

Text: Gal. 4:21-31

Title: "The role of freedom in true justification"

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Introduction: Our nation was born with a Declaration of Independence. Those who signed that Declaration "with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, ... mutually pledge[d] to each other [their] Lives, [their] Fortunes, and [their] sacred Honor" in the cause of freedom.

Here is what some of the signatories said about the centrality of freedom to what it means to be an American [<https://www.insearchofliberty.com/founding-fathers-on-freedom-liberty-and-american-exceptionalism/>; accessed 6/7/2019]:

John Adams: "You will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve YOUR freedom. I hope you will make a good use of it."

Samuel Adams: "If ye love wealth greater than liberty, the tranquility of servitude greater than the animating contest for freedom, go home from us in peace. We seek not your counsel, nor your arms."

Benjamin Franklin: "They who would give up an essential liberty for temporary security, deserve neither liberty or security."

Benjamin Franklin: "Freedom is not a gift bestowed upon us by other men, but a right that belongs to us by the laws of God and nature."

Thomas Jefferson: "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance."

The centrality of freedom to what it means to be an American parallels the centrality of freedom to what it means to be a justified sinner, a true Christian. The centrality of freedom is Paul's point to the Galatian churches in our passage this morning. True justification is liberating, and I want us to see that the passage teaches us this is so in three ways.

I. The Bible of true justification is liberating: desiring to be under the law is slavery; hearing the law correctly is freedom (vv. 21-22a; 27, 30).

Illustration: From time to time we have visitors in our church parking lot who desire to visit purgatory falls. Most of these are young people who rely heavily on gps for their directions, and they come to our church parking lot because their gps system misleads them. They desire to follow the right path to the falls, but they get off track because they are not using the right mapping system.

We fix that with a card that John Henderson has made. It has the correct directions to purgatory falls on one side and the directions to heaven without going through purgatory on the other side, so these have been unique gospel opportunities for me.

Application: Paul tells us that the Galatians have a desire to be under the law, but that desire does not line up with the law that they desire to be under. As they have been guided by false teachers to introduce works-based salvation or justification into their desires, they have lost sight of what the Bible truly says about these things.

Often that is going to be the choice we face – will we chose our desires that are guided by the falsehoods of the world, or will we find out what the Bible says to direct our lives?

Paul took for granted that the right answer was known to the Galatian churches – of course we should choose the Bible instead of our own desires (“do ye not hear the law?”; “For it is written”; “What says the Scripture?”). When we settle in our hearts that the Bible is God’s Word, it simplifies everything for us in a liberating way.

The Bible liberates us from ignorance – “Thy Word is truth!” (John 17:17).

The Bible liberates us from confusion – “Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path!” (Ps. 119:105).

The Bible liberates us from sin – “the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26).

The Bible liberates us from unbelief – “faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

The Bible liberates us from immaturity – “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17); “as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that you may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2).

The Bible liberates us from powerless ineptitude – “The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword” (Heb. 4:12).

But Paul also knew that theory and practice do not always match up. The Galatians would have professed faith in their Bibles, but they had not studied their Bibles well enough to become secure in the truth that salvation is by faith alone and not by works. This neglect allowed them to develop a desire that was not only contrary to Scripture,

but a major threat to their spiritual well-being. Neglecting our Bibles always brings us into the bondage of ignorance, confusion, sin, unbelief, immaturity, and ineptitude.

Application2: Paul mentions in this passage his use of allegory in his treatment of the Old Testament narrative of Abraham's family history (v. 24). What he means by that is what we normally speak of as *typology*. It turns out that one of the wonders of this miraculous book is that its history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is actually a grand illustration of the major truths of God's work of salvation in the heart of an individual sinner. The Old Testament is full of pictures of the truth of the gospel, and New Testament writers often use these Old Testament pictures that God designed to speak to spiritual realities that are important to our souls.

Only the God who can orchestrate history can provide a revelation of this truth of that nature. Our Bible is an amazing book because our God is an Almighty author.

The power of that Author explains why the Bible of true justification is liberating. Following your own desires (in this case, to be under the law) is slavery; hearing our Bibles correctly is freedom. Are you a Bible Christian?

II. The mother of true justification is liberating: justification born out of flesh is slavery; justification born out of promise is freedom (vv. 22b-28).

Illustration: It is a tragic thing when a baby is born in prison. The tragedy is many-faceted. There is often inadequate care for the mother giving birth under these circumstances, but also a mother in prison herself is not able to properly care for her baby the way a mother should.

Application: Paul notes that Abraham had two sons, and that the two sons had two different mothers (v. 22). One was a bondswoman – Hagar who gave birth to Ishmael, and one was a freewoman – Sarah who gave birth to Isaac.

Hagar did not give birth in a literal prison, but Paul points out how that as a bondswoman she could only give birth to a son who was not free himself. Hagar and Ishmael would have chosen themselves to remain in Abraham's house as Abraham's heir, but they did not have this choice themselves.

Paul sees something tragic in the bondage of the birth of Ishmael, which he uses as a warning to the Galatians about how true justification means having the right mother. He emphasizes 2 truths with this contrast between these two mothers and their sons:

1. True justification comes from believing a promise, not the works of the flesh (v. 23). It is easy to see how the history of Hagar and Sarah illustrates this point. Ishmael was born through the ingenuity of the family to come up with their own plan to produce an heir for Abraham. Paul says that coming up with your own plan that way is following the flesh. Isaac was born through God issuing a miraculous promise about a barren wife, namely that she would have a baby. *Isaac* means *laughter*, because Sarah first laughed in disbelief, but then in joyous faith when the promise came true.

What this means for each of us this morning is that we cannot be justified before God by coming up with our own plan, our own God, our own religion, our own works and efforts to get to heaven. The only way to be justified is to trust God's promise to justify us on the basis of what the

son of Abraham's promise, Jesus Christ, accomplished for us on the cross.

2. True justification was never the purpose of the covenant of Sinai (vv. 24-26). Sinai is like Hagar, and the religion of the Jerusalem of Paul's day is like Hagar. Hagar gave birth to a slave, and that is what Sinai's law gives birth to. The covenant of Sinai tells us we are sinners and that we are condemned to die. Apostate Judaism was telling people, even Gentile people, that following Sinai was necessary to salvation. Today, apostate Christianity teaches the same thing.

Illustration: This past week I had the opportunity to share the gospel with two elderly stroke victims. One thing these men have in common is that neither of them are going to find salvation in following the commands of Sinai. Both have miserably failed at that, as have I, and as have all of you. The gospel we need must be a salvation that is free, because we shall never be able to earn it. It must be by grace through faith, and not of works.

Paul tells us that true justification is from a true religion that comes from above – the true Jerusalem, heaven where God is (v. 26). The Jerusalem above is also the Jerusalem of the future. It is the one who is barren and judged for sin today that shall rejoice in her children someday (v. 27). We are children of promise like Isaac (v. 28). Praise God, those men need only have believed the promise of salvation, and they too would be born into the family of the new Jerusalem. That is why we go to the hospital and pray with the dying. That is why we spend a day at the nursing home with a loved one whose life has already been lived. Salvation is a gracious promise to be believed, not a set of laws to be obeyed.

The mother of true justification is God's promise. Has she given birth to eternal life in your heart? Do you believe that God sent His Son in love to die for your sins? Only then will you be free from the bondage of Sinai.

III. The suffering of true justification is liberating: though we suffer now, we shall not be cast out with our persecutors (vv. 29-31).

Illustration: Thomas Jefferson had another quote about the centrality of freedom to being an American. He said: "What country can preserve its liberties if its rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance? Let them take arms." Free people need the spirit of resistance serviced by our Second Amendment rights.

Application: The persecution Paul refers to is likely the mocking of Isaac by Ishmael in the context of the passage he quotes. The Galatians would have known what it was to be persecuted by apostate Judaism. Their churches were born in that persecution.

But for believers, the freedom we possess when truly justified is not political, but spiritual. Our bodies can be persecuted, but our freedom in Christ cannot be harmed. We may forsake it, but it cannot be forcibly taken from us. And so Paul issues his warning from the insight that Sarah had about the threat Ishmael was to her son – "cast out the bondwoman" (vv. 30-31).

Conclusion: Our state motto is one of the best: "Live Free or Die." When it comes to true justification, that is our choice. Live free following Bible truth instead of your own desires; live free believing God's promise instead of striving to obey Sinai's laws; and live free even in the face of persecution,

knowing that no persecutor can take this freedom away.
Live free in Christ, or die eternally.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching