

**Galatians 3:23-29** *But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. <sup>24</sup> Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. <sup>25</sup> But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. <sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.*

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Educational institutions and their administrators have changed a lot throughout the years. They have even changed quite a bit from when I was as student in elementary school just 15 years ago. And I am sure some of you who are older than me have seen more change than I care to imagine.

In my growing up days in Oklahoma, the principle at our elementary school had one very important thing that affected his ability to be effective. It was not his years of training or his great personality. It was a wooden paddle hanging from his wall. While I am not sure if he ever removed it from the wall, the possibility of its removal served to straighten out a good many students.

I recount these memories in order that we might better understand what Paul means when he tells us in our Epistle Lesson that the Law was, as the King James puts it, the schoolmaster that brought us unto Christ. For the picture is best understood when we think of the principles of the past rather than the present. In saying that, I mean no disrespect to the principles of the day. Certainly, one can argue whether the disciplinarian principles of the past were more effective than the relationship-orientated principles of the day. But no one can argue about the Scriptural purpose of the Law of God. It has always been a disciplinarian type of schoolmaster. It serves as a paddle hanging on the wall that humanity might realize what is right and what is wrong and ponder the consequences of its actions.

The Law indeed serves two main functions as it carries out its role of schoolmaster or principle. First, it brings some level of order to society. Even with the worst of unbelievers, the threat of punishment is able to curb their actions. While unbelievers have no concern in essence with doing the godly thing, the immediate threat of earthly punishment and the lingering possibility of eternal punishment for wrongdoing serves at the very least to restrain many people from all sorts of horrendous crimes. The bully on the playground of life may respond to nothing other than the paddle of the Law hanging on the wall of their conscious.

But besides bringing order into the world through its presentation of possible punishment, the Law truly has a much more important task. As Paul says in the KJV, the Law was our schoolmaster, its purpose being that of bringing us to Christ. Any good principle disciplines with a reason in mind. He does not discipline just for the sake of disciplining. A good principle disciplines with the hopes that such discipline will mold a child into a moral, intelligent, upstanding member of society.

So also, the Law was not given for its own sake. But rather it was given that sin might be viewed as utterly sinful. It was given in order that through its discipline people might be led to realize their need for a Savior. It was given in order that people might be led to Christ.

The Law in the Old Testament was filled with many, many regulations. And the hope with each of these rules was that the people might realize their sin, and turn to God for help and forgiveness. The Law was brought forth on Sinai that people might be made aware of their sinful actions. The Law still does the same for us this day. The Law is that which teaches us this day that lust, greed, envy and all other sin is exactly that, sin.

Paul teaches us, however, that the schoolmaster of the Law does not hold its authority over us forever. Eventually, students graduate from a school and the authority of the principle is no longer valid. And so also, when the Gospel of Jesus comes to a person, the authority of the Law is removed from that person's life. With Christ, one graduates out from under the authority of the Law. But what exactly does that mean? What does it mean when Paul tells us that we are no longer under the Law?

Some in the Church throughout its history have used this to justify all sorts of sin. Since Paul says that we are no longer under the Law, they have claimed that this freedom was the license to practice whatever type of sin they felt fit. But this is certainly not consistent with Paul's other admonitions to godly living. So then what does it mean to not be under the Law?

It means two things. First, we are no longer motivated by the Law. We no longer have to live life as if it were all about following rules and regulations. We no longer go through all of the rituals of the Old Testament Law because we have no need of those reminders. We are no longer motivated by the threat of punishment or the promises of reward. We do not live the Christian life to avoid Hell or even to gain Heaven. We live the Christian life simply because we are Christian people. As Paul says, all of us who were baptized

into Christ have put on Christ. As Christian people, we fulfill the Law of God as the Spirit directs without all of the specific regulations of the Old Testament Law. Since we have put on Christ, our lives are His. He lives in us and directs our lives. We live Christian lives of love because Love Himself goes with us everywhere we go. There is no need any longer for the schoolmaster of the Law for we have graduated unto Christ. The paddle of the Law has been taken as the Cross was lifted up.

Secondly, being no longer under the Law is the reminder that the Law's accusations can no longer afflict us. For, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The Law will still show us our sin, but it can not hold us in despair. For since we have graduated to Christ, the second the Law reveals of sin, we run to our Savior for His forgiveness.

The Galatians which Paul was writing had begun to forget their graduation. Through the influence of some false teacher, they had begun again to start to operate as if the Law was again their schoolmaster. In essence, it was as if they were trying to re-enroll in a school they had already completed. Paul encouraged them to remember that through Christ they no longer were under the Law, and that to return to the school of the Law was to turn away from Christ.

We too must always be careful not to return to the school of Law. It can be all too easy to begin to convince ourselves our standing before God is assured by following rule and regulations. We can believe that our flawless church attendance, our service on this board or that, or our strict adherence to a particular order of worship is what keeps us in God's good pleasure. But if we buy that idea, we have re-enrolled ourselves in the school of the Law and in so doing have turned from Christ.

Today, we wish to remove from our hearts any idea of pleasing God by following specific rules and regulations. Rather, we again this day rejoice in our graduation. We rejoice knowing that our Baptismal certificate is the reminder that we no longer are under the Law, but rather live by the Spirit of Christ whom we put on in Baptism.

We go about our lives, not in burdensome obligation to the Law, but rather go about them living in the pure freedom of the Gospel. We rejoice that Christ this day again removes from us the guilt of our sin and removes from us all inclination that we have towards placing ourselves back under the Law. He removed it in

His words of absolution and will again remove it through His Holy Supper. We can be thankful for the Law because it has led us to Christ, but we shall not return to the Law. For we know that return to the law would be to turn from Christ.

While we don't play pomp and circumstance and we don't hand out caps each time a child is baptized, Paul teaches us today that it would not all be bad symbolism. For each time anyone is baptized, that person graduates unto Christ from the schoolhouse of the Law. August this day graduated. He follows in the line of all who have met Jesus and had their sin taken away. Now, he along with us is now blessed to live his life as one who has graduated from the schoolhouse of the Law unto Jesus and His marvelous Gospel. Through Christ's Word and His Supper, August, you, and I we will remain in this freedom until life everlasting. Amen.