

0314
Cursed and blessed
Galatians 3:10-14
January 8, 2023

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.

Prayer

Introduction - George P Burdell

George P. Burdell received numerous college degrees, served in the military. He'd later be on the editorial board for a popular magazine and even had his name on a satellite.

You'd say that was quite the life, but as you'll see, George P. Burdell never actually earned any of those accomplishments. All of it was because of the work of someone else.

We are resuming in Galatians today. We took several weeks away from this series for Advent and New Year's. I think that's always worth doing. But I'm also so glad to be back in the Book of Galatians.

Series context

Considering the hiatus that we took, I think it's worth remembering the context and the flow of Paul's argument that will lead us to the beginning of our passage in chapter 3, verse 10.

If you've been here every week, these next couple moments will be review, but I still think it's helpful as it takes us back into this book.

A major distinction throughout Galatians is the contrast between gospel and law. And the background reason why it matters so much to the Book of Galatians is that there

were people who had infiltrated the Galatian churches and who were still trying to impose Old Testament law onto the gospel.

And as we've said before, a gospel with law is not gospel at all.

And a point that Paul makes in chapter 2 is that the law cannot save you. You cannot be good enough to earn God on your own.

In Galatians 2:16, Paul says:

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Paul will carry this conversation of grace and law into chapter 3.

Beginning in verse 2:

² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith—

In the beginning of the section, Paul is talking about the giving of the Holy Spirit to believers in the gospel. His point is that this is not through works. We don't earn the Spirit. And we certainly don't do anything to deserve the Spirit.

It is something which God gives us on the basis of faith.

Verse 6, Paul will point to the example of Abraham:

⁶ just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”

And that example of Abraham is very important. Throughout this chapter, Paul is looking to Abraham as the prototype of faith and the righteousness which God gives on the basis of that faith.

Paul mentions Abraham 8 times in this chapter alone. And the references will continue into the passage where we will - Lord willing - be next Sunday.

The faith by which the Lord gives us the Spirit when he causes us to be born again as believers in the gospel is the same faith through which the Lord had counted Abraham as righteous so many centuries before.

And as I've said before, the righteousness of God through faith is really the main idea of this entire book of Galatians. Paul just keeps restating this idea and defending this idea in different ways.

At the end of our passage, in verse 14, Paul will again intertwine these ideas of faith, the promises made to Abraham, and the Holy Spirit.

Verses 7-9:

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

There, what Paul is saying is that faith has always been the basis for God's justification.

The blessing to the nations that God had promised long ago to Abraham was God's worldwide gospel whereby people of every tribe, and tongue, and nation would ultimately be saved through the redemptive work of Christ.

I know I'm going quickly. Again, my point isn't to spend a lot of time on those verses. It's just to keep us on Paul's train of thought as it rolls into today's section.

And with that, we'll come to today's section.

Bridge

The main idea of our passage today is that: Jesus was cursed so we can be blessed.

We'll be looking at our passage in two parts.

Cursed and blessed.

The curse of sin and the blessing of Christ.

First part - cursed

Verse 10:

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."

Paul has previously said that the law cannot save you. But here he explains why the law cannot save you. It doesn't save us because we can't follow it.

This isn't the only place in the New Testament where we see this idea.

We see it from James, the brother of the Lord.

James 2:10:

whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

It was one sin which cast man out of the garden. And it only takes one sin to be a transgressor against God's law.

But let's also be realistic. We sin all the time.

1 Kings 8:46 says:

there is no one who does not sin

Isaiah 53:6 says:

**All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;**

In Psalm 14, the Psalmist will talk about how there is no one who is without sin.

**²The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man,
to see if there are any who understand,
who seek after God.**

**³They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt;
there is none who does good,
not even one.**

That language will be used by Paul in Romans 3.

Repeatedly, the Bible teaches that we all sin.

And as I've said many times, our own experiences and interactions with other people constantly confirm that.

In our passage, when Paul says:

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

He's quoting from a section in Deuteronomy 27. That's very smart of Paul.

Because he's quoting from the law to show the consequences of failing to uphold the law.

Deuteronomy 27 is shortly before the Israelites enter the Promised Land and it's giving them various covenant obligations.

These obligations contain things like the forbidding of idolatry, commands to honor one's parents, prohibitions from taking bribes, warnings about sexual sin. But then at the end of that, Deuteronomy 27:26 says:

²⁶ “ ‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

And so to people who want to impose the law on these Galatian Christians, Paul is quoting the law and his point is that it is an unattainable standard.

When Paul points to the faith of Abraham as the example for us all, he's pointing to someone who was justified by faith even before the law was given.

Because it has always been faith. We could never be saved by the law.

And a thoughtful person might ask: then what's the purpose of the law?

The law reveals the holiness of God, it points us to our sin, it pointed the Israelites to how they were supposed to live as a set apart covenant nation.

The law and its precepts could restore a person to covenant relationship with God.

But it does not point us to a pathway through which we can save ourselves¹.

You hopefully follow federal, local and state laws. That means you don't go to jail. It doesn't mean you'll live forever.

And the purpose of the Old Testament law was never meant to be our means of eternal life.

The Old Testament gives this law that we cannot follow, but it is also constantly pointing forward to something greater. To the child of the woman who will crush the serpent, to the promised son of Abraham, to the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to the greater king of Israel, the suffering servant, to God with us. To one who will follow the law.

And the one who followed the law died on a cross to forgive you of your sins.

And Paul is writing to a church where people were still trying to impose the law of the Old Testament as a basis for salvation. And he's saying that to believe in this law for

¹ Grant R. Osborne, [Galatians: Verse by Verse](#), Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017), 94.

your salvation brings a curse, because you will be condemned for your sins. Trying to save yourself by your own goodness will not bring life, but death.

The law isn't bad. The problem is that we're sinful. And we can't follow the law².

Because the standard for our standing before God is perfection.

Our salvation isn't on some moral scale, where we're trying to tip it in our favor.

Nor does God grade on a curve where we just need to be a little bit better than the average person to be considered good.

You might be more moral than your neighbor, or some knucklehead in your family. But that's not God's standard.

Joke - bears in the woods

It's not like that joke of if you're out in the woods with other people and a bear starts chasing you, you don't have to outrun the bear, you just have to outrun the slowest person.

That isn't how righteousness is defined. It's not by a human standard. It's by God's standard.

It is righteousness which is required to be in God's presence. And we can't just be pretty good, or follow part of the law, or usually be moral. That isn't good enough.

And I say this often. But what matters in this verse is that Paul is explaining why the law can't save. Because even one sin is a violation of God's Holy law. There are no small sins.

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

But the good news is that we have a savior who was cursed so that we can be blessed.

We come to our second point.

Second part - blessed

Verse 11:

¹¹ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

² Philip Graham Ryken, [Galatians](#), ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 110.

Paul quotes a second text from the Old Testament.

Here he's quoting from the book of Habakkuk.

The righteous shall live by faith.

In chapter 2, Paul had already quoted from Genesis and how Abraham was justified by faith.

But a person still could have argued, "well maybe the reason why Abraham could be justified by faith was BECAUSE he lived before the law."

But now, Paul is quoting from the prophets to show that the Old Testament is still talking about righteousness and faith.

Verses 12-13:

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"—

A little bit to unpack here.

In the context of our passage, Paul has already been beating the drum that we cannot follow the law. That righteousness is through faith.

So when he says that the law is not of faith, he's again pointing to the distinction between the two.

The law is not faith and faith is not the law.

Faith looks not at what we do, how we can follow the law.

Faith looks at what Christ has done.

Paul quotes again from the Old Testament. This time Leviticus 18:5. I'm going to read that verse:

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

It's a passage that is calling for righteousness.

It's pointing to life that comes from the law. But here's the problem.

Israel couldn't follow the law.

And so I'd argue that it's ultimately pointing to the person who would perfectly follow the law and in so doing, not just live, but give eternal life.

And I think that's the same sense in which Paul is writing in Galatians 3 when he says:
"The one who does them shall live by them."

We cannot follow the law, but someone has. And it is by faith in him that we have eternal life.

And Paul carries the thought of what Christ has done into verse 13:

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"—

Earlier, Paul talked about the curse of trying to follow all the law perfectly, because of our sin.

But here he's saying that Jesus not only took that curse upon himself, but he became a curse.

Jesus would not only die for our sins, but as Paul will say in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus bore the wrath of God for us who deserved wrath.

He faced death for us who were Spiritually dead.
And he became a curse for us who were cursed.

The holy God died for we who were unholy and ungodly.

We could never follow the law. We could not be good enough.

And that's what the world so often wants to focus on. And that's why so many hate the message of the gospel. Because for so many, we don't like the idea of a God who brings wrath. So many don't like the idea of a God who opposes sin. They don't like the idea of a God who would condemn the people he made for disobeying his law in his world and not being entitled to his rewards.

And so people question God. They question his love. Question his goodness. They question how he is good.

But God IS good.

Because even though we were sinful, God made a way.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us

For us.

And those two words should be a cause for rejoicing. For praise.

That we have a good God who redeems. That we have a gracious God who saves.

But it also should be humbling.

That we are sinful people who do not and cannot live up. And we have a savior who went to the cross **for us**.

Not because we're good. Because he's good.

Not because we're so loveable. Because he's so loving.

And so people can complain that they don't like the fact that they can't be good enough on their own. OR they can accept the grace of a savior who went to the cross **for us**.

Meditation

And again, that should be humbling.

And it should be a reminder of why we need the gospel everyday.

Because even as a Christian, it can be easy to feel a sense of moral superiority. It can be easy to feel like we're so far ahead of others.

But no matter how good you think you are, just remember that you'd be lost without Christ. No matter how good you think you are, that you could never be good enough on your own.

I've heard the analogy that the worst player in the NBA is closer to LeBron James than we are to the worst player in the NBA in terms of talent.

And when we want to compare our righteousness to those around us, when we're made by a Holy God, no matter how good we are, we're closer to the worst of tyrants than the Lord.

And so let us not look down on people. Let us pray for people. Let us not be cynical, but let us be loving. Let us not think we're better, but let us rejoice that we know there's salvation.

Because apart from Christ, we are dead in our sins.

I think sometimes we want to only focus on grace. Grace is good. But it's not so amazing if it's not looked at in light of what it saved us from.

If we've been delivered from great areas of sin in our lives, we should praise God for that. But not feel superior because of it. Because without the work of Christ, we'd have been hopeless.

And so may we live as people whose lives have been touched by grace. Who are still a work in progress but who have a faithful God. And who want to share with others the good news that changed our heart and soul, which is that we were cursed because of our sins, but we have a savior who bore the curse so that we could be blessed.

In our passage, Paul says:

“Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—

Here Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy.

Being executed is not usually considered an honorable death.

It's usually reserved for those who commit a serious crime.

The Old Testament law had its various capital offenses.

Now in the Old Testament, they did not have crucifixion. But one of the methods was death by hanging.

And so there is a slight difference between hanging and crucifixion. That's not Paul's ultimate point. His point is on the shaming of execution.

That in a public spectacle, Jesus went to the cross.

He endured the curse of a guilty man, even though he was innocent.

And he did that **for us**.

Jesus was cursed so we can be blessed.

Verse 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.

I want to remind us of something.

I said this in the beginning. But Paul keeps taking us back to Abraham in this chapter.

And he's this central figure of the Old Testament. And to the people who were trying to impose the Old Testament law on new Christians, they were well versed in the story of Abraham, the covenant with Abraham.

And what Paul is again reminding us of is that the promise God had made to Abraham so long ago is achieved by Christ.

Where the Lord first called Abraham in Genesis 12. Even before Abraham had believed, the Lord made the promise that he was going to bless Abraham and make him into a great nation.

The reason why wasn't because of Abraham.

It was because of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who ensures these blessings because he's the one who was cursed.

The bad news of our sin is that it separates us from God.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus saves.

The bad news is that we cannot follow the law.

The good news is that Jesus did it for us. And when you come to faith and believe in him, even though we are sinful, the righteousness of Christ is credited to us as if it were our own.

Conclusion

I'll close with this.

In 1927, a man named Ed Smith applied to Georgia Tech.

But a clerical mistake was made and Mr. Smith was given two enrollment forms.

He had a penchant for practical jokes and decided to enroll twice. Once under his own name and a second time as a fake person. George P. Burdell.

The name came from combining the first name of his high school principal with his mother's maiden name.

When Ed enrolled, he enrolled George P. Burdell in all the same classes.

He signed George's name on the attendance sheet.

If you can believe it, he would do assignments twice.

When exams rolled around, he'd take two copies and take the test twice. For four years.

Georgia Tech issued George P. Burdell a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

And later a master's degree in mechanical engineering.

George P. Burdell did nothing to earn any of it.

How could he?!

Our salvation before God is not because of our own moral actions. Because we cannot follow all that God has commanded. We sin.

But Jesus does the work for us. He lived a perfect life for us.

And when you believe in the gospel, you're believing in the salvation of someone else who did the work for you.

After graduating from college, George P. Burdell was enlisted in the navy and became part of a bomber crew. Despite the fact that he didn't exist.

He was also actually enlisted in the military in Korea and in Vietnam.

Years later, he'd be listed on the editorial board of the satirical Mad Magazine.

He continues to be a running gag with Georgia Tech and their alumni. He's listed on the rolls of numerous Atlanta churches. In 2001, he was one of the leading vote getters in an online poll for Time Magazine's Person of the Year.

In 2019, a satellite designed through Georgia Tech's school of aerospace engineering was sent into orbit. Along with students who worked on the project, Burdell's name was engraved on the satellite.

And all of those accolades are because of the work of others.

The Bible shows us grace and law. It's not two roads to the same destination. One leads to curses, the other leads to blessings.

Man's natural desire is to pursue law and try to earn his own salvation.

But the Bible says it cannot work.

Jesus offers that salvation.

Grace and law.

Blessings and curses.

Jesus and you.

Who do you trust for your salvation? Do you want to trust in yourself? Or do you want to trust in the savior who lived the life for you and who was cursed so you can be blessed?