

The Blessed and the Cursed

Galatians 3:10-14

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December 27, 2009*

In light of the break we've taken from our recent preaching series to focus on the Incarnation of our Savior, I want to remind you of something that you may have forgotten. We are still in a series entitled "In My Place" – a series where we have been considering the doctrine of the atonement as taught in scripture.

What we've sought to do in this series is to take the diamond of Christ's substitutionary atonement – of the truth that that "in my place condemned he stood" and marvel at its beauty and brilliance– from different angles, from different passages in both the Old and New Testaments in order that our understanding of the Cross might deepen and our appreciation for what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf might grow.

Today's message is the fourth and final message in that series.

Well, with that let's read the text.

[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." [11] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." [12] But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." [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 hanged on a tree"— [14] so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

One of the things I love about Christmas, now a few days behind us, is the opportunity we have to sing Christmas carols. Over the past few weeks, I've so enjoyed singing with you a number of those glorious hymns about the birth of Jesus. We all have two or three favorites, don't we? Now I don't know about you, but if I had to pick just one as my very favorite, I think I would pick "Joy to the World" because of how both the melody and the words focus our attention on the joy that is ours in the Gospel.

One refrain in particular I love to sing:

***He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.***

The reason I draw your attention to those words is because of how they point to the theme of our passage: God curses and God blesses. In Galatians 3:10-14: Paul contrasts **those who are cursed of God** with those **who are blessed by God**.

Now a little disclaimer here. Isaac Watts wrote those words anticipating the **second** coming when the curse of the fall will be lifted; when no more thorns infest the ground; when sorrows no longer grow. In our passage, Paul writes about a different curse – the curse that comes from a failure to obey the law as given to Moses.

All that to say, what fills me with joy today is that God makes his blessings flow “far as the curse is found” – no matter what curse you’re talking about – right? I don’t think Isaac Watts would mind it if he knew that when we sing “far as the curse is found” we think not only of the curse of the fall but the curse of the law!

Mr. Watts has been worshipping with the angels for a pretty long time now (since 1748 when he went to heaven). I’m sure the great hymn writing pastor would agree with me when I say this: Every soul who has “prepared Jesus room”; every person who has received him as King...abides now under the blessing of God and will be delivered from every curse including death!

So getting back to what’s happening in Galatians 3:10-14, Paul here contrasts **those who are cursed of God** with those **who are blessed by God**.

Now when you hear that, I don’t know about you but here’s what I think: I want to be someone who is in the “blessed” category not the “cursed” category. What I find so profoundly encouraging about Paul’s divinely inspired words here is that they help me. They help me see clearly that because of Jesus substitutionary work on the Cross I am in “blessed” category. You and I don’t have to somehow work our way into that category by our spiritual performance.

That’s the angle; the vantage point Paul gives us here from which to survey the Cross. I want to tell you that the view of the Gospel diamond from this vantage point is glorious and I hope that gazing at its beauty for while this morning will produce in all of our hearts fresh joy and thankfulness to God for the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on the Cross on our behalf.

We’re just going to ask two simple questions and see how the passage answers them. Who are the cursed and who are the blessed?

Let’s begin with the first question...

1) Who are the cursed?

Well the answer to that question is stated explicitly in verse 10: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse”

For OT support, Paul then immediately cites Deut. 27:26 where God declares to his people after giving them the Mosaic law (which included the 10 commandments)

“Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

Lets reflect for a moment on what it means to be cursed of God.

The apostle Paul obtained his understanding of God’s curse from the Old Covenant; the covenant God established through Moses. So if we are going to understand what he’s saying here, we’ve got to go back to that covenant as well. So real quickly, let’s do that.

A covenant is of course a legally binding promise made between two parties. Both parties have an obligation to keep the covenant. In the Old Covenant, God’s side of the obligation was to pour out blessing in abundance upon Israel *if they would but obey His law* as codified in the law of Moses. God’s obligation was to bless; the people’s was to obey. However, if the people disobeyed God’s law and were unfaithful to Yahweh, then as Paul reminds us in vs. 10, the covenant stipulated that the people would experience God’s curse which of course is the exact opposite of God’s blessing.

To be cursed meant, it means as Sproul notes, "to be cut off from the presence of God, never to see the light of His countenance, to be cast into the outer darkness (*Truth of the Cross* 128)." So that sheds light on what Paul means when he speaks of certain people being cursed.

However, getting back to the big question we are asking right now, we still need to know "Who are the cursed?" Who are they? Well they are vs.10 "*all who rely on works of the law.*"

Paul's point couldn't be more clear: All who persist in relying on and depending on their own obedience to the law for their justification, for their righteous standing before God, are cursed; they will never see the light of God's countenance; they will be cast into the outer darkness where they will experience God's righteous judgment for how they have not lived up to God's holy standard.

For as it is written, Paul says,

"Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Pondering this verse, R.C. Sproul writes,

*"By quoting this Old Testament passage, Paul shows that anyone who relies on observing the Law to achieve relationship with God, who trusts in his own good works and his own performance, is bound to experience cursedness, for God's standard is perfection, which no fallen human being can achieve (*Truth of the Cross* 130)."*

In verse 11, Paul essentially makes the same point using different language when he says,

"Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law..."

The word "justified" means to be counted righteous in God's sight.

So do you get what Paul is saying in verses 10 & 11? He is saying that no one can be counted as righteous before God by law keeping and to seek justification on that basis is to be cursed by God.

Now I want you to listen very carefully here. For those of you here today who like me can be vulnerable to emotions that fluctuate based on your own spiritual performance, just think about this: For fallen people like you and me, the performance road, trying to earn God's blessing, God's favor, by your own godliness, is not just a bad road to be on; it's one that is cursed by God. It's the road that the Pharisees in Jesus' day were on, it's the road that the false teachers in Galatia were on and tragically it's the road that many of the unbelievers we know and interact with today are on at this very moment in time.

Most people rely on works to get under the blessing of God. Virtually all religions except Christianity are based on this principle. But no one can earn the blessing of God and no amount of good works can make up for our guilt.

Sadly many believers today, already justified by virtue of the blood of Jesus, hang out and linger on this cursed road of self-justification. That was exactly the problem with the church in Galatia, and that is a problem for many in the church today as well. Justified by grace alone through faith alone, we still unconsciously try to smuggle works into the process.

However my friends, we have to understand that seeking to achieve God's blessing and favor on our lives through our works is not a morally neutral road. It's a road that has lead many down the path to eternity under the curse of God.

I hope you can see from the passage that **we can never work our way out from under God's curse.**

You can never read your Bible enough, pray enough, love your spouse well-enough, love your kids well-enough, love your dog or cat enough, be a good enough employee or neighbor, think pure enough thoughts or anything else-enough...to justify you; to get God to approve of you, to say "*he has been good enough, so I'll remove the curse and bless.*" That lie appeals to human pride. Satan promotes it order to sap Christians of their joy, of their delight in Christ and of their passion for His purposes. And he uses the same lie to keep unbelievers from faith in Christ – because if you can justify yourself, if you can escape God's judgment by counterbalancing sin with good works, why do you need a Savior?

So Paul makes it very clear in verse 10, our best efforts can never get us out from under the curse of the law. So where do we go from there? If we can never perform well enough to obtain justification, is there any hope for us to avoid God's curse?

The answer is found in vs.13. Let's read it...

*[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 hanged on a tree"—*

Now let's just get this straight here. In verse 10, it's those who persist in the vain attempt to earn God's favor and God's blessing by virtue of their observance of the law who are cursed. Here in verse 13 the text takes a turn. Paul introduces another who is cursed. Who that person? It is Christ who Paul says became a curse **for us** when he hung on the tree, when he hung on the Cross **in our place as our substitute.**

What a dramatic turn.

On the Cross, Jesus suffered the ultimate curse of God. God the Father turned His back on His own Son—Jesus was cut off from the presence of God, our Lord was cast into the outer darkness, He was forsaken by God, in a word He was **cursed** by God in order that we who have believed in Him might never ever experience that curse.

Speaking of this work of Jesus on our behalf, RC Sproul writes:

"He was overwhelmed by the outer darkness. On the cross, He was in hell, totally bereft of the grace and the presence of God, utterly separated from all blessedness of the Father. He became a curse for us so that we one day will be able to see the face of God. God turned His back on His Son so that the light of His countenance will fall upon us. It's no wonder Jesus screamed from the depths of His soul (Truth of the Cross 135)."

Folks, that's what was happening on the Cross.

Now, so far I've been implying something here that I want to make plain and clear. In verse 13 Paul says that *Christ redeemed **us** from the curse of the law. And in the following verse he speaks of this blessing flowing specifically to a certain group of people. The question is, who are those people? Or you could say as I phrased it earlier...*

2) Who are the blessed?

Well it is clear from the text that the blessed are those justified (or counted righteous in God's sight) *by faith* in Jesus. In verse 14 of our passage Paul speaks of "the blessing of Abraham" coming to Gentiles (or non-Jews) and it is clear from verses 8 and 9 earlier in the chapter that the blessing of Abraham here is synonymous, is the same thing as justification by faith. So the blessed are the justified.

This is confirmed in verse 14. Notice the last two words in that verse are -- "through faith." The presence of those two words indicates that the meaning of verse 14 goes something like this: 'It is **through faith** in Jesus that the wonderful blessing of justification - as evidenced by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives - is obtained.'

So "the cursed" vs.10 are all those who rely, who depend on their own ability to keep God's law for acceptance before God. They remain under the curse of the law.

And

"The blessed" vs.14 are those who are justified, who are declared eternally righteous in the sight of God, through faith in Christ. These are the ones who have had a substitute bear the curse for them.

CONCLUSION

My dear brothers and sisters: I want to comfort and encourage you with this truth this morning. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness of sins, God puts you in the category of "blessed", not "cursed". Yes, you are blessed. I'll say it again. You are blessed. You are blessed of God and no failure or sin can ever change that.

I've got to tell you folks that meditating on this passage over the course of the past few days has been quite convicting. Though I seek to remind myself of the Gospel on most days of the week, my default setting is to live as though my acceptance with God depends on my own performance as a disciple, or as a husband, a father, a pastor.

If I do well - and I am performing well - I am elated - and can be tempted to subtly think that "now God's going to bless me." Sometimes I'm not even aware I am doing this, but I am.

If I don't do so well - if I fail or sin in some way - I can become discouraged - and can feel as though at some point "the other shoe is going to drop" so to speak and God is going to come after me; which is why I need to return to these truths about justification again and again.

Folks God calls us to present our lives as worship to God which involves living righteous and godly lives - but He doesn't call us to try and secure God's acceptance through our godliness so that he can then bless us. Jesus has already achieved our justification and therefore secured our acceptance with God by virtue of what we've been celebrating in a focused way over the past few weeks: That a little over 2000 years ago, God sent His Son Jesus into the world, born of the virgin Mary, in order that He might grow up to one day die on the Cross **for our justification**.

We who once had the status of "cursed", now have the status of "blessed", because Jesus came in order that the curse might be removed. The curse of the law has been removed and the curse of fall will be removed as well, in a new Earth.

This is why we sing with such joy in our hearts each and every Christmas...

***He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,***

*Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.
Joy to the world!*

Pray.