

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. 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 3:10-14

It is the most natural thing in the world to suppose that we are approved of God because of the good things that we do and disapproved because of the evil things that we do. The normal, natural man supposes that God keeps some sort of a balance sheet, and that if the value of his good deeds is greater than the value of his evil deeds, then God will approve of him.

There is no question that we form our friendships and that we approve of men on this basis. If we call someone our friend, it is usually because we value certain positive things about person more than we are irritated by the negative things. We think that God is like us in this respect, if we think about it at all. Some people suppose that being human is sufficient to gain God’s favor and that he loves all men without distinction, simply because they are men. Being human is sufficient to have God’s favor.

Of course, those who believe such things have a terrible dilemma when it comes to the bad things that happen to people in the world. The mental gymnastics that people go through on this matter are really interesting.

1. Some say that God is all powerful and all knowing, but that He has given men free will, and the bad things that happen are the result of bad choices that people make. This is very little comfort to me if you burn my house down. God is very clear about this matter in the scripture. If I see evil being done, and hide my eyes from it, and do not try to prevent it, I am guilty before God. Surely He doesn’t hide His eyes from the evil that is done, and seek to comfort me by saying, “Well, I gave man free choice, it’s too bad that they use it so badly.” How can God escape culpability if He knows evil is being done, has the power to prevent it, and does nothing to prevent it? How can He be a good governor of the world?
2. Some say that God is struggling with evil just as we are. He is doing the best He can with it. He uses His influence to try to overcome the evil, but other than that He is an observer of the events. This is an implicit denial that God created all things. Instead, God formed the world out of the substance that He had to work with, and is doing the best He can. This position is essentially the same as the first one.
3. Some say that God is indifferent. He started everything, but just lets it go, having no more interest in the events. We are on our own.

4. Some say that God doesn't know what the future is. He has given man freedom of choice, but has no idea what use man will make of this gift, and so is not responsible in any way for the choices that man makes.

Because of the desire to maintain some shred of natural ability in man to be pleasing to God, men are willing to strip God either of His power or of His knowledge or His goodness. The presence of evil in the world seems to be proof that God is lacking in one or all of these things.

The result is the remaking of man into the victim, the victim of mistreatment by impersonal evil forces that even God cannot subdue. There is an unspeakable horror lying under all reality, and no matter what we do, death and misery ultimately await us. The only thing we can do is imagine a better world and try to work hard to bring our dreams to pass. Man, his love, and especially his imagination, are the things that offer the greatest hope to mankind. Anything else, and especially religion, is illusion and fantasy. Man is not responsible for his misery—it is the natural order of things.

Paul has a completely different world view. It is the world-view of scripture, but it was not the world view of his Jewish contemporaries or of the world at large. Nor was it the worldview of the Judaizers who were attempting to seduce the Galatians away from the Gospel of Christ.

This was Paul's world view in respect to these things.

1. Men lie under a curse—this curse rests upon all their works unless those works are completely and perfectly conformed to the law of God. The curse is from God Himself who gave the law.
2. Therefore men cannot be saved by their works. None of man's works are perfectly conformed to God's law, and even if some were, they could not atone for those present and past works that are filled with sin.
3. Instead, the just live by faith. They always have, and they always will. The justification of those who believe is accomplished by Jesus taking the curse upon Himself on behalf of His people.

But let us look at the words of this passage. The force of Paul's remarks rests upon the citing of three passages from the Old Testament.

- I. The first of these passages is in verse 10: Cursed *is* every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.. This is from Deuteronomy 27:26 and the first verse of the next chapter: **Cursed *be* he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen. And it shall come**

to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe *and* to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

- A. This is the first principle of man nature, and this is the natural ethical principle that was created in man as the image of God. Because God is loving and good, the moral principle that man is called to is to be loving and good. It cannot be but that God would require man to love him with all his heart, all his soul, all his mind, and all his strength. The moral principles of the law reflect God’s own attributes. To require anything else but this would be the denial of God’s own nature, and God cannot deny Himself. If you love me, keep my commandments, our Lord said. Because we **ought** to do what the law commands, if we seek to be justified by the law, the curse comes upon us. There was nothing new in the moral requirements of the law of Moses. The new things in the law of Moses were those things that pointed forward to Jesus Christ—which were done away with when He came. What we owe God because He is our Creator, and because of His infinite and beautiful nature, has never changed and will never change: it is nothing less that to love Him with all our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our minds. Then, because man is in the image of God, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.
- B. Man’s misery then, is because of the curse. Certainly it comes originally from Adam’s sin, but Paul does not bring this up here. His purpose is to refute the Judaizers. They would agree that all mankind is under the curse and is miserable, so that is not an issue. The Gentiles deserve whatever they get would be their attitude, but the law brings a blessing for obedience. Not so, says Paul, for in that case the blessing would be contingent upon **perfect** obedience, which can never be. Therefore to be under the law is to be under a curse.
- C. So Paul’s point is this: If you expect to find favor with God by the works of the law, you fall under the curse, for your works cannot rise to the perfection required by God. In reality, the circumcisers among the Galatians were not contending for love toward God, but for circumcision. Those who boast in the law do not really boast in the law, but in the ceremonies and paltry observances in which they can appear to be more righteous than others. Those who know the true nature of the law realize that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.
- II. The second verse from the Old Testament that Paul quotes is in verse 11 and comes from Habakkuk 2:4 **Behold, his soul *which* is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.**
- A. Some have accused Paul of misusing this verse. Without even discussing the implications for the inspiration of the Bible, we would affirm that Paul is not misusing the quotation. Faith is contrasted with the unjust man whose soul is “lifted up.” The pride of man will not admit his sinfulness and therefore will not accept justification by faith. This is the stumbling block of the cross. Faith in Christ crucified requires

me to confess that I am a sinner unable to do any work that is worthy of earning me favor with God. The writer of Hebrews uses it with the same meaning in Hebrews 10:38, 39: **Now the just shall live by faith: but if *any man* draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.**

- B. The question is this: what is the principle by which you live your life: Do hope to gain favor with God by doing the works of the law? If so, then you are under the curse of the law and cannot be saved. You must renounce your own works as means of gaining favor with God and trust in Jesus Christ, believing that He died for you to give you life and hope. Your works then become sacrifices of thankfulness and love.
- C. The first principle of the life of the Christian is faith, not obedience. As your pastor, I know that your obedience is assured if your faith in Christ is secure. The opposite is not true. Obedience does not assure faith, for reliance upon obedience brings the curse.

III. The third verse quoted by Paul is found in verse 13: “Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree.” The Old Testament not only mentions the curse that comes upon those who do not keep the law to perfection, but also mentions that those who are hanged are cursed. This was the fulfillment of the curse of the law, that those who were worthy of death under the law and hanged were accursed: Deut. 21:22,23 **And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged *is* accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance.**

- A. This refers to the Jewish practice of impaling criminals and exposing their bodies—they were accursed of God. This is a signpost pointing to Jesus Christ.
- B. To be hanged was a representation of God’s curse. The Jews did not execute criminals by crucifixion—their practice was by stoning, and then exposing the body by impaling as a warning to lawbreakers. Christ was executed under Roman law and crucified. In John 12:32,33 **And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.**
- C. Again in John 18: 31,32: **Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death: That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die.**
- D. The truth of the Bible is that Jesus died to remove the curse from those who believe. This is the message of the Gospel: John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

Hallelujah.