

Law and our Union with Christ

Galatians 3:23-29

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Now that Christ has come and fulfilled the Law is there any value in knowing and/or obeying the 613 laws of the Old Testament (OT)? The Old Testament with its heavy emphasis on holiness and God's wrath for breaking His laws led Marcion, a second century heretic, to conclude that the God of the OT not the same God of the NT and therefore the canon of the Bible should only contain the portions of the New Testament that are free from any OT reference.¹ While eliminating 613 laws to follow is very appealing is it ok to do so considering the OT laws are not evil but represent the "holy nature of God Himself"² who does not change (Malachi 3:6)? What did Christ, who frequent quoted the OT, mean when He said He "did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it" and that teaching people to "set aside OT commands would lead to being called the least in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:17-18)? How does one then reconcile Jesus' teaching with that of Mark 7:18-19 when He says all foods are clean which is an obvious contradiction of OT dietary laws?³ Just like in Apostle Paul's day there is much confusion over what does being under the New Covenant mean for a born again believer! In the following sermon we are going to examine Galatians 3:23-29 to show that believers being no longer under the law (Romans 6:14; 7:4-6; Galatians 3:24-26)⁴ but under grace (Romans 6:14) means they have been freed to follow the spirit of God's commands to be holy as outlined in both the OT and NT.

What we were Under the Law (Verses 23-24)

Apostle Paul begins today's passage using the metaphor of a stern jailer⁵ or pedagogue to describe the function of the Law in the OT. In Greek and Roman families of moderate means⁶

¹ John J. Clabeaux, "[Marcion](#)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 514.

² Daryl Aaron, [Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publisher, 2012), 160.

³ Daryl Aaron, [Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publisher, 2012), 161.

⁴ Daryl Aaron, [Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publisher, 2012), 161.

⁵ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 80.

⁶ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 324.

they would employ an older slave to supervise minor children from the ages of six to sixteen.⁷ The



pedagogue went everywhere the children went and their ongoing role was not so much to educate, albeit that was sometimes part of their duties,⁸ but to “teach good manners, to correct bad behaviour and discipline the misbehaving”⁹ so to “bring the children under their authority safely to the time of maturity.”¹⁰ While some pedagogues were loving and kind and seen as parental figures to the children, for the most part they were “very stern and strict, used the rod freely, not to say cruelly, and the conditions of the boys were sometimes no better than that of slavery.”¹¹ Being ruled by a pedagogue who

was “armed with penalties but void of sympathies”¹² often meant that a “free” child had less authority¹³ and a harsher life than that of a slave!¹⁴ Upon reaching the age of maturity however, the authority of the pedagogue was dissolved and the child who was now an adult was allowed to go their own way, having obtained the rights and benefits of a heir of their family.¹⁵

Paul uses the Greek/Roman pedagogue as a metaphor to help explain the purpose of the Law in the OT. Until the coming of faith in Jesus the Law acted like humanity’s guardian, jailor

⁷ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 81.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Stern Pedagogue,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 554.

⁹ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 329.

¹⁰ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 330.

¹¹ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Stern Pedagogue,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 554.

¹² C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Stern Pedagogue,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 554.

¹³ Lee Martin McDonald, [“Galatians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 512.

¹⁴ Lee Martin McDonald, [“Galatians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 513.

¹⁵ Lee Martin McDonald, [“Galatians,”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 512.

or a strict pedagogue.¹⁶ The Law of the Old Testament essentially reflected the holy nature of God Himself¹⁷ and as such was the key to being righteous and pleasing in God's sight. To stop our "mouths as to all self-justifying pleas"¹⁸ humanity needed to be told how far they were



missing the mark "by turning sin into a willful violation of an already existing Law, namely a transgression."¹⁹ With its 613 commands and punishments for breaking them the Law was a strict tyrant because it compelled what was contrary and impossible for us fallen creatures to obey because of our sinful nature.²⁰ Even as God was giving Israel the ten commandments on Mount Sinai He knew they "had already broken it, and that consequently they could not keep its precepts, or claim justification by their

conformity to its requirements."²¹ Those under the Law were under a curse (Romans 3:10-14)²² for the Law could only condemn but not save a person (Romans 3:20; 4:15; 8:3; Galatians 2:17; Hebrews 7:18–19; 10:1).²³ Salvation in the OT was through faith in God (Galatians 3:6)²⁴ but since the Law was external to a person and weakened by the sinful nature (Romans 8:3) it was insufficient to point them to that faith. The Law then was a jailor or merely a guardian, for to

¹⁶ Ben Witherington III, [*Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 268.

¹⁷ Daryl Aaron, [*Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publisher, 2012), 160.

¹⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Stern Pedagogue](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 555.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, [*Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 268.

²⁰ Lee Martin McDonald, "[Galatians](#)," in *The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 512.

²¹ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Stern Pedagogue](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 553.

²² David A. deSilva, [*The Letter to the Galatians*](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 325.

²³ Daryl Aaron, [*Understanding Your Bible in 15 Minutes a Day*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publisher, 2012), 161–162.

²⁴ Scot McKnight, [*Galatians*](#), *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 199.

obtain faith in God humanity needed a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26)²⁵ granted through grace and faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Son.²⁶

No Longer Under the Law (verse 25)

The role of the Law as guardian and jailor ended upon the atoning sacrifice of the Son. Since the “tree of human nature must be altered first, or the fruit cannot be good,”²⁷ the Law



remained a guardian until faith in Christ enabled “you to accept salvation as a free gift of God – to make you stand and own that you are a sinner, and accept a free, full, perfect forgiveness, according to the infinite grace of the eternal Father.”²⁸ Jesus’ atoning sacrifice marks a collective coming of age²⁹ in which grace by faith (Ephesians 2:8), not following the external works of the Law which only lead to condemnation, would be the key to obtaining salvation. Paul’s teaching here is not a form of Antinomianism³⁰ but instead a sense of rejoicing that what was written on stone

tablets, impossible to obey and seen as a jailor, was now written on “the fleshly tablets of renewed hearts”³¹ in Christ, the sinless Lamb of God!³² While believers are no longer under the

²⁵ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

²⁶ L. Ann Jervis, *Galatians*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2011), 101–102.

²⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, “*The Stern Pedagogue*,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 562.

²⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, “*The Stern Pedagogue*,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 559.

²⁹ David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 333.

³⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “*The Stern Pedagogue*,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 561.

³¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “*The Stern Pedagogue*,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 560.

³² C. H. Spurgeon, “*The Stern Pedagogue*,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 560.

authority (Galatians 3:19)³³ and letter of the OT Laws and therefore need not obey its external obligations such as circumcision, ceremonial and dietary laws, written upon the believer's heart is the intent of all of the OT and NT commands for us to obey so that we might be holy as God is holy.³⁴ God of the OT and God of Jesus in the NT then are one and the same for the commandments of both OT and NT are boundary markers³⁵ on holy living that are not a burden but a source of great joy (1 John 1:3)³⁶ to those who believe in the Son! "If you know the hardness of your own heart apart from renewing grace, you thank God every day that you are a believer!"³⁷

Let me pause for a moment and give you an illustration of what Paul has said thus far. Imagine one of the trustees got out a ladder and asked me to change a light some twenty feet in the air of the church. How do you think I would feel at such a request considering I am petrified



of heights! The first few steps would not be too bad for I can handle one or two feet in the air but upon being up several feet I would freeze. Not being able to move a single rung higher I would have no choice but in great shame and humiliation to step back down the ladder to the floor. But if I was free to ask another to climb the ladder and change the light who has flawlessly done so in the past then my success is a given and my heart rejoices. Now imagine a ladder in the middle of the sanctuary that reached all the way to heaven, the home

of God's perfection and holiness. Contained on each rung is one of the 613 commandments of the OT. Imagine trying to climb up the ladder. Each rung would command more, and it would not take very many rungs dare I say before we too would fail and return to lawlessness! Praise be to God that Christ who is one with the Father allows us to climb on the back of His atonement and boldly approach God's throne of grace. This of course does mean we do not have to put effort into our relationship with God but merely that our effort instead of being futile will be redeemed only when we have faith in the Son!

³³ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 326.

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Stern Pedagogue](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 20 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1874), 561.

³⁵ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 328.

³⁶ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1980–1989\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

³⁷ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1980–1989\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

Children of God (verse 26)

Apostle Paul continues his metaphor and states that Christ has ushered in an age of maturity and as such the function of the Law as pedagogue has now ended.³⁸ Paul says the Gentiles who were never under the Law³⁹ and the Jews who were can rejoice for through faith in Christ all the



benefits of being a mature child of God are now given.⁴⁰ Faith has become for Paul an “equalizer in the presence of God.”⁴¹ Through faith the Gentiles have been given the same title “sons of God”⁴² as their Jewish counterparts (Gal. 3:7, 29; cf. John 1:12; 1 John 3:1–2)!⁴³ Being adopted into God’s family represented for Paul a new social entity.⁴⁴ Climbing the rungs of righteousness was only possible through faith because it meant putting on the garments of Christ⁴⁵ who purchased all of humanity at the price of His life. Baptism for Paul was not the act of becoming born again but publicly declaring that one is a

new creation and as such has already put on Christ’s garments.⁴⁶ Having the status of Jew or Gentile for Paul was irrelevant for to obtain maturity and entrance into God’s family was only attainable by those who were clothed with Christ, for He alone could give a person a new nature, God’s spirit whom would forever move “one toward reflecting the family resemblance of

³⁸ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 83.

³⁹ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 335.

⁴⁰ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1980–1989\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

⁴¹ Lee Martin McDonald, [“Galatians,”](#) in [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 513.

⁴² Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 83.

⁴³ Lee Martin McDonald, [“Galatians,”](#) in [The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary: Acts–Philemon](#), ed. Craig A. Evans and Craig A. Bubeck, First Edition. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2004), 513.

⁴⁴ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 334.

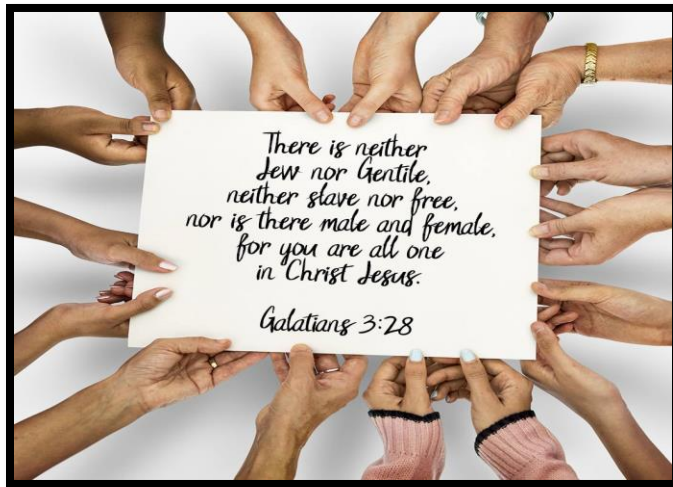
⁴⁵ John Piper, [Sermons from John Piper \(1980–1989\)](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2007).

⁴⁶ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 84.

righteousness of God shown in Jesus.”⁴⁷ So, Paul’s prayer for all of humanity was that “all might receive the God’s inheritance through the faith of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁸

One People (Verses 27-28)

The new social entity of the church was one in which membership to it and God’s family was not on the basis of “rituals, festivals, sacrifices, augury, or astrology,”⁴⁹ but for Paul was on



the basis of having put on Christ. In Paul’s time one’s destiny or roles and status in society was formulated upon birth.⁵⁰ For example a typical Jewish blessing that was often prayed in the morning was “blessed be that God did not make me a Gentile; blessed be God did not make me a slave (or ignorant peasant); blessed be God did not make me a woman.”⁵¹ For the approximately 1/3 of the ancient Roman world that were slaves either through purchase, indebtedness, capture in war and birth; their status was the lowest of society

and as such were often treated very poorly.⁵² Women were inferior to a man in the law,⁵³ were talked about rudely, seen as chattel, were not reliable witnesses in court, and even “sat in seats separate from men in synagogues.”⁵⁴ To form a new church whose membership was not based these cultural differences but promoted equality that was quite radical and for many liberating in

⁴⁷ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 334.

⁴⁸ L. Ann Jervis, [Galatians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2011), 105.

⁴⁹ Ben Witherington III, [Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 275.

⁵⁰ Ben Witherington III, [Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 271.

⁵¹ Ben Witherington III, [Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 270–271.

⁵² Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 200–201.

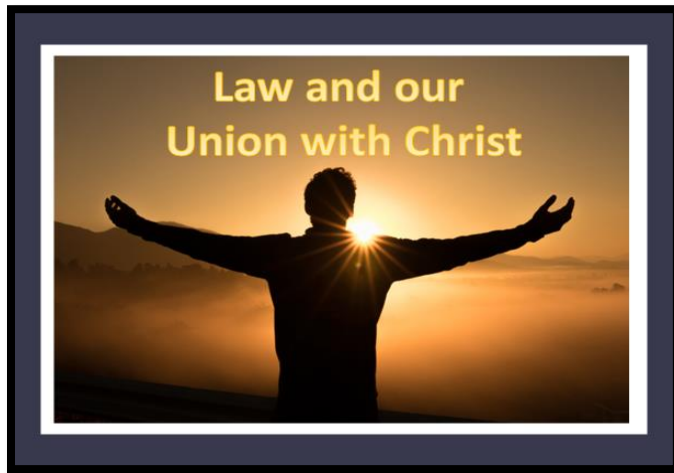
⁵³ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 202.

⁵⁴ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 202.

Paul's time!⁵⁵ What mattered to God was not social status of which one was born but the new creation one has obtained.⁵⁶ Anyone who puts on the character of Christ through faith obtained a new nature and identity⁵⁷ not as Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female but one in Christ whose atonement meant they were forever equal and legitimate heirs of the Father.⁵⁸

Abraham's Seed and Heirs of God (verse 29)

Paul finishes by boldly stating "if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Baptism symbolized for Paul having obtained a new nature believers are in Christ⁵⁹ and since Christ is the Seed of Abraham, then it follows that the Galatian



believers are also in Abraham's seed and therefore entitled to a relationship with God that entails His blessings and goodness."⁶⁰ So, Paul now comes full circle and has explained the value of the Law to a believer. The Law was a pedagogue or guardian that taught humanity how to be holy. Upon Christ's atonement of sin, the Law no longer had authority over the believer. This did not mean the Law was abolished but rather fulfilled in Christ. While believers are no longer under the authority and letter of the OT Law and therefore need not

obey its external obligations such as circumcision, ceremonial and dietary laws, which at best could only condemn a person; written upon the believer's heart is the intent of all of the OT and NT commands for us to be holy as God is holy. Salvation has always been obtained through faith but praise be to God that the Son's atonement for our sins means that anyone regardless of race, sex, nationality, or public status can put on the clothing of Christ and in doing so stand justified by grace through faith in Christ as one body of heirs and children of God!

⁵⁵ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 200.

⁵⁶ Ben Witherington III, [Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 271.

⁵⁷ L. Ann Jervis, [Galatians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 2011), 107.

⁵⁸ Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 84.

⁵⁹ David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 340.

⁶⁰ Scot McKnight, [Galatians](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 202–203.