

## ***“The Promise Received Through Faith”***

February 13, 2011

Text: Galatians 3:10-14

**In today’s text (Gal 3:10-14), Paul deals with the awesome words found in Deut 27:26, which he translates as=>**

***“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.”***

A “curse” is a statement of condemnation which has intrinsic power to destroy.

E.g. in Num 22, a Moabite king named Balak hired a prophet named Balaam to curse Israel, saying=> *“Please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed”* (Num 22:6).

God told Balaam (Num 22:12)=> *“You shall **not** curse the people; for they are blessed.”*

When God, who brought worlds into existence with a word, speaks a curse against any living creature, it dies.

E.g. in Mt 21:19, Jesus cursed a fig tree=> *“Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it, and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He said to it, ‘No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you.’ And at once the fig tree withered.”*

**In Deut 27:26, God’s curse on everyone who doesn’t obey His Law has powerful implications for several reasons=>**

1) God is the One speaking it, so it’s not merely a man’s words.

2) It allows for no exemptions=> ***“CURSED IS EVERYONE.”***

It applies to ministers/missionaries just as it applies to muggers/murderers.

It applies to Mother-Teresa/a-harlot, president/vagabonds.

3) It is endless, giving no breaks, “time-outs”, or end-points (other than death).

***“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE”*** (continue obeying the Law forever).

Man is on trial from conception to death, & any one slip-up during that entire time places him under God’s curse.

4) It allows no exceptions=> ***“CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW.”***

It doesn’t help to say, “I break the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandment & covet once in awhile, but I never violate the biggies like murder/theft/adultery.”

Jms 2:10=> *“Whoever keeps the whole law & yet stumbles in **one point**, he has become guilty of all.”*

- \* Besides that, Jesus said that anyone who hates another person is guilty of murder (the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment) from the Law's p.o.v.
- \* Besides that, those are just the negative commands, behind which lie the positive commands to love God with our whole heart/soul/mind/strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves—no-exceptions, no-mistakes, no-downtime.

5) It is stated in the present tense=> "*CURSED IS EVERYONE.*"

It's not talking about those condemned at the Final Judgment.

God is saying that those who don't obey every detail of His Law, all the time, are cursed right now.

They are living their lives under a curse which will eventually/inevitably catch up with their souls.

Charles Spurgeon=> "If the unsaved could really understand and believe this, they would hardly keep their seats. If you are not by Christ redeemed from the curse of the Law; if you have not, by faith, appropriated His great sacrifice, you are under the present curse of God."

It's good to realize that now, because deathbeds are terrible places to discover one is under God's curse.

**As Paul deals with the truth of God's curse in today's text (Gal 3:10-14), he will tell us how *not to become justified*, and then he will tell us *how to become justified*.**

Only justification can solve the dilemma of man's curse.

As you'll remember from our past studies, to be *justified* means to be declared righteous by God, and therefore no longer under His curse.

The question is, "How do I attain such justification?" But first=>

**\* How Not to Be Justified**

Put simply, the way to not become justified is to depend on your own righteousness/obedience to God's Law to save you from the curse.

The Law curses everyone; it spares no one and it saves no one—ever.

**[Galatians 3:10]=> "For as many as are *of the works of the Law* [those who are trusting in their Law-conforming works to save their souls] *are under a curse*; for it is written [Here's Paul's quotation of Deut 27:26], '*CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.*'"**

This is counter-intuitive!

You would think it would say, "Those who are really trying to obey the 10 Commandments are good people and the curse doesn't apply to them."

But it says the opposite of that.

**Let me remind you again, that Paul is writing to some Galatian Xns who have been deceived by the Judaizers into thinking they must obey the Law to be saved.**

He has just shown that justification/righteousness come by faith.

Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness;

And we too are justified by believing, as Abraham did.

Having demonstrated what faith can accomplish, Paul now shows what obedience to the Law cannot accomplish, further ramping up his attack on the Judaizers' false teaching.

They, like their Jewish cousins, thought they could make themselves righteous thru their own morality.

By quoting Deut 27:26, Paul is pointing out that those who trust the Law to save them, are obligated to keep the whole Law, without exception and without fail.

That is something fallen man simply cannot do, because he is lawless by nature, & enslaved to his sin.

Therefore, Rom 3:10 says=> *“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE.”*

So man always inevitably fails to obey the Law, which results in the Law cursing everyone, w/o exception.

**This makes the Law sound like something bad, but it's really holy/good.**

Rom 7:12=> *“The Law is **holy**, and the commandment is holy and **righteous and good.**”*

The Law has to be good, because it is an expression of the moral character of God Himself—who is perfect.

Ironically, in its original context, Deut 27:26 (which Paul quotes), describes the glory/joy of life lived as man's Creator intended that he should live.

It is living as God Himself lives.

And it's living the way glorified saints in heaven live.

God's Law is the true believer's joy.

Psa 119:97=> *“O how I **love** Thy **law**! It is my meditation all the day.”*

Paul (Rom 7:22)=> *“I joyfully **concur** with the **law** of God in the inner man.”*

If we could live our lives without murder/theft/deception because we loved our fellow-man as God does...

And if we could live in perpetual devotion to the Lord, doing nothing to dishonor His name, because we loved Him wholeheartedly...

Life on earth would duplicate life in heaven, fulfilling Jesus' prayer=> *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”* (Mt 6:10).

This is what Moses had promised Israel if they would obey the Lord's commands (Deut 30:19-20)=> *“I have set before you **life** and death, the*

*blessing and the curse. So choose **life** in order that you may **live**, you and your descendants, / by loving the LORD your God, by **obeying His voice**, and by holding fast to Him.”*

**So why does the Law seem to us as if it were something negative/bad?**

It's all a matter of perspective, like our perspective of the sun.

From our p.o.v., the sun seems to circle around the earth.

But the earth's rotation just makes it appear that way.

In reality, we are circling around the sun.

In the same way, the moral near-sightedness caused by our sin makes God's Law appear bad/harmful to us, when in reality it is perfectly good.

The evil is in our view of the Law—our sinful lawlessness.

Psa 19:7 says the law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul, but our sinful desire for independence from God rebels against His Law's moral authority.

We fail, we sin, and so we fall under the curse of the Law.

Anyone who is what Paul describes as “*of the works of the Law*” (devoted to obeying the Law in order to justify himself), inevitably ends up being condemned/cursed by the Law, which in/of itself is inherently good.

Because of the compulsive wickedness of the sin w/i fallen man, he can't stop violating it, or causing it to curse him.

**Not only does the Law curse man, it can never justify him.**

[Verse 11]=> “*Now that no one is **justified** by the Law before God is evident; for, **THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.**”*

**The reason no one can be justified by obedience to the Law is not simply that the Law is impossible difficult for fallen man to obey perfectly, but that this is an opposite orientation from living by faith.**

Obedience to the Law focuses on man, in all his pride, saying, “I can fulfill the Law if I really put my mind to it.”

“Living by faith” puts no confidence in our own moral strength/resolve, but instead, trusts God to do for us what we can't do.

**Paul's quotation here in verse 11 comes from Habakkuk 2:4, which we studied last Fall.**

You'll remember that Habakkuk asked God 2 questions=>

\* Why do You let wicked Israelites oppress the righteous?

God answered that He was going to send the Babylonians to crush such wickedness in Israel.

\* Why would You use the Babylonians for this, since they're even worse than wicked Israelites?

God said He would later punish the Babylonians too.

Meanwhile, the righteous were simply to trust Him and live by their faith in Him.

Eventually Habakkuk's faith grew into such confidence that he could say in essence, "Even if my world dissolves around me & I become inundated with catastrophe, I am going to trust the Lord and rejoice in Him."

**This is the faith-orientation to which God responds by justifying a person—declaring him/her righteous.**

That was true in the OT, just as it is in the NT.

E.g. Isa 30:15=> *"Thus the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, has said, 'In repentance and rest you shall be saved, In quietness and **trust** is your strength.'"*

**\*\*While the self-effort of trying to live perfectly according to the Law, leads to failure, living by faith rests in God's grace, and leads to justification and eternal life.**

The believer gains God's favor, and he experiences the joy of eternal life.

This is the good life of communion with God, including=>

- \* Both peaceful reconciliation with God (Rom 5:1), and the internal peace-of-God that surpasses comprehension, described by Paul in Phil 4:7.
- \* Fellowship in union with God the Father (that X described in Jn 17:23 as *"I in them, & Thou in Me"*).
- \* Rejoicing in one's relationship with Jesus Himself that I Pet 1:8 says is rejoicing greatly *"with joy inexpressible and full of glory."*
- \* Being transformed through sanctification into the image of the Lord, from glory to glory (II Cor 3:18).
- \* Glorifying God by living a meaningful life that's a blessing to others, in accordance w/ God's purposes.

**Verse 12 says obedience to the Law can't justify man, because it begins from a completely wrong orientation of mind.**

It's an orientation of practicing good works, rather than believing in God (as He desires us to).

[Verse 12]=> *"However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'HE WHO PRACTICES THEM SHALL LIVE BY THEM.'"*

**The Law has nothing to do w/ justification through faith.**

These 2 principles come out of opposite orientations, the=>

- \* "Law-orientation" depending on man's moral resolve,
- \* "faith-orientation" depending on the grace/power of God.

Rom 8:3 explains which is the correct orientation, and why=>

*"What the Law could not do, weak as it was thru the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh."*

The Law's weakness is its dependence on man's sinful flesh, which was fatally crippled by the Fall.

\*Not only does it have no power to curb sin within man (being spiritually impotent),

\*It can't yield spiritual cleansing/regeneration/communion-with-God.

**Most importantly, the Law can't produce faith/trust in God.**

Rather, it produces false confidence in the value of human action ("doing" the things it commands).

The Law's rigid demand for obedience to its own commands stirs/baits man's pride into accepting the challenge, causing him to trust in himself to achieve his own righteousness, that will make him acceptable to God.

The Law says nothing of humbly believing, but only of *doing*;

Nothing of grace/mercy, but only of justice and moral-achievement.

And it can only end in darkness/defeat/death.

Rom 3:20 says=> "*By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.*"

Man's pride insists on trusting in his own strength/resources.

It refuses to obey the Lord from a heart of love, & it refuses to trust the Lord.

It is committed to self-improvement through self-effort.

**Let's hope that each one of us will rightly judge whether the words "*of the works of the Law*" apply to us and describe our own heart.**

Whether we were inwardly reliant on something we are (e.g. respectable), or something we do (pray, read our Bible, or give hundreds of dollars away in charity), or something we don't do (curses/swears) to gain us God's acceptance.

I.e., whether/not he is under the curse of God.

Review—So Paul says, "That's how not to be justified."

\* **How to Be Justified**

**I know that the first part of my sermon was full of unhappy thoughts about the horrors of being cursed by God.**

I'm sure you didn't enjoy hearing it, and you may have either felt uneasy as you listened, or just tuned it out altogether.

But this part of our text should give you great joy, if you know X.

[Verses 13-14]=> "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE' [Deut 21:23]— / in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.*"

**As a believer reads this, he has every right to rest in peace, knowing that because of X's death, he's justified before God, & the Law's curse has been removed from him forever.**

X has redeemed-him/purchased-him/freed-him from his old slave-master=>  
the curse of the Law.

This is the believer's great hope/joy, & it should cause us to sing praises to our Lord  
for having taken the curse off our backs.

And because of X's death on the cross, we have received two priceless blessings=>

- \* justification—the blessing of Abraham,
- \* the H.S.'s indwelling—the promise of the Spirit.

**Let's examine verses 13-14 more closely, in order to enjoy every detail of these  
blessings, by considering the manner/purpose of our deliverance.**

1<sup>st</sup>, the manner of our deliverance from the curse=>

*“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for  
us.”*

This is how we escaped the curse=> X became a curse for us (in our place).

This is the great doctrine of *substitution*, discussed throughout the Bible=> X  
became our Substitute, taking on Himself the curse/punishment for the sins of  
those who believe in Him.

This doctrine was graphically portrayed through the animal sacrifices in the OT.

E.g. Lev 4 describes the sin offering for an Israelite who had unintentionally  
violated 1 of the Commandments.

He was to bring a female goat, w/o blemish, to the Temple.

He was to lay his hand on the goat's head to identify with it, so that the goat  
came to represent him before God.

It became his substitute.

With his other hand, he was to slit the goat's throat, in order to bleed it to  
death.

As the goat slowly lost consciousness & stopped struggling the sinner was  
poignantly reminded of how serious was the curse of God's anger over  
his sin.

And yet, the goat had taken the brunt of his punishment, as his substitute, & as  
a prophetic type of the Lamb of God who would someday be his final  
Substitute, taking away his sin once/for-all.

Jesus became a curse for us, in that God assigned the guilt of all believers to Him,  
and punished Him for it, instead of us.

The OT prophet Isaiah had predicted this would happen.

Isa 53:6=> *“All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his  
own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on  
Him.”*

In II Cor 5:21, Paul goes so far as to write=> *“He [God] made Him [Jesus]  
who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the  
righteousness of God in Him.”*

God didn't make Jesus to become sinful.

God imputed our sin to the sinless Son of God who had never committed a single sin His entire life, pouring out His wrath on Him, as if every sin every believer has ever committed were X's sin (and thus His guilt).

In that sense, Jesus became our sin, and we became His righteousness, in the eyes of God.

That is what justification means, and that is what it took for us to be delivered from the curse of God's wrath over our sin.

It was so traumatic for X (who had known no sin) that when our sin was placed on Him, God broke off fellowship with Him, the world suddenly turned dark/sunless, & out of the darkness was heard Jesus' agonizing cry=> "*MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?*" (Mt 27:46).

That's what it took to get you/me out from under the curse.

Jesus had to become a curse, in our stead.

God sovereignly arranged for the whole world to know that Jesus had become a curse for us, by hanging Him on a tree (the cross).

Paul quotes Deut 21:23 in verse 13 of our text, where God had commanded that the dead body of every Israelite who was executed for breaking the Law was to be hung on a tree, as a sign of his rejection by God.

That procedure was unwittingly followed by the Romans when they crucified Jesus on a cross.

But God sovereignly caused it to happen that way, as a public announcement that Jesus was under our curse.

2<sup>nd</sup>, the purposes of our deliverance from the curse=>

The first purpose was that Gentiles might receive the blessing God had promised to Jews—justification (that's what "*the blessing of Abraham*" refers to).

By Jesus' death for men of all nations, we were "*redeemed*" (purchased just as slaves were) from our slavery to sin/the-curse.

As a result, we are now justified (declared righteous) before God and welcomed into fellowship with Him.

Paul says this has happened "*through faith*"—i.e., our faith in the atoning value of Jesus' death has done for us what the hand of that man sacrificing the goat, did for him when he placed it on the goat's head=>

Our faith made a connection between X/us, a union in which we are identified with Him, & His death became our death.

The second purpose of our deliverance from the curse was that we might receive the "*promise of the Spirit.*"

As we've seen before, this is a code phrase for salvation.

It is through the Spirit that all of God's blessings, purchased with the blood of Jesus, flow to us.

The Spirit is the One who enlightens us, who cleanses and regenerates us, and who indwells us for spiritual empowerment/instruction/guidance.

Through Jesus' death, we have gone from being people who lived/languished under a terrible curse, to people who are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in X" (Eph 1:3).

### **How do we apply these wonderful truths to ourselves?**

1<sup>st</sup>, rejoice—God has justified you, if you have placed your faith in Jesus, & He counts you as righteous before the Law.

The curse no longer has anything to do with you.

Philip Bliss (1½ centuries ago)=>

Free from the law—O happy condition!  
Jesus has bled, and there is remission;  
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,  
Grace has redeemed us once for all."

Through your faith you have also received the promise of His Spirit as a pledge of future blessings (2 Cor 1:22).

In addition, through faith you have also received the H.S. as God's pledge of the joyous life that awaits you in heaven (II Cor 1:22).

The Spirit's presence in your heart is a foretaste of your promised rest/bliss in glory.

Just let the meaning of these eternal/irrevocable blessings sink in for a few moments, and really rejoice in them.

Then let it out in songs of praise & hymns of thanksgiving.

2<sup>nd</sup>, talk about it—We don't extol our Savior's goodness to us in conversations with one another, nearly as much as we should.

We talk freely about things that mean little/nothing.

We should talk w/ one another about the most significant truth in our lives=>

X has taken our curse upon Himself, so we are justified and bound for heaven!

3<sup>rd</sup>, tell the lost about it—They are still living under that curse, and don't know anything about it, as we do.

Don't we owe it to them, to warn them about it?

If they had a scorpion on their back, wouldn't we tell them?

4<sup>th</sup>, repent of sin—We take a very casual view of our own sin, but God doesn't.

It is such a horrid thing that, although God is love, He pronounced a curse on His beloved creatures because of it.

When they break His holy Law, it creates a situation so intolerably serious that His own Son was subjected to suffering which sin rendered

necessary to preserve God's honor/justice, & to propitiate His displeasure.

How can we allow ourselves to trifle with sin?

5<sup>th</sup>, believe in Jesus X—If you haven't done so, the curse of God is still on your soul, even as you sit there in your chair, right now.

As the Spirit enables you to, confess Jesus as your Lord, & to believe in God, who raised Him from the dead.

Reach out to Him in prayer, asking Him=>

- \* to forgive your sin,
- \* to remove the curse from you,
- \* to justify your soul, and
- \* to give you the H.S.

Once for all, O sinner, receive it!

Once for all, O brother, believer it!

Cling to the cross, the burden will fall

Christ has redeemed us once for all!