

THE GOSPEL OF GOD'S GRACE OVERCOMES THE CURSE

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been cursed by another person? Why did they curse you? Have you ever cursed another person? Why did you curse them?

We declare others to be cursed or invoke a curse against someone when they have offended us, when they have in some way unjustly, in our view, disrespected us or harmed us. We have many different kinds of expletives to pronounce our curses upon others. In addition, some people resort to occult practices like voodoo or magical incantations to invoke curses upon others. Whatever words we may use the intent is always the same. We are declaring that another person deserves to suffer, to be punished for the injustice they have brought to us or those we love. While the Bible is quite clear that humans do not have the right to curse others, yet our cursing does reflect what motivates God's curse upon disobedient and rebellious humans. His curse is always perfectly just because he knows every motive and every action of every human. The presupposition of this passage is that every human being in their natural state is not loved by God but cursed by God. Paul's point is that everyone outside of Christ is under God's curse while all those who are in Christ are under his blessing.

STUDY

1. Verse 10 begins with "for," it gives one of the reasons for why v. 9 is true. According to v. 10 why is it that those who trust Christ are "blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith?"

Because everyone who is seeking to be made right with God by obeying the law is under God's curse. Here again he sets in contrast faith in Christ with obeying the law. The reason that the blessing is given to those who have faith and not to those who obey the law is because all who obey the law are under God's curse.

2. Read Genesis 3:14-24 & Deut. 28:58-68, compare with Matt. 7:21-27, 13:47-50, Ephesians 2:3, 2 Thess. 1:8-9 & Rev. 20:10, 14-15, 21:8. What does it mean to the object of God's cursing?

"Cursed" is the OT word that summarizes God's settled anger against the wicked, those who disobey his laws. In Genesis 2 Adam is told that if he eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that he would surely die. Then in Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve disobey by eating the fruit, God pronounces his curse, his judicial sentence, upon the serpent, the woman and the man as the just retribution towards them for their sin, their despising him and his word. The curse of God is ultimately expressed in their being shut out of the Garden of Eden. They are shut out of the blessing of God and thus become subject to death. The curse of God is his justice against the disobedient that ultimately is expressed in that eternal punishment in hell, in the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, where the wicked will be shut out from his presence forever.

3. According to v. 10 why is it that everyone who is seeking to obey the law in order to be made right with God is under God's curse?

It is because the law requires not partial obedience but complete and continuous obedience. Any failure to obey the law immediately subjects you to God's curse. Every act of disobedience calls forth God's just fury against you. Therefore everyone who is seeking to be made right before God by obeying the law is under God's curse because no one is perfectly keeping God's law.

Paul emphasizes the universality of God's curse because there is no one who is perfectly keeping God's law. All men, both Jew and Gentile are obligated to keep God's law because there is one God and one law to which all humans must render obedience. If those who are trying to keep the law, the Jews, are under God's curse because of their failure to keep all of it all the time, then how much more are the Gentiles, who make no attempt to keep God's law under God's curse? All human beings are under God's curse due to our failure to obey God and so those who are seeking to gain God's blessing by keeping the law merely expose themselves to God's curse because they do not keep all the law all the time. God doesn't grade on a curve. He isn't going to bless those who obeyed 75% of his law. He is like the police officer who gives a ticket for speeding in spite of the fact that you inform him that you obey the speed limit most of the time or because you meant to obey it but accidentally went too fast because you were talking on the cell phone. Neither the police nor God is impressed with good intentions. He does not respond to people who admire his law but who do not keep it. He is determined to punish forever everyone who does not do everything that is written in the book of the law all the time.

4. How do you feel about being the object of God's cursing because you do not keep all the law, all the time?

Only by faith in Christ can God's curse be turned into God's blessing because the law condemns everyone who does not obey all the law all the time.

5. According to v. 11, why is it clear that no one is justified by means of keeping the law?

It is because the prophet Habakkuk says (2:4), "The righteous will live by faith."

6. Read the first two chapters of Habakkuk. How does 2:4 fit into the argument of these first two chapters?

At the beginning of this short book the prophet complains to God that Israel is full of wickedness and injustice and God is doing nothing about it. God is permitting injustice to flourish and wicked people to get away with their wickedness (1:2-4). God answers his prophet and tells him that he is doing something about it. He tells him that he is sending the Babylonians to come to Jerusalem to wipe it out because of all the evil the people of Israel have done (1:5-11). When Habakkuk hears God's answer he protests. He informs God that the Babylonians are idol-worshipping pagans who are worse than the Israelites. How in the world can he use such evil people to punish Israel? Literally he says, "Why are you silent while the wicked (the Babylonians) swallow up those more righteous than themselves (the Israelites) (1:12-2:1)?"

God's answer to his question is simply this. God is not going to let anyone get away with anything. Wicked people, whether Jew or Gentile will be punished for their wickedness. In short, he says that everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is under his curse. He is judging all the nations and every human who does wrong. It is in the midst of his declaring his universal judgment on universal human sin that he says, "the righteous will live by faith." Do you see what he is saying? "The only people who will escape this universal destruction, the only ones who will live through this judgment are those who are declared righteous through their faith in my promise." Those who depend upon God to make them righteous will live, will not be destroyed in the universal cataclysm that is coming on all sinners, Jew and Gentile alike (2:2-20).

7. How does the fact that people are made righteous and thus live by trusting God's promise prove that no one is justified by the law, according to v. 12?

If people are made righteous by faith in his promise and thus they live and the law is not of faith, then the law cannot make you righteous. He then quotes Leviticus 18:5 to show how the law is not of faith. "The one who does these things will live by them." The law promises life to the one who obeys the law. Therefore, the law is all about human effort. It is about humans doing something for God, not humans receiving something from God. The law promises life to those who do what the law says, not to those who trust the promise of God. The reason that law keeping is offensive to God is because when you keep the law as the ground of acceptance with God you are treating God as if he needs something from you. You are the strong one, not God. It is your strength that saves you, not God's strength. Law-keeping places you in a relationship of superiority to God. Therefore, law-keeping exalts human beings, not God.

8. What is the ground of your confidence that you will live, escape hell and gain heaven? Are you receiving what God promises by faith or are you trusting in your obedience, your decisions, your prayers, your love for God? How do you know?

Only by faith in Christ can God's curse be turned into God's blessing because either you trust God's work or your work.

9. According to v. 13, why is faith in **Christ** the only way to be made righteous and thus live? What makes him the only fit object of our faith?

When your faith is in Christ you will live, you will be justified, you will be blessed with Abraham, you will receive the promise of the Spirit because "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" All of us are by nature under the curse of the law because none of us has obeyed all the law all the time. Christ takes us out from under God's curse by his becoming a curse on our behalf.

10. What evidence does Paul give that proves that Christ became a curse for us? Why is this sufficient evidence that he became a curse for us? See Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

Paul tells us that we can be absolutely sure that Christ was under God's curse because God says in Deut. 21 that everyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse. He tells us this because we know that Jesus never sinned. Jesus is the perfect Son of Man and the Son of God. He is the only person in the universe who does not deserve to be cursed by God because he always did what pleased his Father. He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. However, God says that everyone who is hung on a tree is under God's just condemnation. Christ was hung on the tree, the cross and thus in this historical event we know that he is under God's curse. How can the perfect Son of Man be under God's curse when it is only those who do not do all the law all the time who are under God's curse? Christ did all the law, all the time and so he should not be under God's curse, so how was it he was hung on the cross? The obvious answer and I believe this is the light bulb that went on for Paul at his conversion on the Damascus road, is that Christ is being cursed not because of his own sins but because of the sins of all who trust in him. I think that the main reason Saul the Pharisee was so angry with Christians and so opposed to Jesus' claim to be the Messiah is because he died on a cross and Paul knew that "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree." Saul the Pharisee thought this way, "The Messiah, God's anointed one, cannot be cursed by God and therefore, Jesus, who was hung on a tree, cannot be the Messiah." However, when Christ was revealed to him as the Messiah he could not deny that God cursed the Messiah because Jesus hung on a tree. Therefore, the curse of God upon him must be due to his taking to himself our sins, not because of his sins.

11. What does it mean that Christ became a curse for us?

He became a curse on our behalf. He took our sins to himself in such a way that God had to curse him with the curse we deserve. Christ was wrapped up in our sins and thus became the object of God's curse. Therefore, we are no longer under God's curse because Christ has our sins and has experienced the curse that was due to us for our sins. We depend upon what Christ has done, not upon what we have done. It is the only way to be free from the curse because Christ is the only perfect man who had no curse upon him and was thus able to take to himself our sins and thus become subject to the curse due us for our sins. God cannot say to the one who trusts in Christ, "damn you to hell," because he placed your sins on Christ and damned him to hell for your sins.

12. To whom does vv. 13-14 apply? Compare with 2:16.

The "us" that Christ redeemed from the curse of the law are all those, whether Jew or Gentile who place their faith in Christ. Those who trust him as the one who bore the curse for them are the only ones who are redeemed from the curse, who receive the blessing promised to Abraham, who receive the promise of the Holy Spirit.

13. Is it faith that redeems us or Christ? Does God consider us redeemed from the curse because we have faith or because we have faith in Christ? Why is that?

Faith does not redeem us from the curse. Christ by becoming a curse redeems us from it. Our faith merely receives what Christ has done. Faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. Faith has no virtue or power in itself, it is only as good as the trustworthiness of the person or object in which it is placed. Consider this example (or make one up of your own). This summer a group of us are going to get on an airplane and fly around the world to Mongolia. Our getting on the plane is evidence that we believe the promise the airline makes to us that if we will sit on this airplane we will end up in Mongolia. We are trusting the plane,

the pilots, the mechanics and the airline that runs the plane to do what they have promised us, take us to Mongolia. Does my faith take me to Mongolia? No, the pilot, the plane, the mechanics, etc. all these are taking me there. My faith merely receives what they provide. The airline does what it promises and thus by faith in the airline I arrive in Mongolia. Let's say I tell you that in order to save money I've asked Warren Sveum to build an airplane from scratch in the next three months and then fly me to Mongolia. I know that Warren is very good at building wagon wheels and he knows a lot about computers. I know that he can drive a car and is a responsible person. Therefore, I am absolutely confident that he will be able to fly me to Mongolia on his homemade aircraft. If I go through with this plan and trust Warren's airplane and his flying ability, will I arrive safely in Mongolia? No I will not. I have the same faith in Warren and his plane that I have in United Airlines, why will my faith not get me to Mongolia? The reason is that my faith is not in a trustworthy object. Faith does not do anything; it merely receives what another has promised to do. Warren cannot perform what he promises. Faith in Warren Sveum is a vain faith, just like faith in my ability to keep the law or trusting that I am valuable and worth saving or trusting that my prayers to dead saints or ancestors is a vain faith. Your faith is only as good as the object in which you place it. Only faith in Christ will not disappointment because only Christ became a curse for all those who trust in him.

14. How does it feel to know that Christ became a curse for you who believe so that you can live and not die?

Only by faith in Christ can God's curse be turned into God's blessing because Christ became a curse to gain the blessing for all who believe.