BORN FREE
Galatians 4:21-31
Who is your mother? So many of the things that have happened to you in life have been predetermined by your mother. If this is true in the physical realm, it is even more true in the spiritual realm.

As he comes to the climax of his doctrinal discussion of the doctrine of justification by faith, Paul caps his presentation with an allegorical illustration. He presents the peril of attempting salvation by the works of the law one more time. At the same time he points to the privileges involved in salvation by grace through faith. The vehicle for his presentation is called an allegory in our text. What the Apostle does is use a well known historical incident to illustrate the spiritual truths he is setting forth.

The historical incident comes from the life of Abraham. Abraham was the father of two sons. The status of these two sons in the family of Abraham illustrates the difference between a person who is working for salvation and one who is trusting God for salvation. The difference in the two sons began with the difference in their mothers. Ishmael, the first of the sons, had Hagar as a mother. He was born when Abraham's faith faltered, and at the insistence of Sarah he took her slave attendant Hagar to mother a child. The birth of this son could be explained in very natural terms. Isaac, the second son, had Sarah as a mother. He was born after God had given a promise to the couple a son when it was physically impossible for them to function in this way., That which God promised He enabled when the couple responded to Him in faith. Isaac was born free because his mother was the free wife of Abraham.

These two mothers and their sons illustrate what happens to men. Those who seek salvation through the law are born slaves like Ishmael. They have the wrong mother. Those who trust in the promise of God are born free like Isaac. They have the right mother.

Are you spiritually free this morning? It all depends upon who your mother is? Let us do some checking as we go through this strange portion of the Galatian letter.

I. THE BIRTH.
The birth makes the difference between freedom and slavery spiritually. "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondwoman, and one other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise." The difference in the birth of these two boys illustrates the basic truth the Apostle wants us to see.

The birth of Ishmael was a very human affair. In their unbelief Abraham and Sarah came up with this plan to help God out. Since God wanted Abraham to have an heir, and it was obviously impossible for Sarah to bare him a child, they must come up with a substitute plan. Their plan was for Hagar to bear a child to Abraham. The child born out of this ill-conceived union was marked by the status of his mother. She was a bondwoman, so her child was of the same sort. Everything about the birth of Ishmael could be explained in terms of what Abraham and Hagar had done.

The birth of Isaac is typical of the spiritual birth. The birth of Isaac was humanly impossible. Sarah was well past the child bearing age. Her capacity to be a mother was physically past. Yet the God who promised Abraham a son provided him a son through the womb of Sarah. When Isaac was born, he could be explained only in terms of the work of God. He was the "son of promise."
The two boys represent two types of religious experience. Ishmael repre8ents those Judaizers from Jerusalem that were seeking salvation by keeping the law. Their religious status would have to be explained in terms of human achievement. It was a work of man-- not a work of God. Concerning Hagar the Apostle explains, "This Hagar is Mount Sinai, in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children." All that the law can produce is bondage. If you are trusting in your obedience to the law, and your religious efforts to bring you salvation, you will never be anything more than a spiritual slave. But if you cast yourself upon the mercy and grace of God in faith, like Isaac, you will be born free.

Will you just check your religious experience this morning? Is it obvious that something supernatural has taken place in your life? Do you know that your religious experience can be explained only as a work of God? Or can it be explained in terms of your joining the church, your efforts at being a good man, your religious faithfulness to the institution? Those who have the right mother, who have been born free, know that they have been born from above. God has done something for them and in them that they could never have done. The birth is so important.

II. THE BASIS.
What is the basis of your spiritual life? Is it based on works or faith? Is it based on what God has done, or what you must do? How you answer this question determines whether you are bound or free! Those who are free have faith as the basis of their lives.

While Abraham is known as the great man of faith in the Old Testament, unfortunately he was not always a man of faith. Ishmael will always be a reminder of the unbelief of the man.

When Ishmael was conceived, Abraham was basing his life upon a works principle. He was attempting to do the work of God for him. God had promised him a son, so he would just produce his own son. At the time it must have sounded so logical and right in light of the culture in which he lived.

Does it not sound right and reasonable that God would expect us to do something about our salvation? Would it not seem reasonable that our salvation would be based upon the life we lived, and the ordinances that we kept? Should not man be the basis of his own life and responsible for his own salvation? But when the man is the basis, all that it can ever produce is bondage and death.

The message of this Galatian letter that Paul is now nailing down for the last time is that the basic principle is not works---but faith, not man, but God. The principle by which man must live is that of dependence upon the work of God alone. It is God, and God alone who can justify the guilty sinner, and give to him eternal life.

III. THE BLESSING
Paul uses the experience of Ishmael and Isaac to demonstrate the difference between life under the law and life under grace. The life of Ishmael wa8 tragic. His life was made miserable because his mother was a slave in the family. Sarah had such resentment toward the boy that finally he and his mother were excluded from the family of Abraham. He ended up with no access to Abraham and out in the dangerous world all alone. In contrast Isaac was privileged Because his mother was the lawful wife of Abraham, and because he was the apparent heir in the family, he was fully accepted in the family from the beginning. He was the object of the unhindered devotion and love of his Father daily. He enjoyed the favor of his dad day after day.

In describing the blessings that come to us by faith, the Apostle focuses upon two things demonstrated in the experience of Isaac. The first is freedom. When the son of promise was born into the family, he was free from the first day. He did not have to do anything to achieve a place in the family. He did not have to earn the right to be the son of Abraham. Rather Isaac moved about the family as one who was already fully accepted, one who was born free. Can you imagine Isaac going to Abraham and saying, "Most holy Abraham, I do not want to receive the right to be your son as a free gift, but rather I want to earn the right to be your son. Do you have some commandments that I can keep in order to earn this right? Is there some duty I can perform?" "The idea is laughable"   He was born a full son. He was born free. He has no obligation to earn a place in the family. So it is with those who come into the family of God through their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They are born from the Jerusalem which is above --- they are born free. What a Joy! To be assured that I am under obligation to do nothing to earn a place in the family of God!

The other blessing referred to is the inheritance. Isaac did not earn the right to receive the inheritance, he was born to it. "For the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman." No amount of effort can ever earn the right to the inheritance in the family of God. This comes to those who are born of God by placing their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. I cannot even begin to describe what the inheritance in the family of God encompasses, but this I know those who are trusting in Christ alone for salvation are aware of some of the blessings involved.

The whole issue is, will you chose the way of the law or the way of grace? Dr. Dehaan helped me to catch the real contrast between these two when he listed them side by side. He wrote,
(1) The law prohibits --- grace invites and gives.
(2) The law condemns the sinner --- grace redeems the sinner.
(3) The law says DO-grace says "It is DONE."
(4) The law says "continue to be holy"---Grace says, "It is finished".
(5) The law curses---the grace blesses.
(6) The law slays the sinner --- grace makes the sinner alive.
(7) The law shuts every mouth before God --- grace opens the mouth in praise to God.
(8) The law condemns the best man --- grace saves the worst man.
(9) The law says, "pay what you owe",---grace says "I freely forgive all.',
(10) The law says, "The wages of sin is death." Grace says, "The gift of God is eternal life."
(11) The law says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die"---grace says "Believe and live."
(12) The law reveals sin- -grace atones for sin.
(13) By law is the knowledge of sin --- by grace is the redemption from sin.
(14) The law was given by Moses --- grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.
(15i The law demands obedience --- grace bestows and gives power to obey.
(16) The law was written on stone --- grace is written on the tables of the heart.
(17) The law was done away in Christ --- grace abides forever.
(18) The law puts us under bondage---grace sets us free in the liberty of the sons of God.
Which will it be for you? Law or grace? 0 God give me grace, give me grace!