

THE TWENTY-NINTH SERMON

WHICH IS THE SIXTH UPON THE FOURTH CHAPTER

- 21** Tell me you that would be under the Law, hear ye not the Law?
- 22** For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bond woman, and the other by a free woman.
- 23** And he that was by the bond woman was born after the flesh: but he that was of the free woman was born by promise.
- 24** Which things are spoken by an Allegory: for they be two Covenants. The one from mount Sina which ingendereth unto bondage, which is Agar.
- 25** For Agar is mount Sina in Arabie, and representeth that which is now called Jerusalem, and is in bondage with her children. —
<480421> GALATIANS 4:21-25

EVERY MAN can say that freedom is a thing so greatly to be desired, that man's life is as it were half dead, or a continual pining away without it. And in very deed we shun bondage and subjection as much as is possible, and seek freedom and liberty, according also as it is named an inestimable benefit in the common Proverb. Now if it be so in respect of this earthly life: Much more is it so when it standeth upon the everlasting salvation of our souls. But we see that many run into bondage, and tie the rope about their own necks willfully. They can well enough say that they desire freedom: but in the meanwhile they show themselves to have as it were vowed themselves unto slavery. And this is specially seen and tried too much when we come to the enjoying of the freedom which is purchased us by our Lord Jesus Christ, to the end that our souls should have rest. For although God set us free from the bonds of Satan, and from tyranny of sin, by the Gospel, in telling us that he adopteth us to be his children: yet do we scarcely see any that accept that benefit when it is offered them, but all do plunge themselves into the cursed captivity of sin, and had lever [*rather*] to be subject to their own lusts, than to walk at liberty by

yielding themselves: to the obeying of God. Not without cause therefore doth Saint Paul reprove here the unthankfulness of such as long to be under the law, telling them that they forsake the thing which they ought most chiefly to wish for, that is, to be frank and free as the children of God. And hereof he giveth us as it were a looking glass or lively picture, saying that even in the Law itself a man may perceive how wretched and miserable man's state is, so long as he abideth under the Law. For Abraham's house was as a lively image of God's Church. There therefore we may see what the state of the Church is. Now it is said that Abraham had two sons: the one named Ishmaell, and the other named Isaac. Ishmaell was born of Agar which was Abraham's handmaid, and had been given him to wife. (^{<011601>}Genesis 16:1) Howbeit there was a foul fault in that he could not discharge the promise and bond that he had made to his lawful wife Sara. Again, we see that the cause of this marriage between Abraham and Agar, happened through the overmuch hastiness of Sara, because she thought that God foreslowed the performance of his promise so long, and she was desirous to have issue. But she thought that that could not come to pass by her own means, and therefore she made a very evil construction upon God's word, and it appeareth that she was not so patient and well stayed in her faith as was requisite. To be short the marriage was to be condemned, and no better than whoredom, howbeit that Abraham's intent was not so. For he was not led with wicked lust. He might very well have desired to have had the seed whereof the salvation of the world should spring: but see what our foolish intents do. When we attempt one thing or other without having God's word for our warrant, we shall be carried and led into many faults through our own rashness. After this manner is Ishmaell born of Agar the bondswoman, and yet is that no Lawful marriage nor allowed of God. Isaac is born of Sara long time after Ishmaell: for Ishmaell might well have been sixteen years old ere Isaac was born. But Saint Paul following the record of Moyses, saith *that Isaac was born by promise, and Ishmaell after the flesh*. Not that Abraham begat not his son Isaac: but that he did it by power from heaven, because his body was already withered and as good as half dead, and he had not anymore lustiness in him. He was a man of a hundred years old, and his wife also pricked much about the same age, who had been barren all the foretime of her life, and was full fourscore and ten years old or thereabouts ere she might conceive and be with child, insomuch that even she herself also

thought it to be but a tale and a laughing matter, when the message was brought him by the Angels. (<011812> Genesis 18:12) Ye see then that Isaac was born by promise. For in that case God wrought by miracle, to the end it might be known that our Lord Jesus should be sent into the world, not after the common order of nature, but as proceeding of God's goodness and wonderful forepurpose. But howsoever the case stand, ye see here in the house of Abraham (who is as it were a figure and image of the Church) two women with their two children born of either of them one. Now as touching Agar, Saint Paul saith that she representeth mount Sinai where the Law is given: and he calleth it a mountain of Arabia, to show that it was not in the holy land which God had appointed to be the inheritance of his people. Also Sara representeth Jerusalem: not the Jerusalem (saith he) which is now standing, for that was corrupted and gone away from the law and pure doctrine of God: I say from the law, not after the manner that Saint Paul taketh it here to engender unto bondage: but according to the covenant that God had made with his people in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forasmuch then as the Jerusalem which was in Saint Paul's time, had forsaken Jesus Christ, and by that means disannulled God's covenant: Saint Paul saith that it must be coupled with Agar or mount Sinai. It is to no purpose (saith he) that the Jews make their brags under color of their Temple, Sacrifices and such other things, that they be God's chosen and peculiar people: for notwithstanding all that geer [*whimsical mockery*], yet are they as good as banished and rooted out of the holy land, and have no more but a vain title of the law. For let a man look upon the state of Jerusalem as it is now to be seen, and it differeth nothing at all from Sinai. *But there is a Jerusalem from above* (saith he) that is to wit, the Church, which breedeth us before God, and she having the incorruptible seed of the Gospel, beareth children that are free and unbound,

and she is the mother of all the faithful, according as it is written,
Rejoice thou poor barren woman. (<235401> Isaiah 54:1)

And Esay speaketh not to any one woman: but termeth God's Church so by a similitude, which Church should for a time be greatly scattered. His saying then is, very well, thou shalt be as an offcast, and there shall be as it were a kind of divorce between God and thee: but in the end he will multiply thee again, and thou shalt have more children than if thou hadst

flourished of all the while in prosperity: and that came to pass when the Gospel was preached openly to the world. For then the Church had not only the children of Abraham, or some one certain people: but through the heavenly seed of the Gospel, she brought forth infinite children unto God, of all Nations and Countries, far and wide, according to the power which God uttered through the whole world. Lo here in effect the substance of the text which I have rehearsed. But first of all we have to mark, that whereas Saint Paul saith, *that these things are spoken by an Allegory*: he meant not to impeach the natural sense of the holy Scripture, as we see how some have done, who through their foolish curiosity of seeking fond speculations in the holy Scripture, have turmoiled and disordered all things, esteeming the literal sense to be nothing worth. This was the cause that all things were falsified and perverted, and there hath not been a more devilish device than these allegories, which have borne such sway in the world, and as yet still delight many men so much, that they be as it were bewitched with them, because they be very favorable and plausible. O noble exposition, say they. And why so? Because that when as it toucheth neither heaven nor earth, the silly people are ravished at it, and it is an easy matter to hang in suspense and mammering [*hesitant, wavering*] at it. But Saint Paul meant not that the things which Moyses reporteth of Isaac and Ishmaell, should only serve for such curious speculations: but he showeth that in that story we see in effect the state of the Church, because that at that time there was no Church in the world governed by God, but only the house of Abraham. There was as yet Salem where Melchizedeck was king: Howbeit forasmuch as the same went still to decay, God gathered a people in the person of Abraham, whereby he gave an inkling, that he would be called upon by those whom he had sholed [*shoveled*] out from the rest of the world. Therefore we must not read this story of Moyses coldly without looking any further, that is to say, without consideration of the things that happened in that house, wherein the state of the Church is showed us. Mark that for one point. But now to come to the principle, let us mark that whereas Saint Paul likeneth Agar Abraham's bond woman unto mount Sinai, and unto the Law that was published there: he meaneth not the Law with the whole contents and substance of it. For in the Law there are promises of salvation, which we must hope for by our Lord Jesus Christ, as Saint Paul declareth in divers places, and as we ourselves have seen. Then if we could take the Law in his right and

lawful use, it is certain that we should have there the incorruptible seed of life, and God would be our father, and we should be set free by him. The law indeed hath engendered unto bondage as in outward respect, as hath been declared heretofore. Although the fathers of old time were God's children and heirs of the kingdom of heaven as well as we: yet were they under tutors and governors. For they were as yet like little children, and the perfection of things was reserved to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: and the Ceremonies were as bridles and thongs, so that they which kept them had not the full freedom that God granteth us to enjoy nowadays as it is purchased for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet notwithstanding Saint Paul speaking here of the Law that engendereth unto bondage, taketh it for the false opinion which they had against whom he disputeth. For he will add anon, that all such as are so engendered, shall in the end be banished and driven out of God's house and heritage. Now although the fathers were engendered in outward bondage, as is said of them in the eighth to the Romans: yet were they free by the spirit of faith, which overruled the bondage, or else they had been cut off from all hope of salvation. To be short, Saint Paul speaketh here of the law, after the interpretation wherewith it had been corrupted by the hypocrites that buried their heads about pelting trifles, and would needs make meritorious deeds of them, and in the meanwhile did cast men's consciences into so straight bonds, as was enough to choke them. But hereof enough hath been said heretofore. Nevertheless we must call to mind how the law hath been compared with the Gospel, because that such as will needs purchase themselves righteousness by it, do bear themselves in hand that God is bound unto them, for their doing of their duty, and they think they do it thoroughly indeed. When they hear this promise, he that doth these things shall live: (^{<031805>}Leviticus 18:5) by and by they strain themselves and they believe that they shall bring the matter about to perform all that ever God requireth and commandeth. And when they have once gotten that promise by the end, straightways they look for the wages too: and they never think anymore that their salvation is a free gift, but that they have deserved and earned God's promise, so that the eternal life is with them but a recompense of their deserts. Thus ye see what is meant by the Law when Saint Paul compareth it with the Gospel. And as touching the Gospel he doth us to wit, that it is a doctrine whereby God showeth himself to be our father, with covenant that we should be set free from the

condemnation of Satan and sin, yea and from the curse of the law. For (as we have seen afore) it is said that all such as fulfill not the law in all points shall be accursed. Now the case is so, that all of us are endangered. And by that means all the world is swallowed up in despair, and there is no remedy, unless God draw wretched sinners out of that condemnation, and acquit them of the sentence that was pronounced against them. Now then we see after what manner Saint Paul took the name of the Law: namely that he meant not, that the doctrine which is contained in Moyses, doth not make us rightly the children of God, or that it containeth not the promises which were for the everlasting salvation of mankind: but only that before Jesus Christ came into the world, there was not yet any full liberty or freedom as there is nowadays, and moreover that the hypocrites abused the law by their false interpretations. For they surmised that they could make God amends, and thereby purchase favor at his hand. And therefore Saint Paul saith that we shall always be in bondage till we be begotten again by another kind of seed, that is to wit, by the Gospel. But let us mark well these words, where it is said that Agar or Sinai representeth the Jerusalem which was at that time, that is to wit, the same City which had erst been [*previously been*] God's sanctuary, and should have been the wellspring of all heavenly doctrine, according to Esay and Micheas, (^{<230203>} Isaiah 2:3; ^{<330402>} Micah 4:2) which say, The law shall come from Sion, and the word of God from Jerusalem. Howbeit forasmuch as the Jews were corrupt, and had mingled their own inventions and glosses with the pureness of the true doctrine, yea and had forsaken Jesus Christ the fountain of life: Saint Paul saith that that Jerusalem of theirs is like Agar the bondsmaid, and like the mountain Sinai which cannot engender but to condemnation: and that is a thing well worthy to be marked: for it serveth to show that God did never so tie his grace to any one place, but that he punished the thanklessness of the inhabitors, when they would not have the wit to make their benefit of the good things that he had put into their hands. Behold, Jerusalem is called God's holy city, his royal palace, his house, and the place of his abode: all these titles are given it in the holy Scripture. (^{<194803>} Psalm 48:3; ^{<19D213>} Psalm 132:13; ^{<400405>} Matthew 4:5; ^{<402753>} Matthew 27:53) And yet notwithstanding Saint Paul saith that she is become like Sinai a barren hill in a desert and elendge [*remote, lonely, dreary*] place, and out of the bounds of the holy land which God calleth his resting place and the heritage of his faithful and

chosen. Seeing there was such a change in the City of Jerusalem, which had been chosen of God and honored with so many goodly and excellent titles: what shall become of all such people as do nowadays refuse the doctrine of the Gospel? Although they were exalted to the like honor, yet could God well enough make them to tumble into all reproach. We see what is said of all those Cities where our Lord Jesus Christ had preached the Gospel: (<401121> Matthew 11:21) as of Capernaum and the rest. For they might have boasted of their having of the message of salvation first afore all others, and of Christ's being conversant among them rather than at Jerusalem. But he saith, thou shalt be cast down to the bottom of hell, and that was because they were stubborn and maliciously willful, in disdainng to receive the grace that was preached unto them. Yea and we see what Jeremy saith of Silo. (<240712> Jeremiah 7:12) Because the Jews boasted so much of their town of Jerusalem, under the color of the Temple and the altar: Go your ways to Silo (saith he): was not the Ark placed there a long time? did not men resort thither from all coasts to worship God? did they not offer sacrifices there? And what see ye now? a terrible token of God's vengeance, because they had not profited themselves by the benefit that was offered to them first of all. Now therefore let us apply this to our own instruction, that whensoever God shall have been so gracious to us, as to make his abode among us, and as it were to plant his royal seed with us to reign over us, we may walk in fear and wariness, endeavoring on our side to obey him, and to shroud ourselves soberly and advisedly under his wings. For if we think to hold him bound unto us, and thereupon presume to be willful in our own conceit, and unhallow the gracious gifts which he had dedicated to our salvation: surely such lewdness shall not abide unpunished. So then we be warned by the example of Jerusalem, to yield ourselves peaceably to the obeying of our God, and to suffer him to govern us, applying ourselves to him in all respects, without puffing up into vain presumption, when he shall have bestowed any of his spiritual gifts upon us, but rather confessing that we be so much the more beholden unto him, and thereupon taking occasion to humble ourselves. And here by the way we see what a fondness it is of the Papists, to tie God unto Rome under color (as they say) that it is the Apostolic see. Let us put the case it were so, although we know not why, for all that they allege of Saint Peter is but tales and stark lies. It is very certain that Saint Paul was held prisoner at Rome, and it may be gathered that he was even put to death

there. Behold, all the holiness of Rome is this, that the Gospel was persecuted there, and that that Devilish dungeon had been defiled with the blood of the martyrs, as it were to provoke god's wrath, and to confederate itself to fight against the truth, and as much as may be to abolish the name and remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Behold here all the worthiness of Rome. But now admit that they had the records which the City of Jerusalem had, whereof notwithstanding they find not one syllable in the holy Scripture. It is not said that God will reign or have any dwelling in the City of Rome, nor that it should be named the mother church, nor have any other dignity or pre-eminence at all. Indeed Saint Paul saith that the faith of the Romans, (and yet they were then but a handful of people,) was at that time known everywhere, even to their great renown. (^{<450108>}Romans 1:8) For ye must not think that those which bear the sword there were the Christians: but they were a few folk gathered together in covert. Those doth Saint Paul praise and commend: but yet doth it not follow that the Church was over all the whole town of Rome, notwithstanding, whatsoever it were, we see what happened to Jerusalem. Saint Paul telleth us that it differed not from Agar or Sinai, which is an unholy and defiled place, so that the holiness thereof was utterly done away, because it continued not in the pure doctrine of the Gospel. Therefore we may conclude that such as have been nearest unto God, and to whom he hath communicated himself most familiarly, shall be shaken off as strangers, if they abide not in the pureness [of the truth] which is the inseparable band whereby we be made one with our God. But surely we see that nowadays, the pure doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ is not only shaken off, trodden under foot, despised, and scorned at Rome: but also cruelly persecuted with fire and sword, and finally that there is no religion at all there. For that place is so full of filth and lewdness, that if a man go thither, it is a wonder that ever he should return with any fear of God or with any good seed in him. We see then that it is as a dungeon of hell: and would God that they which have been there had rather broken their necks than lifted up a foot to go thither. For we see presently, that the country of France hath been infected with all ungodliness by it, so that the most part of them are become no better than hogs and dogs, having less religion in them than brute beasts. But yet (as I have touched heretofore) we be warned hereby to walk in fear and wariness, and to take good heed that we be not bereft and deprived of the benefit which we have received,

if we abuse it, lest God pour out his horrible wrath upon us, and we become as a mirror and pattern of reproach after the manner of Jerusalem, which Saint Paul doth here set upon the scaffold, notwithstanding that it had been so highly honored before. Furthermore let us mark, that under the figure of Abraham God doth here show himself a father to all his: and so ye see we be begotten of God, so as we have room in his Church. But yet is it not enough for us to call upon God as our father, except we be rightly begotten again by the incorruptible seed, which is unto us as a pledge of everlasting life and salvation. If it be asked, how then is it possible that we should be begotten of God, and yet notwithstanding be as it were a bastardseed? The answer is, that we by our own vice and naughtiness do mar God's seed which is his word: for so is it named by Saint Peter. But it is certain that in respect that the word proceedeth from God it containeth in itself nothing but all goodness. And again we see what pureness shineth there, how that all the treasures of God's righteousness, mercy, and goodness are uttered there. Thus then you see what manner of thing God's word is, and what is the nature thereof. Nevertheless when we corrupt it and falsify it by our own fancies, and make a mingle mangle of it: we may still be taken for God's children howbeit we shall be but as bastard children, as shall be declared more at large (by God's leave) after dinner. For then will Saint Paul declare, that although Ishmaell were the eldest Son, yet was he in the end driven out of the house wherein he had taken the chief room upon him, howbeit that he was but a bastard, and also born of a bondswoman. Then let us mark that we must not only be begotten by God's word into a pure faith, and God by his holy spirit enlighten us that we may know his will according as he witnesseth it unto us. For if we change his word after our own fancy, and disguise it: truly it may be called God's seed still, but yet is it not so indeed, whatsoever we make of it, because it abideth not in his own soundness. And here ye see the cause why so many do nowadays falsely name themselves Christians: according as the Papists will well enough confess that they believe in God, and that they be contented to hold themselves to the holy Scripture. But yet for all that, it is apparent that they be utterly perverted, and that as touching the Scripture, whereas they ought to receive it with all reverence, they turn it to their own liking, yea and make a mockage and scoff of it, and (as I said erewhiles [*heretofore*]) they spew out this blasphemy against it, that it is a nose of wax, and that men may turn it which way they list [*wish*]: and

moreover it is apparent that they have turmoiled all things by their own forgeries. For what else do men call God's service in popery, but the things that men have set down of their own brain. There is no mention of ruling themselves by God's commandment and ordinance. God must be thrust out of his place, and men take upon them that which belongeth unto him, challenging authority to bring folks' consciences into bondage, and to make what laws they think good. But that is too villainous and outrageous a corruption. On the other side, whence do the Papists draw the Articles of their faith? even out of their own decrees, for they reckon [*care*] not to draw any resolution out of the holy Scripture. So then they pass not a whit what is in the holy Scripture: but if anything be agreed upon and received by common opinion, that is as an Oracle from heaven with them. And we see also that when they intend to prove any of their toys, the first reason that they make is that it is received, and that antiquity ought to prevail, as who would say that there were any prescription in the matter: and thereupon they pull out certain texts of the Scripture by the hairs of the head, and these must also help forward the matter. But [when all comes to all] it is but flat mockery, and it is apparent that they willfully corrupt God's word. For there is such gross and beastly ignorance in them, that very children might justly spit in their faces for it. So then the Papists are a fair looking glass to us at this day, for the things that are contained here in Saint Paul: that is to wit, that many of them vaunt themselves to be God's children, and householdmainie [*attendants*] of his Church, and yet notwithstanding are but bastard slips, and of a corrupted seed, because that instead of cleaving thoroughly to the pure doctrine which were able to beget them again into the hope of the heavenly life, they be so given to their own minglings, that there is not anymore soundness in them. But we need not to go any further to show that the matter which Saint Paul treateth of here, is verified to much of the Popedom [*papal government*]. For whereabouts is our greatest strife nowadays, but for freewill, for merits, for satisfactions, and for such other things? The Papists say that we are able by our own freewill to purchase grace at God's hand, not that we need not to be aided and succored by his holy spirit, but because there is a certain matching together (say they) between God and us, so as God worketh one piece and we another. Thus do they make us God's marrows, and like as our strength would be too weak if it were not succored on God's behalf: so should God's grace (say they) be unavailable, if we made

it not of force by our own moving thereunto. And hereupon again they forge and build their merits: there is none other talk among them, but of purchasing the realm of paradise, by making God beholden to them: and then step forth their merits and satisfactions to ransom all the faults that they have committed. Thus ye see in effect what the Papists prate and jangle. Thereupon they conclude, that it is blasphemy to say that God's Law is impossible, and that we be not able to perform it: saving that there is no man but he may fully discharge himself of it when he listeth [*wishes*]. It is an easy matter for them to prate after that fashion in the shadow: but they that say so, are naughty ruffians, drunkards, swearers, and folk given to all villainy and outrage. For men know well enough what the holiness of the Monks, of the shavelings [*def: contemptuous epithet for a tonsured ecclesiastic*], and of all the whole rabble of their riffraff and Cankerworms is. But we on our side say that we be born the bondslaves of sin, and are held in so straight bands under the tyranny of Satan, that we cannot so much as think one good thought of well doing, but go forward still unto all evil, like as if an Ass should always bear his yoke or burden with him, and yet we sin not but willingly: But howsoever we fare, we be so saped [*steeped*] in sin, that naturally we cannot do anything but offend God, and therefore that he must be fain [*pleased*] to enlarge us and set us at liberty by his holy spirit. Moreover we say, that the law of God is impossible to be fulfilled, and that it showeth us our duty to the end to condemn us and to stop our mouths, and to make us come before God as wretched offenders, to obtain grace at his hand for the sins which we have committed, and to confound us with shame, to the end we should grant ourselves to be damned, and seek to be saved at God's hand, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally we say, that to justify ourselves before him, is a thing that passeth all our ability, and that he supplieth our wants because he sifteth us not with rigor, nor entereth into account with us: and that when we have offended him, there is none other satisfaction for it, than the sacrifice that was offered by our Lord Jesus Christ, nor any other cleansing than to plunge ourselves overhead and ears in his blood. Thus ye see how the doctrine which is contained in Saint Paul, is to be put in practice in respect of the disputations of the Papists against us. For it is certain, that for all their bragging and false pretending of the name of God, and for all their saying that they be his children because they be begotten by the holy scripture: they show that their mother is Agar or Sinai, and

consequently that they be bondsmen born, and do tie the rope about their own neck, because they have no will to go unto God, to receive the freedom that he offereth them, but will rather usurp to themselves the thing that belongeth to God only, and will needs justify themselves by their own merits, and fulfill the law of themselves. Therefore they be bondchildren, and continue slaves still, and in the end must be driven quite out of the house. As for us, we shall see hereafter what proof the doctrine hath which we hold, and what it bringeth with it: which is, that we have none other freedom than is given us by the doctrine of the gospel, according also as our Lord Jesus Christ showeth in the eighth of Saint John, that it is his peculiar office to make us free, and that the drawing of us out of damnation is a special privilege given unto him by God his father. Therefore when we come to our Lord Jesus Christ, and in him seek for all things that we want, knowing that by his means we be delivered from the yoke of the law, which we are not able to bear, and which not only made us to stoop, but also weighed us down to the bottom of hell: it is the true seed that begetteth us again into full freedom to be God's children, not only to be bruted so in this world, but also to be avowed so at his hand before his Angels, that in the end we may come to the heritage that is bought so dearly for us, and which we cannot attain to by our own power, but by the means of him to whom it belongeth, who communicateth it unto us according as he offereth it us daily by his Gospel.

But now let us fall down before the Majesty of our good God with acknowledgment of our faults praying him to make us feel them better than we have done, so as it may make us to grow and increase more and more in true repentance, that our coming unto him may be in all lowliness without hypocrisy, being ashamed of our wretchedness, and not seeking any other remedy than in our Lord Jesus Christ: and that forasmuch as our good God hath adopted us and sealed the grace of his adoption in our hearts by his holy spirit, we may stand steadfast in the pureness of his Gospel, without adding anything of our own, and without marring it by our own interpretations, and that he so holds us in the obedience of faith by his holy spirit, that like as he hath begun to show himself bountiful towards us, so we also may go continually forward to the said perfection,

without swerving aside at any time. And so let us all say, Almighty God our heavenly father, etc.