



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Law's Built-In Obsolescence

GALATIANS 3:23-25

3/5/13

Don Garner / PO Box 302703, Austin, TX 78703 / Don.Garner@capitolcom.org

INTRODUCTION

You are probably aware of, and at times frustrated by, what is commonly called built-in obsolescence. Built-in obsolescence is intentionally designing a product to become obsolete, that is, to cease to be functional or to go out of style after a certain period of time. Engineers design products in this way to prompt a consumer to desire and obtain the newer and better product. Much of the time, newer is actually better.

Paul speaks of the law as obsolete in view of that which is new—justification by faith in Christ. Paul makes use of a metaphor in these few verses involving a young man being under a guardian until he reaches the age of majority. That guardian provides the supervision, protection, direction, and training necessary to the young man's grooming for the responsibilities of manhood. Yet once the young man reaches manhood, he is no longer under the guardian. In a sense the guardian has become obsolete to the young man.

Galatians 3:23-25 (NKJV)

²³ 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.

THE LAW WAS TEMPORAL (23)

Paul brackets this metaphor with the phrases “But before faith came” and “But after faith has come.” Time is emphasized here with “before” indicating the period during which the law was designed to function and “after” being the point in time when it ceased to function. The purpose of the law was temporal. It was designed to function for a certain period of time—from the time it was given until “the faith which would afterward be revealed.”

Faith is not the revelation referenced here. It is the explicit object of faith that was revealed. Faith was always the only basis for justification before God. But when Christ came, He provided the explicit object for faith toward God.

...kept for the faith which would
afterward be revealed...

In God's progressive revelation of His ultimate plan to redeem fallen mankind, He placed man under the law for a certain period of time. The law guarded and confined the activity of the people of God. The law foreshadowed the sacrifice necessary for redemption. These guarded the faith of God's people until the revelation of the One coming to provide ultimate justification before God—justification by faith.

THE LAW WAS PREPATORY (24)

Paul's metaphor becomes clear as he concludes that the law then acted as our “tutor.” This rendering may be misleading to the English reader. The Greek term, from

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS ONLY: TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY: FRIDAY BREAKFAST @ 8AM IN MEMBERS' LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Texas

The Law's Built-In Obsolescence

which we derive our term “pedagogy” does not have a clear equivalent in English. In the New Testament era, a Greek man in the role of pedagogue was not necessarily a teacher at all. He was likely a slave who served as an attendant to a young man.

...the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ...

He would accompany the young man to his classes and oversee the completion of his studies. He was generally tasked with making sure that the young man behaved himself. In many cases, his role included that of disciplinarian. The word pedagogue literally meant to lead a boy to manhood. He was to assist the young man in the preparations for life as a mature, responsible adult. The goal of the law, as our pedagogue, was to prepare us to be justified by faith in Christ.

THE LAW WAS OBSOLETE (25)

Paul now makes the meaning of the metaphor abundantly clear—we are no longer under the law. “But after faith has come,” speaks of the fact that the explicit object of our faith has been revealed. The person and work of Christ, the very essence of the gospel preached by Paul among them, is the faith he places before our attention. Christ has come to redeem us from the curse of the law and bring us into the promise of Abraham. He is the fulfillment of all the righteousness found in the law and the reality behind every shadow of the law’s sacrificial system.

...we are no longer under a tutor.

After faith (Christ) has come, we are no longer under a tutor (the law). The young man, having reached the age of majority—legal age—is no longer subject to the direction of the pedagogue. Likewise, those who have come to faith in Christ are no longer subject to the law. It is noteworthy that the Temple was destroyed and the Jews scattered shortly after God revealed the Messiah. What a compounding of the law’s obsolescence!

CONCLUSION

Do you recognize the temporal nature of the law? Do you see that it is not meant to be functional in this era of grace? Do you appreciate the function of the law as preparing us to receive grace? The law clearly identifies sin and demonstrates to each of us that we are sinners. The law drives home the seriousness of sin and judgment. The law makes us desire that which came after... Our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ!