

CURSED BY THE LAW AND SAVED BY GRACE

TEXT: GALATIANS 3:10-13

INTRODUCTION:

1. Many people think they can be saved by keeping the law. For example, the Seventh-Day Adventists teach salvation by a mixture of law and grace.
2. The SDA put out a deceptively titled publication, *Saved By Grace*. In this tract, it says, "Christ says to every man in this world what He said to the rich young ruler: If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments, Matthew 19:17. In other words, the standard for admission into heaven is a character built according to the ten specifications, or commandments, of God's Law" (Charles T. Everson, *Saved By Grace*).
3. Does the Lord say to every man in this world what He said to the rich young ruler, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments?"
4. Our Lord did not say that to Nicodemus. Or to the woman at the well.
5. Our Lord was not telling the rich young ruler that he needed to keep the law in order to be saved. Our Lord used the law to show him that he needed to be saved.
6. The law is like a mirror; it cannot save us (cf. James 1:22-25). The law reveals to us our need to be saved.
7. Our Lord was testing the rich young ruler. He was using the law to produce conviction of sin in the man's heart. This is the purpose of the law. The law convicts; the Gospel saves.
8. The rich young ruler was under the delusion that he could get to heaven by keeping the law. Therefore, our Lord used the law to show him how lost he really was.
9. The man thought that he had kept the law perfectly (Matthew 19:20). This proves he knew very little about the law (cf. Gal. 3:10-12).
10. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).
11. Spurgeon said "the rugged way of works was set before him; not that he might attempt to win eternal life thereby, but that he might perceive his own shortcomings, and so feel his weakness as to look for salvation by some other method."
12. On the other hand, there is another extreme to be avoided. Many churches minimize the law and ignore the law. This is also unscriptural. Consider these Scriptures:
 - "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (Matt. 5:17).

- "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12).
- "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (I Timothy 1:8).
- "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Timothy 3:16).

11. From these (and many others) Scriptures we see that it is wrong for Christians to minimize or ignore the law.

12. Then, on the other hand, there are some others who mix the law with grace.

This too is wrong. Consider these Scriptures:

- "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Romans 3:28).
- "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Romans 11:6).
- "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

13. Those who teach that it is not necessary for Christians to preach the law or to obey the moral law of the OT are guilty of antinomianism. This word comes from two Greek words, *anti* (against) and *nomos* (law). Those who teach that Christians are under the law are guilty of legalism. Paul's epistle to the Galatians was written to refute this false doctrine. As I have stated, the theme is "the vindication of the Gospel of the grace of God" (Scofield Bible).

14. Tonight, as we continue in our study of this great epistle we will see that a man who attempts to please God by keeping the law is cursed by the law.

I. THE LAW CANNOT SAVE SINNERS; THE LAW CAN ONLY CURSE SINNERS (GAL. 3:10).

1. Notice that the Bible does not say, "For as many as have broken the law are under the curse..." but rather, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse" (3:10).
2. In other words, all who seek to obtain favor with God on the basis of obeying the law are under the curse of God, i.e. they are condemned to death.
3. As most of you realize, this is the exact opposite of what the world believes. Any time a celebrity dies – it doesn't matter if he or she was an immoral movie star, or a perverted rock and roll singer, or a corrupt politician, the world says: "Oh, he is in heaven now!"

4. Why do they say this? Because they say his good deeds supposedly outweighed his bad deeds.
5. But what does the Bible have to say about this?
6. "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).
7. Nothing about good works. If you believe in Jesus you are not condemned. If you do not believe, you are condemned already.
8. The world hates this. Paul refers to this in Galatians 5:11 as "the offence of the cross."
9. John 3:36 says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."
10. First John 5:12 says, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."
11. In Galatians 3:10, the apostle Paul is quoting Deut. 27:26. Both the Old and New Testament teach that "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."
12. It is not enough to keep the law for a day or a month or a year – the Word of God says "continueth."
13. Can anyone do this? The children of Israel agreed to do it (cf. Ex. 24:3, 7, 8). But they failed to keep God's law; they disobeyed God willfully, continuously, and shamelessly (cf. James 2:10).
14. It is not enough to keep most of the law. Notice the words "in all things" (Gal. 3:10). The law demands complete obedience.
15. You can live in Queens County or Nassau County (New York) for 50 years and never break a law. But do not expect the mayor or some other official to present you with an award. But if you get caught one time driving over the speed limit or driving without a seat belt, brother you are a law-breaker and will get a ticket.
16. Why is that? Because the law only penalizes law-breakers, it does not reward those who keep the law.
17. Harry Ironside used to use this illustration: a man fell off a cliff and as he was going over he grabbed onto a chain that was fastened to a tree stump. The chain had ten links. Ironside asked this question: how many links would have to break before the man would fall into the abyss below?
18. The obvious answer is one. The law is like that chain. To unsaved person: the law is like that chain. You have broken God's law and the Bible says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezek. 18:20), and "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23).

19. So you are falling off the cliff and unless you repent you will fall right into that horrible pit the Bible calls hell.
20. No one can keep the Ten Commandments. And even if one could, that still wouldn't be enough, because there are over 600 laws in the five books of Moses and all of them would have to be obeyed.
21. With the exception of true Bible Christianity, all religions are based upon works – Judaism, Islam, Roman Catholicism, all of the cults such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons, etc.

II. THE LAW CANNOT JUSTIFY SINNERS; WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (GAL. 3:11, 12).

1. Paul has already established that the law cannot save sinners. It curses sinners.
2. Next, he repeats what he already explained in chapter 2, that we are not justified by works, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (3:11; cf. 2:16).
3. Justification is that act of God whereby He declares righteous all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that we are declared righteous the moment we believe in Christ.
4. We are not made righteous. Justification should not be confused with sanctification.
5. Once again, Paul goes to the OT to strengthen his argument (3:11; cf. Hab. 2:4). Habakkuk 2:4 is quoted three times in the NT (cf. Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38).
6. "And the law is not of faith..." (Gal. 3:12). The law does not ask men to believe. It does not even ask men to try and keep the Ten Commandments. The law calls for strict, complete, and perfect obedience.
7. "Ye shall do my judgments, and keep mine ordinances, to walk therein: I am the LORD your God. Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD" (Lev. 18:4, 5).
8. "The law is not of faith..." (Gal. 3:12) – they are contrary principles. The law says: "Do and thou shall live." Faith says: "Believe and thou shall live."
9. This is Paul's argument: The just shall live by faith. Therefore, the man or woman who tries to please God by keeping the law is not living by faith. Therefore, he or she is not just as far as God is concerned. Men may hold certain people in high esteem (e.g. religious leaders like the pope), but God says if they are not living by faith, they are lost.
10. Before moving on to my final point, let me reiterate an important point: the purpose of the law is to show a sinner what a guilty wicked sinner he is (Rom. 3:20; 7:7-10). The law condemns. It never saves; it never justifies.

11. The law is like a mirror that shows us our true lost condition. Religious people who attempt to please God by keeping the law are guilty of "frustrating the grace of God" (Gal. 2:21). And if sinners could be saved by obeying the law, "then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2:21).
12. God did not give the law to save men. God gave the law to test men and to reveal man's true condition before a holy God.

III. THE CURSE OF THE LAW FELL UPON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST; THEREFORE HE HAS REDEEMED US FROM IT (GAL. 3:13).

1. To redeem means to buy back, or to deliver by paying the price. The curse of the law is death. In other words, the penalty for breaking its commandments is death (Gal. 3:10b).
2. Since we are all hopeless and helpless law-breakers, our prospects would not be very good. But thank God, the Lord Jesus Christ has delivered us from paying the penalty of death demanded by the law (3:13).
3. He paid the awful penalty by dying in our place as our substitute. He redeemed us by shedding His blood and dying on the cross for our sins.
4. Beloved, the dreadful curse of God literally fell upon Him (cf. 3:13; cf. II Cor. 5:21; Isa. 53:4-12).
5. Apart from the substitutionary death of Christ on the cross for the sins of fallen mankind, there could be no forgiveness of sin and no salvation.
6. The law taught that when condemned criminals were hung on a tree, it was a sign of their being under the curse of God (cf. Deut. 21:23).
7. What makes this Scripture particularly interesting is that the Israelites did not hang people on a tree as a method of public execution – they stoned people to death.
8. However, when a reprehensible crime had been committed, the criminal would be stoned to death and then his body would be strung up on a tree as a public spectacle, as an example. But it was not to be left there overnight. Otherwise, the land would be defiled (Deut. 21:23).
9. The curse of the law was real. It took our Lord to the cross. The inflexibility of the law's demands is clearly seen in the fact that when Christ took the place of the law-breaker, He had to endure exactly the same penalty as the most wicked of sinners.
10. And the fact that our Lord died by being nailed to a cross underscores the curse of the law.

CONCLUSION:

1. Crucifixion was regarded by the Romans as too shameful and disgraceful for a Roman citizen.

2. Cicero, the famous Roman statesman and writer, who was born 100 years before Christ, wrote these words: "The very name should be excluded from the thoughts, eyes, and ears of a Roman citizen. It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen, but what shall I say about lifting him on a cross? No word can adequately describe such a nefarious thing."
3. And no words can adequately describe what our Lord went through when He died on the cross for the sins of the whole world!
4. How then can anyone imagine that he can please God by keeping the law?