



Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter 3, Verses 21-29

by Tim Kelley

In the previous 6 verses, Paul showed that the covenant promises made to Abraham were not dependant on Torah observance, but on faith in the one making the promises. He also alluded to a Jewish "sod level" understanding that the promises were handed down to the "one seed" of Abraham – Messiah Yeshua, and that if a person were to inherit those promises, they (the promises) would have to flow through Yeshua himself. Thus we see YHVH Himself bestowing the promises on Isaac and then again on Jacob.

But in separating the covenant with Abraham from the Torah, Paul didn't want to paint himself into a corner. He didn't want to send a mixed message. The covenant has its purpose, and the Torah another.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 3:21-22** Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²² But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

In his desire to make a clear distinction between the Torah and the covenant given to Abraham, while at the same time upholding the Torah, Paul asks if the Torah is at odds with the covenant. He answers by stating that they have differing purposes. The Torah provides no way for a person to atone for his own sins. There is no way that a person can be found righteous through Torah observance. Yet God makes many promises concerning Torah and long life, but all are predicated on Torah observance -

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 32:46-47** . . . Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe -- all the words of this law. ⁴⁷ "For it *is* not a futile thing for you, because it *is* your life, and by this word you shall prolong *your* days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess."

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 18:5** 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I *am* the LORD.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:1** "Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:10** "*especially concerning* the day you stood before the LORD your God in Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to Me, and I will let them hear My words, that they may learn to fear Me all the days they live on the earth, and *that* they may teach their children.'

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 5:33** "You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and *that it may be* well with you, and *that* you may prolong *your* days in the land which you shall possess.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 30:6** "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Clearly, Torah observance is the way to extend your life, especially if living in the land, but there's no way a sinner can be found righteous by Torah observance. Righteousness comes by belief and faith, just as it did with Abraham. It's important to remember that the children of Israel were redeemed by the blood of the lamb¹ while they were still serving Pharaoh, before they went to Mount Sinai and received the Torah. They were redeemed because of the promises made to Abraham, not because of their works – their Torah observance.²

Yet before they actually escaped Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they found themselves in a desperate situation. They were surrounded on three sides by mountains and the approaching Egyptian army, and the path before them was blocked by the Red Sea. They were in a situation that, without a deliverer, they would all surely be killed. They were left with no choice but to trust Moses and step into sea, or die.

With that thought in mind – coupled with a better understanding of the Greek text, we can better understand Paul's next statement in regards to Paul's understanding of the Torah –

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

Because Paul has been contrasting the Torah with the promise to Abraham, we can assume that when he used the word "scripture", he's referring to the Torah. Is he saying that the Torah confines one to sin, or is there another message in this text?

In this passage, the English word "imprisoned" is the Greek word "sugkleio" (Strong's 4788) which carries the connotation of surrounding a large group of fish in a net (as in Luke 5:6) with no hope of escape. According to my Alaska fisherman friend, fish caught in a net, even if they're left in the water; will quickly die. Their only hope is if someone releases them from the net.

Going back to the Exodus example, Israel was surrounded by mountains on both sides, a pursuing army behind, and a sea before them. They had no way to turn and so they grumbled and accused Moses of trying to kill them. Never-the-less, without a deliverer, they would surely die . . . and up to this point Moses had been their deliverer. It was their desperate situation that forced them to have faith in Moses and to step into the sea. It was not Torah observance that saved them, it was faith, and because of their faith, they were able to proceed down the road that would lead them to the Torah and eventually to the Promised Land.

In Paul's analogy the Torah is identified as the net that captivates us - giving us no hope, but yet forces us to have faith in the one who can deliver us. The Torah defines sin, and thus convicts us when we transgress. Because sin leads to death, and all have sinned, we are all in a desperate situation without a deliverer. But the Torah provides no means for redemption and salvation by our own deeds. Salvation only comes by faith in the one who can and will save us.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 3:23-25** But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

After showing that the Torah forces you to depend on a savior, Paul then reflects on his own life and the lives of the Jewish people (notice the use of the word "we"). This portion of his letter may have been

¹ Exodus 14:30

² Note that the Passover lamb only protected the firstborn. It did not directly secure their release from Egypt.

directed toward the perpetrators of the “other gospel” since they were more than likely Pharisees like himself.³

History points out that after Judah was taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar, the leaders began to actively teach the Torah to the common people so as to prevent them from once again going into apostasy. This began the synagogue system – the place to study Torah, and the widespread use of the Oral Law. A little more than a century before Messiah came on the scene, the Parshim (Pharisees - “separated ones”) movement came on the scene. They promoted strict Torah observance and began the practice of “fencing in” the Torah – building barriers around the Torah so as to avoid accidental violation of it. But the fences can become a two-edged sword. It was this strict extra-Torah observance that the Jews depended on to keep themselves from being taken captive again. Unfortunately, the “fences” (Oral Torah) that were placed around the Torah became overly burdensome and caused many of the Jewish people to just give up trying to keep this pharisaic version of the “Torah”. Never-the-less, Paul said that it was the Torah that kept them “under guard” until faith came.

In this passage Paul personifies faith, saying that faith “came” to bring them (himself included) out from under the guard of Torah. Note that he is not saying that there was no faith prior to that time, instead, faith had not taken the trip to visit 1st century Judah. We should also note that the “faith” Paul is referring to is faith in Messiah Yeshua, as is indicated by verse 22.

The key to understanding this verse is in a proper understanding of the term “kept under guard”. The Greek word used in this verse is “phroureo” (Strong’s 5432) means “protected by a military guard”. For those who are being guarded, this can be either good or bad. If you are being guarded to keep you from escaping, that’s not good. But if you are being pursued by someone who wants to kill you, being guarded is a good thing. This is how the word is used two of the other three times it’s used in the NT.

^{ESV} **Philippians 4:7** And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

^{ESV} **1 Peter 1:5** who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So being “kept under guard” by the Torah is – according to Paul – a good thing. But notice, the second “kept” in this verse (“shut up” in the KJV) is not “kept under guard” but is the word “sugkleio” that we mentioned above – the net of captive fish. Thus Paul is saying that the Jewish people were a people with no hope (fish caught in a net) who are being temporarily protected, waiting for their deliverer to arrive.

Paul, like most Pharisees, was deeply entrenched in Torah observance.⁴ It was his view that the Jewish people were custodians of the Torah⁵, which they used to protect themselves from assimilation with the Greek culture and ultimate captivity. Though the Torah set up boundaries, it could never change the people’s heart. The people needed a savior, and as the people themselves became more and more corrupt, many began to reach out for one.

So the Torah is what lead many of the Jewish people to Messiah Yeshua. It was their “tutor”, but to understand what that means, we’ll need to understand the Greek word for “tutor” which is quite different from our understanding of a tutor. In this passage, “tutor” is “paidagogos” (Strong’s 3807). Strong’s defines the word as –

“A tutor i.e. a guardian and guide of boys. Among the Greeks and the Romans the name was applied to trustworthy slaves who were charged with the duty of supervising the life and morals of

³ Acts 23:6

⁴ Philippians 3:4-6

⁵ Romans 3:2

boys belonging to the better class. The boys were not allowed so much as to step out of the house without them before arriving at the age of manhood. ⁶

Being a paidagogos was a job a trusted slave was given. Along with his other duties, he was charged with the role of teaching morals to and protecting the boy he was assigned to. Once the boy reached maturity, the slave did not just go away and die, he instead continued in the duties he was charged with before and during the time he was also a paidagogos.

In Paul's use of this word, he's showing that Judah was guarded and supervised by God's trusted servant - the Torah, for the purpose of bringing them to maturity, which for the believer, comes when we realize we can never find hope in our own actions. Note that Paul is not saying that Torah's only role was to serve as a paidagogos, only that for the Jews, it served that purpose. Thus, once they (the believing Jews in Galatia) were made righteous by faith in Messiah, the Torah no longer served that purpose, though it retained its other roles – teaching us how to be pleasing to God and our fellow man. This is consistent with Paul's other writings that always put Torah in a positive light. As in all things Pauline, we must consider all his writings in order to understand what he's saying.

^{NKJ} **Galatians 3:26-29** For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁶ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Switching back to the congregation as a whole, Paul once again uses the term “you” . . . YOU are all sons of God . . . ! What Paul is saying is that, even though people come to it differently, some (the Jews) by Torah and some (the non-Jews) by desperation or some other motivation, once a person has faith (which implies faithfulness) that Messiah Yeshua is his deliver and savior; he becomes a son of God. Through ritual baptism, one immerses himself in Messiah and when he comes out of the water, he begins to look like the one in whom he immersed.⁷

Because all are immersed into Messiah and thus “look like him”, there are no longer any physical or genealogical differences in the eyes of God. Everyone looks the same because they all look like Messiah. What's more, in the Jewish culture, your status changes at baptism, specifically in regards to a betrothed woman. She goes into the water as a young single lady, but comes out as a married woman. She now has all the rights of a married woman, including becoming heir to his estate.

Paul alludes to this fact in his letter to the Romans –

^{ESV} **Romans 8:14-17** ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer (have a relationship⁸) with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Since, as we saw in verse 16, the promises were given to the one seed of Abraham – Messiah Yeshua, those who are joined to Him in marriage, who look like Him because they are immersed in Him, and who are faithful to Him and His walk, are able to share in the promises with Him. Torah observance does not give you a part in the covenant promises, only faith in the one who can deliver you from the consequences of sin. Thus the perpetrators of the “different gospel” are wrong when they teach that one

⁶ Bible Works 6, Strong's Dictionary

⁷ Baptism is a whole different study. Information about baptism can be found on our web site – www.amiyisrael.org

⁸ Strong's 4841 which is derived from Strong's 3958. Literally, “to have been affected by”

must become circumcised before he can be considered a part of the people of God and before he can have part in the covenant promises. Instead, circumcision comes – just as it did with Abraham - when one believes in the God that delivered him.

Shalom Alecheim

To summarize what we've seen in these 9 verses:

- The Torah had a purpose that it filled in ancient Israel. Its purpose was to reveal the need for salvation via a willing sacrifice.
- The Torah is unable to give life because it cannot change a person's heart, but
- The Torah can lead to life by showing that we have no hope without faith
- For the Jews, Torah kept them as a people, and for some, lead them to Messiah
- Once we faithfully follow Messiah, we become sons of God and share in His inheritance