

Sunday, May 28, 2023—Galatians 3:23-25 The Law Was Our Schoolmaster

Galatians 3:23

- **But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.**
- **But before faith came**—note the contrast “but” at the beginning of verse 23. In the context, “faith” in this verse is referring to Jesus Christ. Historically, there was a time before the arrival of Jesus Christ i.e., “the seed to whom the promise was made” in verse 19. There is a historical progression in this passage that cannot be overlooked if one is going to understand it.
 - Verse 15—Paul speaks “after the manner of men” and explains how human covenants work.
 - Verse 16—Paul speaks of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12) and how it will be fulfilled via the Christ.
 - Verse 17—the Law was added along side the Abrahamic Covenant 430 years later.
 - Verse 18—the Law cannot “disannul” (v. 17) the “promise” that God made to the Abraham 430 years later.
 - Verse 19—the Law was “added because of transgression, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made” i.e., Christ in verse 16.
 - Verses 20-22—are explanatory i.e., they elaborate on how the law was give, its impact, and purpose.
 - Verse 23—takes the reader back in time before Christ came (v. 19) and explains the condition that people were in at that time.
- **we were kept under the law**—“we” is a first person plural pronoun. Paul is including himself with his Jewish readership once again with his use of the word “we.” Pronouns are both important and tricky when conducting Bible study.
 - Galatians 2:15—unless there is a contextual reason to think otherwise, I think this verse established who “we” is referring to in the book of Galatians i.e., those who are Jews by nature.
 - Galatians 3:1—“O foolish Galatians” is plural and therefore addressing all the believers in the churches of Galatia both Jews and Gentiles. Therefore, “you” and “ye” refer to all of the Galatians.
 - Galatians 3:2-5—“you” and “ye” are referring to everyone in verse 1 i.e., the “foolish Galatians.”
 - Galatians 3:7—“ye” is still referring to the same group as verses 1-5.

- Galatians 3:13—“us” is first person plural pronoun. Therefore, Paul is including himself in this statement along with all the “foolish Galatians” already mentioned in the context.
- Galatians 3:14—“we” is first person plural pronoun and answers to “us” in verse 14. Note also that verse 14 is explicitly talking about how “the Gentiles . . . receive the promise of the Spirit.” Therefore, the context helps you know that “we” in verse 14 is not a reference to those “who are Jews by nature” because Paul has not changed who he is addressing and verse 14 is explicitly talking about Gentiles.
- Galatians 3:23—is different because Paul is explicitly talking about a time “before” Christ came when Israel was “kept under the law.”
- **shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed**--the Law held Israel in solitary confinement, “shut up” until Christ the seed came. This verse declares that before the principle of faith for salvation was made known, Israel “was kept under the Law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed.”
- Paul was the first to say that faith provides escape from the Law.
 - Acts 16:31
 - Romans 3:28
- Paul says that because now that Christ has been made manifest, righteousness without the Law is manifested.
 - Romans 3:21
- Charles F. Baker states the following regarding this verse in his book *Understanding Galatians and The Law*:
 - “Thus, before this faith in Christ actually came, Paul says we were shut up in prison, locked up until the time of the faith which should afterward be revealed. It is important that faith is used with the definite article. People exercised faith in the Old Testament times and before, but they did not exercise faith in Jesus Christ. The Law held sway until faith in Christ had come. The person of the crucified and resurrected Christ was not the object of faith until after Christ actually came and performed His work.” (Baker, 47-48)
- Likewise, Ernest R. Campbell states the following in his commentary on *Galatians*:
 - “The statement before faith came indicates that there was a definite time when God began dealing with men an a different way. There as a change in His method of relating to men, for faith is now the key to a right relationship to God (cf. Rom. 1:17; 5:2, 2 Cor. 1:24; 5:7).

We have already observed that Abraham believed what God said, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (3:6). Furthermore, the Scripture foresaw that at a given time God

would be justifying the Gentiles by faith; therefore extending the Abrahamic faith-blessing to believers in the present Church age (3:8-9).

We also have other predictive statements in the Old Testament that imply or set forth the principle of justification by faith. David spoke of the “blessedness of the man to whom God counts righteousness apart from works” (Ps. 32:1-2; Rom. 4:6). Habakkuk also declared that “the just (righteous) shall live by faith” (Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17). The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uses the Old Testament evidence to support the fact that today, during the present Church age, God is justifying sinner by faith in Jesus Christ!

Prior to this age, in which God is pouring out “the exceeding riches of his grace upon us in Christ Jesus,” (Eph. 2:7) the Jews were . . . [“shut up”] under the Mosaic Law.” (Campbell, 84-85)

Galatians 3:24

- **Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.**
- The Law was a teacher, and every day it taught the same lesson: “you are a sinner.” It kept the curriculum the same for 1400 years of history and absolutely prevented any man from justifying himself.
- Historically, the schoolmaster was the one responsible for supervising the conduct and morals of Greek and Roman boys up to the age of manhood. The schoolmaster had to enforce obedience to the moral codes. Therefore, the schoolmaster had to be strict, stern, and severe.
 - Galatians 3:10
 - James 2:13—as a “schoolmaster” the Law called for “judgement without mercy.”
- For Israel, the Law served as her schoolmaster. It kept Israel under the stern and strict requirements of the Law.
- Again, we see that the Law was only supposed to be a temporary thing (v. 19).
- Notice how this ties the phrase “before faith came” from verse 23 with Jesus Christ.

Galatians 3:25

- **But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.**
- Has Christ come? Yes. Therefore, the believer is no longer under the Law (Romans 6:14), for we are dead to the Law by our unity with Christ (Romans 6:8-16). Believers have no relation with the Law and, consequently, any attempt to use it in our justification or sanctification is worthless (Galatians 5:4).
- When people go back and try to follow the Law, they are functioning like children.