



GALATIANS: GOSPEL-ROOTED LIVING
Clearing the Way for God's Blessing

GALATIANS 3:10-14

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For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Introduction

My father-in-law spent his life operating on hearts. He was a thoracic surgeon in Indianapolis for thirty years. He retired several years ago. But before he hung up his stethoscope and put away his scalpel, I figured I should go in and watch him operate.

So I did. But, mind you, I don't particularly like blood. Yet it's hard to avoid blood when watching open-heart surgery. The medical staff knew this about me, so they encouraged me not to not lock my knees and sit down if I got light-headed.

I learned a valuable lesson from watching my father-in-law perform an open heart surgery. You can have a strong heart, and a healthy body, yet if you have a blocked artery, you're as good as dead. For one blocked artery can so hinder the flow of blood to the heart and the rest of the body that it can be—and often is—fatal. Which is where heart surgeons come in: they deal with the blockage that hinders the life-giving flow of blood so a person can go on living.

In a way, that is what God did by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. The mission of the Son into our sin-torn world was a massive operation; vastly more so than even open-heart surgery. But if God's life-giving blessing was going to flow into the lives of people, it was necessary.

For, you see, just as surely as the heart pumps blood, so too it's God's desires to pump blessing to the world. But something has gotten in the way of God's blessing. What's gotten in the way was human sin and, in response to human sin, God's curse.

This first happened when Adam and Eve sinned and God cursed the whole creation; but it happened again with God's own redeemed people, the people of Israel, who were to be the agents of God's reversal of the curse upon the whole world. Yet they too sinned, and as a result came under God's curse; only this time, it was the curse of the law. Therefore, God, in his mercy, had to deal with that which blocked the flow of his blessing.

This, in a nutshell, is what Paul says in this passage: The law's curse blocks God's blessing. But Jesus Christ's death has removed the Law's curse. As a result, in Christ Jesus God's blessing can now freely flow.

God has cleared the way for his blessing to flow to the nations, to people of every language and tribe and nationality and race, even to you and me. He's cleared the way through the cross of Christ. He sent forth his Son, our Savior, into the world. And Jesus Christ came, as an obedient Son, to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found, far as the curse is found. This is what today's passage is about in a nutshell.

The Law's Curse Blocks God's Blessing (3:10-12)

In the immediately preceding passage (3:6-9), we see that Abraham's blessing goes to those who live their lives by faith along with Abraham, the man of faith. From the beginning, God always intended to extend Abraham's blessing to the nations. Genesis 12:3, which Paul quotes in 3:8, says precisely this very thing: "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

But, of course, the biblical story doesn't simply go from Abraham in Genesis 12 to the Great Commission and the nations in Matthew 28. It's not as if God simply leap-frogs right over the top of the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. There are many chapters in between. And those chapters tell the story of the people of Israel, Abraham's physical offspring. This is the story of the Old Testament. It's a rich and colorful story.

But, from a human perspective, it's also a sad story. It's a story of God's grace and redemption, yes; but it's also a story of Israel's tragic rebellion and sin, eventually leading to her coming under the curse of the Law for failing to keep the law. This is Paul's point in 3:10: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them'" (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26).

Paul, then, goes on to reinforce this point in the next two verses, with two more pithy statements and two more Old Testament citations (3:11-12). If the law's not the path to blessing, and if it's not the route to justification, then what is? We experience God's blessing, and we find justification before him, only by living a life of faith: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law" (3:11a). In fact, this is what the prophet Habakkuk himself learned many hundreds of years before Christ: "The righteous shall live by faith" (3:11b).

And lest there be any misunderstanding, Paul drives home this point with a second pithy statement and another quote from the Old Testament. Why cannot God's blessing be found in the Law? Because, as Paul says, "The law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them'" (3:12). In order for the law to bless, the law must be kept. But this is where Israel fell short. She did not keep the law. If she would have, as Leviticus 18:5 says,

then, to be sure, she would have found life through the law. But she didn't; and so, instead, she received the curse of the law and thus death through the law. And this resulted in her being exiled out of the land of promise and scattered among the nations.

The main point of these three verses, then, is simply this: Israel is under the curse of the Law; and so too are all who are of the works of the law. Yet this is not only a statement of historical fact; it's also a warning to anyone who, like the Galatians, thinks that the law itself is the pathway to blessing or the way to life.

What we learn from the whole Old Testament, as well as from this passage, is that God has posted a gigantic Dead End sign over that path. There's no outlet. For the law cannot give life (3:21). Apart from the grace of God, the law of God will only stir up the sin within you which will ultimately choke you to death.

What folly, then, to try to sail the ship of morality all the way to heaven. It's been tried many times before; but it simply won't work. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon grapples with the dead-end of the law as the pathway to God's blessing.

The law seemed also to blight all my hopes with its stern sentence, 'Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Only too well did I know that I had not continued in all those things, so I saw myself accursed, turn which way I might. If I had not committed one sin, that made no difference if I had committed another; I was under the curse. What if I had never blasphemed God with my tongue? Yet, if I had coveted, I had broken the law. He who breaks a chain might say, 'I did not break that link, and the other link.' No, but if you break one link, you have broken the chain. Ah, me, how I seemed shut up then! I had offended against the justice of God; I was impure and polluted, and I used to say, 'If God does not send me to hell, He ought to do it.' I sat in judgment upon myself, and pronounced the sentence that I felt would be just. . . . So the law worried and troubled me at all points; it shut me up as in an iron cage, and every way of escape was effectually blocked up.¹

Now, I fear some of you are still locked up in that iron cage. You've tried every way of escape, but found them all to be blocked up. You've tried moral reform, allegiance to the right Christian causes, even church membership. Yet you've never truly come to Christ by faith, in brokenness and repentance, in need of grace and mercy. And so you're still shut up in an iron cage, still trying to convince yourself that the one who does them shall live by them.

Christ's Death Redeems from the Law's Curse (3:13)

Shut up in an iron cage with no way of escape. That's a fit description of the life of everyone apart from the grace of God. It is a good description of Israel of old. The whole

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, pp. 61-62.

nation was shut up in an iron cage with no way of escape. In fact, the Old Testament ends with the entire nation scattered among the nations of the world. And the only thing they can do is wait for God to show up and do something about their desperate situation. And so they sing: “O come, O come, Immanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the son of God appears.”

Yet after many hundreds of years, Immanuel did indeed come. When the fullness of time had come, God sent for his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law (4:4-5). Listen to the triumphant way Paul puts in 3:13: “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law.”

I love the strength of this verse; notice it does not say Christ tried to redeem us from the curse of the law; nor does it say Christ made it possible for us to be redeemed from the curse of the law. No, it’s a much heartier statement; Christ accomplished something *definitive* on the cross. His death was entirely effective; he accomplished precisely what he wanted to accomplish: he redeemed his people from the curse of the law.

But how did Christ do it? He did it, as one 20th century theologian has said, in a way that’s “almost unbearably severe”—“by becoming a curse for us” (3:13a). For a pious Jew like Paul this would have been a horrific thought, blasphemous even. But the proof was undeniable; for Jesus has been nailed to a tree that had been turned into a cross. And the law clearly states: “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Deut. 21:23; Gal. 3:13b).

So, then, he who knew no sin became sin, so that we might in him become the righteousness of God. What a remarkable twist to the story! It’s like a heart surgeon who recognizes that the only way his patient can survive is with a heart transplant; and so the surgeon himself voluntarily gives his own life to save his dying patient.

This is what Jesus Christ did when he embraced death on the cross. Let us stand amazed, then, in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene! And wonder how he could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Calvary,
And suffered and died alone.

O how marvelous! O how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
O how marvelous! O how wonderful!
Is my Savior's love for me!

When life gets difficult, I know it can sure feel like you’re under God’s curse. But if you’re run to Christ and are walking by faith, the curse is lifted!

In Christ Jesus God's Blessing Now Flows (3:14)

Because of Christ's cross, the law's curse has been lifted. That which blocked the flow of God's blessing has now been removed. God's blessing can flow to the nation of Israel, as well as to all the nations of the earth. This is the upshot of what Paul wants to say in this passage: In Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham now flows to the Gentiles, to the nations (3:14a).

When people from among the nations of the earth turn from sin and put their faith in Christ, they receive forgiveness, find reconciliation and now stand in the channel of God's promised blessing. This is the great impulse behind the outreach and mission of the church: to extend God's blessing to the nations.

But so, too, Paul says, Christ's death opens the pathway for God's blessing to flow to the nation of Israel. And the promised Spirit now flows to the remnant of Israel. They experience renewal through the Spirit as they embrace their own Messiah by faith. Christ's absorbing the curse of the law allows God to pour out his promised Holy Spirit upon his people through faith (3:14b).

This is what Israel's prophets had envisioned would one day take place; God would restore the nation of Israel by removing her sin and sending his Spirit. And this pouring out of God's Spirit upon the people of Israel happened on the Day of Pentecost. Speaking to the crowd of Jews in Jerusalem at the time, the Apostle Peter tells them:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing (Acts 2:32-33).

But the renewal of Israel is not yet complete. It's only partial. Indeed, a day is coming when all Israel shall be saved; right now, this is not the case; two thousand years ago, Paul recognized that "a partial hardening has come upon Israel" (Rom. 11:25). And it remains to this very day. But, as Paul goes on to say, one day this hardening shall be removed and then, as the Bible says, "all Israel will be saved" (Rom. 11:26). "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins" (Rom. 11:26-27; Isa. 59:20-21).

Yet when Israel is at last fully renewed, this will mean, as Paul says, even greater blessing for the nations! Yes, Israel's partial renewal has meant great things for the nations. But what, then, might Israel's complete renewal mean for the nations of the earth? It will mean a massive enfolding of people from every tongue and tribe and language and people (cf. Rom. 11:11-16).

Conclusion – Clearing the Channel of Our Lives

The coming of Christ Jesus into the world, dying in our place upon the cross, taking upon himself the dreaded curse of the law, this has enabled God's blessing to flow freely.

God has cleared the way for his blessing to flow. And he's done so because of Christ and only in Christ—in Christ alone. So flee to Christ and hide yourself in him as your only hope!

Yet what must happen for us to be effective channels of God's blessing to flow into the lives of others? We need to have the mind of Christ our Savior. Our minds must be conformed to his; our hearts must be saturated with his word; his peace must rule our lives in everything; his love must fill us, as the waters fill the sea; his humility must be ours so that we exalt him and gladly abase ourselves; his strength and courage must be ours as we run the race set before us, looking onward and upward, only to Jesus; and may his beauty rest upon you, as you seek the lost to win and lives to bless, and may others forget the channel, seeing only Him.

Amen.

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