

or “the only one.” Surely this is a statement of monotheism, but it is even more suited to Paul’s present argument in which he is contrasting the two differing types of covenant. Even as in the Shema in which the declaration that God is the “only one” (the only God), so when Paul connects this reality to the Abrahamic covenant, it means quite simply that He is the only one able to bring the covenant to fruition. But what is even more, He alone took the oath relative to the Abrahamic covenant, and thus is the only one within the covenant structure itself to accomplish its goals. There is no need to mediate the Abrahamic covenant between two parties of the covenant, because the success of the covenant depends entirely upon God alone.

We may conclude, then, that Paul’s point here is simply a buttressing of his original statement: a covenant made later cannot add to nor annul a previously ratified covenant. And since that previously ratified covenant, by its very nature, is dependent solely upon God’s faithfulness and omnipotence, we may be certain that it will, in fact, be completed. This means that God has set Himself to bring in the Gentiles as a matter of His grace (promise), not through them becoming Jews through a rabbinic ritual.

But it means even more than this: it means that the Torah is given as a “helper” to the Abrahamic covenant. The Torah’s purpose (as Paul will now show) is not to set aside the promise of the Abrahamic, nor to add stipulations to it, but to assure its success (cf. Genesis 18:17). In this way, the Torah is not contrary to the Abrahamic promise, nor does it in any way change the promise, but it comes to assist in bringing the promise to fruition. If we were to couch this in theological terms, we would parallel the Abrahamic promise to Paul’s teaching on justification, while the Mosaic covenant would be parallel to sanctification. The Influencers had these two confused: they were teaching the Gentile believers that entrance into the covenant of promise (justification) can only be achieved through adherence to their form of the Mosaic covenant (sanctification): they had the cart before the horse. But Paul would not have ever ventured to express a downgrade of sanctification! Growing in holiness is the result of justification, and a means of realizing covenant membership in its fullness. Sanctification is the inevitable result of justification, not the means of obtaining it.

----- *End of the Excursus* -----

21 Is the Torah then contrary to the promises of God?⁷² May it never be! For if a Torah had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on Torah.

Here Paul makes his point clear: his teaching about the Torah should not be received as saying that the Torah and the promise are somehow at odds. As Dunn remarks,

The response indicates clearly that Paul would deny the very antithesis between law and promise which so many infer from verse 20. On the contrary, the role of the law is consistent with, integrated into that of the

⁷² There is a variant in the Greek here: some manuscripts include “of God” and others do not. The majority of the oldest manuscripts include it, but Vaticanus (B) does not. The UBS editors include “of God” in the text but in brackets to show that it is questioned.

promise.⁷³

Indeed, Paul makes it crystal clear that the promises of God, which include blessing, salvation, protection, and the coming of Messiah to accomplish all of these, are not in any way distinct from nor contrary to the Torah. The two fit together to bring about God's purpose in redemption. The difficulty comes when one attempts to use the Torah in a way God never intended.

And what way would this be? To think that one's attempts at obeying the Torah would be received by God as a means to forgiveness of one's sins. Or to say it another way: that one could atone for his own transgressions through obedience to the Torah. To make it specific to the Galatians: to think that a Gentile would be received into the covenant on the basis of his obedience to Torah (both Written and Oral).

When Paul here speaks of "imparting life," he is obviously referring to "life as a covenant member," that is, life lived in the reality of sins forgiven and under the blessing of God. In short, Paul is speaking of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Forgiveness of sins goes hand in hand with the Torah written on the heart, clearly a work of the Spirit. But such a work of the Spirit is not earned nor gained through man's efforts, but by the sovereign grace of God reaching to the sinner, taking out the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh. God never intended by giving Israel the Torah, that it would be the means by which a change of heart could be effected—that the Torah, in and of itself, could impart righteousness. Had God intended that the Torah function in such a way, then clearly it would have done so, and righteousness would have been based upon Torah.

We should note that the word "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη, *dikaioisune*) has the definite article here.⁷⁴ While we may not be able to make too much of its use here, one might suggest that he includes the article in order to specify what he means by "righteousness," that is, the same righteousness that God reckoned to Abraham on the basis of his faith (3:6). This is also emphasized by the fact that in the two lines of our verse, "righteousness" stands as parallel to "impart life." No one would deny the fact that the Torah, when implemented into society, does in fact work a sort of righteousness (and thus the so-called "third use of the Law" delineated by the Reformers). But this is not the righteousness to which Paul refers here. He is speaking of being declared righteous by the King of all the earth—having one's heart changed in order to walk in His ways and actually grow in righteousness before Him. This the Torah could not do, because it was never designed for this purpose. As I have noted above, the Torah was given to a redeemed people. In the metaphor of redemption worked out in the history of Israel, the Torah is given to a people already redeemed, not in order to achieve their redemption. This is Paul's point. God gave the Torah for a specific purpose, that is, to teach and lead the redeemed people in the way in which they should go (Lev 18:1-5)—to constantly lead to the Messiah as the fullest revelation of God's will. The Torah is for covenant members; it is not a means of becoming a covenant member. Had God intended the Torah to function as a means of becoming a covenant member, then surely it would have succeeded in this mission, but it was not for this

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⁷³ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 192.

⁷⁴ The other three times Paul uses the term in Galatians, he does not include the article. Cf. Gal. 2:21; 3:6; 5:5.

purpose that the Torah was given.

22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Yeshua Messiah might be given to those who believe.

The singular use of the word “Scripture” (ἡ γραφή, *he grafe*) with the definite article could mean that Paul had a particular text in mind, but more likely he refers to the Scriptures as a whole, or at least the collective witness of the Scriptures. Here is yet another indication that by Paul’s time, the canon of Scripture was well enough fixed so that it could be referred to as a unified collection of books without further elaboration.

That the Scripture has “shut up everyone under sin” is very parallel to the thought of Romans 3 in which Paul, by stringing together a number of texts, proves from the Scriptures themselves that all men, both Jew and Gentile, are under the penalty of sin. “Shut up” (συγκλείω, *sugkleiō*, used only here in the Apostolic Scriptures) means “to confine” and also “to imprison.” It is the witness of the Scripture that all men, regardless of ethnicity or station in life, are in fact sinners, and therefore under the just penalty of their sin (“under sin”). They are “imprisoned” because left to themselves, they have no means by which to be made free. And the Torah itself offered no solution to this dilemma, for it gave no solution to overcome the power of sin. As Paul would teach in Romans (cf. 7:9-12), the Torah, rather than offering a solution for the power of sin, apart from the Spirit only was used by man to sin even further.

Thus, if anyone is to be free from the penalty of his sin, it is only because God has graciously stepped into his life and made a way for forgiveness. This is the “blessing” promised to the Gentiles as well, that “in your seed all the nations/families of the earth will be blessed.” That blessing is nothing short of the forgiveness of sins, and the impartation of life (=righteousness). But the means of this blessing, the avenue through which it flows, is faith: “by faith in Yeshua Messiah.” Paul has already shown that the promise is finally and ultimately fulfilled in Yeshua, and thus the blessings of the promise are to be found only in Him.

Some have suggested that the phrase “faith in Yeshua” should be translated “faithfulness of Yeshua.” In fact, the preposition “in” is not represented in the Greek (note the CJB: “on the basis of Yeshua the Messiah’s trusting faithfulness”). However, quite often “faith of Yeshua” means “faith in Yeshua.” And this is most likely how we should understand the phrase here. This whole section is essentially Paul’s exposition on 3:6 and Abraham’s faith which was reckoned as righteousness. There (Gen 15:6), the language is clearly “faith in,” and so we should understand it in this verse as well, it being no doubt a further explanation of that faith. Thus, “faith in Yeshua . . . to those who believe,” while being a tautology, is understandable in light of Paul’s argument and emphasis here.

Here the term “promise” is used in its broadest sense, i.e., of the salvation promised by God to all He would save. Since the promise given to Abraham included this ultimate blessing of salvation, to receive the “promise” in this context is to receive salvation from God’s hand. Since the Scriptures themselves showed conclusively that all people, without respect to ethnicity, are under the penalty of sin, the Scriptures likewise pointed the way to Messiah, the only means of acceptable atonement.

Thus, for Paul’s immediate argument, he has shown that the Torah was working in concert with the Abrahamic promise in order to bring it to fruition.

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23 But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Torah, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.

In the previous verse Paul has personified the Scriptures: it was the Scriptures that imprisoned man by declaring all mankind under the guilt of sin, being imprisoned by his inability to do anything about that condemning situation. Here, faith is personified as “coming.”

Many, not recognizing this metaphoric language (the personification of faith), have misunderstood the verse to be saying that there was a time when faith was non-existent, and that at a given point in time, “faith came.” But if we think about this for just a moment, it is clearly not what Paul means, for already in this epistle he has quoted Genesis 15:6 (in 3:6) in which it is stated that “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.” Remember that both in the Hebrew and Greek, the verb “believe” and the noun “faith” share (respectively) the same basic root word.⁷⁵ To say that Abraham “believed” God is the same as saying “Abraham had faith in God.” So Paul cannot be teaching here that before the coming of Yeshua, there was no saving faith! Such an interpretation of our verse should obviously be dismissed out of hand.

So then what does Paul mean by using the phrase “But before faith came ...”? First, we should note that the word “faith” (πίστις, *pistis*) here has the article, τὴν πίστιν, and thus perhaps more woodenly “Before the faith came ...” Secondly, in the context, Paul is speaking of the manner in which those without faith, come to faith. In his emphasis here, the question is how the Torah functions (“why then the Torah?” v. 19) in this process of bringing those who are imprisoned under sin to the place of forgiveness before God as His covenant people. Thirdly, then, it seems most natural to understand the phrase “before the faith came” to mean “before personal faith is exercised by those God saves.”

Paul includes himself in the scenario: “we were kept....” His own testimony no doubt figures into his explanation here and as such, his 1st person plural (“we”) may be understood as “we Jews.” There was a time when Paul, zealous for the Torah, was still without saving faith. In this state of unbelief (having rejected Yeshua as the Messiah), the Torah continued to function in the role of a custodian—it continued to point to Yeshua even though Paul’s eyes were blind to His glory contained in the Torah. The Torah “shut up” mankind, including the descendants of Jacob (the Jews), to Yeshua as the only answer, since the Torah both revealed the sinfulness of man’s heart, and offered no remedy for this sinfulness in and of itself. In other words, in pointing out sin but not prescribing a means by which the sin could effectively be overcome, the Torah guided the sinner to faith in Yeshua. Thus the Torah was not contrary to the righteousness granted by faith in Yeshua, but was rather a positive revelation of God’s method of declaring a person righteous. In this role of revealing God’s method of salvation, the Torah functioned precisely as God intended it to function.

The idea of “custody” (φουρέω, *phoureō*) can have a negative connotation, i.e., “hold in subjection,” and many commentators have taken it this way (paralleling “under sin” in the previous verse). But the word’s principal meaning is one of a positive nature: “to guard,” “watch over,” and in fact, the only other times the word is used (Phil 4:7 and 1Pet 1:5), it bears this

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⁷⁵ Hebrew: אָמַן / אָמַן; Greek: πίστις / πιστεύω

positive meaning:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Messiah Yeshua. (Phil 4:7)

who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1Pet 1:5)

In fact, in forcing the sinner to see his sin as God sees it, the Torah functions in a positive role to reveal the means of salvation in Yeshua.

The NASB is somewhat misleading when it translates “being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.” More literally it would be: “being shut up to the faith which was about to be revealed.” The translation of μέλλω, *mellō*, by “later” plays into the misinterpretation that faith did not exist before the coming of Yeshua, and that it was only revealed “later,” i.e., after the appearance of the Messiah. Rather, the idea here is that the Torah pushed the sinner to the Messiah and that therefore, for the one who was awakened by the Spirit through the revealed truth of the Torah, faith was “just around the corner.” The word itself simply denotes something that takes place subsequent to another event.⁷⁶

In terms of the promise given to Abraham, then, the Torah functioned in a positive role to lead sinners to the Seed, that is, to Yeshua the Messiah. Paul will now give further clarification of this role of the Torah.

24–26 Therefore the Torah 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. For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Paul now employs the metaphor of a pedagogue (παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*) to explain this role of the Torah. The translation “tutor” is not the best. The word *paidagōgos* literally means “a boy leader.” “The image is that of the slave who conducted a boy to and from school.”⁷⁷ He was not a teacher, but a custodian to bring the boy to his teacher. This is the role of the Torah which Paul here wishes to emphasize. It is not the only role, mind you, but the one that best fits Paul’s current argument. Thus, the Torah was given charge over Israel, and all who would join Israel, to lead them to Yeshua in whom there is justification by faith. Like a boy in a hostile society who needed to be guarded as he journeyed to his teacher, so Israel, surrounded by the paganism and idolatry of the Ancient Near East, needed the Torah to guard them and bring them to Messiah. Here, then, is a remarkable statement of Paul: one of the roles of the Torah is to teach justification by faith!

But what does he mean by the statement in v. 25, that since faith has now come, there is no longer any need for the pedagogue? Has the Torah run its course, and therefore offers no further value in the life of the believer? Is Paul here suggesting that the Torah has depleted its usefulness? Hardly! And it is only a severely negative perspective that would suggest such a meaning here. If one already has the prejudiced view that the Torah is bad and that it is a temporary evil designed to be replaced when Yeshua came, then it is easy to

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⁷⁶ BDAG, “μέλλω”.

⁷⁷ Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 198; see BDAG, παιδαγωγός. ESV has “guardian,” NIV has “put in charge,” both of which are much better than NASB, “tutor.”

read the verse in this negative light. But if one understands Paul's overall argument here, no such reading is possible.

Paul is addressing his remarks primarily to the Influencers. They were saying that the Gentiles needed to enter the covenant by conforming to their view of the Torah, that is, the Torah as written and oral, which included the requirement for Gentiles to become proselytes. Paul's point is that the Gentiles are already covenant members by faith in Yeshua. He knew this from personal experience, since he had witnessed their confession of faith, and the manifested presence of the Spirit as proof of their conversion. To cast the matter in the manner of the metaphor, the Gentile believers had already arrived to the Teacher (Yeshua). They did not need the Torah to function as a pedagogue to lead them there. Taken in this light, we should read the verse as meaning: "The Torah functions as a custodian to lead the sinner to Yeshua. You have already come to Yeshua through faith, and therefore the Torah no longer functions in this role for you." That this is Paul's primary conclusion is clear from v. 26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua."

But this does not negate the fact that the Torah continues to function in this custodial role for those who have not yet come to faith. Surely the revelation of God, contained in the Torah, which showed God's method of declaring a sinner righteous, still functions to point people to Messiah. Furthermore, in 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 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.

Moreover, initial faith in Yeshua must be nurtured so that it might grow and increase, and the Torah aids in such growth since it is the revelation of God, His method of declaring sinners righteous, and teaches what God defines as righteous living. The Torah therefore instructs the forgiven sinner by showing how to grow in likeness to the Messiah. While the function of leading the sinner to the "Teacher" may no longer be needed (since he has already come to Him), the role of the Torah as teacher (a role Paul does not emphasize here) in revealing the full work and purpose of the Messiah continues on (cf. Rom 8:5ff).

So the conclusion of Paul's argument here is stated straightforward in v. 26, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Messiah Yeshua." The Gentile believers at Galatia are in no need of a ritual of proselytism, a "works of the Torah" kind of entrance into the covenant—they are already full-fledged covenant members because they have been granted faith in Messiah Yeshua.

Note the switch from 1st person plural "we" (vv. 23, 24, 25) to 2nd person plural "you" in this verse. Paul has demonstrated that the Torah functioned primarily to lead Israel to Yeshua, since Israel was the only nation to which the Torah was originally given (thus "we"). But the sudden switch to "you" (which denotes the Gentile believers) emphasizes the central theme of Paul's argument, that the believing Gentiles have equal covenant status with the Jews who have believed. The stress is on "You are sons of God."

Paul uses the phrase “sons of God” only two other times, Romans 8:14, 19. In all three of these instances, he is describing the covenant relationship that believers have with the one true God of Israel. This description of believers as “sons of God” given to the believing Gentiles puts them within the scope of Israel as God’s firstborn son (Ex 4:22) and thus as sharing in all of the covenant promises and responsibilities granted to God’s chosen people.

This granted covenant position is “through faith in Messiah Yeshua.” Even as Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him for righteousness, so the Gentiles have believed and they too stand righteous before God, for they have been reckoned righteous on the basis of Messiah work for them. His payment for sin, sealed in the resurrection as accepted by the Father, and His now sitting in the place of authority where He intercedes for His own—all of this accrues to the salvation of the elect, of which the Gentiles are a part.

This covenant position, obtained by faith in Messiah Yeshua, is now further explained in the following verses.

27 For all of you who were baptized into Messiah have clothed yourselves with Messiah.

Paul speaks of “all of you who were baptized.” The language may indicate that he expected visitors to be present who may not have considered themselves part of the believing community.

The word “baptize” is simply a transliteration of the Greek word βαπτίζω, *baptizō* and meant to immerse in water. The Hebrew word of the 1st Century that denoted such an immersion was מִקְוֵה, *mikveh*. Judging by the numerous ritual baths discovered in Jerusalem and throughout the Land of Israel, it is clear that in the time of Yeshua as well as His Apostles, the use of the *mikveh* was prevalent. The Torah requires immersion in water as the conclusion of purification for various kinds of ritual impurity (cf. Lev. 11:32,36; 14:8; 15:8,13; 17:15; Num. 8:7; 19:12,18-19; 31:23). Moreover, in the Judaisms of the 1st Century, a *mikveh* had become part of the ritual for the proselyte. John the Immerser called the people to repentance in view of the coming Kingdom, and ask them to manifest their preparation of soul by undergoing a *mikveh*.

In general, the *mikveh* of 1st Century Judaisms marked a change of status, primarily from the state of ritual impurity to that of ritual purity.⁷⁸ Thus, the name “*mikveh*” is derived from the word meaning “hope” (*tikvah*), the waters of purification being that place of “hope” where one intended to acquire the status of ritually pure. This primary meaning, a change of status, worked perfectly for demonstrating metaphorically the change of status for those who placed their faith in Yeshua. The immersion marked the cleansing of one’s soul from the weight of sin, and the acceptance of Yeshua’s sacrifice as sufficient for payment of one’s debt. In this way, “baptism” in the Apostolic Scriptures combines both the ritual act (the actual immersion in water) with the metaphoric and spiritual reality, the change of status from guilty to not guilty, from unrighteous to righteous. Unfortunately, in the emerging Christian Church, the ritual act itself was infused with an efficacy which neither the Scriptures nor Yeshua had given it. Like the sacrifices in the Temple which could never atone for sin but which were metamorphosed by the priestly theology into something that supposedly could wash away sin, so immersion was turned into a

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⁷⁸ For further study on the *mikveh* in late 2nd Temple Judaisms, see the excursus in my *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (TorahResource, 2007), pp. 75–82.

saving act by man's theology.

In Paul's day, and in the experience of the Galatians, however, the immersion "in the name of Messiah" (cf. Matt 28:19f for a baptismal formula in "the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit"⁷⁹) was a ritual act that manifested the inward faith of those who had believed. This confession with the mouth that revealed the belief of one's heart (Rom 10:9-10) was considered the decisive moment at which a person placed his faith in the atoning work of the Messiah. As such, Paul could reference the *mikvaot* of the Galatians as proof that they had, indeed, confessed Yeshua to be their Messiah and Savior, and thus as proof that they were joined to the faithful of Israel as God's covenant people.

The result of their confession of Yeshua as Messiah was that they had "clothed themselves with Messiah." Literally, the Greek says simply: "have put on Messiah." Once again, it is clear that Paul is speaking in metaphoric language. The idea is of putting on clean clothes, a metaphor used in the Tanach. For instance, in Isaiah 61:10 the prophet speaks of being clothed "with the garments of salvation," and Zechariah talks of Joshua the priest being stripped of his filthy clothes and dressed in clean, priestly garments, all of which is symbolic of taking away iniquity (Zech 3:1ff). To be clothed with Yeshua, then, is to identify with Him in His righteousness; to have one's clothes, filthy with sin, removed and the pure, clean garments of holiness donned in exchange.

Here is true identity—being "in Messiah Yeshua." The life which Paul argues is the possession of the Galatian believers is one of identity, first and foremost with their Messiah. That the Influencers were denying this identity apart from "the works of the Torah" was to shift the identity from being "in Messiah" to being approved by man. This Paul could never allow.

But we should also note that for Paul, genuine faith involved "putting on the Lord Yeshua Messiah" (Rom 13:14), meaning that the righteous life of Yeshua becomes the life of His disciple as well—there can be no provision made for the flesh. Paul knows no faith that is devoid of faithfulness. If the Influencers were fearful that acceptance of the Gentiles purely on the basis of their confession would result in a diminished practical holiness of life, they were sorely mistaken. Paul understands that the change of status envisioned by the "*mikveh* into Messiah" is an inward reality that inevitably manifests itself in daily *halachah*. The Gentiles did not need to undergo a ritual of proselytism in order to assure the community that they would walk righteously and godly in the present age. They had "put on Messiah," and His life of Torah obedience lived out in humble faith to God was the pattern for all who called themselves His disciples.

⁷⁹ Some have questioned the textual integrity of Matt 28:19, supposing that the phrase "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" was a later addition. There is, however, no real textual support to exclude the phrase, and overwhelming textual evidence for its authenticity. See my essay, "Matthew 28:19—A Textual Critical Evaluation," available at www.torahresource.com/ArticlesEnglish.html.