

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Two Adams, Two Covenants and *Sola Fide* (PART 2)

“Such is the popular conception of a curse—” writes Michael J. Glodo, “the mere utterance of profanities. While our world has perfected the art of profanity, cursing is unappreciated.”¹ In some parts of the country, hurling crude and profane epithets at people (and things) is colloquially called “cussing.” Our English word *curse* comes down to us from an Anglo-French term, *curuz* which meant “wrath.” Thus, to curse someone was to call down the wrath of God on them. It was the invoking of a divine imprecation. To curse someone meant that they were accursed by God. Cursing, as you can see, involved some theological understanding! I doubt if many people who flippantly use words like “hell” and “damn” (especially when this last word is divinely intensified) are self-consciously aware of the biblical imagery their language actually involves. Paul’s argument in the third chapter of Galatians graphically unfolds what is really involved when someone is said to be *cursed* by God. The Apostle is forcefully arguing his case for justification by faith alone by first pointing the Galatians back to their own salvation experience (3:1 - 5) and then by appealing to the case of Abraham (3:6 - 9) and finally by pointing to what the Law really does—curse.

I. SALVATION BY FAITH: ARGUMENT FROM THE CASE OF ABRAHAM

The gospel that Paul preached was no innovation. The Galatians had been bewitched by the way the Judaizers appealed to the Old Testament Scriptures. Look at Abraham, says Paul. The apostle will spend the next two chapters focusing his attention on Abraham. “This is no mere incidental illustration,” notes Burton, “but fills a vital place in his argument. The fact itself suggests, what an examination of the argument confirms, that Paul is here replying to an argument of his opponents.”² This is the same problem that we met in Paul’s epistle to the Romans (4:9 - 12). By bringing in Abraham, Paul successfully trumped the Judaizers who had evidently appealed to Moses to substantiate their claims. Three things are emphasized about Abraham (cf. Genesis 15:1 - 6):

- A. God made Abraham a promise. This is covenantal.
- B. Abraham believed God.
- C. Abraham was declared righteous.

NOTE: The instrumentality of Abraham’s justification was faith—*works were not involved*. Abraham was justified *before* circumcision (Genesis 15:6 and 17:9) on the basis of faith alone. This is the pattern that Paul is establishing—the Gentiles are justified in the same way that Abraham was. Blessings come through *believing* Abraham, not through circumcised Abraham.

II. SALVATION BY FAITH: ARGUMENT FROM THE CURSE OF THE LAW

The Judaizers wanted to introduce the Law into the gospel. Paul’s masterful grasp of the Old Testament is again demonstrated as he proceeds to show that righteousness cannot be had by the works of the Law. On the contrary, the Law can only condemn. All who seek justification by the Law are under a divine covenantal curse.

A. The Condemnation of the Law (3:10 - 12)

Suppose the Judaizers had responded to Paul’s appeal to Abraham by saying, “Well, Abraham’s case is different. He came *before* the Law. Now that we have the Law, things are different.” No, declares Paul, it is *impossible* to be justified by the Law. He supports his case by appealing to Deuteronomy 27:6; 21:23 and Habakkuk. There are *four* specific things that should drive every legalist out of his false sense of security:

1. The Law must be *continually* kept.
2. *Every* aspect of the Law must be kept (cf. James 2:10).
3. *All* of the Law (moral, civil, and ceremonial) must be kept.
4. The Law must be *done*. There is no stopping short of 100% doing (cf. Acts 15:10). Finally, also Moises Silva, my former professor of New Testament, makes this crucial observation, “The fact is that the apostle nowhere (in Galatians or in his other letters) characterizes his opponents as people who are obedient to the law. He will admit to no such thing. In this very epistle, as many have pointed out, he specifically accuses them of not keeping the law (6:13). And in Philippians 3:2 – 3, when describing a group of opponents who, to say the least, had some affinities with the Judaizers in Galatia, he deliberately depicts them as pagans. That general conviction could hardly have been foreign to the Galatian Christians. There is in fact every reason to believe that when they heard Paul describing his opponents as being of the works of the law, these Galatians knew that by that phrase he did *not* mean something like ‘these are the people who fulfill the law’! Or to put it differently, the Galatians could perfectly well understand (whether they agreed or not) why Paul would think of his opponents as people who did not *remain in all things written in the book of the law to do them*.”³

B. The Curse of Christ (3:13)

If the Law brings only a curse, how can faith lift the curse? How can the blessing of Abraham be obtained? Paul returns again to the redeeming work of Christ (cf. 1:4; 3:1). It is Christ, not our faith, that saves and He does this by bearing the curse of the Law.

1. The term “redeemed” is from the word EXAGORAZŌ, commonly used in buying a slave’s freedom (cf. I Corinthians 6:20; 7:23; Revelation 5:9). He delivers us from the penalty of the broken law. “At issue here is satisfaction of violated justice, as is evident from the phrase: from the *curse of the law*.”⁴
2. The method of redemption is substitution. He became a curse *for us*, that is *in our stead*.

NOTE: There is in the Greek text, a graphic picture of what Christ has done as captured in Paul’s use of prepositions. We were *under* (HUPO) a curse (cf. Romans 3:9, *under sin*). Christ purchased us *out from under* (EK HUPO) the curse of the law. He did this by becoming a curse *over* (HUPER) us and so between us and the overhanging curse which fell on Him.⁵ That Christ became a curse is inferred from Deuteronomy 21:23.

CONCLUSION: The Lord Jesus became accursed for His people. He hung on the cross as a condemned criminal (Philippians 2:5 - 11). The cross emphasizes the curse of God, and so a curse becomes a blessing. Christ Jesus has secured the blessing of heaven to earth, and this includes justification (3:8), life (3:11) and the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 9:15). The last three words of 3:14 are emphatic. The blessing comes by faith alone, quite apart from the Law. Any attempt to add works or a condition for justification brings a curse. Time and time again I have highlighted the way those associated with N.T. Wright, Norman Shepherd and their followers in the Federal Vision attempt this very thing. Here is another example. Peter Leithart of the Federal Vision makes this astonishing statement regarding the final judgment. He starts with Westminster Confession of Faith 33.1: In which day, not only the apostate angels shall be judged, but likewise all persons that have lived upon earth shall appear before the tribunal of Christ, to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. Then he asserts that this conflicts with Declaration 9 from the PCA Ad Interim Study Committee on Federal Vision, etc., which reads: The view that justification is in any way based on our works, or that the so-called ‘final verdict of justification’ is based on anything other than the perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ received through faith alone, is contrary to the Westminster Standards. Dr. Leithart then concludes: When anyone associated with the FV says “final verdict of justification,” they mean “final judgment.” It appears that the committee condemns the very view that WCF 33.1 articulates, since the Confession says explicitly that what we receive at the final judgment will be “according to what they have done,” which is clearly *something other* than the “perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ received through faith alone.”⁶ Notice what Leithart is saying—*something other* than the finished work of Christ is necessary for our justification. Does the Westminster Standard support this claim? NO. Note the following, Robert Shaw in his *Exposition of the Westminster Confessions of Faith* (1845) writes: “The sentence to be pronounced will be answerable to the several states in which mankind shall be found. They will receive their doom *according* to their works. –Revelation xx. 13. It is to be remarked, that the good works of the righteous will be produced in that day, **not as the grounds of their acquittal, and of their being adjudged to eternal life, but as the evidences of their gracious state, as being interested in the righteousness of Christ.** But the evil deeds of the wicked will be brought forward, not only as evidences of their being strangers to Christ, but also as the grounds of their condemnation. [my emphasis] This directly contradicts Dr. Leithart’s conclusion. What does it mean to be ‘interested in the righteousness of Christ’? Romans 3:21, 22 says: But now the righteousness of God has been manifested *apart from the law*, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. (ESV) [my emphasis] ‘... apart from the law ...’ This agrees with Galatians 3:5, 6 and Genesis 15:6 which both say that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. It couldn’t have been Abraham’s covenant faithfulness involved in his justification here, because he had barely begun to walk in covenant with God. Yet God clearly pronounced Abraham forensically righteous. Romans 3:21, 22 also tells us that God sees Christ’s imputed righteousness, not our works of the law—again directly contradicting Leithart’s conclusion. Another classic Confession reference is A.A. Hodge’s *The Westminster Confession of Faith* commentary. On WCF 33.1, he says essentially the same thing as Shaw: ***The saints will not be acquitted in the day of judgment on the ground of their own good deeds***, but because their names are found ‘written in the book of life,’ or the book of God’s electing love, and ***on the ground of their participation in the righteousness of Christ***. Their good deeds will be publicly cited as the evidences of their union with Christ. Their union with Christ is the ground of their justification. Their faith is the instrument of their union with Christ; and their faith, as the Apostle James says, is shown by their works. Philippians iv. 3; Revelation iii. 5; xiii. 8; xx. 12, 15. [my emphasis] Again we see that historic Reformed thinking differs greatly from the Federal Vision approach. It’s not what we did or do, but what Christ did for us. Faith is the instrument of our salvation, and even that is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). We are saved by faith, not by works, lest any man boast (Ephesians 2:9). Hodge directly refutes Dr. Leithart by stating the Biblical truth that we are saved because of Christ’s righteousness, not ours. One last comment on Dr. Leithart’s premise. NO one disputes that there will be a final judgment where the elect will receive their eternal reward and the non-elect shall receive their deserved eternal condemnation. The issue is on what that verdict will be based. As we’ve seen in this brief exercise, the classic Reformed and Biblical answer is ‘by faith alone, through grace alone, because of Christ alone.’ The Federal Vision answer is by ‘covenant faithfulness’ which Dr. Leithart not just admits but proclaims to be based on ‘something other than the ‘perfect obedience and satisfaction of Christ received through faith alone.’’ How anyone can say this and then in the next breath say they believe in *sola fide* totally eludes me. This very brief jaunt through some of the classic works on the Confession clearly shows that Federal Vision’s view of the final judgment is not only out of accord with the Westminster Confession, but by extension and demonstration differs from the Biblical presentation. Once again, the Standards hold up as ‘containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.’ NO surprises here.”⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ M.J. Glodo, “The Blessings and Cursings: Deuteronomy Chapter 28,” *Tabletalk*, May 1995, p.12.

² E. DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On the Epistle to the Galatians* (T&T Clark, 1977), p. 153.

³ M. Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method* (Baker, 2001), p. 231.

⁴ H.N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Eerdmans, 1953), p. 126.

⁵ Cf. the excellent discussion by A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In the New Testament IV* (Broadman, 1931), p. 294.

⁶ <http://www.leithart.com/archives/003078.php>

⁷ <http://reformedmusings.wordpress.com/2007/06/22/hi-ho-hi-ho/I> owe this analysis of Leithart to Bob Mattes.