

Galatians *Freedom in Christ*

5. Free or Slave? *Galatians 4.21-31.*

Aim: To be reminded that we are free children of God, and to consider how we should live in the light of that.

To start with:

Read out the following laws, which do people think are genuine or fictional?

(Alternatively you could divide the group into teams, give each team a set of cards with the laws written on, ask them to put them into two piles; true or false and then see which team has got the most right.)

(N.B They're all genuine!)

- All English males over 14 are required to carry out two hours longbow practise per week; supervised by the local clergy.
- London taxis must carry a bale of hay & a sack of oats.
- In Oklahoma you can be arrested for making ugly faces at a dog.
- In Athens, a driver's licence can be taken away if the driver is thought to be either 'poorly dressed' or 'unbathed.'
- In Samoa it is a crime to forget your wife's birthday.
- In California it is illegal to set a mouse trap without a hunting license.

Worship:

In what ways would you say your faith in Jesus has set you free from things?

In order to spend some time reflecting on those things, you could:

- Share short testimonies of how those things happened
- Give people some creative materials to model/ draw something that symbolises that (which they could then explain)
- Get them to write on slips of paper things that used to bind them up which no longer do. They could then read them out, rip them up and put the pieces in a central bin.

Then spend some time together praising Jesus for the ways in which he has liberated you.

Engaging with the Text:

1. Get everyone to read **Galatians 4:21-31** individually, then in pairs discuss:

- What do you think Paul is saying?
- What don't you understand?

Feedback to whole group, especially anything you don't understand.

2. What do you know about Hagar and Isaac, the two characters mentioned in this passage? *(You could get everyone to chip in and scribe this on a big piece of paper)* What do you think they symbolise?
3. Paul sets out a series of contrasts in verses 22-26. Try to identify all these contrasts. Feedback to the group, with one person scribing.

You should get something like this: (See Overleaf)



Slave woman, Hagar	Free woman, Sarah
Son = Ishmael	Son = Isaac
Born as a result of human effort	Born as a result of divine promise
Represents Sinai covenant, law	Represents new covenant (through JC)
Present Jerusalem	Jerusalem above (the future heavenly city)
Living in slavery	Living in freedom

The Jewish Christians in Galatia were teaching that the Jews were God's free people, while the Arabs (the Gentile descendants of Ishmael) were not. Therefore, they said, circumcision was necessary for Gentile Christians to become sons of Abraham, and thus be saved through their obedience to the Old Testament law.

4. How does Paul respond to their argument? What does he argue about having a relationship with God?
5. At the time this letter was written people had a clear idea of what slavery actually meant (they knew slaves!) for the most part we do not.
 - a. Spend some time thinking about what you think being the child of a slave would actually mean - what effects would it have on someone's life?
 - b. How does this help you to understand the metaphor Paul is using?
6. We have already discussed ways in which people feel Jesus has set them free during the worship. Now spend some time thinking about any areas that you feel you may still be enslaved or trapped by in some way?

Give everyone a few minutes to think privately about one aspect of their life where they act as if they are enslaved, rather than free in Christ. Ask them to reflect on how that influences their thinking and behaviour - and what they think freedom would look like?

Then either:

- Give people pens and paper, to write prayers to God. If appropriate, encourage people to share their thoughts in pairs or threes.

Or:

- Ask people to share those things they feel able to in small groups, discussing how they might practically get free in those areas and pray for each other, that they will be able to embrace the liberty Jesus has given them.