

FAQ: What About Galatians 3:23-25? | by Daniel Botkin

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Q: I would be quite interested in your understanding of [Galatians 3:23-25](#). “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.” 🔍

A: As Peter says, some things Paul writes are “hard to be understood” ([2 Pet. 3:16](#)), and this is especially so in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. As do all of Paul’s letters, Galatians presupposes a knowledge of Paul’s oral teachings in that place prior to his letter, and a knowledge of what was happening in Galatia. The readers in Galatia knew exactly what was going on; we can only make educated guesses based on what can be inferred from the text. We are reading someone else’s mail as it were, without the benefit of knowing every thing that transpired before the letter was sent. Because we are so far removed from the historical, linguistic, and cultural context, it requires some historical, linguistic, and cultural knowledge to correctly understand the situation that Paul was addressing. 🔍

To properly explain Galatians would require a book. Obviously I cannot write a book in this limited space. However, I can address the subject of the “schoolmaster,” which is usually the main focus of this passage.

The schoolmaster (*paidagogos*) is defined in lexicons as a “trainer, guide, custodian, attendant [slave],

childconductor.” C.I. Scofield quotes H.A.W. Meyer’s definition of the *paidagogos*: “Among the Greeks and Romans, persons, for the most part slaves, who had it in charge to educate and give constant attendance upon boys till they came of age.” (A modern version of the pedagogue would be someone like a child’s personal tutor or governess or nanny.)

After the boy reached adulthood, he was no longer under the authority of the schoolmaster. Since Paul says that “the law was our schoolmaster” and “we are no longer under a schoolmaster,” many Christians conclude that this means we can now ignore all the Old Testament laws. However, this cannot be what Paul means, because in other places he speaks highly of God’s law and urges believers to obey it, and scolds them for disobeying it. So what did Paul have in mind when he compared the law to a schoolmaster?

Consider what happens when a governess or nanny is assigned to a child. The nanny teaches the child the basics about hygiene, safety, and manners. The nanny makes sure that the child bathes and brushes his teeth properly, looks both ways before he crosses the street, and says “please” and “thank you.” The child is gradually trained to do these things. Eventually the child matures and becomes an adult, and is no longer under the nanny’s authority.

Now that he is out from under the nanny’s authority, what does the young adult do in regards to hygiene, safety, and manners? Well, if he had the same kind of attitude toward the nanny as some Christians have toward the Torah, he would disregard everything the nanny taught him. He would quit taking baths and brushing his teeth. He would ignore all the safety rules he had been taught. He would no longer practice courtesy and good manners. But of course a normal young adult does not disregard the things the nanny taught him; he continues to do these things. His outward behavior continues as before. The only difference is that now, as an adult, he does these things naturally, because he wants to. If he does not, something is wrong with him. People will wonder why he doesn’t remember the basics which his nanny taught him.

After we are “justified by faith” ([Gal. 3:24](#)) and “receive the adoption of sons” (4:5), we are “no more a servant, but a son” (4:7). “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (4:6).

To be “under the law” is to have the law outside you, hanging over your head and breathing down your neck like a schoolmaster. To be a son of the New Covenant is to have your Father’s Torah internalized, written on the fleshly tablets of your heart ([2 Cor. 3:3](#)). The commandments do not change. *We* change. We remember the instructions of our schoolmaster, and we appreciate them. We walk in obedience to the commandments of the Torah as mature sons, because it is now our nature to do so. Even C.I. Scofield, who was quite antinomian, wrote this: “The adult ‘son’ does voluntarily that which formerly he did in fear of the pedagogue.” That sums it up quite well.