-living’” in your life? If you became convinced that this is what Scripture was teaching, how would you live your life differently?

16. React to the following statement:

Most Christians today live their lives, in essence, just like Old Testament Jews. Oh sure, they don’t sacrifice animals or keep strict observance of the Sabbath, but they have effectively replaced one set of laws (Sabbath-keeping, 10 Commandments), with another set of laws (church-going, moral living, family values, etc.). There is little real difference between how they live their lives compared with how devout Jews lived their lives under the Old Covenant. In what way do you think this statement is true? What do you think? Is this a fair statement?

17. What observations do you have of this passage? What stands out to you most about what you read?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know how the plane of God is carried out flawlessly.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose His will over our own.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His wisdom and strength.

### **Outline:**

I. The Historical Illustration (4:21-23)

**“It should be noted that his summary is dominated by contrasts, namely the contrast between slavery and freedom, and the contrast between flesh and promise.”**  
([emphasis added] Donald Francois Tolmie, 157)

The story is straight out of the Genesis narrative. Abraham had two sons, one by Hagar and the other by Sarah. The one through Hagar was born according to the flesh and the other son was born according to the promise.

The account is found in Genesis 15-21. God promised Abraham a son. Sarah ran ahead of God’s timing and produced an offspring that was not of the promise. God confirmed the promise to Abraham in Genesis 18 and Sarah laughed. God challenged Sarah’s unbelief with this statement, “Is anything too difficult for the LORD?” (18:13).

Paul’s take on this event is revealing in Romans 4:18-21.

“He describes Abraham’s response to this promise in three complementary ways.”

- He was willing to believe the impossible (v.18 [“In hope against hope”])
- He was willing to look beyond the understandable / observable (vv.19, 20 [“now as good as dead, yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief”])
- He was willing to stand on the unchangeable (v.21 [“fully assured, what He promised, He was able to perform”])

“The secret of Abraham’s faith is that he acknowledged God’s glory by acknowledging his ability to carry out his promises as the resurrecting and sovereign God. **Faith glorifies God because it acknowledges that life must be lived in complete dependence on him. The supreme way to worship God is not to work for him but to trust that he will fulfill his promises.**” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 238 [emphasis mine]).

“Genuine faith adheres to God’s promise despite the whirlwind of external circumstances that imperil it. Most important, faith receives its nourishment by anchoring on the God who made the promises. He can and will fulfill his pledges because He is the resurrecting God who creates life out of death, and because He is the sovereign God who summons into existence that which does not even exist.” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 239).

It was because of unbelief that Abraham had the child according to the flesh. Do you think the Islamic world is a result of Abraham’s sin or God’s purpose?

## II. The Allegorical Explanation (4:24-27)

The point Paul is seeking to make is singular in nature. The details are of little significance. We must embrace the primary point.

1 <sup>st</sup> Covenant	2 <sup>nd</sup> Covenant
1 <sup>st</sup> Woman	2 <sup>nd</sup> Woman
Mount Sinai	Jerusalem from above
Slaves	Free
Hagar	[Sarah]
[Ishmael]	Isaac
[Flesh]	Promise

Consider the following verses:

Galatians 4:23: “But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the **flesh**, and the son by the free woman through the **promise**.”

Galatians 4:29: “But as at that time he who was born according to the **flesh** persecuted him who was born according to the **Spirit**, so it is now also.”

Galatians 3:3: “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the **Spirit**, are you now being perfected by the **flesh**?”

It should be clear from comparing Galatians 4:23 and 4:29 with Galatians 3:3 that the two sons represent the two “paths” identified in Galatians 3:3.

### III. The Spiritual Application (4:28-29)

Paul identifies himself with the Galatian converts as the heirs of the promise (Isaac) and that he is being ridiculed and persecuted by the Judaizers (Ishmael - Gen. 21:10).

- A. You are children of the promise (v. 28)
- B. You are persecuted by the flesh (v. 29)

### IV. The Practical Exhortation (4:30-5:1)

- A. Cast out the bondwoman (v.30).

Paul uses a strong word for “cast out.” It is a compound word with a prefix that intensifies the root word. The idea is that of giving it “the boot.” It is an imperative. Why are we called upon to cast out the “legalist?” For this reason, (**gar**) the bondwoman shall no never (Paul uses a double negative [**ou ma**]) be an heir with the son of the freewoman!

With the double negative and the subjunctive Paul is “ruling out even the idea as being a possibility: **ou ma** is the most decisive way of negating something in the future.” (Wallace, *Beyond Basics*, 468).

What is Paul’s point? Paul’s point is this, “The legalist shall never share in the inheritance of the free born.”

He then falls into verse 31. Verse 31 begins with a conclusion or summary conjunction, “so then” (**ara**).

- B. We are not according to the flesh and bondage but according to the promise and freedom (v. 31).

We are not to be looking to the law or rules or these six steps or seven guidelines as it relates to relational truth. You are not to be in bondage to doing, but you are to be resting in being.

- C. Christ wants you to be free in Him (5:1a)

The NAS gives us the exact word order of the text, “It is for freedom that Christ set us free.”

We were saved from bondage and given our complete liberty in Christ. Romans 8:21 describes this liberty as “glorious.” It is the Spirit of the Lord that grants to us this liberty (2 Cor. 3:17). “And it is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2). John clearly states that when the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36 [“indeed,” most assuredly, certainly, “no questions asked”). Some cannot tolerate true Christian liberty because of their spiritual immaturity and thus will judge you for what is both lawful and right (1 Cor. 10:29). Some would rather see you live in bondage than in Christ (Gal. 2:4). “They promise you liberty, while they themselves are the servants of corruption” (2 Peter 2:19).

It is possible to have a skewed view of liberty and thus see it as a license to sin (1 Peter 2:16). However, this is a wrong view of grace/liberty. A proper view of grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2:12). Paul assures me that I am no longer a servant to sin. I am freed from sin’s authority in my life (Rom. 6:18, 22).

When you begin to understand your freedom in Christ there is a sense of great relief. Some who hear will naturally ask, “Are we to continue to sin that grace might increase?” Like Paul I would respond, “May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” (Rom. 6:1) Others will ask, “Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace?” And I would again answer like the apostle, “May it never be! (Rom. 6:15)

Yet I must ask the question, “From what am I freed?”

- I am freed from a debt I could not pay.
- I am freed from a burden I could not bear.
- I am freed from a gulf I could not cross.
- I am freed from a wrath I could not satisfy.
- I am freed from a relationship I could not fix.
- I am freed from a standing I could not alter.
- I am freed from a standard I could not meet.
  
- I am freed from feelings of inadequacy in service.
- I am freed from feelings of rejection in relationships.
- I am freed from feelings of pressure to perform.
  
- I am freed to love without condition.
- I am freed to embrace with shame.
- I am freed to share without deception.
- I am freed to give without reservation.
- I am freed to rest without guilt.

Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32).  
Do you know the truth?

The verb is an aorist active indicative. From the moment you were saved you were set free. Think about it. From that moment until this moment you have been free. But have you been living free? My guess would be either no, kind of, or yes. Friend, I am an optimist, yet I believe that the vast majority of believers are living in bondage to man-made rules and worldly conformity. How tragic!

D. Keep standing firm in your freedom (5:1b)

This is the second imperative in the passage. His word choice is interesting (**stakw**). The idea is that of being “stationary.”

Paul exhorts the believer, “To stand fast in the faith” (1 Cor. 16:13), “To stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27), “To fast in the Lord” (Phil. 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8) and “To stand fast in the taught truth” (2 Thess 2:15).

E. Do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (5:1c)

Paul calls legalism “a yoke of slavery.” There are two yokes mentioned in the Scripture. **First**, is the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11:29, 30).

Matthew 11:29 "**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

**Second**, is the yoke of a performance based acceptance before God (Acts 15:10). This yoke is impossible to bear.

Ac 15:10 "Now therefore **why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?**

All of us today are wearing a yoke. Which one are you wearing?

The word “subject again” is interesting. It is used only three times in the New Testament (Mark 6:19; Luke 11:53; Galatians 5:1).

Mark 6:19 Therefore Herodias had a **quarrel** against him, and would have killed him; but she could not: {a quarrel: or, **an inward grudge**}

Lu 11:53 and as he said these things unto them, the scribes and the Pharisees began to **urge him vehemently** (**very hostile** [NAS]), and to provoke him to speak of many things:

The King James uses “entangled again.” Have you ever had an unresolved inward grudge or quarrel with someone? Do you remember how you felt? It keeps you up at night, it preoccupies your waking moments, and if left unresolved, you basically become consumed by it. How do I know this, because I have been there and done that? That is what it is like to be saved by grace, but trying to be sanctified by works.

When you are free in Christ, you let your hurts go and you learn to forgive as you have been forgiven. When you become “subject again to a yoke of slavery” you enter into the realm of the inward grudge. This is our third imperative. When you go back to the law of rules, regulations, systems, steps and policies as a means of living the Christian life you will not win. You will die.

Many Christians are like the inmate who has lived in bondage so long that they cannot function when granted their freedom and seek the security of the prison system. Friend, being bound might give you a false sense of security, but it is neither natural nor right.

“It is impossible for law and grace, the flesh and the Spirit, to compromise and stay together. The Judaizers in Paul’s day – and in our day -- are trying to reconcile Sarah and Hagar, and Isaac and Ishmael; such reconciliation is contrary to the Word of God. It is impossible to mix law and grace, faith and works, God’s gift of righteousness and man’s attempts to earn righteousness.” (Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 106).

### **Shepherding the Sheep:** (What’s the NEXT STEP?)

As we work through the book of Galatians we went from the autobiographical where Paul defended his apostleship, to the theological where he laid out the doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is now moving into the applicational. You cannot separate what Paul has said with what he is about to say. The focus is always to be upward and toward Christ. What you do is simply the outworking of what you are. Nothing can change what you are in Him. Paul’s desire is to align our practice in life with our position in Him.

1. Consider the following interpretation of the “two sons:” Abraham’s and Sarah’s decision to use Hagar to make God’s promise “happen” analogizes Christians’ efforts to produce righteousness on their own (“by human effort,” in the power of the “flesh”). While it seems “reasonable” and “sensible” to make rules and lists to discipline and push ourselves towards righteousness, this is not God’s way. There are no “Twelve Step” programs to better spiritual living – despite the fact that this seems eminently “reasonable” and “sensible” to us. But God’s way is not our way. God’s way is by grace, through faith. It is the result of a “promise,” implemented by His Spirit. It is the way of Isaac, not Ishmael. What do you think of this idea? Does it seem reasonable to you? As a believer you are a child of the promise and not according to the flesh (v. 28).

2. As a believer who embraces grace living, expect to be persecuted by the legalist (v. 29).
3. Seek to root out every trace of self-sufficiency from your Christian experience (v. 30). You cannot change the flesh nor can you compromise with it.
4. As a believer Christ wants you to be free in Him (5:1a).
5. As a believer keep standing firm in your freedom (5:1b).
6. As a believer do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (5:1c).
7. “A Virginia man came forward Tuesday to claim the Mountain State’s third Powerball jackpot within the past year. Hobert Parnell, 50, of Rocky Gap, Va., blinked nervously behind wire-rimmed glasses as he stood in the spotlights to accept an oversized check for \$62.4 million. He has chosen the cash option, which means he will receive \$24,534,249 after taxes.” (Newspaper) Many of us have chosen to take a small amount of what we could have by having a wrong focus. Why settle for \$24 million when you won \$62 million?