

Chapter Fourteen

The Law as a Schoolmaster

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:24-25).

We our study of the Law verses God’s grace, we have seen “Three Pictures of the Law;” - **(1)** *The Law as a Judge*” - **(2)** *The Law as a Demanding Husband*” - “ and **(3)** *The Law as an Executioner,*” however, there are “**Four** Pictures of the Law” in God’s Word that we will study. The next picture of the Law is - **(4)** *The Law as a Schoolmaster.*” It is given in answer to Paul’s question in Galatians 3:19, “Wherefore then serves the Law?” or why was the Law given anyway? If the Law cannot save the sinner or keep the saint, then why did God give it anyway? If God knew that no one could or would keep the Law perfectly, then what good was there in demanding obedience? We have seen in the past lessons some of the answers, and in the lesson we come to another reason for the giving of the Law. Paul anticipates the question and so he asks:

“Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Galatians 3:21-23).

Once more Paul declares that the Law was never given to save or make men righteous. I repeat this again because it is so often repeated in Scripture. It is stated once more in verse 21, that I quote again:

“...for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Galatians 3:21).

If it were possible for a person to attain righteousness by keeping the Law, Paul is saying, it would have made the sacrifice of Christ unnecessary. Then to illustrate the ministry of the Law he gives the picture of the ancient *schoolmaster*. He says, “*the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ*” (Galatians 3:24).

Before going into this figure of the schoolmaster, let’s first think about the key to the proper interpretation. We will never understand what Paul is teaching here without the use of this *key*. The key is the distinction between two little pronouns, “*we*” and “*ye*.” They are used over and over again in Galatians 3. The little word “*we*” (and “*our*”) is used *four* times in verses 23 to 25. The little word “*ye*” (and “*you*”) is used *six* times in verses 26 to 29. In the next chapter (Galatians 4) the pronoun “*we*” occurs three times and the word “*ye*” occurs twelve times. The key to the understanding of Paul’s teaching here is to take special note of whom, and to whom, he is speaking when he says “*we*” and when he says, “*ye*.” Whenever Paul in this chapter uses the pronoun “*we*,” he is

speaking as a Jew to the Jews representing the nation of Israel under the Law. When he uses the word “*ye*” he is speaking of the Christians – the Church, *under grace*. He distinguishes between “*we*” Jews and “*ye*” believers. Unless this distinction is recognized, only confusion results. Bearing this in mind, we now take up the Scripture. In verses 23 to 25 Paul says:

“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:23-25).

You see then that Paul is speaking of the nation of Israel (under the Law) as “*we*.” And then the pronoun changes as he addresses the believers under grace, consisting predominantly of Gentile believers in Galatia, and he says to them:

“For ye [believers] – the Church] are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26 & 28).

Israel And The Church

Israel was under the Law; the Church is under grace. Israel was under a schoolmaster, as is necessary for immature children; we are (“*positionally*”) mature children of God – placed as sons of God – in the family of God. But someone asks, “*Doesn't this passage teach that the Law is our schoolmaster and guide to bring us to Christ?*” Note that this verse in Galatians 3:21 says, “*The was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ*” – It does not say, “*The Law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.*” And, also, the “*our*” is making reference to the Jews’ schoolmaster!

Misunderstanding results when just “*surface,*” causal, or careless reading of the Word takes place. There is a vast difference between “*was*” and “*is.*” So if we apply the key of “*ye*” and “*we,*” in these verses all becomes clear. Paul is writing as a member of the Jewish nation, to the believers, the churches in Galatia, consisting predominantly of Gentiles, and says, “*the Law was our (writing as a member of the nation of Israel) schoolmaster*” – not “*your*” schoolmaster.

Until Christ

Our English word “*schoolmaster*” does not convey the real meaning of the word as used in the original Greek. The Greek word is “*paidagogos*” – a “*child-trainer.*” This was a person who was held responsible for the disciplining and training of a child until he became “*of age*” in the family. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia gives the best explanation. It says:

“Schoolmaster is a translation of `paidagogos, literally, ‘child-leader.’ This paidagogos was not a teacher but a slave, to whom in wealthy families the general oversight of a boy was committed. It was his duty to accompany his charge to and from school, never to lose sight of him in public, to prevent association with

objectionable companions, to inculcate moral lessons at every opportunity, etc. He was a familiar figure in the stress, and the (sour) 'face of the paidagogos' and 'to follow one like a paidagogos' were proverbial expressions. Naturally, to the average boy the paidagogos must have represented the incorporation of everything objectionable. Hence St. Paul figure may be paraphrased; 'The Law was a paidagogos, necessary but irksome, to direct us until the time of Christ. Then was the time of our spiritual coming-of-age, so that the control of the paidagogos ceased.'

This excerpt from the encyclopedia is a most correct commentary on the meaning of Paul's words. The Law was to Israel what this strict, rigid, exacting, disciplining trainer was to a growing boy. It watched him every minute, restraining, prohibiting, and threatening, However, when the boy became of age he was taken from under the "paidagogos" authority and accepted into the family with full liberty and privileges of a son of the father.

Coming of Age

This period of training, however, was only temporary, and ultimately ended. This Paul asserts in our Scripture. The ministry of the Law was only until Christ came. John said,

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Paul teaches the same thing, and says:

"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ" (Galatians 3:24).

It is vastly important in understanding this verse to note that the three words, "to bring us," are in italics in the Bible – indicating that they are not in the original but were supplied by the translators. Untold confusion and misunderstanding has been caused by this oversight. Paul does not say that the Law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, but instead, (if we omit the italicized words), Paul says, "the Law was our (the Jews) schoolmasters until (or "up to") Christ" This is made clear by the verse that follows (verse 25).

"But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Galatians 3:25).

Israel then was kept under the Law until Christ should come, and then the Law ceased to exercise its power and authority over those who believe. The true believer in Christ is in this dispensation is not under the Law as a "paidagogos" or taskmaster, but is a "son of God" under grace. The believer is under the training of the Law but has graduated and is now ready to go to work. That training period under the Law is over for the Christian. As a "son" he now takes his place in his Father's business, and does joyfully and gladly and eagerly that which he was commanded to do under the law with its threatening and penalties. After faith is come, says Paul, "We (Jews) are no longer under the schoolmaster."

From “We” To “Ye”

And then he continues, now addressing the believers, members of Christ’s Body:
“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus”
(Galatians 3:26).

Notice carefully the change of pronouns here from “we” to “ye.” The Law was for the nation of Israel as a disciplinary preparation for the coming of Christ, but the believer on the side of the Cross – (whether Jew or Gentile) – is not under the schoolmaster, but “ye (believers) are all the children of God by faith.” The believer today never was under the law as a schoolmaster, and so Paul adds:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:28-29).

The promise was to Abraham by grace, long before the Law was given on Mount Sinai. The Law has done its perfect work, It has proven that salvation must be by grace and not by the works of the Law. And today the believer is forever delivered from the penalty and curse of the Law. But, until the sinner sees himself as having come short of God’s demands, and flees to Christ from salvation, the wrath of God and the curse of the law still hang over him.

Israel before the coming of Christ had the Law as a teacher and an exacting schoolmaster. The believer in this day of grace has as his teacher the Holy Spirit, and the Word of God in its completeness. God’s grace teaches us that which the law was unable to do. The grace of God enables us to do by love, what all the threatenings of the Law failed to do by commandments. It is at Calvary where we find atonement for our sins. Having graduated from the elementary school of the Law, we now sit at the feet of our instructor, the Holy Spirit. The old teacher, the Law, could show us where we were wrong, but could do nothing to correct it, could demand holiness but not provide it. My cry to you is to cease your struggling to do what only Christ could do, and heed His call.

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).