

Paul's letter to the Galatians



The Temporary Function of the Law

Galatians 3:23 - 4:7



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In custody before faith came (3:23)



- “**we were kept in custody** (*phroureō*) **under the law**” ~ the Law served to capture and incarcerate guilty sinners.
- “**shut up**” (*sunkleiō*) ~ “to lock up securely or enclose on all sides.”
- The Law itself provided no way of escape from condemnation.
- **Faith** has always been the only way to obtain salvation:
 - Before Christ came, believers trusted that God would provide a future Redeemer (Gen 3:15; Job 19:25).
 - After Christ came, their faith looked back to Christ’s finished work on the cross which paid the price to redeem them.

The Law is a tutor or guardian (3:24)

- **“the Law has become our tutor”** (*paidagōgos*) ~ “one who guides, guards, disciplines, and manages young children.”
- The guardian set boundaries around the child, and similarly, the Law enclosed sinners, showing that no one can gain or maintain a right standing before God through works of obedience.
- They must look **outside** the Law for rescue from bondage.
- **“so that we may be justified by faith”** ~ Paul had emphasized this truth repeatedly (cf. 2:16; 3:8). God’s gift of salvation by grace through faith was now open to everyone.

No tutor is needed after faith in Christ (3:25-26)

- **“now that faith has come”** ~ after the substitutionary death of Christ for our sins, there is **“no longer”** a need for the Law to serve as a tutor or guardian.
- This function of the Law was **temporary**. A young man would change his style of clothing to show that he had ceased to be a child and had become a responsible “son of full age.”
- **“faith in Christ Jesus”** made them adult **“sons”** (*huioi*) who had outgrown the need for a guardian. They also gained a new family association in God’s household as sons who have a direct relationship with God as Father.

You are all one in Christ (3:27-28)

- When you put faith in Christ you “**have clothed yourselves with Christ.**” God sees the righteousness of His Son which covers the one who has trusted in Him (cf. Rom 13:14; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).
- “**baptized into Christ**” (*baptizō*) ~ John the Baptist mentioned two connotations for *baptism*: actual water baptism as well as “*baptism with the Holy Spirit*” (Mark 1:8). The Spirit unites believers with Christ and all the members of God’s family (cf. 1 Cor 12:13).
- “**you are all one in Christ Jesus**” ~ the early church began to break down cultural norms in the area of social and class distinctions.

“The ground is level at the foot of the cross”

A childhood heir is under guardians (3:29 – 4:1-2)

- **“if you belong to Christ”** you are (*literally*) **“of Abraham’s seed”** and therefore eligible to receive a share in the inheritance of God’s blessings promised through Abraham.
- **“as long as the heir is a child”** (*nēpios*) ~ a young child who has not reached the age of maturity. A childhood heir **“does not differ at all from a slave”** and is **“under guardians and managers.”**
- Such a child will eventually be the **“owner of everything,”** but during his immature years he *controls* absolutely nothing.
- But after **“the date set by the father”** the emancipated son becomes eligible to receive his full inheritance.

God sent forth His Son (4:3-4)

- Paul drew his analogy: “**so also we**” were like those children.
- Before the gospel came to us and before placing our faith in Christ, we were like immature “**children**” (*nēpioi*).
The “**elemental things of the world**” held us in bondage.
- “**But when the fullness of the time came**” ~ culturally, politically, and religiously.
- At exactly the right moment in human history, “**God sent forth His Son.**” He was “**born of a woman**” (cf. Gen 3:15; Isaiah 7:14) and “**born under the Law**” (Matt 5:17; Luke 24:44; John 15:25) just as planned and determined by God.

The redeemed receive adoption as sons (4:5-7)

God's purpose for sending forth His Son:

1. **“so that He might redeem”** (*exagorazō*) ~ “to pay the price in order to reclaim something from someone else’s control” (3:13).
 2. **“that we might receive the adoption as sons”** (*huiiothesia*) ~ “to place as an adult son.”
- **“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts”** ~ the new birth of regeneration through the Holy Spirit (cf. 2:20; 3:2; 21).
 - Conclusion: **“therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.”**

Summary

- The Law was God's means of demonstrating man's need for the promise of redemption. It served as a jailor or prison guard, and as a tutor or guardian who watches over and disciplines immature children. So the Law was meant to serve a temporary purpose.
- The Law was our **"tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith"** (3:24). But after a person trusts Christ alone for salvation, there is no longer any need for the guardian. Believers are emancipated sons and **"heirs according to promise"** (3:29).
- The period of the law's guardianship ended with Christ's coming. Believers are now justified by faith and live by the Spirit.