

In the classic movie, *Mary Poppins*, Julie Andrews plays a no-nonsense, yet delightful, nanny to two young children, Jane and Michael Banks. As a nanny to a wealthy family, she is part teacher, part parent, and part disciplinarian. She gets the children up in the morning, puts them to bed at night, supervises their many adventures, and guides them in many ways. While they are in her care, she is responsible for their overall safety and well-being.

In the ancient world, wealthy Greek and Roman families would assign this kind of responsibility to a slave called a *paidagogos*. It is from this word that we get the English word pedagogy, the art and science of teaching, and the noun pedagogue, a teacher.

The *paidagogos* was usually an older male slave, charged with the responsibility of caring for a young boy through childhood into adulthood. At times, he might need to be a disciplinarian; at other times more of a teacher; at other times more of a supervisor. It was an important role, but also a temporary one that ended once his young charge reached adulthood.

In Galatians 3:24, the apostle Paul calls the law a *paidagogos*. In some English translations, this word appears as "disciplinarian"; in others, it's translated more broadly as "schoolmaster" or "guardian." But like the *paidagogos* of a wealthy family, the law was really more than any of those things. It provided discipline, teaching, supervision, and overall caretaking — but only for a time.

The Catechism says of this word *paidagogos*,:

***Like a tutor it shows what must be done, but does not of itself give the strength, the grace of the Spirit, to fulfill it. Because of sin, which it cannot remove, it remains a law of bondage.*¹**

The Catechism also points out:

***This divine pedagogy appears especially in the gift of the Law. God gave the Law as a "pedagogue" to lead his people towards Christ.⁷³ But the Law's powerlessness to save man deprived of the divine "likeness," along with the growing awareness of sin that it imparts, enkindles a desire for the Holy Spirit.*²**

Here is another way to think about this. Without the law our conscience can help discern between right and wrong but only is a vague sort of way. However once the Law is given there is a new dimension of awareness and what was once vague become clear.

¹ Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., p. 476). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

² Catholic Church. (2000). *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd Ed., p. 187). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

Let's think about this concretely. A person reads for the first time the commandment that says: "Thou shalt not commit adultery". He or she says, got that once. I have never cheated on my spouse. But now this person goes over to the New Testament and reads these words of Jesus. He happens to read it in a contemporary language version where it is made even more explicit:

You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your heart can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your body. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.³

Now the disciplinarian of the law, the divine pedagogue is really speaking to his heart. Not only is he aware of lust, he also admits that he habitually looks at pornography. He realizes that he is so need of the mercy and grace of Jesus that he goes to Confession because his lustful habit is indeed a mortal sin.

He needs not only the place to truly admit his sin but even more to hear Jesus' words of mercy and forgiveness, so that empowered by the Holy Spirit he can choose to clothe himself in the grace of Christ rather than in the disgrace of disordered sexual desire. If all we have is the judgement of the Law, we would stand condemned. But Paul says we are now justified by faith. In other words we cannot justify our sinful disorientation but our faith in the mercy of Jesus does justify us.

I like the way this is put in the Message,

But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise.⁴

The Law brings to mind the influence of power of sin in our lives. But this in turn brings us to Christ so that we no longer need to live childishly.

We discover that we are part of this universal family where we are all one in Christ and stand before him equally because we all need his mercy and grace. Those who day by day are appropriating that mercy are discovering how incrementally day by day we are more able to both hear and do the will of Jesus.

³ Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Mt 5:27–28). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

⁴ Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: the Bible in contemporary language* (Ga 3:25–27). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.