

HIS SIDE VERSUS OUR SIDE - OVERVIEW OF GALATIANS

Or, What is a TRUE Christian?

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CHAPTER 7

BLESSING VERSUS CURSING - GALATIANS 3:13-14

"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." -- Galatians 3:13, 14.

What an antithesis (or paradox) is now before us! It is intended to remind us of the scene in Israel's history when, upon entering the land, they were to divide into two groups -- an antiphonal chorus, as it were -- the one on Mount Ebal, the other on Mount Gerizim. The group on Mount Ebal were to take the law with them, and from this mount was to go forth "**with a loud voice**" the warning of "**Cursed be he,**" "**Cursed be he,**" "**Cursed be he**" who disobeys its demands. Then across the valley came the echoing chorus of "**Blessed shalt thou be**" for heeding the voice of the Lord. Read Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Israel's history has been a prolonged experience of the curse, with but brief interludes of the blessing.

What is the Curse?

Shall we regard the Ten Commandments, embodying the highest possible moral standard for regulating human conduct, a curse? No, indeed; they have been the basis for the world's best jurisprudence. Where, then, lies the curse?

1 -- *The Law's insistence upon obedience from men who are by nature sinners.* "**Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them**" (Galatians 3:10).

The law is a system that requires continuous obedience, not to one point but to the whole. "**For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all**" (James 2:10). If I break one law I cannot plead my obedience to a score of other laws to get me off; I am in the toils of the law for breaking just one.

Thus we see that nature and intent of the law: not as a way of salvation; never, but as a system of showing up man's sinfulness. **"For by the law is the knowledge of sin"** (Romans 3:20); **"That sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful"** (Romans 7:13). **"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions"** (Galatians 3:19), that is, to make us consciously transgressors.

To understand the intent of the law we must consider its characterization in II Corinthians 3. It is called **"the ministration of condemnation"** and **"the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones."** This, note, is GOD's characterization of the Ten Commandments; they bring the curse of condemnation and death to sinful man.

And the teachings of Jesus, instead of easing the situation, make it far worse. In the Sermon on the Mount He made the infringement of the law to consist, not in the outward act but in the sinful condition of the heart. Thus the highly respected man, as society sees him, may be a murderer or an adulterer in the sight of GOD. See Matthew 5:21, 22, 27, 28. Jesus was demanding a rightness of heart, a **"righteousness [that] shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees"** (Matthew 5:20), men who prided themselves upon their law performances but were utterly condemned by the spirit and intent of that law.

2 -- *The law fastened its curse upon our Lord Jesus CHRIST.* **"Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"** (Galatians 3:13).

While the Jews executed by stoning to death, they had the custom of impaling the dead body on a tree. Their law said, **"He that is hanged is accursed of God"** (Deuteronomy 21:23). Deliberately, voluntarily, the Blessed One, having proved Himself sinless, allowed the law to pronounce Him worthy of death and place Him on the tree that He might Himself become **"accursed of God."** Reading the psalms of the suffering Saviour -- see Psalms 22 and 69 -- we are in the presence of an agony far greater and deeper than physical suffering. Forsaken of GOD! Hanging between heaven and earth, rejected of both, acceptable to neither. Despised; yes, made a curse!

-- Why all this? **"For us."** **"Made sin for us"; "Wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities"; "Bare our sins in His own body on the tree"; "Gave Himself for our sins"**

-- to what purpose? -- **"that He might deliver us."** With this awful picture before our eyes of what the law could, would and should do to us, but did it instead to our Substitute, thus "redeemed from the curse of the law" we can sing from hearts filled with gratitude:

Free from the law, O happy condition,
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission;
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Grace hath redeemed us once for all.

Now are we free -- there's no condemnation,
Jesus provides a perfect salvation;
"Come unto Me," O hear His sweet call,

Come, and He saves us once for all.

"Children of GOD," O glorious calling,
Surely His grace will keep us from falling;
Passing from death to life at His call,
Blessed salvation once for all.

-- P.P. Bliss.

3 -- *The law imposed a burdensome yoke.*

As a system of life it prescribed the minutest details of one's conduct; do this, and don't do that. Cursing with the death penalty for its infringement, it equally cursed with its demands for daily living. So much that Peter, at the council gathered in Jerusalem for the consideration of this vexed question, pleaded: "**Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?**" (Acts 15:10). From this cursing, galling yoke CHRIST has come to deliver, saying,

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

What is the Blessing?

Law demands; grace gives.

If we will but come out from under law and its curse, come under the provisions of grace, GOD will give, and give, and give. Under grace He gives favor, He gives life, He gives Himself. In fact, He delights to give. Thus a threefold blessing is set before us:

1. -- *The blessing of Abraham* (3:14) In Scripture Abraham is the primal illustration of faith: "**He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness**" (Genesis 15:6).

Above all else GOD wants faith -- faith that CREDITS Him and His word. In Abraham's case it was faith in the promise of a physically impossible seed; but that promised seed, Isaac, was the key to the promised Seed, CHRIST. It is through this Seed, by the same operation of faith, that we, too, come into the favor of GOD. So this Gospel that included us by faith was preached before "**unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham**" (Galatians 3:8,9).

2 -- *The promise through faith* (3:14). Note the repeated occurrence of "**promise**" -- seven times in this one chapter (3:14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 29). It is upon this word that the argument for grace as against law, for faith as against works, hinges. Neither law nor law-performance has any promise -- other than penalty for falling short of law's demands. But grace through faith brings promise upon promise. Note verse 16, "**to Abraham and his seed,**" referring to CHRIST as the one channel through which the promises are passed on to us.

What, then, is the specific promise accorded to us through CHRIST? When He had finished His work on our behalf, He bade His disciples to "**wait for the promise of the Father**" (Acts 1:4), namely, the HOLY SPIRIT. Of all the gifts of grace the HOLY SPIRIT is the greatest. He it is who makes the plan of redemption operative and effective. It is His presence that makes Christian living distinctive. "**The promise of the Father**" -- to whom? Primarily to the Son, in the ages past when this plan was agreed upon in the Godhead. As though the Father had said, "Son, if You will take upon You flesh and blood, and give Your life a ransom, I promise to give the HOLY SPIRIT to all who believe upon You, thus to unite them to Us and enable them to live our life upon earth."

3 -- *A covenanted blessing, ours as an "inheritance"* (3:18). This is the climactic point in the argument against law and works. One does not work for an inheritance; it is one's by right of birth, or adoption. The law had nothing to do with GOD's blessing to Abraham; it could have no part in that blessing since it came "**four hundred and thirty years after**" (3:17). The blessing was wholly of promise (vs. 18). And now GOD has passed on to us as children of Abraham this method of dealing, namely, by grace through faith, under the New Covenant, a new agreement with promises still more wonderful than those of the Abrahamic covenant, for CHRIST "**is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises**" (Hebrews 8:6).

How Christian people need to be aroused to a realization of their riches under the New Covenant, a covenant of life, a covenant that secures the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT, the promise of the Father, to all who believe. And all this is ours, not by merit, not by working for it, but by way of inheritance. So the chapter concludes: "**And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise**" (3:29).

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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