

# Christian Freedom: Born Free

by Warren Wiersbe

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*Warren Wiersbe's sermon emphasizes the contrast between living under the law and embracing the freedom of grace in Christ, illustrated through the story of Abraham's two sons.*

**Duration:** 41:24

**Topics:** "Freedom"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on Galatians chapter 4, specifically verse 19 onwards. He highlights how Paul draws spiritual lessons from the Old Testament Scriptures. The preacher emphasizes the conflict between law and grace, flesh and spirit, using the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Isaac, and Ishmael. He explains that Hagar represents the law, which brings death and slavery, while Sarah represents grace, which brings life and freedom. The preacher urges the audience to understand the foolishness of trying to mix law and grace, emphasizing the need to choose the spirit over the flesh.

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## Transcript

Our theme tonight is Born Free. And we're reading from Galatians chapter 4, beginning at verse 19 through the end of the chapter. This has always been a fascinating paragraph to me because it shows how Paul reaches back into the Old Testament scriptures and finds some wonderful spiritual lessons.

Galatians chapter 4 verse 19, My little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, I desire to be present with you now and to change my tone, for I stand in doubt of you. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh, that is, in the course of nature.

But he of the free woman was by promise. Which things are an allegory? An allegory is a story with two levels of meaning. Pilgrim's Progress is perhaps the best known allegory in the English language, where people and events stand for abstract truths.

For these are the two covenants, the one from Mount Sinai bearing children for bondage, who is Hagar. For this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and answers to Jerusalem which now is and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all, that is, all believers.

For it is written, Rejoice thou barren that bearest not, break forth and cry thou that travailest not, for the desolate hath many more children than she who hath a husband. Now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. But as then he that was born after the flesh, Ishmael, persecuted him that was born after the spirit, Isaac, even so it is now.

Nevertheless, what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son. For the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman, so then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free. Stand fast therefore in the liberty with which Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

Now for some of you this may be very complex and mysterious, but those of you who know your Old Testament scriptures understand what Paul is talking about. He is talking about two family problems that Abraham had. They are recorded back in Genesis 16 and Genesis 21.

When Abraham was seventy-five years old, God called him into a life of faith and promised that he would have a great many descendants. Ten years went by and he had no son. And so his wife, Sarah, said to him, now Abraham, God told you that you would be the father, but he didn't say that I would be the mother.

Why don't you marry Hagar, my maid, and perhaps you can have the son by her. Now that was legal, perfectly legal, but it wasn't scriptural. There are many things in Chicago that are legal that are not biblical.

And so he did, he married Hagar. And when Abraham was eighty-six years old, Hagar gave birth to a son, Abraham's firstborn son, and they named him Ishmael. Now when Hagar discovered that she was carrying a child, Sarah became very jealous of her and they had a fight and she threw Hagar out of the home.

And God said to Abraham, now you bring Hagar back, let her stay here, and let her submit herself to Sarah. So when Abraham was eighty-six years old, Ishmael was born. Now when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God came and said, Abraham, you should have waited, because Sarah is going to be the one to have the son.

About this time next year, your wife Sarah is going to give birth to a son. Sure enough, when Abraham was a hundred years old and Ishmael was about fourteen years old, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Isaac means laughter, because Isaac brought such great joy into their home.

Now we have a problem. When Isaac was about three years old, he was weaned and they had a big feast to commemorate his weaning. And we read in the scriptures that Ishmael, who would now be a teenager, about sixteen or seventeen, persecuted him.

I don't know what he said, but having been around a lot of teenagers, I can imagine what he said. And Ishmael made things rough for little Isaac. And Sarah said to her husband, throw that woman out and tell her to take her son with her.

God said, Abraham, that's right. The first time Sarah said for her to get out, that was wrong. But now it's right.

Let Ishmael go and let Hagar go, because you can't have Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael in the same family. Now when you read all of this in Genesis, it just looks like a couple of family problems that they would have written to dear Abby about if she'd been around. But there's a lot deeper truth to it than just family problems.

It's an allegory. Abraham stands for something, Isaac does, Sarah does, Ishmael does, Hagar does. Now all of us know what Abraham symbolizes in the Bible.

In fact, Paul has mentioned it several times in Galatians. Abraham signifies faith. He's the great man of faith.

He's the father of the believers. And so when Abraham is mentioned, you say faith. Now he tells us what Sarah represents.

Sarah represents the covenant of grace. And so when you see this very fine couple, Abraham and Sarah, you have faith and grace. And of course they gave birth to a son and Isaac stands for the believer.

Verse 28, now we brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. Ishmael stands for the flesh. His mother stands for the covenant of law.

And so here's the whole picture before us. And we didn't make this up. Paul told us this.

Paul says Abraham stands for faith and Abraham's family has Sarah and Isaac. Sarah stands for grace. Isaac stands for the miracle of the new birth, the new nature.

Throw out Hagar who stands for law and her son, Ishmael, who stands for the old nature. So when you put it all together, you discover something very interesting. Paul is talking about the two basic conflicts that you have in your life every day.

If you're a Christian here tonight, you have these two conflicts. Now, if you aren't a Christian, you don't have these conflicts. You've got a worse conflict.

You're at enmity with God. You're at war with God. And boy, you don't want to stay at war with God because you'll lose the war.

What are the two conflicts that we have in our Christian life? The conflict between the flesh, the old nature and the spirit, the new nature, and the conflict between law and grace. And Galatians has been dealing with this. Now, Paul says to his friends in Galatia who had become his enemies, my little children.

You see, he had brought them into the family. He had begotten them through the gospel and he's treating them like little children. He says, let me just tell you a story.

I can't explain these abstract truths to you. You're such babies. Let me just tell you a story about Abraham and Isaac and Sarah and Hagar and Ishmael.

And perhaps if I tell you this story, you'll understand how foolish you are to try to keep law and grace, flesh and spirit in the same family. Can't do it. Somebody has to go.

Now let's look together at these two basic conflicts in the Christian life. First, Isaac and Ishmael, the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. When I'm out in conference ministry, I always enjoy asking congregations questions.

Sometimes the answers are very embarrassing. For example, I'll often say, who's the first king in the Bible? And somebody will stand up and say, Saul. I'll say, you're wrong.

It's Adam. God made Adam the first king in the Bible. Which king took over after Adam? Silence.

Romans five tells us sin began to reign and death began to reign because of Adam's sin. Then I'll say something like this. Who was Abraham's firstborn son? Isaac.

Oh no. Ishmael. And Paul tells us here, there's a tremendous contrast between these two boys.

If you want to understand the flesh, your old nature and the spirit, your new nature, just get acquainted with Isaac and Ishmael. Look at their birth. Ishmael's birth was done by the will of man, by the will of the flesh.

It was not of God. Sarah said to Abraham when he was 85 years old, we had better help God out. Mary Hagar.

Hagar agreed to this. The whole thing was man-made. The whole thing was completely apart from the will of God.

Ishmael was born of the flesh. This is why the Bible tells us back in Genesis, he was a wild man. Ishmael was a wild man.

I don't mean by this, he frothed at the mouth and broke windows, but he was not controllable. And I say to myself, you know what? When I was born the first time, they could have called me Ishmael. I went through Moby Dick some months back.

It's one of my favorite books. If you've never read it, you ought to read it. But I went through the book for this purpose, just to mark all the scripture references and all the scriptural allusions in that book.

There are more than 100 references to the Bible in Moby Dick. In fact, when you start the book, I wonder how many high school students who have to read Moby Dick choke on the first sentence. Call me Ishmael.

That's significant. When I was born, they were going to call me Philip. And if I was going to be a girl, they were going to call me Phyllis.

But I had a cousin whose name was Warren, and he died. And my father was rather, he liked that little nephew of his, and so they called my name Warren. You know what they should have called me? Ishmael.

Because I was born with an old nature, and it didn't take them long to find out I had an old nature. And as I grew up, it didn't take the neighbors long to find out that I had an old nature. Didn't take my kindergarten teacher long to discover I had an old nature.

And no amount of discipline, no amount of law could change that old nature. That's Ishmael. Did you ever notice in your Bible that God always rejects the firstborn? He rejected Cain and chose Abel.

He rejected the firstborn in Egypt. He rejected Esau and chose Jacob. He rejected your first birth.

He rejected Ishmael and chose Isaac. God rejects the first birth, Ishmael. Now Isaac was born by the power of God.

Abraham was physically dead. Here's a man who is 99 years old. Here is a woman who's 89 years old.

The very idea that they should have any children. That's why God waited. God could have performed the miracle at 75, but people would have said, well, 75, that's possible.

85, well, maybe 99. Romans chapter 4 says God waited until Abraham and Sarah were as good as dead. And then he performed a miracle in their bodies and gave them new life.

It's a picture of what happens when you're born again. Well, when you come to the point when you're dead, slain by God, I can't save myself. I can't do a thing for myself.

Oh God, you have to do it. That's why John says we are born not of the flesh, the will of the flesh or the will of man. We're born of God.

And so Isaac is a picture of that new birth. There's a contrast in their births. Now I want to ask you this question.

How many births have you had? Oh, you say my first birth is really good. If you knew my mother and father, I don't know your mother and father. And I'm not sure I want to, but I know this much about you.

If you've only been born once, you're a sinner. I know something else. If you've only been born once, you're going to die twice.

You can die physically and you'll die eternally. There's a place called hell, which is the second death. The first death is a physical death.

The second death is a spiritual death, an eternal death, separation from God. And so I asked you point blank, how many births have you had? Now, if you can say I've had two births, I know that I was born Ishmael, but praise God there. I believe the promise like Abraham did.

And one day God's power went to work in my life and I trusted Jesus Christ and Isaac came along. The joy came in and new life came in and I've been born again. Now, if you can't say that you have been born again, you better be able to do it tonight.

You better trust Jesus Christ right now. So there's a contrast in their birth. There's a contrast in their behavior.

You will never find Isaac creating problems for Abraham and Sarah. Never. He brought joy into their home.

By the way, Ishmael didn't really show how mean he was until Isaac came along. I thought my old nature was bad before I was saved. But man, when Isaac came into my life and there was a new nature, oh, my old nature began to fight.

Did you have that experience? You say I still do. I do, too. He talks about it over in Galatians chapter five, where the flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit lusts against the flesh.

And these are contrary the one to the other. You see, Isaac was always submissive. Abraham said, Isaac, get on the altar.

I'm going to kill you. He did it. The new nature always obeys the father.

The old nature always fights the father. And Ishmael gave problem after problem to Abraham. Let me drop this into your heart just to think about on your way home.

If you get into a traffic jam or a long stoplight, just think about this. Abraham stands for faith. Sarah stands for grace.

Isaac was born by grace through faith the same way you were born. For by grace are you saved through faith. Ishmael wasn't born by faith, the works of the flesh.

Ishmael wasn't born by grace. Hagar is the law. And in their behavior, the two are contrary.

Isaac is submissive. Ishmael is rebellious. Isaac brings joy.

Ishmael brings sorrow and division. Wherever you find the saints of God not getting along with each other, somebody has quit walking according to the spirit and has started walking according to the flesh always. Whenever the saints of God in a home or a Sunday school class or any church anywhere else, whenever the saints of God are happily getting along with each other in creative work and blessing, it's because Isaac is in control.

Whenever the saints of God are having problems with each other, and we've all been through it, it's because Ishmael got in. He always caused trouble. Now there's a contrast not only in their birth and in their behavior, but there's a contrast in their blessing.

I don't want to go into this in too great a detail, but I want to point it out to you. God did give blessing to Ishmael, material blessing, lands and mountains and things like that, but he never gave any spiritual blessing to Ishmael. But Isaac was given all of Abraham's wealth and the spiritual blessings of Abraham.

Isaac was the heir. My new nature is the heir of God and makes me a joint heir with Christ because I have the new nature within me. And if you're saved, you have the new nature.

We are the heirs of God. Your old nature is not going to give you any inheritance. If you're living for the flesh, the Bible says that which is born of the flesh is flesh and always will be flesh.

But my friend, if you've been born again, you've been born rich and you've been born free because Isaac was not the son of a bondwoman. Isaac was the son of a free woman. Grace! When you were born, you were born free.

You weren't born under the bondage of the Ten Commandments. You weren't born under the bondage of some religion. You were born free.

Abraham never had to issue commandments to Isaac. As far as the record is concerned, Isaac's great joy was to obey his father even unto death. Ishmael, that's a different story.

May I repeat for you something I have often said? The old nature knows no law. The new nature needs no law. When two people fall in love with each other, you don't have to talk to them about obeying.

Where there's love, there's a desire to serve. When you have the new nature within, there's the desire to serve. Now what does God do with Ishmael? He throws him out.

You say, but I still have my flesh. That's right. I still have my old nature.

I do too. Every once in a while it asserts itself rather vociferously. But you said the old nature was cast out.

That's right. As far as God is concerned, this old nature of mine is through. Every time I reckon myself to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God, that old nature can't do anything.

You see, the problem is not God. The problem is myself. God has told me, look, as far as I'm concerned, that old nature has been thrown out.

As far as I'm concerned, you've been dead to that. As far as I'm concerned, I am crucified with Christ. Therefore, reckon yourself that way.

Believe what God says and act upon it. The reason Isaac brought such joy and such blessing to the home was because he always stayed in fellowship with his father. If you'll keep this new nature within you in fellowship with your father, you and the Lord are going to have a wonderful time together.

And you're going to find that that old nature, though it will fight, though it will do insidious things, though it will seek to drag you down, you'll find that old nature will be defeated because the new nature will be the stronger. Paul says, make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof. Do you remember the story that the Indian told Dr. Ironside? You recall how he used to work among our Indians in the Southwest.

He was talking about this very conflict of the old nature and the new nature. And he says, this Indian has two dogs down inside, a good one and a bad one, and they fight each other. Dr. Ironside said, which one wins? The Indian said, the one I feed the most.

That's good theology. Make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lust thereof. Don't feed it.

Don't let it in the house. Reckon ourselves to be dead. Cultivate Isaac and the father in fellowship together.

Now we must hasten and look at the second contrast. And this is such a beautiful thing. The contrast between Sarah and Hagar.

Ishmael and Isaac, the flesh versus the spirit. Hagar and Sarah, law versus grace. And they go together.

Grace makes possible the new nature, law the old nature. By the law is the knowledge of sin. Now let's look at Hagar.

Number one, Hagar was Abraham's second wife, not his first wife. Boy, if all the legalists would just notice that and believe it. Hagar was not his first wife.

Hagar was his second wife. God never meant for Abraham to be married to Hagar. The law was added.

The law, God didn't begin with law. You don't find the law in the Garden of Eden. You find a commandment.

Don't don't eat of that tree. That was the test. You don't find the law.

You don't find the law in the land of Egypt when God delivered them. God didn't say now if you'll all take copies of the Ten Commandments and hang them on your door. Oh no.

He said you put the blood on the door. That's grace. God did not deliver the nation of Israel from Egypt by law.

He delivered them by grace. So Hagar was his second wife and the law was added. God brought the law in, but he started with grace.

Dear friend, when you got saved, you weren't married to law. You were married to grace. I noticed a second fact about Hagar.

She was a servant. Paul says, wherefore then serveth the law? The law is a servant. I mentioned this to you several weeks ago.

Permit me to repeat it. The law was never meant to be your servant permanently. Paul talks about the little child who has to have law to protect him that he might grow into maturity.

He said the Jewish nation was like this. The law protected the Jewish nation until the fullness of the time was come and God sent his son and his son redeemed them from the law. Hagar was a servant.

Now the law is a marvelous servant, but a very poor master. And I'm afraid that many people who worship law don't realize they're stepping out of grace. They don't realize that the law is supposed to be a servant and the law still has a service to perform.

The law convicts of sin. The law reveals sin. The law shows us how sinful we are.

You would never have known what a sneak Sarah was had it not been for Hagar. Hagar showed that Sarah was impatient and Sarah liked to scheme and second guess God. You would never have known what a weakling Abraham was if it had not been for Hagar.

Hagar revealed the fleshliness of Abraham. The law reveals sin. She was a servant, but not a master.

The fact of the matter is she couldn't even control her own son Ishmael. Now you'll not read any place in Genesis where Hagar told Isaac what to do. Hagar was not even able to change Ishmael.

The law brings out the worst in me. Grace brings out the best in me. Hagar was a servant.

Thirdly, Hagar was not supposed to bear a child. The law does not give birth. The law gives death.

Paul says in Romans 7, the law killed me. God never gave the law to give life. How do you get life? By grace through faith.

The law was given to expose sin, to show how sinful sin really is, and to condemn us and to help us to feel the awful condemnation of sin. But the law can't save. The law was never given to give life.

Hagar was never supposed to have a child. There's a fourth fact about Hagar you'd better get a hold of. Hagar gave birth to a slave.

The son of a bondwoman is a slave. The law always gives birth to slaves and God doesn't want us to be slaves. Remember the prodigal son? He got himself into a mess of trouble out in the far country.

He was broke. He was hungry. He was homesick.

He said, you know what? The servants that my father has at home are better taken care of than I am. I'm gonna go home. I'm gonna tell my father I've sinned.

Make me a servant. And so he did. He came home.

His father saw him afar off and he ran and threw his arms around him. You know why he did that? If the father had not run and thrown his arms around the boy, the people in the village would have stoned him to death. He was a rebellious son.

And when the father threw his arms around that boy, they couldn't stone the boy. And the villager said, here is a strange thing. This father's gonna forgive his son.

And the boy says, father I've sinned against heaven and in your sight I'm no more worthy to be called a son. Make me one of your hired servants. You know a lot of Christians are this way.

Oh God, make me a slave. I'll grovel in the dust. Make me a slave.

God says, wait a minute. I want you to be a son. Hagar gave birth to a slave.

If you put yourself under law, you become a slave. God doesn't want you to be a slave. If the son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed.

Now he's not talking about license. He's not talking about what the theologians call antinomianism, against the law. Anybody who says, hey, I'm saved.

I've been saved by grace. I can live the way I please. It's probably giving evidence he's never been saved at all.

When Isaac comes into your life, you don't want to live the way you please. You want to live to please your father. She gave birth to a slave.

The fifth fact I notice about her, she was thrown out. Cast out the bond woman and her son. Throw her out.

He didn't say compromise with her. Now we have this in churches today. We have a little bit of law, a little bit of grace.

You can't do that. He didn't say to compromise with her. He didn't say to capitulate to her.

He didn't say to change her. He didn't say to do anything. Throw her out and let her take her son with her.

The strength of sin is the law. Paul says that. 1st Corinthians 15.

Do you know what it is that makes my old Ishmael nature want to do bad things? When you tell me I shouldn't do them. Don't do this, oh yeah? Now do that. That's why in churches that are very legalistic, people are always mad at each other.

They're taking out their frustrations on each other, fighting each other and splitting. How did Abraham and Isaac raise, how did Abraham and Sarah raise Isaac? By grace through faith. How do Christians grow up at Moody Church? By grace through faith, not law, through flesh.

So when Hagar goes, law, flesh goes. Because the law, like a magnet, draws out flesh. Throw her out.

Would you notice a sixth fact about Hagar? And this blesses me. She never got married again. She never got married again.

God never gave the law to the church. God never gave the law to the Gentiles. God had used the law in His way for His purpose.

She never got married again. And there are organizations today, there are so-called Christian groups today that want to marry Abraham and Hagar again and God says no, throw her out. Someone comes and hands you a magazine that says you're supposed to keep the Sabbath day or you're supposed to keep Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks, trumpets.

Just say sorry. When I got saved, God kicked Hagar out of my life and I'm not going to get married to her again. Was never supposed to be married to her to begin with.

So you see, we're born free. Like Isaac, we are born free. We are children of the free woman.

And because we were saved by grace through faith, the way Isaac was born, how do we live? By grace through faith. Where's the grace come from? God. Where's the faith come from? God's Word.

And so your life is not built on rules and regulations and religious restrictions. Does this mean we throw out all rules and regulations? No, we'd have chaos. When you unite with Moody Church, we give you a little booklet that says here's how the train runs on the track.

This is the way we keep from having confusion around here. We try to keep a certain order. But we don't say that by keeping this, you're going to be spiritual.

When you go to a Christian school, they have certain rules and regulations. You knew them before you came. Why are these rules there? To make you more spiritual? Of course not.

My guess is with 10% of the students, it makes you more carnal. Just the very idea of someone saying you can't do this. Oh yeah, I'll show you I can do it.

Why are these rules there? To maintain order. Let all things be done decently and in order. We're not talking about the social obligations of people.

I'm talking about the spiritual relations of people. Let no one say because I don't do this and don't do that and don't go here and don't go there, I am spiritual. The Pharisees said that and they crucified Jesus.

We're born free. That's why Paul, really, chapter 5 verse 1 should be the conclusion. It should be 432.

Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free. When I first began to study this passage some years ago, I said to myself, you know, it's awfully mean of God to do that. I mean, all right, he probably wasn't madly in love with Hagar, but Abraham did love Ishmael.

You know, for some 14 years, he was his only son. Boy, a kid gets to be about 14, his personality is developing. Abraham loved Ishmael just the way you and I love the flesh.

In fact, at one point, he cried out and said, oh, that Ishmael might live before you. God said, don't talk to me like that. I'll give what I want to Ishmael, but I'm choosing Isaac.

I said to myself, you know, God, God was awfully hard on Abraham, taking away his firstborn son. And then the spirit of God said to me, why you fool, didn't God give his only begotten son? Can't you just see Isaac, Sarah, Abraham, that last day when Ishmael and Hagar are leaving? Sarah was happy. I'm sure Isaac was happy.

I'm sure he was obeying God. But oh, there goes his son, his firstborn son. Oh, his heart was broken.

And the Lord said to me, don't feel too sorry for Abraham. There was a day when I sent my only begotten son out and he went to a cross. And you know why he went to that cross? So that people could be saved from the law.

Because on the cross he bore the curse of the law. So that people could be saved from the awful penalty of sin. For the wages of sin is death.

So that people could be saved from the awful power of the old nature. That I might make new people out of them. That Isaac might be born within them.

Don't weep over Abraham. Just remember, says God, my son, my only son, my firstborn left home and bore your sins on the cross. Now, my dear friend, which family are you living in? You say, well, I've never been born again.

I don't know what this thing is about having a new life down inside. Well, then you belong to Hagar and Ishmael. And Hagar means law.

That means the judgment of the law is over your head and it'll catch up with you someday. God says, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not. And there's, oh, Ishmael, he's going to get you into trouble.

Why don't you move over into the other family? Move into the Abraham-Sarah family. It's a good family. Put your faith in Jesus Christ.

By grace are we saved through faith. Sarah, grace. Abraham, faith.

Oh, it would be wonderful if tonight, Isaac, a new nature, a joyful new nature, an obedient new nature could just be born into you. You say, can that happen? Certainly it can. That's why Jesus died.

That's why we give an invitation at the close of every service at the Moody Church, so that people can come and say, I want to change families tonight. I was born Ishmael. I want to be Isaac.

I was born the wrong way. I want to be born the right way. I was born in bondage.

I want to be born free. I was born bankrupt. I want to be born rich.

I was born with no home. I want to be born into God's family and have an eternal home and never be kicked out. That can happen to you tonight if you'll just give your heart to Jesus Christ and be born free.

Gracious Father in heaven, thank you for this picture that you give to us of what it means to be free. And I pray that someone here tonight might trust Jesus Christ, believe, be born again and go away with joy and peace and new life and eternal forgiveness. Father, this can only happen by the miracle of God.

And I pray that in many hearts tonight that miracle might take place. And so work tonight to do your will for your glory in Jesus name. Amen.

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