Christ became a curse for us: Galatians 3:10-14

This passage turns on the contrast that Paul draws at the start of v.12: ‘The law is not of faith.’ He has opposed law and faith a few times already in the letter (2:16; 3:2-5), so the contrast is not unexpected. Let me invite you to do an exercise with pen and paper. Write ‘law’ on the left-hand side of the paper, and ‘faith’ on the right-hand side. Reading through the passage, which word does Paul most associate with ‘law’ in this passage? Write that word underneath ‘law’ on your paper. Reading again through the passage, what does Paul say about those who have faith? List these things under ‘faith’ on your paper. What does Paul identify as the blessing of Abraham (3:14)? What other blessing does Paul apparently attribute to Abraham in 3:6? How does that correspond to your list?

You should now (I hope!) have ‘law’ and ‘curse’ on the left-hand side of your paper. In Galatians 3:13, what does Paul say that Christ has done for us to deal with this association of the law and curse and its impact on our lives? And what is the result, or the outcome of what Christ has done (3:14)? Try writing ‘Christ’ now in the middle of your paper. Does this visually help you to see how Christ nullifies the curse of the law for us? And what is the outcome of Christ becoming a curse for us (3:14)?

Now compare 3:10 and 3:14. What two terms in these verses (the first and last verses in our passage) have opposite meanings? Can you see that the effect of Paul’s argument is Christ has turned a curse into a blessing? And who does the blessing come to in verse 14? Can you see how Paul ends the passage by associating Gentiles and faith and blessing, whereas he starts it by focusing on those who are of works of the law (Jews), the law and curse? And why do you suppose he mentions the Spirit again in 3:14? In 3:1-5, Paul has pointed to the Galatians’ experience of receiving the Spirit. Could it be that he is pointing to their reception of the Spirit as evidence that they have received the righteousness that God gave to Abraham (3:6); and if they have that righteousness, what do they also have (3:11)?

If you have been able to follow this exercise, how has that helped you to understand Paul’s argument here? If I have just confused you, then I heartily apologise for that!

Throughout this passage, Paul argues on the basis of Scripture, and he cites a number of texts here: Deuteronomy 27:26 (Galatians 3:10); Habakkuk 2:4 (Galatians 3:11); Leviticus 18:5 (Galatians 3:12); Deuteronomy 21:23 (Galatians 3:13). Visually, where does each of these references belong on your piece of paper – on the left- or right-hand side, or in the centre? Do these references add any depth to your understanding of this passage? (It doesn’t matter if they don’t!)

Now put yourself in the position of Paul’s audience, who had been told that they needed to keep the law of Moses. Do you think you would have found Paul’s argument persuasive?

Why do you think Paul suggests that people who rely on the law are under a curse (3:10)? How did Christ become a curse (3:14)? What do you think Paul means when he says that Christ has ‘redeemed’ us from the curse of the law? How does that work? How do you feel about this? In what way is this passage relevant to anyone who supposes that they could be put right with God by fulfilling the requirements of the law? Paul uses the language of ‘we’ and ‘us’ in Galatians 3:13-14. Do you feel that these verses are true of you? If so, thank God for that! If, not, perhaps this is an opportunity for you to put your faith in Christ so that they can be true of you.

“Lord Jesus Christ, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong in my life (take a few moments to ask his forgiveness for anything particular that is on your conscience). Please forgive me. I now turn from everything that I know is wrong.

Thank you that you died on the cross for me, so that I could be forgiven and set free. Thank you that you offer me forgiveness and the gift of your Spirit.

I now receive that gift. Please come into my life by your Holy Spirit to be with me forever. Thank you Lord Jesus, Amen.”

Nicky Gumbel, *Why Jesus?*