

'All Greek To Me' : Out Of Action

Καταργέω *katargeō kat-arg-eh'-o*

From: 'kata' - completely and 'argos' - idle, inactive. 'Kata' turns up in many English words, such as catastrophe ('complete turning'), catalyst ('complete breaking up'), cataclysm ('complete washout'). 'Argos' in lethargy ('forgetful inactivity'). 'Slow' or 'idle' in modern Greek. The first inert gas to be discovered was called argon, because it didn't do anything! (It is now used in welding and lighting.)

Meaning: To render inoperative, abolish, be or render entirely idle or useless, literally or figuratively.

Translated as: abolish, bring to an end, cease, deliver, destroy, do away, become (make) of no (none, without) effect, fade away, fail, loose, bring (come) to nought, nullify, passing away, put away (down), released, removed, render powerless, severed, vanish away, make void, use up.

All but two of the New Testament uses of this word are in Paul's letters. The Lord Jesus used it in his parable about the unfruitful fig tree in **Luke 13:7**: "Cut it down!" the vineyard owner says to the vineyard keeper, "Why does it even **use up** the ground?" By 'using it up', this fruitless tree is making the ground completely ineffective when it could be used for something fruitful.

In **Hebrews 2:14-15**, the writer says: "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook* of the same, so that through death He might **render powerless*** the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free* those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." (Many translations have 'destroy' instead of 'render powerless'.)

When we think of Jesus 'destroying' the devil, that may seem like a long-term goal which will only happen in the distant future, and the word 'might' makes it seem remote and, although possible, probably unlikely in our experience. A better translation could be '. . . in order, through death, to **put out of action*** the one who has the power of death . . .'

When we see the true meaning as 'put out of action', the whole thing jumps into the present day and our own daily experience! Jesus shared in our human flesh and blood so that by dying he could **put out of**

action the one who has the power of death (the devil), and free those who through fear of death would otherwise be subject to slavery all their lives. Present-day release on the basis of the victory of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus! Because Satan **was put out of action** by Jesus' death. Result: We do not need to be in slavery all our lives! Now! Present day!

Another small but significant point: Did you notice the asterisks (*) next to some of the words from *Hebrews*? I have put those in to mark the aorist tense. What's that? It's when an action takes place once for all, when something is **finished and done**. For example, if I say 'We moved house', that is the aorist, and it speaks of an event that is finished and done. If I say 'We have moved house', that's an event that has only just happened and is not quite so finished. (The 'perfect' tense, in case you want to know!) It's significant that all those asterisked words speak of things that are DONE! Go back and think about them again. I'll go on marking aorists with asterisks as we move on . . .

Paul uses this word *katargeo* to great effect to drive home the reality of the release that we have been given through being joined to Jesus. At the end of these notes, there is a complete list of the New Testament passages where this word is used, but here are a few examples. I have highlighted in **bold** type the words that translate *katargeo* . . .

"Knowing this, that our old self was crucified* with him, in order that our body of sin might be **done away with***, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin." (*Romans 6:6*) 'Done away with' again sounds like something that MIGHT happen in the future. In reality, what Paul is saying is that our old life is over because we have been joined to the death of Jesus and our 'body of sin' (i.e. our continuing slavery to failure and wrongdoing) has already been **put out of action!**

There's release from slavery again! And release is a continuing theme with this word . . .

"But now we have been **released*** from the Law, having died* to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." (*Romans 7:6*) Years ago, when I was reading this in the Revised Standard Version, these words hit me: "But now we are **discharged*** from the law, dead* to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new

life of the Spirit.” ‘Discharged’, ‘released’ – YES! The power of law has been **put out of action** in our lives because we are in Christ and joined to his death.

In **2 Corinthians 3**, Paul compares his own service in presenting the good news with the service of Moses in delivering the ‘Ten Commandments’ and says that if the ‘ministry of condemnation’ came with glory, then the ‘ministry of righteousness’ overflows with much more glory. See how this word ‘put out of action’ is used in slightly different ways through this passage: “But if the ministry of death, engraved in letters on stones, came with glory so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, **fading** as it was, how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory? For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, much more does the ministry of righteousness excel in glory. For indeed what had glory in this case has no glory, because of the glory that surpasses it. For if that which **fades away** was with glory, much more that which remains is in glory. Therefore, having such a hope, we use great boldness in speech, and not like Moses, who used to put a veil over his face so that the sons of Israel would not stare at the end of what was **fading away**. But their minds were hardened; for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remains unlifted, because it is **removed** in Christ.” (**2 Corinthians 3:7-14**)

I can understand how the translators wanted to find a phrase that expressed what was happening here, but the believers in Corinth who read this letter (in the original Greek) will have understood that Paul was writing about the old covenant being **put out of action**. He uses this same word, which has been translated ‘fade away’ as well as ‘remove’. The glory that showed on Moses’ face was fading away – being put out of action.

The original purpose of the face covering that Moses wore was apparently so that the Israelites would not be terrified by the glory of God that was shining from his skin. (See **Exodus 34:29-35**) Even though that awesome glory gradually faded, Moses still kept his face covered, because even the fading glory was too much to look at. Now, says Paul, when people read the old covenant – the rules and laws that God gave through Moses – it’s like the glory is covered up and hidden by a face covering. That covering – those same rules and laws which

obscure the glory of God – is removed, **put out of action** in Christ, so that the glory of God is revealed! And this glory, says Paul, does not fade away, does not get **put out of action**. It remains, continues, endures. He uses the same word that Jesus uses in **John 15:4** : ‘abide’.

One last example that tells us clearly that the Lord Jesus **has already done away with** disunity! Really? YES! “For He Himself is our peace, who made* both one and broke down* the barrier of the dividing wall, by **abolishing*** in His flesh the hostility, the Law of commandments in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two one new person, establishing peace; and that He might reconcile* them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death* the hostility.” (**Ephesians 2:14-16**)

Hostility – in their case, between Jew and Gentile; in our case, perhaps denominations or special loyalties – was **put out of action** by the death of Jesus. Done ‘once for all’ and still effective today!

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Here are all the New Testament passages where this word is used. With each reference, I have noted the word that is used to translate it in the New American Standard Version (1995). Other translations may use different words, but you should be able to work out what they are.

As you look them up (and please do!), try inserting the basic meaning of the word, to ‘put out of action’ or ‘make inoperative’. I think you will find some fresh understanding as you read . . .

Luke 13:7 – ‘use up’. **Romans 3:3, 3:31, 4:14** – ‘nullify’. **Romans 6:6*** – ‘done away with’. **Romans 7:2, 7:6*** – ‘released’. **1 Corinthians 1:28*** – ‘nullify’. **1 Corinthians 2:6** – ‘passing away’. **1 Corinthians 6:13, 13:8, 13:10, 13:11** – ‘do away (with)’. **1 Corinthians 15:24*, 15:26** – ‘abolish’. **2 Corinthians 3:7, 3:11, 3:13** – ‘fade (away)’. **2 Corinthians 3:14** – ‘removed’. **Galatians 3:17*** – ‘nullify’. **Galatians 5:4*** – ‘severed’. **Galatians 5:11** – ‘abolished’. **Ephesians 2:15*** – ‘abolishing’. **2 Thessalonians 2:8** – ‘bring to an end’. **2 Timothy 1:10*** – ‘abolished’. **Hebrews 2:14*** – ‘render powerless’.

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