

The Road to Faith



SABBATH—AUGUST 5

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Galatians 3:21–25; Leviticus 18:5; Romans 3:9–19; 1 Corinthians 9:20; Romans 3:1, 2; Romans 8:1–4.



God has mapped out the road to faith. The “map” of this “road” is found in the gospel.

MEMORY VERSE: “Are God’s laws and God’s promises against each other? Of course not! [Suppose] we could be saved by his laws, then God would not have had to give us a different way to get out of the grip of sin—for the Scriptures [Bible] insist we are all its prisoners. The only way out is through faith in Jesus Christ; the way of escape is open to all who believe him” (Galatians 3:22, TLB).

HOMING PIGEONS are trained to fly home from a great distance. They can fly hundreds of miles a day and arrive at the end of their journey with great skill. But even the best homing pigeons have gotten lost and not returned home. The worst known case happened in England when about 55,000 birds never came back to their lofts.

Most of us have gotten lost at least once. And sometimes we can lose our way, as the pigeons did, even after we accept Christ.

The good news is that God has not left us alone. He has mapped out the road to faith. The “map” of this “road” is found in the gospel. And the road to faith includes the law. Many people try to separate the law from the gospel. Some even see the law and the gospel as fighting against each other. This view is dead wrong. And it often can lead to terrible results. Without the law, we would have *no* gospel. Indeed, it is hard to understand the gospel without the law.

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE (Galatians 3:21)

Paul feels his statements might cause his attackers to think he has a low opinion of the law. Why? Because Paul talks about how God's promises are more important than everything. Paul's attackers might think such talk means Paul is putting down the law. So, Paul asks his attackers the very question they are thinking, "Are you saying the law goes against the promises of God?" Paul answers with a strong, "No!" God's promises to Abraham could never disagree with the law. Why? Because God could never go against Himself. He gave both the promise and the law. But the two have different purposes in the plan of salvation.

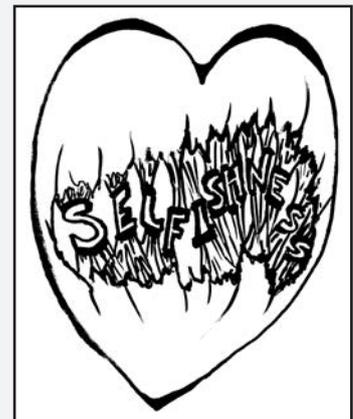
Read Galatians 3:21; Leviticus 18:5; and Deuteronomy 6:24. What do these verses tell us about the purpose of the law? What false ideas did Paul's attackers have about the purpose of the law instead?

Paul's attackers believed the law gave them spiritual life. They may have gotten this wrong idea from misunderstanding certain verses, such as Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 6:24. These verses talk about how life should be lived by those in a special relationship with God. The law governed life *within* the relationship. But Paul's attackers wrongly believed the law was the cause of that relationship. The Bible is clear: only God and His Spirit can "give life" to the spiritually dead (Romans 4:17, NIV; read also 2 Kings 5:7; Nehemiah 9:6; John 5:21). The law cannot give spiritual life to anyone. But this fact does not mean that the law is against God's promise of eternal life.

Paul wants to prove that the law cannot give life. So in Galatians 3:22, he says, "The whole world is controlled by the power of sin" (GW). In Romans 3:9–19, Paul uses Old Testament verses to show just how bad we are. He starts with the heart of the sin problem—selfishness. Then he moves to verses that show how widespread sin is.

Paul's point? Sin affects everyone, and the law is limited. So the promise of eternal life can come to us only through Christ. Here again, we see the great truth that led Martin Luther to break the power of Rome.

The law cannot save us. But what great benefits do we receive from obeying it? That is, what good have you experienced in your life through obedience to God's law?



Selfishness is at the heart of the sin problem.

**“HELD PRISONERS BY THE LAW”
(Galatians 3:23, NCV)**

In Galatians 3:23, Paul writes, “The law held us in prison like slaves. We were kept there until the one [Jesus] to believe in should come” (WE). Galatians 3:23 also is translated as “before faith in Christ came” (NIRV). But the verse in Greek says, “Before *the* faith” came. Here, Paul shows the place the law had in the lives of the people before and after Christ (Galatians 3:24). So, the wording “the faith” most likely means “belief” instead of the Christian faith, over all.

In Galatians 3:22, 23, Paul says the Jews were “held prisoners by the law” (NCV) before the coming of Christ. The KJV translates this verse as “kept [placed] under the law.” What does Paul mean by “under the law”?

Paul uses the wording “under the law” 12 times in his letters. “Under the law” means under the power, or penalty, of the law. Paul’s attackers in Galatia were trying to be saved by obeying the law. But Paul already made it clear that being saved by works is impossible. Why? Because without Christ we are not able to obey the law. Later, Paul points out what the Galatians really were doing when they wanted to be saved by their works. They were rejecting Christ.

The meaning of the wording, “under the law” includes being found guilty of breaking the law (Romans 6:14, 15). The law cannot free us from the guilt of breaking the law. Instead, the law acts like a jailer or a prison guard. It “locks up” all who have broken it. And all people are guilty of breaking the law. So, by breaking it, we bring ourselves under a death sentence. In tomorrow’s study, we will learn more about the use of the word “guard” in Galatians 3:23 (NKJV). This word shows that Paul is talking about our guilt when he uses the wording “under the law.”

Another Greek word, *ennomos*, also is translated often as “under the law.” But it really means “within the law.” It means living within the requirements of the law by being joined together with Christ (1 Corinthians 9:21). We cannot obey the law or be made holy apart from Christ. Only those who are made holy through faith will live (Galatians 3:11). But, this truth does not make the law useless. Instead, it shows only that the law cannot give us eternal life.



The law acts like a jailer or a prison guard. It locks up all who have broken it.

“GUARDED BY THE LAW” (Galatians 3:19–24, NIV)

Paul sums up his thoughts about the law in two points: (1) The law does not undo God’s promise made to Abraham (Galatians 3:15–20). And (2) the law is not against the promise (Galatians 3:21, 22).

What is the purpose of the law then? Paul asks this very question, “Then why was the law given at all?” (Galatians 3:19, NIV). He answers his question in the same verse, “It was added because of human sin.” Paul uses three more words, or sets of words, to help us understand this idea. These words explain more fully what the law was meant to do. They are: “guarded” (verse 23), “locked up” (verse 23), and “in charge of” (verse 24).

Read and pray over the meaning of Galatians 3:19–24. What is Paul saying in these verses about the law?

The Greek word translated as “guarded” (verse 23) means “to protect.” It can have a negative meaning. But in the New Testament, it has a positive meaning. It can mean to “watch over” or to be “kept safe” (Philippians 4:7; 1 Peter 1:5, NIV). The same is true of the word translated as “locked up” (Galatians 3:23, NIV). In Joshua 6:1 and Jeremiah 13:19, the word is translated to mean “shut tight” and “guarded closely.” These examples show that this word can have a positive or a negative meaning. The meaning depends on how it is used.

Read Romans 3:1, 2; Deuteronomy 7:12–24; and Leviticus 18:20–30. What benefits did the law provide the children of Israel? (By “law,” we mean two laws. First, the moral law. The moral law is God’s Ten Commandments. And second, the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law governed the sacrifices and feasts that pointed to Jesus’ death.)

The law was not a curse God placed on Israel. It was meant to be a blessing. The sacrifices could not remove sin. But they pointed to Jesus who could. And its laws protected Israel from the sins of other nations.

Good things can be used in the wrong way. How does this idea help us to understand the problems Paul faced when helping people to understand the purpose for God’s laws?



The sacrifices could not remove sin. But they pointed to Jesus who could.

THE LAW AS OUR “TEACHER” (Galatians 3:24, NLV)

Read Galatians 3:23. In this verse, Paul says we were “guarded” and “locked up” by the law (NIV). Now read verse 24. What does Paul, in this verse, say the law does for us?

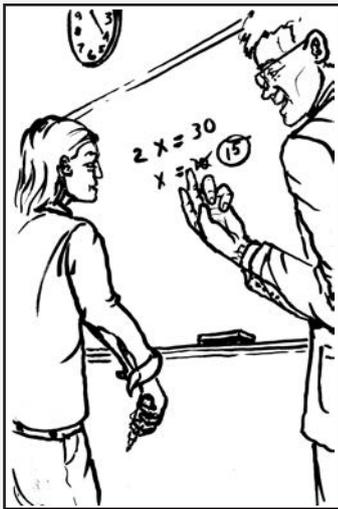
The word translated as “teacher” (NLV) comes from the Greek word *paidagogos*. Some Bibles translate the word as “schoolmaster” (KJV) or even “guardian” (ESV). But no one word fully captures its meaning. The *paidagogos* was a slave in Roman society. He was placed over his master’s sons from the time they turned six or seven until they became men. The *paidagogos* took care of the young boys’ needs. He prepared their baths. He provided them with food and clothes. He protected them from danger. The *paidagogos* also made sure the master’s sons went to school and did their homework. He taught them the right way to live. And he was expected to help them live out those beliefs.

Some *paidagogoi*, or teachers, certainly must have been kind and even loved by their masters’ sons. But these teachers were very strict. Some of them threatened and scolded their students to make them obey. Some teachers even used whippings and beatings.

Paul’s description of the law as a strict teacher helps us understand even more fully what Paul thought the law was meant to do. The law was added to teach and to point out sin. The law scolds us, and it shows us our guilt. But even this “negative” side of the law is a blessing. Why? Because God uses it for our benefit. The law tells us we are guilty. And the guilt the law brings drives us to Christ. So, the law and the gospel do not disagree. Instead, God created them both to work together to save us.

“In Galatians 3:24, the Holy Spirit speaks to us through Paul. The Spirit talks about the moral law. [The moral law is the Ten Commandments.] The law shows us our sin. It causes us to feel our need of Christ. And it causes us to run to Him for forgiveness and peace. And it causes us to feel sorrow for our sins and to turn from sin to Jesus.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 234.

Read Matthew 5:28 and Romans 7:6. What does the law point out to you about your actions and your words? How does your answer prove Paul’s point that the law is a strict teacher that shows us our sin?



Paul describes the law as a strict teacher. It teaches us and points out our sin.

THE LAW AND THE BELIEVER (Galatians 3:25)

Many people think Paul's words in Galatians 3:25 mean that he is completely dismissing or ignoring the law. But that belief cannot be correct. Why? Because Paul makes positive statements about the law elsewhere in the Bible.

So, what does Paul really mean in this verse?

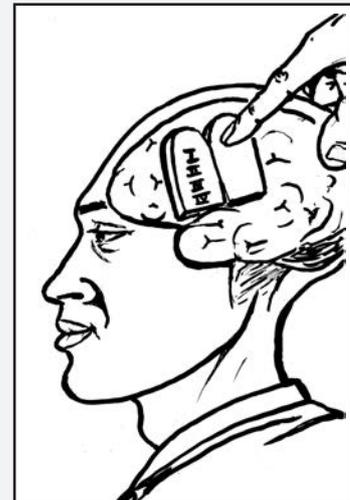
First, he means we are no longer under the law's judgment of guilt. Instead, we belong to Christ. As His, we are under the power of His grace (Romans 6:14, 15). Grace is God's gift of mercy, forgiveness, and power over sin. And being under grace sets us free. It permits Christ to work within us. We no longer fear being judged for any mistakes we made in the past. True freedom in the gospel means being free from fear and judgment. This freedom is completely different from no longer having to obey the law. Sadly, some people think true freedom in Christ means no longer obeying the law. But disobeying the law is sin. And sin is not freedom (John 8:34).

Read Romans 8:1–3. What does it mean to be no longer judged guilty by the law? How does this wonderful truth change how we live our lives?

We are forgiven through Christ. And our relationship to the law is different. We now are called to live lives that are pleasing to Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Paul calls this life being "led by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:18, NIV). This new life does not mean there is no need for the Ten Commandments. Of course we need them! After all, the moral law tells us what sin is. And God writes His law in our hearts (Hebrews 8:10).

The law shows us who God is. We show who God is by obeying His law. But the law is not just a set of rules. Obeying the law means following the example of Jesus. He does for us what the law never could do. He lives the law within us. He makes it possible for us to obey the law (Romans 8:4). And He gives us this power to obey the law as we never could before.

Read Romans 8:4. What is Paul saying here? How have you seen this promise take place in your own life? At the same time, why must salvation always be based only on what Christ does for us and nothing else?



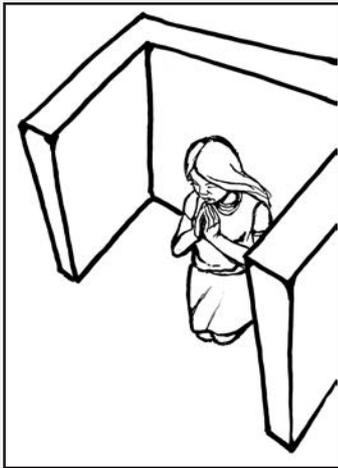
Jesus writes the law on our hearts and minds. He makes it possible for the law to be kept in us.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “I am asked which law it is in Galatians that Paul calls our teacher. Is it the law governing sacrifices or the Ten Commandments? I answer: it is both.

“Jesus became the foundation for the entire law of sacrifices. Those sacrifices pointed to His future death. The blood of the sacrifices was a symbol of Christ’s blood to be shed for the world at the cross. God planned the whole system of sacrifices to show humans how He would save them. But not everyone would accept this plan. For example, Abel died because Cain rejected God’s plan for being saved. Cain refused the shedding of blood in his behalf. For it taught that all humans are sinners in need of a Savior. But Abel accepted what Cain would not. And in this way, the law of sacrifices started its work as a schoolmaster. It brought sinful humans to Christ.

“All who took part in the service of sacrifices were being taught about Christ’s work of saving humans. The service was meant to create in every heart a love for God’s law. The law of God is the law of His kingdom.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 233.

“The Ten Commandments are not to be thought of as a set of negative rules. Instead they should be seen as a law of mercy. The rules of the law guarantee our happiness if we obey them. So, we must receive the law of Christ into our hearts. Then it will work in us to make us pure. And it will bring us joy in heaven. To those who obey the law, it is a wall of protection.”—Adapted, Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 235.



“To those who obey the law, it is a wall of protection.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① What promises does the Bible give of victory over sin? How can we make these promises real in our lives? At the same time, why must we be so careful that our hope of salvation fully rests on Christ’s victory for us?
- ② We often hear Christians say the law has been done away with. But these same Christians will speak out against sin. So they really do not mean the law is done away with at all. Instead, what do they mean by that claim? (Hint: Which commandment do they usually say we no longer need to obey?)

SUMMARY: The law was given to point sinners to Christ. The law is a guardian and schoolmaster. It teaches us about God and protects us from evil. But it also points out our sin. It shows us our guilt and our need of Christ.