Gal. 3:10-14; Dt. 27:9-10, 26; The Curse of the Law I. Relying on the Works of the Law II. Redeemed from the Curse of the Law

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, most of us like to think that we are on the right side of the law. The fact is, how you view the law is directly linked to how you stand in relation to the law. If you are a rebel, you do not like the law. There was a song back in 1960 that put it this way- I fought the law and the law won. But as Christians, we are don’t fight the law- right? We like the law- in fact we think that the law should be applied more in society. We find comfort in knowing that the law is being enforced- we like the idea of police enforcing the law even when we sleep. Well, today we are going to see the Law in a different light. The Law of God is not going to be the source of comfort for us today. Today Paul continues his very tight reasoning as he unfolds the use of the law in relation to our salvation. The law/gospel contrast is again before us. Are we saved by works or faith- are we the recipients of the curse or of blessing? Paul is putting the first use of God’s Law before us- that the Law of God show us our sin and misery and as such the Law condemns. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ delivers us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us.

**I. Relying on the Works of the Law**

In our first point we consider the inability of the law to save. Those who rely on the works of the law will find that the law is not able to deliver. These works cannot be used to ransom the soul. As v. 11 says, no one is justified before God by the law. Now why is this? The reason that our obedience to the Law cannot be the ground for our justification is twofold. Both man’s inability and the high standard of the Law are the two reasons why our justification cannot be found here. So what is man’s ability? Well, by the works of the law no one can be justified because we are sinners. Or as v. 10 says, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. As Rom. 3 puts it, there is no one righteous. We have all fallen short- we all fall in various ways and at various times. We all stray like sheep as Isaiah 53 puts it. Added to this, the high standard of the law is perfection. God is holy and His law is holy! Those who abide by all things written in the Law will be blessed- but if you do not abide by all things written in the law you are cursed as v. 10 continues. So the work of your hands- your supposed obedience to the law cannot save you because you will never be good enough. Perfection to every law in every way is what God requires. Since we are fallen and imperfect, the law can now only condemn. This is not because there is a problem with the Law per say, but rather the problem is with us. We are no longer able to keep the Law as we were once able. So the law is good in itself, but to us as law breakers the law can only bring curses. The Law of God is a unit- and since the Law reflects God’s character, the Law must be kept wholly. If you break the law in any part or way at any time, you are a lawbreaker. The Law of God stands or falls together. I could say that the Law of God judges us on a pass/fail scale. Either obey fully and perfectly, or you will be condemned. That is why v. 10 says- abide by all things! Do them all- obey them all- or you have obeyed none. So although obedience to the Law is commanded and expected, we have not and cannot attain blessings from God by our obedience to it! Rather, the only thing that we gain or earn from the Law is a curse!

If you try to use the Law as a mechanism to gain favor with you, you will find yourself falling short and the Law’s only word to you is this- you are a law breaker and condemned by God! What is a curse? Well, the curse of God is the pronouncement of judgement and wrath upon those who rebel against him. The curse is the appointed penalty for wrongdoing. This curse is seen the most clearly in the wrath and judgement of God made evident in death. Ultimate and eternal death- those who are under the curse are under God’s wrath and are deserving of His righteous anger. But who is God angry with? Who deserves this curse- this hot indignation? Well, look again at v. 10. Anyone who relies on their own works stands under this curse. Anyone who thinks that they are good enough for God- who do not see their need for forgiveness. Anyone who boast in their own merit and ability- thinking that God will accept them as they are without any mediator. But more than that- God’s curse is not just on those who boast of their own works- God’s wrath is on any and all who do not abide by all the things written in the book of the law. So not just those who know the Law and try to earn God’s favor- but anyone who breaks the law- unconsciously rebelling- these too are under a curse. So it is not just the Pharisee who has their own rules- not just the moral ones who trust in their morality to save- but any and all who are law breakers! In other words, everyone! All humanity is united in their being under the wrath and curse of God because we are all rebels- we all break God’s law! As Jer. 17 says, the heart is deceitful and desperately sick! The whole world is under the curse and we all must come to grips with the wrath of God! The Law exposes our sin and misery- proving to us that we are rebels who deserve the curse! Instead of getting us closer to God, the Law puts us under the curse of God! It does not make things better- only exposes what is true! We are guilty, polluted sinners! Children of wrath as Eph. 2 says. This, the first use of the law, can only condemn. So the application is clear- those who want to be justified must never trust in their own works- nor look to the law of God to save us from the wrath of God!

**II. Redeemed from the Curse of the Law**

Rather, there is another way to be saved- not by works but by grace! Not by Law but by Gospel! As Paul continues in v. 11, the law is not of faith- but the righteous shall live by faith! We are not under the law as a way in which to earn our salvation- but rather salvation is freely given to those who are of faith! We live by faith! Not only is it true that no one will be justified by their obedience to the law, it is also true that we can be justified by faith! So how does this happen? How can the guilty, law breaking sinner that deserves a curse become justified and righteous before God? The answer is found in what we call vicarious atonement- or as Mt. 20 puts it- Jesus gave His life as a ransom for many. Although we are guilty and deserve to be cast our and condemned, we are purchased and redeemed by Christ as v. 12 puts it! We are redeemed from the curse of the law. Redemption is a term that speaks to payment- something is purchased and paid for. A certain payment was made so that an object now has a new owner. We were once sold to death and a slave to sin- in line for the curse. We were on the conveyer belt on our way out the door- ready to be dropped into the pit of despair and everlasting death. However, we were purchased! We were taken off that conveyer belt- no longer in line for condemnation! This is the good news of the gospel- we did not receive what we deserved as law breakers. Instead, Jesus took our place on that line! Jesus became a curse for us- He took our place and suffered what we should have received. You see, Jesus purchased us by the shedding of His blood- He became a curse for us and in our place! He suffered on the cross- which caused him to cry out in agony- being forsaken by the Father. This is what it means to be redeemed! We now belong to Jesus Christ- fully and finally- because we have been purchased. The condemnation that hung over our heads fell on His shoulders! He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. By His wounds we are healed! Upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace! He became a curse for us as v. 13- specifically and symbolically as he suffered on the cross. In quoting from Dt. 21, Paul reminds us that death by crucifixion was a sign that this person on the cross was cursed by God. Those who were hung on trees suffered until they died as a warning to others- this person’s life was so heinous that only the most painful death would satisfy the justice of God. But when Jesus took our place on the cross, it was the just suffering for the unjust! The only one who does not deserve to be cursed as a lawbreaker was treated as if he was the worst lawbreaker to ever live. The only perfect person was treated as the most rebellious! His death was a detestable and accursed- because that is what a law breaker deserves. He had to die so that we might live! He had to suffer the curse so that we might be blessed! This is the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me!

As we close, the contrast between man’s idea and God’s plan for salvation is put on display once again today. Are you saved by working under the law, or by believing under grace! This makes all the difference- as stark as the difference between curses or blessing! Instead of using the law to expose our need, the Judaizers were trying to use the law to get them saved! All these I have kept- they were saying. But the only hope for a fallen mankind is found in the atonement! Redeemed by grace! As II Cor. 5 summarizes, the Father made him who had no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God! Jesus Christ delivers us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us.