

Galatians: Free in Christ

Redeemed from the Curse

Galatians 3:10-14

From the very beginning God promised to bless the world with salvation through Abraham: “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (3:8). Abraham heard the gospel centuries before Moses received the law, but there were teachers in Galatia claiming Mosaic superiority—that the nations really need to follow these laws. Paul has already stated people who mess with the gospel are cursed (1:8-9), but now he elaborates on how the curse falls on the “law-keepers” and astonishingly on Jesus himself. Why? So that we might have the Spirit (v14).

Under the Curse

Those who are “of the works of the law are under the curse” (v10). One of the most important distinctions to make as we read the New Testament is the difference between faithful law-keeping and the perversion of law-keeping that Jesus and Paul condemn (e.g. Jn. 14:15; Matt. 23:23). One is the “obedience of faith” and the other is “works”, what we call legalism. In verse 10 Paul quotes Deuteronomy 27:26, part of the scene when the tribes of Israel shouted the blessings and curses of the covenant on mounts Ebal and Gerizim before entering the land. Those Israelites who kept some parts of the law but neglected others would be cursed, exactly what Jesus accuses the Pharisees of doing. Moses accused them (Jn. 5:45). The Torah understood rightly made provision for sin—confession, sacrifices, a broken spirit and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). But Jews who thought their law-keeping justified them (against the teaching of the law!) were condemned. This is obvious throughout Scripture, so Paul quotes Habakkuk: “the just shall live by faith” (v11; Hab. 2:24). When Paul says “the law is not faith”, he means “the twisted use of the law is not of faith”, and thus false teachers think Leviticus 18:5 (“the man who does them shall live by them”) means you add law-keeping to faith in order to be saved. God forbid! God didn’t ask His people to trust Him by faith in the wilderness but then to earn their life in the Promised Land, and He doesn’t do anything like that with us. We are cursed to try.

The Cursed Christ

The religious do-gooders are cursed, but they’re not the only ones. *We* have been redeemed from the curse of the law (v13). To redeem someone meant to buy them from the slave market. The curse of the law hung over Jew and Gentile alike because all were slaves to sin. Everyone likes their flavor of sin, which is the whole point of slavery. We hate it, but like an addiction, part of us *loves* it, and therein lies the problem. Some are formally religious like Luther was, some are informally religious like neo-pagans and secularists, but everyone is “justified” in some way. The truly justified person knows there’s nothing in him that deserves the curse any less than anyone else. The only difference is that he believes the

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shocking truth that Christ became a curse for him. We have let this truth slap us. *The Messiah of God was cursed by God.* The God-man was God-damned on the cross. God required the body of someone guilty of capital crimes to be hung on a tree to show they were under His curse, and then the body was taken down in order to not defile the land (Dt. 21:22-23; cf. Josh. 10:26; Jn. 19:31; Acts 5:30, 12:39; 1 Pet. 2:24). This would warn and sober people about their sinfulness. How offensive is it to see the perfect man crucified, hung by us and for us? This was a scandal to the Jews, and stupidity to the Greeks. But to those with faith, it's the wisdom and power of God. On the cross we see the clearest picture of God's hatred of sin; death in it's most chilling form. To be cursed is to be separated from the love and blessing of God, ultimately from the presence of the Holy Spirit. This is what Jesus lost: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). It wasn't the physical pain, but the separation from His Father and the Spirit, the condemnation, our condemnation, that fell upon Him. This is why the cross is the greatest demonstration of love.

The Promise of the Spirit

Israel didn't keep the law by faith and therefore were sent into exile. Even when they dwelt in the land, Jesus had to flee to Egypt to get away from the king (Matt. 2:13). But it was on the cross that Jesus went into true exile so "that we might receive the promise of the Spirit by faith" (v14). He bore the curses of the covenant so that we would be brought back and restored. The Spirit doesn't just bring us to the land and bless us. He brings us right into the Triune fellowship of God. To receive the promise of the Spirit is be indwelt by Him, and therefore to be shown the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:10-12).