

Galatians 3:23-25

Pastor: Galatians 3:23-25: The Law is our tutor to lead us to Christ.

“But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.”

3:23a If one can believe it, Galatians 3:23-25 comprise one of the most difficult passages in the entire Epistle to the Galatians, not necessarily because of what Paul was communicating to his ancient audience, but instead because of how it has been approached within a history of interpretation, especially in more modern decades.¹ One view, which I will argue to be the correct view, approaches Galatians 3:23-25 from the perspective of an individual coming to saving faith in Yeshua the Messiah. Another view, which is quite commonplace among Christian examiners today, approaches Galatians 3:23-25 from the perspective of the Jewish people having to keep the Torah only up until the arrival of the Messiah.

The people who are being talked about in Galatians 3:23-25 are quite plainly, “those who believe” (Galatians 3:22), meaning those who have placed their trust in Yeshua. Galatians 3:23-25 may be fairly taken to summarize the current status of born again Believers in relation to the Torah of Moses. Paul first indicates in Galatians 3:23, “And before the coming of the faith” (YLT), with *tēn pistin* (τὴν πίστιν) appearing with the definite article. Some may claim that “the faith” to which Paul is referring is the new Christian movement of the First Century, to be contrasted against an old Judaism based on rigid law. Yet, there are other interpreters who do not make this assumption, and instead would argue that “the faith” to which Paul is referring is what Yeshua Himself emulated. Richard N. Longenecker concludes, “Paul means not faith generically, but the particular faith referred to in v 22b that has to do with ‘the faithfulness of Jesus Christ’ and humanity’s response of faith.”²

Paul describes how “before faith came” into their lives, the Galatians’ lives and his own life, “we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed” (Galatians 3:23). Before Yeshua’s faithfulness was recognized by them via the promise, all that the Torah could do was condemn both him and the Galatians as sinners. *This is life “under the law,”* shut up as criminals under the Torah’s penalties.

A condition of being “held in custody under the law, locked up” (TNIV), is rightly discerned to be a pre-salvation condition for all persons. Two verbs are seen in the clause *hupo nomon ephrouroumetha sugkleiomenoi* (ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι), “under law we were being kept, shut up” (YLT). The first is *phroureō* (φρουρέω), “**to hold in custody, detain, confine**” (BDAG),³ like a jailed prisoner waiting for his trial to commence.⁴ The second, *sugkleiō* (συγκλείω), regards “**to confine to specific limits, confine, imprison**” (BDAG),⁵ and notably appears in Romans 11:32 where Paul says “For God has shut up [*sugkleiō*; consigned, RSV] all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.” This describes a universal state of sinfulness for all human beings that must exist, in order for God’s mercy to be truly shown to be mercy. But is this the fault of the Torah and its instruction? No! It is the fault of all people being cursed by sin and their disobedience (Galatians 3:22).

Before Messiah faith arrives onto the scene in anyone’s life, a negative condition of living *hupo hamartian* or “under sin” (Galatians 3:22) is present, with people effectively jailed and locked up as prisoners “under the law.”

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

² *Ibid.*, 145.

³ *BDAG*, 1067.

⁴ “The terminology is consistent w. the Roman use of prisons principally for holding of prisoners until disposition of their cases” (*Ibid.*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 952.

While he disagrees with this view, thinking that the Jewish people being forced to follow the Mosaic Law is actually being discussed in Galatians 3:23-25, Douglas J. Moo nonetheless has to recognize that people being subject to the Torah's condemnation is an option before the interpreter. He describes, "If 'under the law' is exactly parallel to 'under sin,' then to be 'under the law' could denote being subject to the curse of the law. An additional reason for this interpretation comes in [Galatians] 4:5, where those whom Jesus needs to redeem are those 'under the law.'"⁶ This is precisely the interpretation for "under the Law" that we should conclude fits Galatians 3:23 best, as the problem of human sin for all (*ta panta, τὰ πάντα*)—"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (Galatians 3:22, NIV; cf. Romans 3:9)—is being discussed. Yet Moo has to protest this, incorrectly concluding, "the assertion of v. 22 about being under sin is something of an anomaly in the flow of this context, speaking of 'Scripture' (rather than 'the law') and of 'the whole world' (rather than just the Jews)."⁷ But why would the claim of Galatians 3:22 have to be treated as some kind of an anomaly, unless the condition of "under the Law" as affecting all sinners is to be discounted?

Is "under the Law" a condition experienced by all people who need salvation *or* not? Do not the Tanach Scriptures serve as God's *torah* or Instruction? Elsewhere in Paul's letters, texts aside from those of Genesis-Deuteronomy are actually referred to as "the Law" (1 Corinthians 14:21; quoting Isaiah 28:11), meaning that his usage of "the scripture" (*hē graphē, ἡ γραφή*) followed by "under the law" (*hupo nomon, ὑπὸ νόμου*) in Galatians 3:22, 23 need not imply that different parts of Israel's Bible are being referred to; the Tanach Scriptures on the whole as *torah* certainly condemn sinners every bit as much as the Pentateuch proper. Moo has to claim that the presence of Galatians 3:22 is "an anomaly in the flow of this context," precisely because all of sinful humanity being "under sin" **and** "under the Law" would *seriously weaken* his case that "under the Law" is just a condition of the Jewish people having to keep the Mosaic Torah.

The main issue being addressed is stated previously in Galatians 3:22 to be *common human confinement* "under sin," with Galatians 3:23 following this up with how a condemnation status of being "under the Law" is nullified via faith in the Messiah. F.F. Bruce comes about as close as anyone to recognize the universal significance of all people being "under the Law":

"To be 'under law' is in practice to be 'under sin'—not because law and sin are identical, but because law, while forbidding sin, stimulates the very thing that it forbids. As will be seen in 4.4, one purpose of the coming of Christ is the redemption of his people from their bondage 'under law'....As Gentiles and Jews alike are 'confined under sin' in v22, so Gentiles and Jews alike are 'confined under law' here."⁸

3:23b-24 A common interpretation present, among Galatians' examiners today, is that in Galatians 3:24 when Paul tells the Galatians, "The law, then, was our guardian until Christ" (HSCB), he is speaking of the Jewish people having to keep the Torah. Longenecker is one who asserts, "The point of the analogy here is not that the Mosaic law was a positive preparation for Christ...Rather the focus here is on the supervisory function of the law, the inferior status of one under such supervision, and the temporary nature of such a situation in the course of salvation history."⁹ Yet is this a view—in addition to it leading to a conclusion where the Torah is not only effectively nullified for God's people in the post-resurrection era, but where it could also be viewed as dishonored—which adequately accounts for how all people need redemption from the Torah's condemnation?

At this point, many interpreters—in spite of how "the scripture has all men 'imprisoned' under the power of sin" (Galatians 3:22, Phillips New Testament)—opt for the "we" statements made by Paul to regard only his fellow Jews, and not to all of his audience. So, when Paul says "before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed" (Galatians 3:23), such confinement was considered only a Jewish issue. The clause *eis tēn mellousan pistin apokalupthēnai* (εἰς τὴν μέλλουσάν πιστίν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι), "to the faith about to be revealed" (YLT), is thought to be taken with a

⁶ Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 362.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bruce, *Galatians*, pp 181-182.

⁹ Longenecker, 148.

temporal force, with the proposition *eis* (εἰς) to be viewed “to denote a certain point or limit of time” (*LS*),¹⁰ hence the common rendering “until faith should be revealed” (RSV). The faith in view is undoubtedly the belief or trust to be placed in Yeshua and His redemptive work; being “confined under the law” (RSV), though, is thought to only be a Jewish issue, with the Messiah’s arrival now abolishing Moses’ Teaching.

If Galatians 3:23 is approached from an individualistic perspective, the statement “before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed,” regards the status of all people who were once condemned by God’s Torah as sinners, locked up in some kind of condemnation state before salvation. We should agree with Tim Hegg, who says “it seems most natural to understand the phrase ‘before the faith came’¹¹ to mean ‘before personal faith comes to those God saves.’”¹² Only when people are able to recognize the significance of Yeshua’s faithfulness to die as a permanent sacrifice for human sin, this reality of faith having arrived to them, can they then be shown the great revelation of how faith in the Savior is to significantly transform them and allow them to enter into the Father’s destiny for their lives. This is something that the Apostle Paul did not want his Galatian audience to forget: what it took to get them to truly arrive at the significant faith in the Lord that they possess.

While many would prefer to take the verb *apokaluptō* (ἀποκαλύπτω) in Galatians 3:23b as regarding God’s plan in Yeshua “to be revealed” within salvation history, earlier in his letter Paul himself uses it to describe how “God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal [*apokaluptō*] His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles...” (Galatians 1:15-16a). To have the importance of faith actually *revealed* to a newly saved person, who has just been freed from the guilt incurred by sin and Torah-breaking, **is entirely consistent with how Paul himself was redeemed**. The initial salvation experience of faith in Yeshua is to be followed with a person being shown even more how significant the Messiah’s work is. It is more appropriate to render the clause *eis tēn mellousan pistin apokaluphthēnai* as something like: “to the faith intending¹³ to be revealed” (my translation), that which is destined to manifest itself in the redeemed. Paul acknowledges the initial entry of Messiah faith in someone’s life, leading to a greater revelation of what faith in Him and who He is encompasses. The preposition *eis* (εἰς) can notably also mean “to express relation, *to* or *towards*” (*LS*).¹⁴ Paul later specifies how the power of the good news is to lead one from *faith to faith*, meaning that the significant revelation of faith in Yeshua naturally gets deeper after one has been forgiven of sin and grows in Him:

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation [to salvation, YLT; *eis sōtērian, εἰς σωτηρίαν*] to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God **is revealed from faith to faith** [*apokaluptetai ek pisteōs eis pistin, ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν*]...” (Romans 1:16-17a).

A proper view of Galatians 3:23 recognizes that: (1) saving faith is to manifest itself in the life of a Believer, (2) because of such faith one is freed from the imprisoning condemnation of sin and being “under law,” and (3) this results in being revealed a greater significance of faith as growth in Messiah begins.

Having stated how those who are “under law,” locked up as condemned sinners, must have faith in Yeshua come into their lives—and consequently with the redeemed being shown the magnificent importance of such faith in Yeshua—Paul follows this by explaining a pre-Messiah function of the Torah. As rendered by the NASU, Galatians 3:24 reads as,

¹⁰ *LS*, 231.

¹¹ Grk. *Pro tou de elthein tēn pistin* (Πρὸ τοῦ δεῖ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν); “before the coming of the faith” (YLT), something akin to the “arrival” of Messiah faith in someone’s life.

¹² Hegg, *Galatians*, 128.

¹³ Grk. *mellousan* (μέλλουσαν).

I have chosen to render the verb *mellō* (μέλλω) here along the lines of “**to be inevitable, be destined, inevitable**,” which for Galatians 3:23 is specifically noted for “w. aor. inf. ἀποκαλυφθῆναι *that is destined* (acc. to God’s will) to be revealed” (*BDAG*, 628).

¹⁴ *LS*, 231.

“Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith.”¹⁵

A majority of today’s interpreters take Galatians 3:24 as being a temporal function for Paul’s own Jewish people. From this perspective “our” means “Jewish,” and “the law was our custodian until Christ came” (RSV) or “the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came” (NRSV). The Torah was the Jewish “imprisoner,” so to speak, *eis Christon* (εἰς Χριστόν). Highly reflective of this view, and one who definitely believes that the Torah is not to be followed in the post-resurrection era, is Ben Witherington III, who concludes that “the Law as the pedagogue of God’s people lasted only until Christ came. Here εἰς Χριστόν is surely to be taken in a temporal and not a telic sense.”¹⁶ Such an interpretation of Galatians 3:24 could lead one to conclude that Paul is a turncoat Jew, and he is saying that with the arrival of the Messiah that his own people do not have to observe the burden of having to keep any of the Law of Moses; it was, after all, only “until Christ.”¹⁷

Much of how we look at Galatians 3:24 is influenced by how we look at the role of the *paidagōgos* (παιδαγωγός), which is invariably translated as “tutor” (NASU), “custodian” (RSV/CJB), “child-conductor” (YLT), “guardian” (HCSB), or “schoolmaster” (KJV), comparable to our English word “pedagogue.” Many examiners are in rightful agreement that “tutor” is not the best rendering for *paidagōgos*, as there is something specific to be understood from this term in antiquity. In Galatians 3:24, we actually see Paul using a classical Greek term to express a Jewish concept.¹⁸ The *paidagōgos* was “Orig. ‘boy-leader’, the man, usu.[ally] a slave...whose duty it was to conduct a boy or youth...to and from school and to superintend his conduct gener.; he was not a ‘teacher’...When the young man became of age, the π[αιδαγωγός] was no longer needed” (BDAG).¹⁹ In a classical sense, the *paidagōgos* was a protector who was to guard young boys on their way to school until they reached a certain age. This “disciplinarian” (NRSV) or “guardian” (ESV) would try to instill within them a basic sense of who a responsible citizen was, until they arrived at a point when they were old enough to take care of themselves.

Within much of the ancient period, the *paidagōgos* had a widescale reputation for strictness. Hans Dieter Betz indicates, “The figure of the pedagogue is looked upon as a hard but necessary instrument in bringing a person to achieve and realize virtue.”²⁰ So here, the Torah is not that much more than a merciless taskmaster that has to beat proper behavior into someone. Witherington is more tempered, remarking that this point of view “is much too one-sided. There were both bad and good pedagogues and the latter were not rarer exceptions to a rule.”²¹ Paul is certainly not expecting his Galatian audience to apply all of the possible negative traits of a classical *paidagōgos* into his usage in Galatians 3:24.

While strict in terms of discipline, and while various interpreters would oppose this conclusion, the *paidagōgos* did have **an important educational function**. As Plato would describe it, “Our sharp-eyed and efficient supervisor of the education of the young must redirect their natural development along the right lines, by always setting them on the paths of goodness as embodied in the legal code” (*Laws* 7.809).²² Dunn argues in favor of the *paidagōgos*, again while being strict, having a “responsibility to instruct in good manners, and to discipline and correct the youth when necessary.”²³ TDNT further remarks that the Torah “is a *paedagōgós* while we are minors. During our minority we are under it and virtually in the position of

¹⁵ *New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970), NT p 241 has “the law was a kind of tutor in charge of us until Christ should come,” but notes the alternate rendering “Or a kind of tutor to conduct us to Christ.”

¹⁶ Witherington, *Galatians*, 269.

¹⁷ Longenecker, 149 does notably speak against this, claiming that “One may, of course, as a Jew continue to live a Jewish nomistic lifestyle for cultural, national, or pragmatic reasons. To be a Jewish believer in Jesus did not mean turning one’s back on one’s own culture or nation,” although he unfortunately further argues that things like circumcision or the dietary laws have nothing to do with “the life of faith.”

¹⁸ The term “pedagogue” does appear as a borrowed term in some Jewish literature (Ibid., pp 146-148).

¹⁹ BDAG, 748.

²⁰ Betz, 177.

²¹ Witherington, *Galatians*, 263.

²² Plato: *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin Books, 1970), 253.

²³ Dunn, *Galatians*, pp 198-199.

slaves. With faith, however, we achieve adult sonship and a new immediacy to the Father which is far better than dependence on even the best ‘pedagogue.’ ...It is a taskmaster with an educational role.”²⁴

The related verb to *paidagōgos* is *paideō* (παιδεύω), which can mean both “to provide instruction for informed and responsible living, *educate*” and “to assist in the development of a person’s ability to make appropriate choices, *practice discipline*” (BDAG).²⁵ *Paideō* is often employed in the Septuagint to render the Hebrew *yasar* (יָסַר), meaning, “chastise, discipline, rebuke,” and “teach, train” (CHALOT).²⁶ It appears in Proverbs 29:19: “A slave will not be instructed [*yasar*] by words *alone*; for though he understands, there will be no response,” or “A stubborn servant will not be reproved [*paideō*] by words: for even if he understands, still he will not obey” (LXE). Yet, even while the verb *paideō* can relate to negative discipline or chastisement, it is used in the Apocrypha to represent the education of someone in the Tanach Scriptures:

“Therefore set your desire on my words; long for them, and you will be instructed [*paideō*]...Therefore be instructed [*paideō*] by my words, and you will profit” (Wisdom 6:11, 25).

“If you are willing, my son, you will be taught [*paideō*], and if you apply yourself you will become clever” (Sirach 6:32).

Another related term to *paidagōgos* is *paideia* (παιδεία), regarding “**the state of being brought up properly, training**” (BDAG).²⁷ This notably appears in 2 Timothy 3:16, where Paul says “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training [*paideia*] in righteousness.” Also to be considered could be 4 Maccabees 1:17: “[There] is education [*paideia*] in the law²⁸, by which we learn divine matters reverently and human affairs to our advantage.”

Whether Galatians 3:24 should be understood in the context of the clause *eis Christon* meaning “to lead us to Christ” (NIV) or “until Christ came” (TNIV) is determined by the value judgment of a reader concluding whether or not the figure of the *paidagōgos* or pedagogue had any kind of educational role. No one can deny that the *paidagōgos* was a strict disciplinarian. While Witherington argues that “it was not unusual for the pedagogue to chide or even beat a child on occasion to achieve the desired form of behavior,” even he has to recognize “The pedagogue did have a limited educational role...”²⁹ All are agreed that the Torah function as a pedagogue regards the issuance of condemnation to Torah-breakers, but does this condemnation stir up within condemned persons the need for them to cry out *to* the Messiah—or did the Torah only have a limited function in protecting the Jewish people *until* the Messiah’s arrival? The combined disciplinarian-educator can actually be seen when we compare Galatians 3:24 to 2 Timothy 3:14-16:

PAUL TO THE GALATIANS	PAUL TO TIMOTHY
Therefore the Law has become our tutor...to Messiah, so that we may be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).	You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned <i>them</i> , and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Messiah Yeshua. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:14-16).

²⁴ G. Bertram, “education, instruction,” in *TDNT*, 757.

²⁵ *BDAG*, 749.

²⁶ *CHALOT*, 137.

²⁷ *BDAG*, 749.

²⁸ Grk. *estin hē tou nomou paideia* (ἐστὶν ἡ τοῦ νόμου παιδεία).

²⁹ Witherington, *Galatians*, 265.

The Apostle Paul lauded Timothy for how he was raised by his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5) in the Tanach Scriptures, which are Holy Texts to be employed for *paideian tēn en dikaiosunē* (παιδείαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ), “training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Torah and Tanach are going to train people in ways of righteousness, whether they are redeemed *or* unredeemed, and for the latter such training will undeniably involve chastisement. The Torah, Prophets, and Writings are going **to always reveal** a person’s innate need for a Divine Redeemer—One whom the Father has provided in His Son Yeshua (Jesus). Paul quite keenly says of the Tanach Scriptures, that they are “able to make you wise to salvation through belief in Messiah Yeshua” (my translation), *eis sōtērian dia pisteōs tēs en Christō Iēsou* (εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ πίστεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). In 2 Timothy 3:15, the preposition *eis* involves Timothy’s training in the Tanach *leading* to his salvation.

There is no reason at all why the clause *eis Christon* (εἰς Χριστόν) cannot be viewed as “to Christ.” It is true that a version like the NASU has added some words in *italics* with “the Law has become our tutor *to lead us* to Christ” and the NKJV has the similar “the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ.”³⁰ These words are justifiably added to recognize the appropriate preparatory role of the pedagogue: *eis Christon*, “to Christ”—which is comparable to *eis sōtērian*, “to salvation.” In Galatians 3:24 the perfect verb *gegonen* (γέγονεν) is used, indicating that the role of the Torah as pedagogue, while something done in the past, still has an ongoing effect for born again Believers. The Torah having once served a pedagogue for the redeemed—a strict disciplinarian for those who have now arrived at faith in Yeshua—does not allow for people to dispense with its instructions. When Matthew 1:21 informs Bible readers, “Now all this took place to fulfill [*gegonen*] what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet,” are we expected to throw away and ignore the Messianic prophecies now that they have been fulfilled via the Incarnation of Yeshua? Or are we to understand them in a new light?

There is every reason to recognize the validity of the Torah serving as the pedagogue leading individuals in need of salvation to the Messiah. Yet, even if we were to view Galatians 3:24 from the perspective of the Torah serving as a strict disciplinarian “until Christ,” meaning “until Christ *came into our lives*,” this should not automatically mean that God’s Law gets cast aside as unimportant. The function of the Torah as a pedagogue is over for those who recognize the Messiah, whether you render the clause *eis Christon* as “until Christ” or “to Christ.”

While some might want to argue against the view that the Torah is to serve as an individual’s pedagogue—concluding that the “we” Paul is speaking of in Galatians 3:24 is just “we Jews”—the Torah did indeed play a role in the non-Jewish Galatians’ own salvation experience. Paul’s visit to Southern Galatia in Acts chs. 13-14 reveals that he certainly taught about Yeshua from the Torah and Prophets to more than just Jews, observing that He provided a forgiveness from sins and freedom that the Torah could not provide (Acts 13:38-39, 43).

In various sectors of today’s Messianic movement, Galatians 3:24 has been viewed from the perspective of a young man or young woman being prepared for *bar/bat mitzvah*.³¹ In Judaism, boys and girls are taught the commandments of the Torah from their infancy. The commandments are rigorously instilled in them so that by the time they reach puberty, usually by the age of 12 or 13, one who goes through his or her *bar/bat mitzvah* recognizes that he is accountable for being a member of the Jewish community. While it is now traditional to hold festivities and parties for *bar/bat mitzvah*, the First Century historian Josephus recorded, “when I was a child, and about fourteen years of age, I was commended by all for the love I had to learning; on which account the high priests and principal men of the city came then frequently to me

³⁰ Two notable Messianic versions render Galatians 3:24 along these lines. The TLV has, “Therefore the *Torah* because our guardian to lead us to Messiah, so that we might be made right based on trusting.” The 2011 The Messianic Writings has, “By this the Law has been our childhood guardian to bring us to Messiah, so that we might be declared righteous from faith.”

The CJB/CJSB, unfortunately, represents an alternative view for the clause *eis Christon*: “Accordingly, the *Torah* functioned as a custodian until the Messiah came, so that we might be declared righteous on the ground of trusting and being faithful.”

³¹ Cf. Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Torah Rediscovered* (Lakewood, CO: First Fruits of Zion, 1996), pp 23-24.

together, in order to know my opinion about the accurate understanding of points of the law” (*Life* 1.9).³² A major role in a *bar/bat mitzvah* ceremony (or even in a Protestant Christian denomination confirming a youth as a church member) is so that young people arrive at the point of being aware of their responsibilities before God, and that they have an understanding of the Scriptures.

The practice of preparing a youth for *bar/bat mitzvah* is to instill in the boy or girl the understanding that he or she is accountable for living up to the Torah’s standards. The Torah up to this point serves as the person’s tutor or schoolmaster, and hopefully when the youth gets up to the bema to read from the Torah scroll, he or she has an understanding that this is very serious in the eyes of the God of Israel. In a Messianic context, we surely hope that a young person undergoing *bar/bat mitzvah* has truly come to that moment where he or she realizes that the Torah is not enough, and that it is the Lord Yeshua to which its instructions inevitably point.

In the view of Galatians 3:24, God’s Law as pedagogue is to rigorously instill within us a sense of His holiness and righteousness, but our innate inability to ultimately keep its commandments perfectly **should lead us to faith in the Messiah**. When salvation from our sin comes, the key principles of God’s Torah are to certainly remain instilled with us. As we then grow and mature in such salvation, with the New Covenant promise of the Torah being supernaturally transcribed on our hearts now in play (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), we can fulfill the Torah in emulation of Messiah Yeshua (Matthew 5:17-19), *surely demonstrating* it in action via good works of mercy and kindness toward others.

It cannot go overlooked how those who see Galatians 3:24, relegating the Torah for a previous era, still have to affirm that Christian Believers today are not dismissed from following any set of Biblical guidelines for living. The thought of Witherington, at least, is that “the pedagogue [of the Law] is replaced in the life of the Christian by other things, namely: (1) the example of Christ; (2) the ‘Law’ or principle of Christ; and (3) the Holy Spirit.”³³ None of today’s Messianic Believers should think that these qualities are unimportant; **they certainly are**. But how can we truly understand these things *as the Messiah Himself and the Apostles would have understood them* **without understanding** the message of the Torah and Tanach? How can we be everything that Yeshua was without adhering to a Torah ethic? Simply stating that one must follow the example of Christ and the Holy Spirit is too vague without given some more specific framework. One of the most important ways that born again Believers can fairly understand the symbiosis between trust in the Messiah, and obedience to God’s Torah, is seen in the John Wesley sermon “Properties of the Law”:

“I cannot spare the law one moment, no more than I can spare Christ: seeing I now want it as much, to keep me to Christ, as I ever wanted it to bring me to him...Indeed each is continually sending me to the other,—the law to Christ, and Christ to the law. On the one hand, the height and depth of the law constrain me to fly to the love of God in Christ; on the other, the love of God in Christ endears the law to me ‘above gold or precious stones;’ seeing I know every part of it is a gracious promise, which my Lord will fulfill in its season.”³⁴

Is Paul’s vantage point in Galatians 3:24 that the Torah functions only as the Jews’ disciplinarian, or the disciplinarian of the individual prior to receiving the gospel and being transformed? If Paul is speaking to his “brethren” (Galatians 3:15) in Yeshua in Galatia, then surely the Torah has played a role *for all of them*—both Jewish and non-Jewish—“so that we [plural] might be justified by faith.” The Torah served as a *paidagōgos* for all of them in their salvation experience. The Torah played a role in them understanding their sin nature and how they failed to live up to its high and holy standard. More importantly, **the Torah showed them their need for a Redeemer**.

3:25 In Galatians 3:25 Paul can say, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor,” *hupo paidagōgon* (ὑπὸ παιδαγωγόν). Does this mean that the principles that the Torah was to instill should be cast aside? Or, when one comes to faith in Messiah has the Torah’s function *as a pedagogue* ended? Are the

³² *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, 1.

³³ *Ibid.*, 266.

³⁴ N. Burwash, ed., *Wesley’s Doctrinal Standards Part I: The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes* (Salem, OH: Schmull Publishing, 1988), 350.

ethics and morality of the Torah no longer important? The thought of many is that this means no longer being “under the supervision of the law” (NIV), and that God’s people should not be concerned about keeping God’s Law. Is this a valid approach to Galatians 3:25?

In the previous remarks on Galatians 3:24, we have described how the ancient classical figure of the *paidagōgos* is like a strict disciplinarian. While having an educational role for those on the road to saving faith, the *paidagōgos* is still going to condemn a person more often than not. Paul’s word “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a pedagogue” (PME), should be understood from the perspective that after a person has arrived at salvation in the Messiah Yeshua, the Torah’s function as a *paidagōgos* is over. Bruce ably comments, “with the coming of faith believers have come of age and no longer require to be under the control of a slave-attendant: ὑπο. paidagwgo,n has the same sense as ὑπο. no,mon in v. 23.”³⁵ A fulfillment of the Torah in acts of love, focused around the fruit of the Spirit, is clearly to begin (Galatians 5:14-6:2). **For the redeemed, the function of God’s Torah only condemning people with guilt because of their disobedience has ended.**

In what context are born again Believers no longer “under a tutor”? If we are in the faith and have reached a point of spiritual maturity where we know what the Torah tells us is right and wrong, and we have repented of our sins and been spiritually regenerated, we have no need for the Torah to serve as a *paidagōgos*. We have no need for this kind of rigorous training, because if we have experienced the new birth we naturally want to obey our Heavenly Father *through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit will convict us and remind us as we study the Scriptures, as we pray, and as we sincerely seek the Lord about what we should and should not be doing. For those truly saved and earnestly seeking the Lord, the Torah no longer serves as a schoolmaster, because we should be naturally following God’s commandments as an outward part of our walk of faith.

The Jewish philosopher Philo also expressed how “there is an undying law set up and established in the nature of the universe...that instruction is a salutary and saving thing, but that ignorance is the cause of disease and destruction” (*On Drunkenness* 141).³⁶ The goal of any kind of instruction given by God is to be salvation, especially as human beings understand their limitations in light of His eternal holiness and perfection. And while it is most imperative for our mortal inability to fully obey the Lord to drive us to the cross of Yeshua in confession and repentance, *instruction in sanctification* is to truly follow being saved as the Holy Spirit takes up residence within us and transforms us to be more like Him. Some of this involves further discipline (1 Corinthians 11:32; Hebrews 12:6; cf. Proverbs 3:12) when we err, but it also involves opportunities for God’s people to simply demonstrate His good character to others (1 Thessalonians 2:10).

In order for the Law to have actually once functioned as an individual’s tutor or pedagogue: people have to know it. Where in mainstream Christianity today are the commandments of the Torah really taught to even lead people to faith? Are God’s commandments being taught in Sunday school so that the youth can know that they are sinners and that they need a Redeemer? Surely if they were in greater numbers than they currently are, some of the moral dilemmas that the contemporary Church faces would not be present. Unfortunately, the “salvation history” reading of Galatians 3:22-25, which we have just elaborated upon, has done much of the current generation a serious disservice: **Christian people are really not being instructed in the Law of Moses.** The role that the Torah plays, or has played, in seeing Yeshua arrive onto the scene of history *and* into the lives of the redeemed—**is not that appreciated.** Hegg offers us some key observations:

“[I]n the metaphor Paul uses, when one has arrived at the teacher, one does not therefore despise the *pedagogue* who lead him there! If anything, one is more appreciative of the custodian because he has performed his duties faithfully. In the same way, when a sinner comes to realize that he is unable to remedy himself of his guilt, and when the Torah leads the sinner to Yeshua, the only remedy for sin, he is forever

³⁵ Bruce, *Galatians*, 183.

³⁶ *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, 219; cf. *Noah’s Work As a Planter* 144.

grateful for the role of the Torah in leading to Yeshua. Far from considering the Torah to have been worthless, he recognizes the strategic role it has played.”³⁷

Indeed, as redeemed Believers are no longer “under a tutor,” we should nonetheless be most grateful that the Torah-function as pedagogue *has led us to the Divine Savior, Yeshua the Messiah*. Following our salvation, we should demonstrate the appropriate respect, honor, and obedience that is due Moses’ Teaching.

Now, with Yeshua’s faithfulness manifest via His death and atoning sacrifice, the Torah’s condemnation upon sinners has been lifted. *When people acknowledge and believe this they can be saved!* The purpose of the Torah for unredeemed people is to show them their need for a Redeemer, having once served as a schoolmaster or strict disciplinarian for those on the road to saving faith (Galatians 3:24). God’s giving of the Torah was never to force people to earn salvation by keeping it, but rather show people the need for something greater: a permanent fix for the human sin problem being required (cf. Hebrews 10:1-7). When any of us read the Torah and Tanach, **we need to understand how a major trajectory of it is the promise that is totally manifested in Yeshua’s faithfulness unto death.**

The motive, for obeying God’s commandments as a born again Believer, is in recognizing “that faith has come.” The tutor has performed its job well, showing us our need for salvation, because without Divine intervention all we will be is condemned. Being people of the New Covenant, transformed by God’s Spirit, He will write His commandments onto the transformed heart (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 36:26). Being saved, we will obey the Father as we strive to emulate the Son’s faithfulness, and mature in the new relationship that we have. And, we will know that such obedience comes because He wants us to be holy and set-apart, *not* that we feel that Yeshua’s faithfulness demonstrated for us is insufficient.

Indeed, one must recognize that in the Torah God’s people are called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6; cf. 1 Peter 2:5). God’s people are called to be a missional community active in the world, making a difference. Any good Christian theologian agrees with this. Having the Torah’s principles imbued into the human person empowered by God’s Spirit *makes the Torah even more important* following salvation—not less important.

While Galatians 3:23-25 have unfortunately taken more of an anti-Torah connotation in recent decades among interpreters, there are some positive developments. Several more modern commentaries do not discount Paul as recognizing that the Torah had value for First Century Jewish Believers. Longenecker validity asserts, “To be a Jewish believer in Jesus did not mean turning one’s back on one’s own culture or nation.”³⁸ He and others would assert that for Jewish identity the Torah indeed played an important role. The significant question that the Messianic community is trying to answer today, though, is not whether the Torah has an important role for Jewish Believers in Yeshua—*it does*. The question that is being discussed and debated today is whether or not the Torah has a role to play in the faith experience of non-Jewish Believers, and how to fairly handle the expectation of the Prophets, which is that in the end-time the nations were to come to Zion to be taught the Torah (Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3).

To answer this question, I personally believe that we need to take a look at the spiritual condition of today’s Christian Church, overwhelmingly dominated by non-Jewish people. Much of today’s evangelical Christianity is suffering because of downplaying or *outright casting aside* the ethos of the Torah. The comments of a commentator such as Longenecker adequately summarize the difficulty that today’s Church faces:

“The Christian church today has many who formally oppose legalism but hold firmly to nomism. There is a religion of piety that they believe to be God-honoring. What they fail to realize, however, is that in many ways they are recapitulating the error of the Judaizers.”³⁹

While this is likely not his intention, are modern-day Christian “Judaizers” those who oppose gross sins such as homosexuality on the grounds of God’s commandments in Leviticus 18? Are those who oppose

³⁷ Hegg, *Galatians*, 130.

³⁸ Longenecker, 149.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

murder, theft, or adultery on the basis of the Ten Commandments “Judaizers”? Note that the remarks above are *not directed* toward Torah observant Messianics who keep the seventh-day Sabbath or eat kosher; they are directed against Church going Christians who afford a high regard to God’s Law, mostly as it concerns ethical and moral matters. These are the people who as young children were likely taught the basics of right and wrong from the pedagogue of the Torah (even if a bit under-encompassing in some areas).

It is unfortunate that much of today’s Church has cast aside the relevance of the Torah, so much that even sincere theologians consider “nomism” to be a modern manifestation of “Judaizing.” Today’s Messianic movement has an awesome responsibility not only as we restore the forgotten Hebraic Roots of the faith, but also as we can provide solid theological answers to those Church goers who have a high regard for the ethos of the Torah that their denomination may be disregarding. We also have the responsibility to demonstrate not legalism, but that the pedagogue of the Torah has truly led us to Yeshua, that its principles are firmly embedded in our hearts, and that we follow its principles emulating the example of Yeshua—most especially by demonstrating His love.

Galatians 3:23-25 should be a reality that has been made manifest *in each one of our lives*. Prior to salvation, we each stood under the condemnation of God’s Law, having violated its statutes. Some of us knew we were dead guilty of transgressing many of God’s specific commandments. Others of us knew we were just guilty of doing wrong things, and that we would be pretty horrified if we ever stood before our Maker. Specific or general knowledge of sin and transgression does not matter in terms of standing condemned before the Creator, as James the Just specifies how one who “fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). Such an experience of guilt and fear before the Heavenly Father should have led each of us to the salvation provided in His Son (Galatians 3:24)!