

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Galatians		Pastor/Teacher
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SET FREE IN CHRIST

The Old Testament with its prophecies, ceremonies, types and institutions is a preparation for Christ. What is a type? Berkhof answers, “. . . A correct answer to this question will safeguard us against the double error of limiting the typical element too much, on the one hand, and, on the other, of enlarging it unduly. The word *type* (Greek *tupos*, derived from the verb *tupto*), denotes (1) the mark of a blow; (2) an impression, the stamp made by a die – hence a figure, an image; and (3) an example or pattern, which is the most common meaning in the Bible. Both types and symbols are indicative of something else. They differ, however, in important points. A symbol is a sign, while a type is a pattern or image of something else. A symbol may refer to something either past, present, or future, while a type always prefigures some future reality. Davidson says: *A symbol is a fact that teaches a moral truth. A type is a fact that teaches a moral truth and predicts some actual realization of that truth (Old Testament Prophecy, p. 229).* Scriptural types are not all of one kind. There are typical persons, typical places, typical things, typical rites and typical facts.”¹ Types as such all point forward to Him, and there is a progression from the promise to Abraham through the Law to the fulfillment of the promises in Christ. The Old Testament is, therefore, not to be discarded or despised. In fact, the Apostle Paul is building his case for justification by faith alone on the Old Testament! In this section he is answering an implicit objection to his doctrine that it in effect overthrew the Law. Not so, says the Apostle. The Law was *never* intended to give life. Its purpose was to convince people of the true character of their sin (3:19-22). In the rest of this chapter Paul will develop this in detail. He will seek to show the inferiority of the condition of people under the Law and the temporary character of the statutes.

I. **THE CONFINEMENT OF THE LAW.** In verse 22 Paul points out how the Law brought bondage. It revealed the sinfulness of sin with the result that no one is clear of guilt.

A. **The Figure of the Prison.** Paul’s language in verses 22-23 graphically portrays how the law served to *shut in* everyone to the consequences of sin. The Law was a jailor. Two words are used to describe this. The first word *phroureō*, “were kept” (KJV) “held prisoner” (NIV), was used of guards doing sentry duty. It is important to note that this verb is in the imperfect tense, expressing durative action in past time. The other word *sunklbiō*, “shut up” (KJV), “locked up” (NIV), is the same word we found in verse 22.² The Law brought confinement – its function was entirely adverse. Moises Silva, one of my former professors, makes this very helpful observation: “Paul’s linking of the words “law”

(*nomos*), “could” (*dunamenos*, lit. “being able”), and “life” (*zōopoiē sai*, “to make alive”) is strongly reminiscent of Rom. 8:2-3: *For the law of the Spirit of life [ho’gar nomos, pneumatōs tas zōās] in Christ Jesus set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, since it was weakened by the flesh [togar adunaton tou nomou enōasthenei dia tasx sarkos] God [did]. . . .* The parallel between this statement and Gal. 3:21 is not merely lexical but substantive. Two principles are contrasted in the Romans passage: one is the Mosaic law, which Paul associates with sin, as in Gal. 3:22-23; the other is the life-giving principle of the Spirit, which corresponds to the saving promise of Gal. 3:14 (*tan epaggelion tou pneumatōs*). Moreover, Rom. 8:3 makes explicit what is only implicit in the Galatians passage, namely, that the weakness of the flesh is the obstacle making the law impotent for salvation. Men are dead in their trespasses and sins, and so the commandments do not avail. What we need is life. Apart from spiritual life, we cannot do what is written in the Book of the Law and so we come under a curse. This point needs to be stressed, since a few writers have denied that the universality of sin plays a role in Paul’s argument in Gal. 3:10.”³

- B. ***The Figure of the Slave-Guardian.*** In verse 24 he refers to the Law as being a *paidagōgos*. This term was used for the attendant whose duties consisted of escorting a small child to and from the school – and of enforcing strict disciplinary duties, especially moral ones on the child.⁴ The Law, in this sense, was to be the means of bringing us to Christ in that it would demonstrate our absolute helplessness and thus turn us to the Savior.

II. ***THE FREEDOM OF SONSHIP.*** The only hope was not a super *paidagōgos* or instructor (a new Law) but an actual redeemer who could set us free from bondage.

- A. ***Sonship by Faith (verses 25-26).*** The KJV has the word “But” at the opening of verse 25. This is in keeping with the Greek text which has the adversative and serves to introduce a shift. Since Christ (Paul uses the word *faith* in this context to refer to *faith in Christ*) has come we are no longer *slaves* but *sons*. God no longer is seen simply as a judge to execute the penalty of the broken Law (Christ bore this). He is now, since the coming of faith, the Father, and the sons are adult sons and no longer children. We are sons, therefore, not by virtue of creation but by faith in Christ.
- B. ***Union with Christ (verses 27-28).*** The “for” of verse 27 explains how this sonship came about. *Baptism* here refers to the work of the Holy Spirit who baptizes into Christ (Romans 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The figure of putting on Christ is an allusion to putting on a garment. “The expression,” notes Guthrie, “conveys a striking suggestion of the closeness which exists between Christ and the believer.”⁵ (cf. Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:12f)

NOTE: Verse 28 is sometimes appealed to in order to repudiate any and all distinctions between male and female in the Church (i.e., women are on the same level as men and should therefore be eligible to be ordained.)⁶ This is manifestly not Paul’s point. He is referring to *spiritual blessing in Christ*, specifically to *union with Christ* – and in this sense there is no difference. *But* there are different roles and functions in the family and in the Church.

- C. *Abraham's Seed and Heirs (verse 2)*. Paul now concludes his argument "and if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." Christians are now fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. Gentile Christians are no longer foreigners to the covenants of the promise (Ephesians 2:11-22) but are now grafted into the Abrahamic root (Romans 11:11-21).

CONCLUSION: Sonship, union and heirship are the blessings delivered by faith in Christ. The Law cannot give us these things – it can, however, bring us to Christ by showing us the seriousness of sin. The pressing question is this: Have you come face to face with the Law so that you clearly see your sin, guilt and condemnation? Philip Ryken, a seminary classmate, writes, "By making this declaration of depravity, the law performs a valuable public service and proves that it still has a valuable place in the plan of salvation. The law is powerless to make anyone right with God. It cannot justify, it can only condemn. It cannot make us righteous; it can only lock us up in the prison of sin. But by showing that it cannot save, the law helps us to look for a Savior. And when the world starts looking for a way out of sin, it discovers that God's mercy is the only escape. This is how the law leads to Christ. It cannot save, in and of itself, but it leads us to Christ, and he can save. Martin Luther explained it like this: 'The Law with its function does contribute to justification – not because it justifies, but because it impels one to the promise of grace and makes it sweet and desirable. Therefore we do not abolish the Law; but we show its true function and use, namely, that it is a most useful servant impelling us to Christ . . . for its function and use is not only to disclose the sin and wrath of God but also to drive us to Christ. . . . Therefore the principal purpose of the Law in theology is to make men not better but worse; that is, it shows them their sin, so that by the recognition of sin they may be humbled, frightened, and worn down, and so may long for grace and for the Blessed Offspring.'"⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Baker, 1977), p. 144.

² This is translated "a prisoner of sin" in the NIV (verse 22). The word vividly describes being incarcerated. It means "to shut in on all sides" with no possibility of escape. The word was actually used in reference to a prison in Paul's day and time. Cf. J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament: Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-Literary Sources* (Eerdmans, 1972), p. 609.

³ M. Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Exploration In Exegetical Method* (Baker, 2001), p. 188.

⁴ *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based On Semantic Domain I*, eds. J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida (United Bible Societies, 1988), p. 466.

⁵ D. Guthrie, *Galatians: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1973), p. 110.

⁶ This is **the** favorite text of feminists. Ruth A. Schmidt is representative of those who refer to themselves as Evangelical feminists and contend that Galatians 3:28 effectively overturns all those other texts like 1 Timothy 2:12, cf. her article "Second-class Citizenship in the Kingdom of God" in *Our Struggle to Serve: The Stories of 15 Evangelical Women*, ed. Virginian Hearn (Word, 1979).

⁷ P. Ryken, *Galatians: Reformed Expository Commentary* (P&R, 2005), p. 137.

