



The Band

My friend Dave's well-worn hollow-body guitar had been electric—until his brother gutted it. But it was nevertheless a guitar. Being 15 and not too discerning, I traded for it with my old electric train, which no longer interested me. A few months and lots of practice later, three high school buddies and I formed a band. After a few weeks of practice, we began playing for dances.

We were the quintessential mid-60s garage band. There followed nearly two intoxicating years of gigs, rehearsals, stagecraft, warnings from police to keep our volume down, creative conflicts, setting up and taking down of equipment and some shabby musical arranging—all the while keeping up with school and other activities.

Then came graduation, and we went our various ways—to college, work or the service. At least one band mate (Otis) opted to stay in the game. He dove headlong into the local band scene. The next year when I came home from college on spring break, he had become an accomplished musician but had gone full psychedelic. I recall him declaring, “Anything that wants to can grow on me!”

Not long after that, during his physical exam for the draft, he suffered a genuine cardiac event from the sheer level of exotic substances in his system. Someone reported him flashing a grinning thumbs up as he was trundled away on a gurney to the ER. Of course he was rejected from the service and free to continue his reckless ways. Yet just a couple of years later Otis turned a sudden 180, sold all his instruments and returned to his Mormon roots. As far as I know, he is a dedicated church and family man to this day.

I'm sure his parents applauded his decision. Others, myself included, wondered if his return to such an authoritarian institution amounted to more bondage than the addictions/excesses of his psychedelic days.

But I should talk. My own high school years had been no shining example of virtue

(although somehow I managed to graduate with honors). After all, I had the use of a car, lots of freedom, girlfriends, the rush of being a rocker on a stage and a few bucks in my pocket. What more could a 17-year old guy want? I was not exactly looking forward to four years of incarceration at a strict religious college, but I applied because I believed it was “the right thing to do.” (Once I settled in, I actually enjoyed my college years, learning a profession and meeting a girl I'd later marry.)

Years afterward I would understand that Otis and I had done just about the same thing. Whether from a sense of guilt, obligation or fear, we had dutifully traded a freewheeling lifestyle for the guardianship of religion.

Many of us go through times of freedom, possibly followed by seasons of restraint after we abused the freedom. I think those times of restraint might be similar to something the Apostle Paul discussed in his letter to the Galatians—regarding the difference between the Old Testament law and faith in Christ. *“Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith”* (Galatians 3:23-24).

Because this passage is poorly translated in some versions, some folks mistakenly believe that Old Testament law leads us to Christ. Some even advocate preaching the Law as sort of a foundation in order to terrorize people into repentance. This is pointless! Christ himself is the only true foundation and God draws us to him (John 6:44). About the only thing the law and religious regulations can maybe do is to help keep us from destroying ourselves until such time as we accept Christ's invitation into genuine freedom.

The final verse in that passage nails Paul's concept: *“Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian”* (Galatians 3:25). □

—Monte Wolverton