

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON FORTY)**

### ***“A CURSE FOR US”***

#### **GALATIANS 3:13-14**

#### **(ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION)**

*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.*

The two verses of our text beautifully summarize all that Paul has been saying in this section. In verse **10**, Paul’s readers were given **bad** news: “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.” In verses **13** and **14**, we read the **good** news that the curse of the Law has been negated by Christ’s act of becoming a curse for us!

In verse **13**, Paul writes, “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.”

There are two prepositions, one in verses **10** and the other in verse **13**, which present a striking picture of what is at stake in salvation, and the fate that awaits all those who reject Jesus Christ. In verse **10** Paul informs us that we are *under* a curse. In verse **13**, he states that, Christ has redeemed us *from* or *out from under*, the curse.

From the moment of our birth we are **under** the curse of the Law. The curse of the Law has been hanging over our heads like a sword. In the case of those who reject Christ's offer of salvation, the "sword" will fall on them at the end of their lives and they will suffer the consequences of the curse throughout eternity-eternal separation from the presence of God their Creator.

If we have not accepted Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, we will have to pay the price for our sins ourselves. If we have not yet found refuge in Christ, we are, at this very moment, in peril of our souls! The sword may fall on our heads in the next moment!

The curse spoken of in verse **13**, is that which the passages of the Mosaic Law, particularly **Deuteronomy 28**, pronounced upon those who seek to be justified by the works of the Law, or any other system of rule-keeping. The Law pronounced a blessing and a curse. But the blessing was barren, because the Law made no allowance for human sin and weakness, and **one** failure brought condemnation upon the offender. **James** informs us of this in chapter **2** and verses **10** and **11** of his general epistle:

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

*11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.*

**(English Standard Version)**

From this hopeless state of condemnation in which sinners were not only helpless to redeem themselves, but were helpless to satisfy the just demands of the Law and therefore unable to find acceptance with God, Christ redeemed us by satisfying the just demands of the Law which we broke, and paying the penalty in our stead, thus making it possible for a thrice holy God to bestow mercy on sinful human beings on the basis of justice satisfied.

As sinners, we were **under** the curse. Christ came **between** sinners and the curse. The sword that was hanging over our heads fell on His head and slew Him. He took us out from under the curse, having become a curse for us. In so doing He *“redeemed us from the curse of the law.”*

The word *“redeemed”* is a translation of the Greek word **exagorazó**: (**ex-ag-or-ad’,-zo**), which means, “to redeem i.e. by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off; to buy up, to buy up for oneself, for one’s use.”

The **Septuagint**, often abbreviated as **LXX (70)**, is the earliest existing **Greek** translation of the Old Testament from the original Hebrew. The word **exagorazó** is used frequently in the **Septuagint** with the idea that such redemption involves a cost of some kind, effort, suffering, or loss to the one who effects the deliverance. It conveys the figure of a ransom. We see a powerful illustration of this in **Hosea 3:1-3**, where the prophet is instructed by God to redeem his adulterous wife Gomer, who has left him, perhaps to become a prostitute in the temple of a pagan god:

*1 And the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.”*

*2 So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.*

*3 And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.”*  
**(English Standard Version)**

Brothers and sisters, we were in the same condition as Gomer. As sinners we needed a ransom, for we were prisoners, sentenced to death under the Law. The word **exagorazó**, often spoke of one purchasing the freedom of a slave or a debtor. Because the death of Christ was a substitutionary death for the sins of God’s elect, it satisfied God’s justice and exhausted His wrath toward His elect, so that Christ actually

purchased believers from slavery to sin and from the sentence of eternal death. Thus God could be both Just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

In Romans **3:19-28**, we read the following:

*19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God.*

*20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

*21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—*

*22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:*

*23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

*24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

*25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.*

*26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

*27 Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith.*

*28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.*  
**(English Standard Version)**

If a person dies outside of Christ, the only thing that he or she can receive from God is **justice**. God cannot be his or her **Justifier!**

It is apparent that the false, legalistic teaching of the Judaizers, may have persuaded the Galatian believers that Christ's substitutionary death on their behalf, only redeemed them partially, and that they had to complete the redemption process by submitting to circumcision and a strict observance of the Law. This is why they were willing to abandon the Gospel of the grace of God and embrace a gospel that was a mixture of Christianity and Judaism. Paul rebukes them for this and says in essence, "You do not need to mix grace with Law in order to be fully redeemed, for Christ has fully redeemed you by becoming a curse for you."

Commenting on verse **13**, **Charles Swindoll** writes the following:

"Those who attempt to be saved—or, really, to save themselves—by any means other than by grace through faith fool themselves. Instead of receiving a blessing as a result of their efforts to obey the Law, they fall under a curse. So how does faith remove us from this curse of the Law? Paul tells us that Christ, Who did live a perfect, righteous life without even the slightest sin, nevertheless suffered the curse of the Law...By suffering death 'on a tree,' that is, a cross of wood, Jesus Christ experienced the kind of death the Law reserves for one who is cursed."

In verse **13**, as he does so often in this section of his letter, Paul quotes Scripture. This time he quotes from **Deuteronomy 21:22-23**:

*22 "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree,*

*23 his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*

**(English Standard Version)**

**Warren Wiersbe** explains that the Jews did not crucify criminals; they stoned them to death. But in cases of a particularly shameful violation of the Law, the body of the offending Individual was hung on a tree and exposed for all to see. This was a great humiliation, because the Jewish people were very careful in their treatment of a dead human body. After the body had been exposed for a time, it was taken down and buried. Of course, Paul’s reference to a “tree” is a reference to the **Cross**. Our Lord was not stoned and then His dead body exposed; He was nailed alive to a tree and left there to die. But by dying on the Cross, Jesus Christ bore the curse of the Law for us. He became a curse for us so that now we are no longer under the Law and its dreadful curse.

It was the curse of the Mosaic Law that descended on Christ, subjecting Him to the death of a criminal. The Law satisfied its demands upon the Lord Jesus. It therefore removed Him from the confines of its legal dominion and control. Since believers are identified with Him in His death in which He paid our penalty, they are removed with Him from the confines of the Law’s dominion and control, and are therefore no longer under its curse.

Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, became a curse **“For Us!”** By bearing God’s wrath for our sins on the Cross, Jesus Christ took upon Himself the curse pronounced on those who violated the Law, as the following passages, all reflecting the translation of the **English Standard Version** indicate:

**Isaiah 53:4-6**

*4 Surely he has borne **our** griefs and carried **our** sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.*

*5 But he was pierced **for our** transgressions; he was crushed **for our** iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought **us** peace, and with his wounds **we** are healed.*

*6 **All we** like sheep have gone astray; **we** have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of **us all**.*

### **Mark 10:45**

*“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom **for many**.”*

### **Romans 5:6-8**

*6 For while **we** were still weak, at the right time Christ died **for the ungodly**.*

*7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—*

*8 but God shows his love for us in that while **we** were still sinners, Christ died **for us**.*

### **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.”*

### **Hebrews 9:28**

*“So **Christ**, having been offered once to bear the sins **of many**, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.”*

### **1 Peter 2:24**

*“He himself bore **our** sins in his body on the tree, that **we** might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds **you** have been healed.”*

### **1 Peter 3:18**

*“For Christ also suffered once **for sins**, the righteous **for the unrighteous**, that he might bring **us** to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.”*

Jesus Christ took our condemnation, punishment and death, upon Himself and bore them all for us. He took our place as the lawbreaker and guilty party before God, and He bore the punishment of the lawbreaker for us. Jesus Christ substituted Himself, His perfect life, for our sinful life. He substituted His obedience to God for our

disobedience. He bore our sin and punishment so that we might stand righteous and perfect before God. This is the great Biblical truth of the vicarious, substitutionary sufferings and death of the Son of God who paid the price for the sins of God's elect. Christ the perfect Sacrifice offered Himself to bestow a perfect salvation. The innocent One died for the guilty ones; the Just One died for the unjust ones; the Sinless One died for the sinful ones.

The great Protestant Reformer, **Martin Luther** wrote,

"Paul does not say that Christ was made a curse **for Himself**. The accent is on the two words, '**for us.**' Christ is personally innocent. Personally, He did not deserve to be hanged for any crime of His own doing. But because Christ took the place of others who were sinners, He was hanged like any other transgressor.....Whatever sins I, you, all of us have committed or shall commit, they are Christ's sins as if He had committed them Himself. Our sins have to be Christ's sins or we shall perish forever."

The **King James Version** translates **Numbers 6:22-27**, in the following way:

*22 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,*

*23 Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them,*

*24 The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:*

*25 The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee:*

*26 The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.*

*27 And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.*



In verses **24-26**, we read the words of blessing that the High Priest was to pronounce over the people. If instead of blessing the people, the High Priest cursed them, he would utter words such as these:

The Lord curse thee, and abandon thee:

The Lord turn His face away from you and condemn thee:

The Lord hide His face from you in His wrath and withhold His support from you, thus leaving you without any assurance whatsoever.

**R. C. Sproul** wrote the following in respect of the curse of the Law:

"In our day a curse is regarded as superstitious, but in biblical categories it has a different meaning. The curse in the Old Testament refers to the negative judgment of God—**the opposite of blessing**. When God gave the covenant to Israel he listed the curses and blessings, the punishments and rewards, to be dispensed to the faithful or unfaithful (**Deuteronomy 28**).

In the Bible blessedness means to be able to come near to the presence of God. The closer you come to a face-to-face relationship with God, the more blessed you are; and the farther you are from God, the more cursed you are. Thus, the curse of God was likened to being removed from his presence altogether, to be utterly cut off from him...

**John's** Gospel opens with the statement, *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.'* The word translated *'with'* implied "face to face." Originally, the Son of God was face to face with God.

When Jesus bore the punishment for our sins he experienced God's curse and rejection. God's benevolent face was turned away from Jesus, and in its place he encountered, face to face, the malevolence of God. In spiritual torment he cried, *'My God, my God, why have you*

*forsaken me?' (Matthew 27:46). Why? So that he might die that we might live.*

*At the cross we see the truest picture of the horror of our sin. Thank God that Jesus was willing to undergo the curse on your behalf."*

*Christ voluntarily took our place and was made a curse for us, so that the blessing spoken of in the following verse (verse **14**), might be ours. He fulfilled the Law's demands by His perfect obedience, and He suffered the Law's full penalty by His death on the Cross. Now all those who believe in Him are forever justified because of what He did for them.*