

## IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING BIBLE WORD PICTURES

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### Track 8 – Lining Up the Word Pictures in Galatians 3 and 4

#### Introduction

Is the Law “*our tutor that leads us to Christ?*” This translation of Galatians 3:24 has led to much discussion and debate regarding the role of the Old Testament Law for the church today. Within mainstream evangelicalism, there are several denominations which teach that the Law is essentially made up of two parts<sup>1</sup>, the *ceremonial* and the *moral*, and that while the ceremonial was done away with after Christ's death, the moral elements of the Mosaic Law are still in force and "binding." They would generally maintain that salvation is by grace through faith, but that for sanctification one should seek to obey "God's Law." While there would be disagreement concerning whether failure to keep those moral codes would result in the loss of salvation, these groups would agree that the moral aspects of the Law should be "obeyed."<sup>2</sup> Beyond that, these groups would maintain that anything in the New Testament which presents the "Law" in a negative light is to be understood as a "distortion" of the Mosaic Law or a "misapplication." But are they right?

This difficulty is not diminished by the fact that the semantic range of the term "law" is fairly broad and ambiguous. The range of meaning for "law" in the New Testament encompasses everything from "principle" to "motivation" to "command" to "the Old Testament Scriptures."<sup>3</sup> With such ambiguity, it is that much more difficult to determine what is being referred to when "law" is being discussed.

So how do we determine the meaning of this verse and the surrounding context, and how might an examination of Paul's grammatical and rhetorical choices help someone who is trying to figure out the role of the Law in the life of the believer? Are there considerations which will help determine just what Paul's attitude toward the Law was? Let's take a look together at the epistle to the Galatians, which is the letter containing the most information about "the Law" written by Paul. My goal is not so broad in its scope so as to consider *all* the aspects worthy of consideration, but should be a good overview of the word pictures involved, and demonstrate how an analysis of Paul's choices in *describing* the Law can help the reader better understand Paul's point of view with regard to the Law and its application.

#### What is "Law" in Galatians?

What appears to be Paul's definition of "law" in the epistle of Galatians? There are three places in the epistle where Paul clarifies this ambiguity. The first, in chapter three, verse ten, calls this "law" "the book of the Law," which is a clear reference to the *Torah*, the first five books of the Old Testament (which contain the Mosaic Law).<sup>4</sup>

The second clarification of the term "law" is given in chapter three, verses twenty-two through twenty-four:

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<sup>1</sup> Some even divide the Mosaic Law into three parts: civil, ceremonial and moral.

<sup>2</sup> These groups generally see the church as a *continuation* of Old Testament Israel, so that the church is seen as a "New Testament Israel" (because of the nation Israel's failure to obey God). The implication of this view is that if the Mosaic Law was given to Israel, then the "single people of God" must in some sense be under the Mosaic Law as well.

<sup>3</sup> Louw, Johannes P. and Eugene A. Nida, eds. 1989. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies.

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:21 is sometimes cited to try to show that Paul is NOT talking about the Mosaic Law, since there it is clearly pointing to *any law whatsoever*. The (2<sup>nd</sup> class) condition of the sentence makes it clearly an exception.

<sup>3:22</sup> But **the Scriptures** have shut up all men under sin, in order that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. <sup>3:23</sup> But before faith came, we were kept in custody under **the Law**, locked up to the faith which was later to be revealed. <sup>3:24</sup> So that **the Law** became our pedagogue until Christ, in order that we might be justified by faith.<sup>5</sup>

Here, by means of syntactic parallelism, Paul equates "the Law" with "the Scriptures," a reference to the Old Testament (whole/part metonymy).

The final reference, in chapter five, verse three, states that anyone who receives circumcision "is under obligation to keep *the whole Law*." Again, this is a clear reference to the Mosaic Law, which would have been seen as a *unified system*, an indivisible "whole."

From these three references, it is clear that the "law" in Galatians is for Paul the Mosaic Law, taken as a whole, indivisible system.

Within the epistle to the Galatians, there are *five major word pictures* given for the Law. Let's look at each of them and then tie them together.

### 1. The Law as a Curse (Galatians 3:10-14)

This example of a figure of speech clearly continues the trend of seeing the Law as something horribly negative. This figure is from chapter three:

<sup>3:10</sup> For as many as are of the works of the law are **under the curse**; for it is written, <sup>i</sup>“**Cursed** is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” <sup>3:11</sup> But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for <sup>j</sup>“*the just shall live by faith.*” <sup>3:12</sup> Yet <sup>k</sup>the law is not of faith, but <sup>l</sup>“*the man who does them shall live by them.*” <sup>3:13</sup> <sup>m</sup>Christ has redeemed us from the **curse of the law**, having become a curse for us (for it is written, <sup>n</sup>“*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*”), (NKJV, bold is the author's)

In verse thirteen, "of the Law" is considered to be an appositional genitive, equating the Law with the "curse." This is a case of metonymy, where the effect or result of the system is put for (or "stands for") the system as a whole:

It is extremely common for people to take one well-understood or easy-to-perceive aspect of something and use it to stand either for the thing as a whole or for some other part of it.<sup>6</sup>

But what are the salient features of "curse" that Paul would like the reader to consider here? "Curse" brings to mind a script of some kind of pronouncement or invocation, with evil or harmful results. According to Paul, anyone who tries to keep the Law is already under a curse. The implied information in verse ten is that no one is capable of doing ALL the things written in the Law. The result is that anyone who tries to keep the Law will reap the "rewards" of the Law: being cursed. Whether "works" are seen here as a distortion of the Law or the proper exercise of the Law, the result is the same. Not only that, Paul goes on to state that the *only* means of

<sup>5</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotes will be free translations by the author from the Greek text.

<sup>i</sup> Deut. 27:26

<sup>j</sup> Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38

<sup>k</sup> Rom. 4:4, 5

<sup>l</sup> Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5

<sup>m</sup> [Rom. 8:3]

<sup>n</sup> Deut. 21:23

<sup>6</sup> Lakoff, George. 1987. *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 77.

achieving righteousness is by *faith*, which has a different basis than the Law. That basis is the redemption from the curse of the Law which is found in Jesus Christ alone.

It is interesting to note here that Paul presents the Law and faith as contraries, and as two options to choose between. What a choice! The Galatian problem was that false teachers had come in and were calling them to combine faith with keeping the Law. Paul does not give them that option. He gives them the option of seeking to be under Law, which will result in being cursed, or living by faith, which will result in righteousness (here equivalent to "eternal life").

Again, it is clear here that the metonymy "curse" has *no* components which are positive, *only* negative. This must somehow be reconciled with the passages which present the Law in a positive light. But before doing so, perhaps it would be best to examine some more figures of speech for the Mosaic Law.

## 2. The Law as a Jailor (Galatians 3:22-23)

In this passage, several verbs are used which present the Law as an agent, "doing" things to men:

<sup>3:22</sup> But the Scripture **has shut up** all men **under** sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

<sup>3:23</sup> But before faith came, we were **kept in custody** under the Law, **being shut up** to the faith which was later to be revealed. (NASV, bold is the author's)

The terms here are all terms which would be used to describe a *prison*. They include the ideas of being *guarded* and *locked up*. The anthropomorphism they all point to (for "Law," which is here equated with "Scripture") is the metaphor of a *jailor*. The salient features of "jailor" would include the ideas of guarding, restraining, disciplining, maintaining an incarceration, and locking up, all of which are *negative* features. Again, it can be seen from this metaphor as well, that the Law is presented by Paul in purely negative terms where man is concerned.

Beyond that, however, it is important to notice the consistent use of the Greek aorist (typically a past tense) in this passage. The only other main verb is an imperfect ("were being kept in custody"), but that as well gives the idea that something *was* the case. Paul makes clear the period of time for which this was the case when he writes, "*Before* faith came." This temporary situation is consistent with the *jailor* metaphor; prisoners are kept in jail by the jailor *until* their sentence runs out. While a "life sentence" or a "death sentence" would certainly be exceptions to this idea, the typical *script* called to mind is that prisoners serve a "term." According to Paul, the "term" that prisoners of the Law served ended when Christ paid the price of redemption.<sup>7</sup>

So, once again the Law is presented as something which is harmful to man, with only negative effects. While the *jailor* himself may be good, he will not be experienced as good by those under his authority. The Law, as a *jailor*, kept those who were under it "locked up," "restrained," and "imprisoned."

## 3. The Law as a Pedagogue (Galatians 3:24-25)

This passage is a continuation of the ideas presented in verses twenty-two and twenty-three (as indicated by the ὡστε, "*So that*," at the beginning of the verse). Here the Law is metaphorically compared to what has been variously translated "tutor," "schoolmaster," "child-conductor," and "pedagogue." The passage reads,

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<sup>7</sup> This is also consistent with Jesus' payment of a *ransom*, another *script* which points to Jesus' giving people freedom from the Law (Matthew 20:28). People were prisoners, incapable of escape, Jesus paid the ransom!

<sup>3:24</sup> Therefore the Law has become our **tutor** *to lead us* to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. <sup>3:25</sup> But now that faith has come, we are no longer under **a tutor**. (NASV, italics in the text, bold is the author's)

This is a somewhat more difficult metaphor for several reasons. First of all, English has no clear "dictionary" equivalent for the Greek term παιδαγωγός.<sup>8</sup> There is no easy way to translate the concept cross-culturally. Secondly, the way that the term has often been translated has added to its ambiguity, not helped to clarify it. Beyond that, the preposition εἰς ("to lead us to", in italics for a reason!) which follows has been translated *directionally* instead of *temporally*, which does violence to the temporal nature of the context, and confuses the temporal nature of the metaphor.

παιδαγωγός has in many English versions been translated "tutor" or "schoolmaster." But these translations are inadequate, because they miss several of the most salient features of the term in Greek. The archaic English term "pedagogue" is a tolerable translation, although few typical Americans would have any idea what it means! This term is a good example of the "slippage" which takes place in translation, and unfortunately which in this instance has led to some misconceptions about the teaching of the passage. The term παιδαγωγός would have been well-understood in that culture at that time:

In the figure here used the "pedagogue" is the man--generally a slave-- in whose custody the slave-owners boys were placed, in order that this trusted servant might conduct them to and from school, and might, in fact, watch over their conduct throughout the day. He was, accordingly, an *escort* or *attendant*, and also at the same time a *disciplinarian*. The discipline which he exercised was often of a severe character, so that those placed under his guardianship would yearn for the day of freedom. And, as has been shown, that was exactly the function which the law had performed. It had been of a preparatory and disciplinary nature, readying the hearts of those under its tutelage for the eager acceptance of the gospel of justification by faith in Christ.<sup>9</sup> (Hendriksen 1968:148)

From this explanation, two of the more salient features of παιδαγωγός have been brought out: (1) the fact that this servant was in charge of discipline and punishment, and (2) that the relationship between the servant and the child was of a temporary nature. The relationship would continue until the child came to the point where he was considered a "son," and then the relationship was *brought to an end* as the son was brought into direct relationship with his father. In verses twenty-five and twenty-six, Paul makes it clear that the condition for entrance into this "sonship" was *faith*.

These two components of παιδαγωγός are consistent with what has been seen in the other terms or concepts given for Law. They also make much more sense in terms of the cohesive connections with the immediately preceding passage. Again, the Law is seen as essentially negative from the perspective of the recipient, as well as temporary, until *something better* was established.

Beyond that, however, the παιδαγωγός metaphor has another salient feature which should be mentioned. This term has as a component (because of the nature of a servant in a household) the

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<sup>8</sup> Hodges, Zane C. and Arthur L. Farstad, eds. 1985. *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. 2nd ed. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 575.

<sup>9</sup> Hendriksen, William. 1968. *Exposition of Galatians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 148.

concept of inferiority.<sup>10</sup> Put another way, the father is seen as superior to the "pedagogue." The father is the one who has the final authority over the situation, including the "pedagogue." The father is the one who enlists the services of the pedagogue until the father pronounces the child a "son."

From these features, it can be seen through metaphor that Paul's theology concerning the Law was that the Mosaic Law was:

1. essentially negative (in keeping with the context),
2. temporary (has an end), and
3. a hindrance to a direct relationship with the father.

Many today would object to saying that once a person becomes a believer, they no longer have any relationship to the Law. Would this not result in disobedience and possibly even anarchy? The same question could be asked of the new son, who has ended his relationship to his "pedagogue" in order to enter into a direct relationship with his father. The newfound joy of communion with the father would make the "pedagogue" not only unnecessary, but also a hindrance. *Which one* truly serves as the better motivation for holiness? Paul expected his readers to make a choice!

Paul, in Galatians 5:18, addresses just this problem. There he states that ". . . if you are led by the Spirit, *you are not under the Law*" (NASV). According to Paul, it is the Holy Spirit who gives the power to believers to live in harmony with God, their "father." The Law disciplines and punishes, while the Holy Spirit brings freedom from the Law and the ability to experience and enjoy this newfound relationship.

#### 4. The Law as a Guardian and House-Manager (Galatians 4:1-7)

Galatians 4:1-8 serves as a reiteration and development of the παιδαγωγός concept in chapter 3:24-25. As such, one might expect that it would exhibit the same essential features, with its metaphors and the resulting schema.

<sup>4:1</sup> Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything. <sup>4:2</sup> but he is under **guardians** and **managers** until the date set by the father. <sup>4:3</sup> So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. <sup>4:4</sup> But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>4:5</sup> in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. <sup>4:6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into (y)our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>4:7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.  
(NASV, Majority Text variant in parentheses)

Seen in light of the discussion of the "pedagogue," this passage is very easy to comprehend. The only difference here is that the guardians and house-managers would continue on with their responsibilities after the child became a son; they would just *no longer have authority* over him. For as long a time as the child remained a child, however, he had "no freedom of action."<sup>11</sup> He

<sup>10</sup> Bertram, Georg. 1967. παιδεύω, παιδεία, παιδευτής, ἀπαίδευτος, παιδαγωγός. In *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 5. Ed. by Kittel, Gerhard and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. 596-624.

<sup>11</sup> Burton, Ernest De Witt. 1971. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Galatians*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 210.

was "controlled" by the authority exercised by these servants. As would be expected, these metaphors demonstrate the same components as those of the pedagogue, and represent the Law:

1. They are essentially negative (in keeping with the context),
2. They are temporary (have an end to their authority), and
3. They are a hindrance to a direct relationship with the father.

Beyond that, the image called up by the way Paul uses these metaphors shows that the child *should* actually have a better position, but he cannot experience that position until he is freed from the authority of those who are over him.

### 5. The Law as Hagar (Galatians 4:21-31)

The final figure used by Paul to discuss the Law occurs in the second half of chapter four, and is a metaphor which is part of a larger figure of speech, an allegory. There Paul compares the Old Covenant to the Old Testament character Hagar, a slave and concubine to the biblical patriarch Abraham. He uses this metaphor to set up an allegory in which Hagar's "descendants" are compared to those who are under the Law, while Abraham's wife Sarah's descendants are compared to those who have faith. This analogy would have flown in the face of the theology of Paul's opponents. It would be a complete contradiction to their views, as illustrated in *Table 3*:

	Hagar/Ishmael	Sarah/Isaac
Paul's Opponents	the Arabs/Gentiles (by extension)	those under the Law
Paul	those under the Law	those who are of faith

Again, the three most salient features of these figures are all present in this metaphor of *the Law as Hagar*: the primarily *negative* nature of the Law, the *temporary* nature of the Law (verse thirty states that she should be "thrown out"), and the fact that the Law is a *hindrance* to relationship with God (in this case because it is an *unnatural* relationship). Recognizing the consistency with which these components have come up in these figures, why is it that so many in the Christian community today still want to hang on to the Law?

The table below gives a summary of the major figures used by Paul to represent the Law:

Verses	The Law =	Type of Figure	Salient Features
Galatians 3:10-13	"curse"	metonymy/part for whole	Negative, Pronouncement of Judgment with harmful or evil results
Galatians 3:22-23	"kept in custody, guarded, locked up"	Anthropomorphism/prison "frame" with jailor	Negative, judgment, restriction, discipline, generally for a "term" (temporary)
Galatians 3:24-25	"pedagogue"	Metaphor	Negative, discipline, restriction, temporary, barrier
Galatians 4:1-3	"guardians, house managers"	Metaphors	Negative, restriction, discipline, temporary
Galatians 4:22-26	"Hagar"	Metaphor	Negative, bondage, "children" are slaves, to be rejected, a false heir

## Conclusions

From the foregoing analyses, what conclusions can be drawn with regard to Paul's theology? It is clear that Paul consistently presents the Mosaic Law as something negative with respect to man, because it was always there to point out his faults and to condemn him for those faults.

But what of the passages, such as Romans 7, which present the Law as "good and perfect and holy?" How can those passages be reconciled with these findings? In each of the figures of speech given, for instance,<sup>12</sup> there is a disparity between the thing in itself and others' perception of it. For instance, when a jailor guards his prisoner, he is doing what is "good and right," yet the prisoner's *perception* of the jailor (as the recipient of his actions) is generally *not* good. And that perception is not without justification, because what the prisoner receives is generally negative. Such is the case with the Mosaic Law; while it is inherently perfect and holy, and as such reflects the perfection and holiness of its Author, if it is perceived properly its recipients will recognize that its effects on them are only negative, because it will *always* find man guilty and pronounce *judgment*. The Law *always* points to God's perfection and man's imperfection, God's holiness and man's guilt. If it were the only way out, there would be no escape.

Fortunately, God in His grace provided the means of escape in His Son. As a result, the Law can be seen as temporary until faith is exercised in Christ. While there is some dispute over the application of the Law to non-Christians today (which could serve as subject for another paper, while not within the scope of this one), one thing seems certain: once faith is placed in Christ, the figures of speech Paul uses for the Law consistently show that the believer's relationship to the Law has *ended*. There is no longer a need for the bondage (and the resulting condemnation) which the Law brought upon man. The Christian should not seek to place himself back into a negative relationship (which ended!) when they have established a positive and *far superior one*.<sup>13</sup> This would not make sense; nor would it be wise, because the Law in its perfection always results in one thing for men: judgment. All of the figures of speech used by Paul to discuss the Law teach ("map") this same truth.<sup>14</sup>

Beyond that, Paul's linguistic and rhetorical choices give several other clues concerning his theology with regard to the Law. Beyond his belief that the Law was only negative in terms of its *results*, Paul also consistently makes several other beliefs about the Law clear. First of all, he consistently points out that he believed that the Law was *temporary* in nature, and was in force for only a given period of time. Secondly, he believed that the Law was *a barrier* between men and God, *a hindrance* instead of a help. Finally, Paul's theology was that faith is *contrary* to placing oneself under the Law, and there is no way to synthesize the two.

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<sup>12</sup>with the exception of "curse," which only gives the result of the Law as a metonymy or possibly an anthropomorphism; either way, *the outcome is the same*.

<sup>13</sup> See **2 Corinthians 3:4-18**, which fits beautifully together with this discussion!

<sup>14</sup> This whole discussion *leads to Paul's conclusion*, which is often missed, in Galatians 5:1. It contrasts the *freedom of grace* with the *bondage of the Law*: "Stand fast **therefore** in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." (NKJV, emphasis mine)