

The Gospel of Grace Defends Our Freedom

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Date: 03 April 2016

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so before we begin, show of hands, and have I ever done my Charles Dickens rant? Have I done that from up here before? No, I was trying to remember if I had, because I was like, I hate to do the same thing twice. How many of you have read anything by Charles Dickens? Okay, watching A Christmas Carol on TV doesn't count. Like, how many of you have read, actually read, Charles Dickens? Okay, I once read the entire book David Copperfield. I had to do that in my schooling. That's an experience that, honestly, I would recommend to nobody, okay, because I got about a third of the way through the novel, and I wasn't keeping track at the time, and I got about a third of the way. I'm like, man, this thing's almost over, right? And I looked through, and I'm like, oh my gosh, it just keeps going and going and going. The man was incredibly wordy, and the reason he was so wordy is because he was writing in serial format for serial publications, and he was paid by the word, and so he used every possible word he could. You know, so for example, if Charles Dickens were to walk into this room, he would start by describing the pulpit, and he would describe, you know, where the glass came from, and how it was made, and what kind of glass it was, and what the wood veneer was, and he would talk in great detail about what this microphone was, and then the chapter would end, and you'd have to find out more about the room in the next installment, you know, let alone what actually happens in that room. So I never, you know, I had that one bad experience at Dickens.

I never got around to reading A Tale of Two Cities, which is too bad, because that book, A Tale of Two Cities, we're going to read today what I jokingly like to call a prequel to it.

So did you know that long before Charles Dickens wrote A Tale of Two Cities, there was a prequel written to it, and in the spirit of his Victorian wordiness, I'm going to give this prequel the title, A Tale of Two Cities, Mountains, Covenants, Mothers, and Sons. All right, rolls right off the tongue.

So we're going to learn the story in Galatians chapter 4, verses 21 through 31. We're going to learn this story, A Tale of Two Cities, Mountains, Covenants, Mothers, and Sons. Now, if that sounds confusing to you already, that's fair. It's a story that's difficult to understand if you don't have the right context of what Paul's writing about, and if you don't have the right background to know what kind of history he's writing about. So let's first start out about the context of this passage of Galatians chapter 4, verses 21 through 31. So the book of Galatians in the New Testament, as you can see, if you look at my Bible, it's most of the way through the New Testament. Galatians is a fairly short letter. It's a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote in the first century to a number of churches throughout the region of Galatia. It's an area in what we would now call Turkey, around the Mediterranean Sea. And Paul is writing this letter to these churches that are caught in what we might today call an identity crisis.

The churches are, first of all, made up of Jews, and these Jews who are living outside of the land of Israel, but they have that close heritage, that connection with Israel. They have this special relationship with God, which they can trace back 2,000 years into the past to their ancestor Abraham. They can trace that relationship all the way back to the past as they read their scriptures, what we now call the Old Testament. But these churches, in addition to the Jewish people, they also include Gentiles who are new to the faith, who are new to what we call Christianity. These Gentiles, that word just simply means everyone who isn't a Jew, raise the question, how do they become included among God's people? How do they fit in with the Jews? They're newcomers to this. They're outsiders. So do they have to become Jews by observing all the rituals and festivals and circumcision of the males that's required by the law of Moses? Do they have to become Jews, follow all these commandments? That's what they are being told, in fact, by a group of false teachers, of individuals who we now might call Judaizers. And these Judaizers have come to these churches and they've said, look, if you are a Gentile, if you want to be counted and included among God's people, you have to start obeying God's law in every detail. You have to start performing.

[4 : 29] You have to start doing all the things that a good Jew does. That's how you become a Christian. That's how you are accepted by God and become one of God's people. And Paul disagrees. He vehemently disagrees. He says that the Gentiles are included because God sent his son, Jesus Christ. God has sent his son to live a perfect life that fulfills the law of Moses. God sent his son to fulfill the law of Moses on our behalf, to die a shameful death on a Roman cross, to be raised to new life. So now Jews and Gentiles who both believe in Jesus Christ, they are both united with him by faith. And so through Christ, both Jew and Gentile are included in God's people. They're included in God's family. They're included in the church. And so Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to be part of God's people.

They don't need to perform all these good works that are required by the law of Moses. They don't need to set themselves apart as the people of God by all the good works they're doing. They are included on the basis, not of all that they have done, but on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done on their behalf.

And so now in his letter to the Galatians, Paul has been using a variety of arguments to establish this point, to establish the point that we are justified. We are counted as righteous and accepted by God on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done. And we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by good works that we do apart from Jesus Christ.

And so now Paul is going to take us back to his, to argue his point one final time, he's going to take us back to the tale of two cities, mountains, covenants, mothers, and sons. And what we're going to do is, once again, we're going to hop on the magic school bus.

We're going to travel 2,000 years back in time. Once again, we're going to visit the ancestor of the Jewish people. We're going to visit Abraham. And the story of Abraham is told in the first book of the Bible, in the book of Genesis. And so this is the background that we need to understand what Paul's talking about. So this story of Abraham, it extends in the book of Genesis, in the first book of the Bible. It extends from Genesis chapter 12, all the way through Genesis chapter 25.

[6 : 59] And the story begins with God promising to make a great nation out of Abraham, to give Abraham many descendants, and to bless all the nations of the earth through him.

And the central problem that needs to be resolved in Abraham's story, the central defining problem throughout the whole story of Abraham is this. How is God going to accomplish this? Abraham and his wife Sarah are unable to have children.

How do you have descendants? How do you become a great nation? How do your descendants and this nation bring blessing to all of the world if you don't even have a single child?

And your heritage and this promise and this line dies with you. How does that happen? Abraham and Sarah get older and older throughout the story.

They pass their childbearing years. And they do want God's promise to come to pass. So, Sarah hatches a plan.

[8 : 10] Sarah decides that she's going to give her female slave, Hagar, to Abraham to act as a surrogate mother for their child. And Hagar gives birth to a son named Ishmael.

But then God, after Ishmael's birth, tells Abraham, this wasn't how he had planned to carry out his promise. Instead, what's going to happen is that God is going to give Sarah herself a child.

Even though she is, by this time, 90 years old. And God's word comes to pass. Sarah gives birth to a son named Isaac. Now, apart from obviously very miraculous nature of a 90-year-old woman giving birth, this whole series of events of giving a, of taking your, of a woman taking her female slave, giving it to her husband to give birth, that may not have been unusual in that culture.

However, the idea being the, the slave comes as sort of a package deal with the wife. If she's infertile, the slave is the backup plan to give an heir. You know, that's sort of the culture's way of ensuring the husband doesn't, how his husband's family name doesn't die out.

But that doesn't mean it was a good arrangement, obviously. I mean, we'd all be horrified by that. And the biblical authors weren't too impressed with it either. God makes it clear just by portraying the sheer dysfunction that happens, not only here but in the story of Abraham's grandson Jacob.

[9 : 43] He portrays the sheer dysfunction of the slavery, of this polygamy. It turns, it turns these patriarchal families into basically Jerry Springer show families. And we're going to sort of see an episode of the Jerry Springer show going on here.

This wasn't God's plan for marriage and family relationships, but this was Abraham and Sarah's sort of scheme. To make things happen. And so Abraham is basically faced with a dysfunctional family conflict when Sarah has a son.

Because now you've got two mothers. They each have a son. Which one is going to be the heir? Which one of them is going to basically receive the father's name, the father's blessing, carry on the family legacy, receive the great portion of the father's inheritance?

This conflict boils over when Isaac is weaned, and that occurs in Genesis chapter 21. At that point, Abraham throws a feast, and then on that feast day something happens.

The book of Genesis describes it as follows. Genesis chapter 21 verse 9. Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So Sarah sees that Hagar's, by this time, teenage son, Ishmael, is quote-unquote laughing.

[11 : 01] And it's not clear exactly what is really meant by this. At the very least, it's probably likely, Ishmael may have been mocking Isaac in some way, mistreating him in some way.

This might have even been a euphemism for something more. We actually don't really know exactly what was going on. Whatever is going on here, though, it triggers something in Sarah. And Sarah, the mother hen, she says to Abraham in verse 10 about her, in defense of her son, cast out the slave woman with her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.

Sarah loves her son Isaac. Sarah's whole world is her son Isaac. And Hagar and Ishmael are threatening her son, because as she perceives it, Hagar's son Ishmael is usurping Isaac's place as Abraham's heir.

And so she wants Hagar and Ishmael gone. The story continues in verse 11. The thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.

So Abraham very much loved Ishmael. And rightly so. But God said to Abraham, be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you.

[12 : 22] For through Isaac shall your offspring be named. And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring. So that's God's solution to the problem. He, on the one hand, doesn't approve of Sarah's attitude.

He wants to take care of Hagar and Ishmael. He promises Abraham, you know, if you send her away, I will take care of them. I will take care of them. I will protect them. But on the other hand, God is pointing out Sarah is right, and that it is Isaac that the Lord has chosen to bring blessing and promise to the world through.

So Abraham sends Hagar and Ishmael away. He trusts God to protect them. He trusts God to provide for them. And throughout the rest of the chapter, you see that happening. And you see that God is faithful to his promise.

And so Abraham's offspring, Abraham's seed, is carried on through the line of his son Isaac. And it is carried on through the Jewish people, through the tribe of Judah, through King David, down to the son of David, the ultimate cedar offspring of Abraham, Jesus of Nazareth, God's anointed king, his Messiah.

And so this brings us to the apostle Paul. This brings us to Paul, who is warning his readers. He is warning his readers that they are not, quote unquote, under the law.

[13 : 39] In Genesis chapter 4, verse 21, they are not under the law. That is, they are not accepted as God's people. They are not accepted as Abraham's descendants. They are not under the law because they have adhered to the law.

In other words, they are not under the law because they have adhered to this law that Moses was given on Mount Sinai. Instead, they are accepted as God's people. They are accepted as God's people, as Abraham's descendants, through the line of Isaac, because they have faith, just like Abraham did.

They have faith that Jesus Christ fulfilled the law on their behalf. And they have faith that Jesus Christ was the one that was promised, ultimately promised to Abraham, the one who would bring blessing to the world.

So in Galatians chapter 4, verses 21 through 31, here's what Paul writes to his readers. Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law?

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

[14 : 52] Now this may be interpreted allegorically. These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. She is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia.

She corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem from above is free, and she is our mother.

For it is written, Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise.

But just as at that time, he who is born according to the flesh persecuted him who is born according to the spirit, so also it is now. 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. So, brothers, we are not children of the slave, but of the free woman.

[15 : 58] This is the word of the Lord. And Paul here is taking us back 2,000 years to this historical conflict between Sarah and Hagar, between Isaac and Ishmael.

And the Jews included this history as part of what they would call their Torah, their books of the law. The first five books of the Bible. And so Paul goes to this conflict in the Torah, and he draws from this conflict an important message.

And here is this message that Paul draws. The gospel of grace defends our freedom. The gospel of grace defends our freedom. Now, if you read the story of Hagar and Ishmael, you might wonder where that is coming from.

And we're going to sort of trace that out and draw out those connections because Paul sees this conflict that occurred 2,000 years before he wrote this. Paul sees this conflict kind of like what we might call a foreshock.

You know, when a great earthquake happens, sometimes it's preceded by maybe a few hours or days beforehand. It's preceded by a small rumbling of the earth, a foreshock that prefigures the great earthquake to come.

[17 : 12] And Paul is saying, you want to go back to the law of Moses in the Old Testament, do you? All right, let's go back to the law. Let's go back to the Old Testament. But don't forget to include the rest of the Torah, the rest of the law.

And so Paul explains how this history between Isaac and Ishmael included in the Torah, it is a foreshock of a great earthquake that's coming, of the gospel of grace which defends our freedom.

And what Paul is getting at when he says in verse 24 is he's getting at this foreshock when he says, verse 24, now this may be interpreted allegorically, referring to this story of Herod, Lefserah and Hagar.

Now that idea, this idea of an allegorical interpretation, that's very challenging. It's very challenging to figure out what Paul means because this idea of an allegorical interpretation actually opens up a whole can of worms.

If you want to sit down and have a conversation with me about this afterward, we could talk for a while about this. Here's a definition of the word allegory that explains why. I got this from my handy little pocket dictionary of theological terms.

[18 : 20] Allegory or an allegorical method, the definition is an allegory, is a story in which the details correspond to or reveal a hidden, higher, or deeper meaning.

The allegorical method of biblical interpretation assumes that biblical stories should be interpreted by seeking the quote-unquote spiritual meaning to which the literal sense points.

So what's an allegory? Let me give you an example of a story that, of a few stories that were written intending to be, intended to be read as allegories.

Aesop's fables are all allegories. The tortoise and the hare, they're not meant, I mean, nobody sits down and tries to think, when did the tortoise and the hare live? And you know, what were the characteristics of them?

And trying to learn about these characters and their historical background, trying to understand their motivations and psychologically evaluate them. Nobody does that with the tortoise and the hare because they're meant to represent principles and ideas and concepts.

[19 : 26] If you ever read The Pilgrim's Progress, one of the most printed books in the English language, nobody reads The Pilgrim's Progress as though these characters, Christian and evangelist and Mr. Worldly Wise Men, are real people.

Okay, nobody reads it like that. Like, A, they're historical people, or even that they're sort of characters to analyze and evaluate. We don't even treat them like real people. We understand that they're just means to an end.

They're just means to an end. They and the story they're part of, it's kind of like, they're kind of like a window pane, like one of these glass window panes in the back of our, of the worship center here.

What you're supposed to do is you're meant to see through them. You're not meant to look at the window pane itself, you're meant to look through it to see the spiritual realities behind it.

The characters and the story itself aren't really that important. It's what's behind it that matters. They're part of an allegory. Now, there are a couple of dangers when you approach the Bible as though its stories, its historical stories are simply allegories.

[20 : 32] There are some, some points in the Bible where a character will tell a story that's an allegory. That does happen. But there's dangers when you approach the Bible as though its stories are just allegories.

First, one danger is you might think of them as purely fictional. You might think of the story of Sarah and Hagar as though it's purely fiction. It's nothing more than a fable like the tortoise and the hare.

These women didn't really exist. They're just there to sort of represent some broad principles and ideas. These stories lose their historical content. And second of all, there's nothing stopping you from finding pretty much any meaning you want in the text.

This kind of became a problem throughout church history as allegorical interpretation really became popular starting in the early church and just swelled in popularity throughout the Middle Ages.

You can find all sorts of really wacky allegorical interpretations. I've talked with people where it's like you, they'll offer an allegorical interpretation of an Old Testament text and I just sit there scratching my head like, where in the world did you get that from?

[21 : 37] I would never have come up with that in a million years and nobody else would have either. What's really funny is Paul's not the only one to allegorically interpret this story of Sarah and Hagar.

The Jewish philosopher Philo also wrote about the story as if it were an allegory. In Philo's allegorical interpretation, Hagar represents intellectual study that can be found in one's schooling and Sarah represents virtue that produces wisdom and so, you know, Philo's making this big point about philosophy and so forth and actually his allegory actually has a good point.

I think he's got a lot of good things to say but the problem with his allegory is it treats Sarah and Hagar and Isaac and Ishmael as though they're nothing more than window panes that we just look through to see this deeper meaning behind them.

They're just nothing more than a means to an end and that's not the way Paul sees them. Paul doesn't see these people as means to an end. He sees them as real people that really wrestled with the Lord, that really interact with God, that God really cared about.

Real people. And what Paul calls allegory, maybe we could more precisely refer to as typology. That's sort of a word. Typology. Inside of your bulletin we put a definition of it and I cobbled this together from a few different sources and I'll put it up and we'll put it up on the screen here.

[23 : 04] Typology is a correspondence between the people and events of the past and those found in the present or future. Typology identifies God's patterns of work in the history of Israel and it sees in them a foreshadowing of his purposes which are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and his kingdom.

So in contrast to purely allegorical interpretation, typology, it sees the people and events as real people, real events. It doesn't look at them as simply windowpane to be looked through.

It doesn't view them just merely as means to an end. It accepts them. It values them. But then much like in a sense very similar to an allegory, it looks at them though and it notices that they fit into larger patterns of how God works in history.

So we might look at Abraham and we see that, you know, Abraham functions as a type of Jesus Christ, a foreshock because Abraham is the one man through whom God brings blessing to the world and so Abraham is a type of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is what we might call the anti-type of Abraham, the one that Abraham was pointing towards. Now Paul looks at Sarah and Hagar and he notices, hmm, they fit into a pattern of God's work in Old Testament history.

[24 : 26] Often, throughout the Old Testament, you'll especially notice this in the book of Genesis. God will choose to have a special relationship with one person over another. God chooses Abel and not Cain.

God chooses Seth and his descendants, his line, and not Cain and his descendants. God chooses Isaac and not Ishmael. God chooses Jacob and not Esau. God chooses Ephraim and not Manasseh.

He chooses, as you proceed further on into the book of 1 Samuel, Hannah and not Penina, Samuel and not Eli, David and not Saul.

Paul notices that in each of these cases, God has promised to bring blessing to the nation and to the whole world through this individual that he has chosen.

And often this individual, in fact, almost always this individual that God chooses is in contrast to another individual that human beings choose and promote and strive for.

[25 : 30] The people of Israel liked Saul. He was a tall man. He was an imposing figure. He was the kind of man that they thought would make a great king. But David was a man after God's own heart.

And as Samuel, as God calls Samuel to pick out David as the next king, the next leader of Israel, he tells Samuel, who is very skeptical of David, he tells him, you know, that God, man looks at outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.

And God chooses David over Saul. And so Paul sees in Hagar and Sarah a contrast. He sees that Sarah and her son, they correspond to God's chosen seed or offspring, the true children of Abraham.

Paul sees Hagar and her son corresponding to a counterfeit seed or offspring, the counterfeit children of Abraham. Abraham. And Paul sees Hagar and Ishmael fitting into this pattern of types.

Not only that, but he sees verse 25. They fit into this pattern with Mount Sinai in Arabia, its covenant, the law of Moses, the present Jerusalem, and its slavish adherence to the law of Moses.

[26 : 45] And then in contrast to that, he sees Sarah and Isaac fitting into a different pattern of types, the contrasting pattern. Mount Zion and its covenant, the promise to Abraham, the Jerusalem above in verse 26.

And it's freedom from the crushing slavery of good works that are performed to earn God's favor. So God, what he does is he takes this dysfunctional Jerry Springer show family and he takes it and he weaves their story into what we might call a primitive form of the gospel of grace.

their story becomes a foreshock of the great earthquake to come, the gospel of grace that defends our freedom. And there are three ways in which the gospel of grace defends our freedom that we see in Paul's letter to the Galatians in this passage.

First, we see that Paul is continuing to think about what he calls in verse 26 the Jerusalem above. He sees, he's continuing to think about this city that is coming to earth and this Jerusalem that we read about throughout the New Testament, throughout the Old and New Testament and then ultimately we see in the last two chapters of the last book of the Bible.

This Jerusalem is God's people both Jew and Gentile living in the presence of God, chosen and precious, loved, accepted by him, treasured by him.

[28 : 12] And Paul, Paul can't help think about this connection with Isaiah 54, verse 1 about the joy of this new Jerusalem and so in Galatians chapter 4, verse 27, he quotes Isaiah's words.

He writes, 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.

Isaiah was writing about Jerusalem. And Paul can't help but notice that sounds a lot like Sarah's situation too. It's part of these types that are coming to their fulfillment in the people of God through Jesus Christ.

Just like Hagar, the present Jerusalem of Paul's day seemed to be the one that was fertile, that was teeming with people, filled with power and influence and glory.

But Paul says that the new Jerusalem is soon going to surpass the original one. Paul says that the new Jerusalem is going to exceed in glory the present one.

[29 : 20] His words have already come true, haven't they? We haven't even seen the full fulfillment of it and we're already seeing it come to pass because the church of God, including both Jews and Gentiles, including you and me, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, it has exploded in size from its origins in the first century.

Like a mustard seed, the kingdom of God started out tiny, small, insignificant in human eyes, but it has now become this great, huge plant that is overshadowing the garden.

And so Paul says, this is a cause for joy. This is a cause for rejoicing. Because now the seemingly barren city of New Jerusalem is teeming with life.

Here's what the gospel of grace does. First of all, the gospel of grace defends our freedom from joy robbers. The gospel of grace defends our freedom from joy robbers. We're called to rejoice.

The gospel should bring great joy. The fact that it gathers so many people like you and me, people who have no business being in God's kingdom, people who have sinned, who have rebelled against God and yet have now been forgiven.

[30 : 35] What a cause for joy that is. And yet there are people who will rob that joy from you. There are people who will steal away that joy from you. The Holy Spirit is warning people like you and me that there are others who claim to be part of God's people.

Other people who will try to take our joy. Joy robbers, what they do is these Grinches, they teach you to glory in your own ability to earn God's favor.

They teach you to glory in your own righteousness, in your own status. They teach you to, you know, always in a tactful way, you know, they teach you to boast about and find, and to define yourself as successful because you have kept God's law or maybe because you have kept your own standard of what makes you good and valuable.

perhaps you have a lot of money or you've got a great social status. You're talented, you're skillful, you've got great abilities and to top it all off, you've got the moral character that God's looking for.

They try to convince you that these are enough to earn God's favor and that on the basis of these, you are counted as righteous. On the basis of these, you are counted as God's people.

[31 : 54] You've got the performance and maybe they'll tell you, Joy Roberts, you've got the pedigree, you've got the ethnic background or you've got the heritage as a lifelong churchgoer and therefore God's going to accept you as his own.

And they'll probably contrast that with people who just can't measure up to your level of faithfulness or just aren't like you enough. They try to convince you that you belong by default into God's kingdom, that you are counted righteous as God's people.

They downplay the fact that you and I, we are children of Abraham, children of grace, been given all that we have because of the goodness of God, children of the promise by faith in Jesus Christ and so they will steal away all that gratitude, they will steal away all that joy from your heart.

But the gospel of grace reminds us of what the joy robbers prefer to forget. It reminds us to rejoice. It reminds us of Galatians chapter 4 verse 28.

Now you brothers like Isaac are children of promise. That's reason for joy. That's reason to take this deep-hearted, joyful attitude because we should have been the one that God didn't choose.

[33 : 22] We should have been the ones that God didn't accept. And yet, he has chosen us. Yet, we are the children of promise.

The gospel of grace defends our freedom from joy robbers. And second, Paul writes in verse 29, 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.

Whatever it was that, remember how Ishmael was laughing, was laughing, quote unquote. Whatever it was that he was doing, Paul recognized he was acting against Isaac, whether in mockery or something worse.

Paul reminds us that Ishmael was, quote unquote, born according to the flesh, whereas Isaac was born according to the spirit. So we have this contrast between flesh and spirit.

And this occurred earlier in the book of Galatians. You can look back through and find one point where it occurred. Well, we're going to see it pop up over and over and over again from here on out. This contrast between flesh and spirit.

[34 : 34] Ishmael was born according to the flesh because it was simply human flesh, human ability, human self-reliance apart from God that planned Isaac's birth.

This was Abraham and Sarah's plan to produce an heir and it required no dependence on God. It required no trust in his power. It required no reliance on his spirit.

But Isaac, Isaac was born according to the spirit because his birth was empowered by our life-giving God. It was empowered by God, the Holy Spirit.

Isaac's birth, yes, it did require human effort and work, but it was work that depended on God from people who trusted in God's power, who relied on his spirit.

The difference between the flesh and the spirit, it's not a difference between action versus inaction. It's a difference between independence and dependence.

[35 : 43] Independence of God and dependence on God. It's a difference between self-reliance and trust in God. It's a difference between human autonomy from God versus faith and God's power.

And so the gospel of grace defends our freedom from autonomists. The gospel of grace defends our freedom from autonomists. And when I say autonomous, I don't mean like, you know, the combination of an automaton and an economist.

I mean, just somebody who wants to live apart from God's power, who wants to sort of plan and do everything by human effort and planning and strategizing and thinking and sheer willpower and force.

And we just see throughout so much of Paul's writings that he warns us about autonomists. Make no mistake, we, I can say this, I'm not thinking of anyone in particular, I'm just saying this because this is true of pretty much every church.

We as a church are crippled by autonomists and the mindset that they bring. I was humbled this week to realize in preparing this sermon and discussing it with some fellow pastors that I have an ugly autonomous streak in me.

[37 : 03] I'm not an automaton, don't worry, you know, it's not like, I'm not like a Terminator with like robot, you know, body underneath me. But I do tend to be an autonomous because I've got a, you know, let me give as an example this very sermon.

I've got a system for putting together sermons. I've got strong analytical abilities, I've got good writing skills, I've got the ability to present vividly what I've written and I can assemble and I can deliver a sermon without once getting on my knees and crying out to the Lord for help.

I can do all of that without God's help and the sermon can go over well and the sermon can be a, inhumanize a success, it can make people think highly of me, it can accomplish in the end absolutely nothing, nothing of eternal value and it can contain none of the Spirit's power.

God is not interested and God will not bless that mindset of autonomy, the mindset that tries to accomplish things merely through human effort and thinking and planning and to achieve results that look successful in the eyes of other people and make me think of myself as a success.

God is looking not for men like King Saul, he's looking for people like King David.

[38 : 26] God is looking for faithful, dependent people loved, chosen by God, quick to recognize their inability, their need, eager to pray, eager to fan and to flame a culture of prayer in our church and I think of some of you, now I am thinking of specific people here who I know you pray and you support me in prayer.

You should be the ones up here on the stage getting the credit because you are not autonomous. Because you depend on the power of the living God and the Spirit of God.

May God fan into flame a culture of prayer in our church, both individual prayer and corporate prayer as we gather together. The gospel of grace defends our freedom from joy robbers and second, the gospel of grace defends our freedom from autonomists.

Third, finally, Paul writes in verse 30, 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.

So brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. Now those words, cast out the slave woman and her son, those were words spoken by Sarah out of blind devotion to her son.

[39 : 49] You know, words that we could probably correctly argue words of cruelty to her rival. But what God did is he took that ugly situation and he used it.

And he turned it for something good, something for our benefit by teaching us a valuable lesson. The fact is, illegitimate heirs, they don't belong in God's kingdom.

Illegitimate heirs don't belong in God's kingdom. Ishmael was an illegitimate heir because he was the son of a slave woman. He was not the son of Abraham's wife, Sarah. And so it is with you and me.

We are God's people. We are united to his son, Jesus Christ. We are set free by the power of his spirit. We don't belong to a family of slaves.

We don't find our identity in slavish adherence to the law. We don't earn our value by means of self-reliance. We are freed.

[40 : 50] We are freed from that culture of slavery. We are not children of the slave but of the free woman. And his perhaps significance that Abraham's sons, Abraham's descendants, Jacob's sons, in Genesis chapter 37, they encounter the descendants of Ishmael in a caravan.

And in this encounter, what happens? They sell their brother Joseph to the Ishmaelites who take him to Egypt as a slave. Ishmael and his descendants correspond to a culture of slavery.

They correspond to the Judaizers who Paul wrote about in Galatians chapter 2 verse 4. False brothers slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus so that they might bring us into slavery.

They might bring us into slavery. We need the gospel of grace. We need to be reminded daily of the gospel of grace because the gospel of grace defends our freedom from enslavers.

The gospel of grace defends our freedom from enslavers. The gospel of grace tells us to cast them out. To rid our churches of this mindset and of anyone who insists on promoting it.

[42 : 06] And so I'll say right now, if there are any of you who insist that you've got to perform to be counted as one of God's people, that people who don't, who aren't good enough, they don't belong with you, they don't belong in this church here and if you refuse to repent of that mindset, get out.

you don't belong here. Either turn from your sin, turn from that attitude and humble yourself before God.

Embrace your identity as a child of the free woman, as a child of the promise or go. The gospel is our great defense from natural earthly obsession with success from, it's our great defense from our obsession with approval and outward appearance that, that woos us, that seduces us, that enslaves us.

The gospel reminds us of our true identity. We are people. You and I are people who have received undeserved kindness from God who have been chosen by Him.

We have no merit. We have nothing that would ever make God accept us, that would ever please Him, but we have been accepted. We've been welcomed.

[43 : 24] We've been loved and embraced into His family because of what Jesus Christ has done. The heir of Abraham. We've been given a new life in Jesus Christ.

You have a new life in Jesus Christ if you have faith in Christ. You have a new freedom in Him. You are no longer under the law. And the gospel of grace, it defends our freedom.

Praise be to God. Our God and our Father, I know that we just keep slipping back into this. And I know that there are many in this room who maybe this has stricken them.

Maybe they've looked honestly on their own hearts and they've said, that's, my joy has been robbed away. I keep slipping back into slavery.

I keep slipping back into autonomy. I believe. Help my unbelief. Oh God, would you deliver them.

[44 : 29] May your spirit open their eyes. Open them to what they have in Jesus Christ. What they have in the power of your spirit. Oh Lord God, you've given us all that we need in Christ Jesus.

You've given us all that we need in the Holy Spirit that you have sent. Forgive us for trying to earn your favor through our own efforts. Forgive us for trying to live the Christian life and do all the right things merely out of our own planning and willpower and scheming.

Oh God, make us dependent people that we might have joy. That we might rejoice and find our identity and our hope in the fact that we are children of the promise.

Thank you for setting us free. Amen.