

## What does Paul Make of the Law in Galatians

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Veritas Class  
College Church  
March 19, 2023



**Sarcophagus of the Twelve Apostles**  
Ravenna, Italy (AD 5<sup>th</sup> century)

But still, the law itself is holy, and its commands are holy and right and good. (Rom 7:12, NLT)

### A. Introduction (Acts 15:1, 5)

1. The Importance of *nomos* in Galatians
2. The Standard Approach to Paul's Treatment of the Law
3. The Popular Significance of Circumcision in Paul's Thinking

### B. What would Moses say about the Popular Approach to Paul's Treatment of the Law?

1. The name Deuteronomy (second law?)
2. The etymology of *Torah*
3. The semantic range in Deuteronomy
4. The nature of Moses's activity in Deuteronomy: "teaching"

### C. Options for interpreting *ho nomos* ("the law") in Galatians and the rest of the New Testament

1. Law in general (5:23, 6:2)
2. An individual law (5:23)
3. The law as a body of covenant revelation (3:17, 18, 19, 21[3x], 23, 24; 4:4, 5:14; 6:13)
4. The covenant stipulations (Mosaic law) + the oral Torah (2:16[3x], 19, 21; 3:2, 5, 10a, 11, 12, 13; 4:21; 5:3, 4)
5. The transcribed speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy (3:17, 18, 19, 21[3x], 23, 24; 4:4; 5:14; 6:13)
6. The book of Deuteronomy (3:10b)
7. The Pentateuch (Rom 3:21)

### D. Principles for Interpreting Paul's Use of *nomos*

1. Recognize the multivalence of the expression.
2. Deal with each occurrence in its literary context.

### *Hearing Galatians with Moses*

3. Recognize the theological unity of Scripture, which means that God cannot inspire an author to comment on a theological or scriptural matter and then contradict that statement, explicitly or implicitly.
4. If it appears that Paul contradicts Moses ask whether you may have missed something in the earlier text that he addresses, but do not force an unnatural meaning on it based upon Paul's usage of the notion.
5. Where apparent contradictions occur, ask Paul, what it was about his audience and his argument that triggered this awkward and stretched use of a plain First Testament text.

#### **E. Four Specific Issues**

1. The Works of the Law (2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10)
2. Desiring to be "under the law" (3:23; 4:4-5; 4:21; 5:18)
3. The Law as *Pedagogue* (3:19-25)
4. The Curse of the Law (3:7-13)