**CHRIST REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW**

September 29, 2019

Galatians 3:1-25

Key Verse 3:13 “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, ‘Curse is everyone who is hung on a pole.’”

You may be wondering, “Is the law a curse?” Then why did God give the law? We are not Jews, and we are not familiar with the absolute strictness with which the Jews strive to live according to their law. But we can understand the curse of the law by considering our own struggles to live up to the expectations of those around us. When I first believed in Jesus, I was very happy. I was full of zeal to please God by having many Bible studies. I was largely successful. Then I began to feel the pressure to teach the Bible and bring students to the conferences. Teaching the Bible became a burden. Then at one Easter Bible conference, I could not bring any student, even though I tried very hard. Everyone I invited made an excuse not to come. Then I broke down completely. I felt that I failed as a disciple. I even refused to share my testimony out of shame. Through my shepherd’s counseling, I then began to see Jesus on the cross and his grace. I could accept God’s grace for the forgiveness of sins by faith. After that, what other people thought of me did not matter. When other people say, “You don’t have many Bible students,” then I would say, “I am a great sinner. Please pray for me.” We can try to reconcile ourselves with having failed to meet human expectations, but the curse of having failed to meet God’s expectation is irreconcilable. There is no escape. There is no magic that can make it go away. The law was given to discipline and prepare people belonging to God. But the law became a trap for sinners from which there is no escape. Only Jesus saved us from the curse of the law. May God bless you to learn the grace of Jesus who redeemed us from the curse of the law through this passage.

**First**, it is foolish to live by the works of the law after believing in Christ. Look at verse 1. “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.” The Message Bible translates as “You crazy Galatians!” To Paul, the Galatians’ flirtation with the law was foolishness itself, even crazy, and the result of the devil’s deception. The gospel message is simple and vivid. The Son of God came to this world to die as the Lamb of God for the sin of the world. He was crucified, and shed his blood from the cross, though he had not sinned. Then God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, proving that he was the Son of God, and exalting him as King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, had come to the Galatians as a witness of Christ’s death and resurrection. He portrayed it to them vividly, so that there would be no doubt that the Son of God had come and was crucified like a criminal for them. What happened when the Galatians heard the gospel? They believed what they heard, and immediately the Spirit of God came to their hearts, and began to work in them, changing them from wretched sinners under the power of sin and death, and making them into the holy children of God. They believed what they heard, and miracles happened. They were so happy when they just heard and believed. Paul later says that in their joy they would have torn out their eyes and given them to Paul in his sickness, if they could have.

But false teachers came along, and tricked the Galatians’ consciences. They said to them, "You have been saved through faith in Christ? Amen, brother. Now, you can be really spiritual! All you have to do is obey these laws, these ancient, holy laws given through Moses. That’s why Christ saved you, don’t you see?” What did Paul say? Look at verses 2-3. “I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?” In these verses Paul reveals the bankruptcy of the idea—‘Saved by faith--sanctified by the law.’ When the Galatians believed the gospel, they received the Holy Spirit in their hearts. The Spirit rebuked them for their sins. The Spirit led them to repentance and to deeper faith in Christ and love for God. The Spirit encouraged them in the midst of persecutions to hold on to the promise of God. In short, when the Galatians believed, they invited the Spirit to come in and make them a new creation in Christ Jesus. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of those who believe, from first to last (Rom 1:16,17). Nowhere and at no time is the gospel about what men can do for themselves or for God. Sanctification is the work of the Spirit, given by faith in Christ Jesus. What the Spirit began in the Galatians’ hearts, only the Spirit could complete. But the Galatians foolishly listened to the false teachers, and began trying to accomplish the Spirit’s work by their human efforts.

In verses 6 to 9, we have Paul’s positive proof that even Old Testament salvation is by faith alone, and the positive proof is Abraham. The false teachers were saying that in order to be real children of Abraham, they should be circumcised just like Abraham did. Paul is going to take Abraham and defend faith alone using Abraham. He is going to beat them at their own game by an accurate understanding of Abraham. Look at verses 6-9. “So also Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” Also Habakkuk 2:4 says, “The righteous will live by faith.”

**Second**, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Even as Gentiles, many of the Galatian believers were probably drawn to the Jewish faith because of the Jews’ high moral standards and their clear teaching that God is One. However, those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. Look at verse 10. “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’” Moses wrote that unless we obey the law fully and at all times, we will be cursed. The law does not say, “try to keep the law.” If we keep the law 99% of the time, the law does not say, “Good job. It is wonderful.” No, the law demands perfect obedience, saying, “Why didn’t you get 100%?” We cannot pick what we like to obey and discard what we dislike. We have to obey all the laws of God without fail. Let’s consider an example of marriage. Mr. Law is a perfectionist. He is tall and handsome, with a perfect physique, and is disciplined, intelligent, and a master of all trades. So, many women are eager to marry him. But after the wedding they experience a very painful reality. Every morning he gets up at 4:00 a.m., reads the Bible and prays. He works hard twelve hours a day, keeps time precisely, and never makes a mistake. He does so without fail. And he demands his wife to do so. If she fails to do one small thing, he condemns her without mercy. This goes on every day, day after day, without ceasing. Can anyone bear being married to Mr. Law? Even though one keeps 99% of the law, if he breaks one law, he becomes a lawbreaker. Paul shared his testimony in Romans 7. He kept most commandments. However, the commandment, "Do not covet," which deals with the inner life, convicted him of sin. Because he had broken this one law, he became like one who broke all the laws. He was condemned and destined to die. So he cried out, “What a wretched man I am!”

What hope, then, is there for sinful mankind? Look at verse 13. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.’” In his great wisdom and mercy, God prepared a way for mankind to meet the requirements of the law. Christ Jesus came to this world and lived a holy life in service to even the most wretched person. He was without sin. But in obedience to God’s world salvation plan, Christ Jesus allowed himself to be arrested, mocked, tried, tortured and finally crucified on the cross. Paul saw that Jesus, the one and only Son of God, had allowed himself to be cursed by God. We cannot face the law. We cannot face God’s righteousness which condemns our consciences unmercifully, in absolute adherence to the truth. But Christ Jesus faced up to the condemnation of the law. He made himself the object of the law’s curse and accepted the law’s wrath that belonged to Paul, and to you and to me. We know that Christ was crucified. But we don’t want to come too close to his cross, which reveals the terrible price that he paid as a ransom for our sins. But we must come to his cross, and see the curse of God, but borne by him. We must see his shame and pain and know that it was by his wounds that we are healed. Christ paid the price to free us from the curse of the law. Look at verse 14. “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” Praise God who redeemed us from the curse of the law through the cross of Christ, so that we may be justified by faith in him, as God promised Abraham.

**Third**, the purpose the law. If we are saved by faith in Christ, why did God give the law? What was the purpose of the law? Look at verse 19. “Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.” The law was added in order to help people recognize sin as sin and to realize their need for a Savior. Romans 3:20 says, “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.” Sin existed before the law came, but man did not recognize it as sin until the law came. The law was given to show men what hopeless sinners they were so that they would cry out to God to save them. Look at verses 23-24. “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.” Here the word for “guardian” refers to an educated slave appointed by his master to protect and discipline the master’s children during their childhood. The guardian was often very tough in order to fulfill his duty. The law is holy because God gave it. But its role was disciplinary and temporary until Christ came. Indeed the law preserved the people of Israel as a distinct nation as a nation of the law. After we come to faith in Christ, the “guardian’s” job in showing us our sinfulness and therefore leading us to the Savior is accomplished, and we are, at that point, no longer under the guardian.

What then, is the role of the law in a Christian today? The law continues to serve as a moral compass and God’s prescription for holy conduct, while convicting the consciences of men and women throughout the world as it reveals sinfulness and thus the true depth of need for the Savior. The law reveals God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness. The Gospel identity chart shows that as we grow in Christ, our awareness of sin grows, and our awareness of God’s holiness also grows. It is not that God is becoming more holy or that we are becoming more sinful. But our awareness of both is growing through our knowledge of the law. We increasingly see God as he actually is (Isa. 55:8–9) and ourselves as we actually are (Jer. 17:9–10). As our understanding of our sin and of God’s holiness grows, something else also grows: our appreciation and love for Jesus. His sacrifice, his righteousness, and his gracious work on our behalf become increasingly sweet and powerful to us. The cross should become larger and more central in our life as we rejoice in the Savior who died upon it.



Unfortunately, because of the indwelling sin that remains in us, we have an ongoing tendency to minimize the gospel or “shrink the cross.” This is manifested in two ways: pretending and performing.



The growing awareness of our sin becomes a crushing weight and becomes a curse. We buckle under its load and compensate by pretending that we are better than we really are. Pretending can take many forms: dishonesty (“I’m not that bad”), comparison (“I’m not as bad as those people”), excuse making (“I’m not really that way”), and false righteousness (“Here are all the good things I’ve done”). Because we don’t want to admit how sinful we really are, we spin the truth in our favor. On the other hand, the growing awareness of God’s holiness is also challenging. It means coming face to face with God’s righteous commands and the glorious perfections of his character. It means realizing how dramatically we fall short of his standards. Performing minimizes God’s holiness by reducing his standard to something we can keep and thereby try to satisfy his righteousness by keeping the law. Then the cross becomes smaller and Christ’s importance in our life is diminished.

The law is good and holy. The problem is not the law. The problem is our sinfulness. So the law became a curse. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law so that we may live a new life as holy children of God. May God bless you to grow in awareness of God’s holiness and awareness of your sinfulness so that the cross of Jesus becomes larger and more central in your life.