

# **Sermon: The Cross and Substitution: Two Relationships**

**Text: Galatians 3:10-14**

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**Introduction:** There is one thing that is clear from the opening book of the Bible, and that is God wants to have a relationship with us. According to Paul we have two choices in our approach to God. We can develop a relationship with the Law or one with Jesus. It is the difference between curse and blessing, death and life.

I am sure all of us have experienced traffic jams where we have slowed down or come to a complete stop for a while wondering if traffic would ever start moving again. After a while cars do begin moving again and usually we go by whatever was causing the bottleneck. (see N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, pp. 32ff.)

Even before the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai, The Israelites were identified as God's people. We hear family talk as early as Genesis.

The original highway down which everyone was going on their way to God had been somehow blocked by the Jews. They had gotten out ahead and produced a traffic jam and they were not letting anyone else by or letting anyone else in.

**Genesis 12:1-3 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Somehow the Jews had excluded all others based on their forgetfulness and special laws, days and practices.

God escorted Abram out under the night sky and said, **Genesis 15:5-6 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup>... "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup>Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

On this road to God the Jews were supposed to lead the way, not block the way. "But what had happened to this family?...God's promise still held good; God still intended to bless the whole world through Abraham's family; but Israel, the promise-bearers, were not only themselves failing, but getting in the way of the wider fulfilment." - N. T. Wright, p. 33

Paul wants to make it clear to the Galatian churches that one choice in developing a relationship with God is:

## **I. Obeying the Law (vv. 10-12)**

There's an innate problem with this approach, however.

The Law curses the imperfect.

i.e. everyone is under the curse because Paul knew:

**Romans 3:23 (NIV)** <sup>23</sup>... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**Leviticus 18:4-5 (NIV)** <sup>4</sup>You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup>Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

And anyone who would break any of the laws that follow in the Leviticus text **Leviticus 18:29b (NIV)** <sup>29b</sup>“...—such persons must be cut off from their people.

Paul had said earlier in this chapter that to go back under the Law, i.e. trying to be perfect, was a fool's game (**3:1**).

The curse that ends an entire list of curses in **Deuteronomy 27** is quoted in our text:

**Deuteronomy 27:26 (NIV)** <sup>26</sup>“Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this law by carrying them out.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

The Israelites had always been quick to promise obedience and, just like us sometimes, quicker to break their word.

Since we are all imperfect we stand cursed by God.

Certainly a major concern for Paul was: if the Galatians are brought back under the Law, they will fall back under the same curse as their Jewish instigators.

The Law condemns.

Because we are imperfect, and if we insist on living in the Law, we stand condemned without remedy. The Law is set up to punish, condemn and kill. We deserve the verdict of death if we choose to live under the Law.

The Law is perfect in its ability to point out our deficiencies. It does not necessarily point out how good we are. Its goal is not to beat us down, but to point us to developing a relationship with God.

**Illus.** Certainly there are differences between a couch potato and a world-class athlete when it comes to jumping over an obstacle for example. If the item in question is, say, 50 feet wide, though, both will fail in jumping across it. People have degrees of ability spiritually, but all fail without the cross.

The only sensible choice in developing a relationship with God involves:

## **II. Living by Faith (vv. 13-14)**

This is done through our relationship with Christ. As Bonhoeffer says: “Christ is for us.”

“It was Paul’s achievement to express the miracle of the Incarnation in an infinite variety of ways. All the foregoing may be summed up in the single phrase -- Christ is ‘for us,’ not only in word and in his attitude towards us, but in his bodily life. He occupies in his body the place where we should be before God. He suffers and dies in our stead, and can do so because of the Incarnation (**II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3.13; 1.4; Tit. 2.14; I Thess. 5:10**, etc.). The Body of Christ is in the strictest sense of the word ‘for us’ as it hangs on the cross, and ‘for us’ as it is given to us in the Word, in baptism and in the Lord’s Supper.” - Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship*, pp. 268-269

Christ took our curse.

He took our place, our punishment, our sentence of death. What happened to Jesus on what we call “Good Friday” was reserved for the worst representative of humanity instead of its best. We would never allow anything like this today as a punishment even for the worst criminal.

Lee Strobel in his book the *Case for Easter* paints a picture of what happened. He says it is “a beating so barbarous that it shocks the conscience, and a form of capital punishment so depraved that it stands as wretched testimony to man’s inhumanity to man.” And this is only the physical part of Jesus’ suffering for us.

Christ redeemed us.

Even though I do not understand it fully, I believe that the price of Jesus’ life removed the curse and penalty for my sins. Because he bought me with his blood I have traded masters and have an obligation to do my best for my Lord. God has brought me into his family and made me a co-heir of everything promised to Jesus.

Christ provides the Holy Spirit to those who believe.

**We have the choice of remaining, living, abiding in the Law or in Christ. The decision seems clear. We pray others see what we have seen: Jesus on the cross. That is the end of many things and the beginning of a new life for those who believe.**

**The most wonderful gift of God's Spirit gives us the assurance that we are eternally to be a part of the family of God. The Spirit gives us the power to do what we could never do on our own: live in Christ.**

**Conclusion:** Sometimes the smallest word can make a huge difference in understanding. In **verse 13** there are two prepositions that carry important meaning theologically.

**Christ redeems us literally "out" of the curse or "from" the curse of the Law.**

**Christ becomes a curse "for" us, i.e. "on our behalf."**

**And in Verse 10 Paul uses a preposition (ὑπο) "to show our relationship to the Law. In other words, we were under the curse of the Law and Jesus stepped in between us to allow us to come out from under the curse."**

**- notes from Dr. Marion Henderson on Galatians.**

**Hallelujah, what a Savior!**