

“The Wondrous Cross”

(Galatians 3:10-14)

Introduction

- In 1702, when he was twenty-eight years old, Isaac Watts became the senior (preaching) pastor of Mark Lane Independent Chapel in London. Just five years later, in 1707 (at the age of thirty-three), he published a collection of hymns for his church called “Hymns and Spiritual Songs” (many of the hymns he wrote in his late teens or early twenties). He is credited with writing some 750 hymns and is regarded by many as the “Father of English Hymnody.”

Included in those published songs was a hymn that many consider to be best hymn ever written in the English language. It was based on Galatians 6:14 – *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”*

- This hymn is titled, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”:

When I survey the wondrous cross / On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss / And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast / Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most / I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet / Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet / Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine / That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine / Demands my soul, my life, my all.

- Over three hundred years later, after it was first published in 1707, this hymn is still cherished and sung by Christians today throughout the world. It is fiercely biblical, richly poetic, and spiritually convicting. For the cross of Christ invites us to see the splendor of God’s amazing love and unmerited grace. But it also calls us to come and die. The gore and glory of the cross demand that we take seriously our desperate need for a Savior. The cross of Christ confronts our pride, assaults our self-righteousness, and exposes our wretchedness. It also portrays God’s sovereign love, great mercy, and amazing toward us as sinners – that the “Prince of Glory died” for me! Such illustrative language reminds us that an instrument of cruel torture and death became God’s wondrous instrument for our salvation.

- ✓ Illust: Commenting on this second verse (of Watt’s hymn), author Douglas Bond offered this personal testimony:

“Watts, by his sense of wonder at the cross of Christ, and with skillful strokes of his poetic pen, showed me the absurdity of my view of the world. He deftly stirred up in me the ugliness and utter inappropriateness of my pride and boasting, my preoccupation with empty things that so captivated my teen world. By vividly holding before me the cross of Jesus, he demanded that I drop everything and reckon with it. By his words, Watts compelled me to join him, to see with him the One who hung on that cross for me” (Douglas Bond, *The Poetic Wonder of Isaac Watts*, p.26).

- In keeping with this year’s Summer Sermon Series: “Sing to the LORD” – using a lyric from a Christian worship song as the biblical theme/topic for the sermon – I have chosen the hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” as our theme song, and Galatians 3:10-14 as our passage for this morning.

Gal 3:10-14 ~ “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them.’ ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

➤ As we pick up this passage in the middle of the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatian Christians (*"the churches of Galatia"*; 1:2 [Galatia was a region in Asia Minor (modern Turkey)]), it is important for us to understand that Paul is arguing against the teaching of a works-based salvation and contending for the truth of the Gospel – salvation by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Unfortunately, the Galatian Christians – who had once professed to believe in the true Gospel – were being deceived those who taught that salvation was, at least in part, earned by a person's good works (i.e., following religious tradition, ritual, rules; e.g., circumcision [see Gal.2:3, 7-9; 5:2, 3, 6, 11; 6:12-13, 15]). Under the pressure of "legalists", who were "false teachers" [*"false brothers"* (2:4); known as *"the circumcision party"* 2:12) and *"the Judaizers"* (2:14)] – who had "secretly" infiltrated or joined the church (2:4) – the Galatian Christians were moving from the true Gospel (of faith) to a false gospel (of works).

Gal 1:6-9 ~ "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed [*anathema*]. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed [*anathema*]."

Gal 2:16 ~ "yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Gal 2:21 ~ "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

Gal 5:2-4 ~ "Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace."

➤ In chapter three, Paul began his Scripture-based defense for the teaching that God's salvation can only be received *"by hearing with faith"* (3:2) and not earned *"by works of the law"* (3:2). In Galatians 3:10-14, Paul compared the *"curse"* (3:10^{2x}, 13^{3x}) that comes from the law verse the *"blessing"* (3:14) the comes through faith in Christ. In fact, this passage can be easily divided into two parts: A) The curse of the law, B) The redemption of Christ.

A. The curse of the Law (vs.10-12)

➤ In the New Testament, the word *"curse/cursed"* (*katara/epikataratos*; 3:10^{2x}, 13^{3x}) is a serious and sobering word. It refers to God's just condemnation (not merely "a swear word"). It is the exact opposite of God's blessing. To be cursed by God, or under the curse of God, is to be actively damned by God and under His wrath (Jn.3:18, 36).

✓ Illust: "The curse to which Paul refers is nothing less than exposure to the unmitigated wrath of God Almighty. It is a frightful and dreadful thought, eclipsed only by the reality that this is the destiny of all those who do not live by faith in Christ" (R.C. Sproul; *"The Curse of the Law"*).

➤ Not only did the Judaizers wrongly apply Abraham's circumcision as a means of salvation, they also wrongly taught that one must keep the Law in order to be saved. They believed that they could obtain (or secure, repay) God's salvation (His saving grace) by their good works. But Paul showed them, from Scripture, that the law does not (cannot) save – it actually curses.

Gal 3:10-12 ~ "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.' ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.' ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them.'"

- In verses 10-12, we find three different Old Testament Scriptures that Paul used to show that keeping the Law does not save but actually condemns – *“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse”* (vs.10). To *“rely on works of the law”* (vs.10, *“of the works of the law”*, NAS) is the attempt to obtain or secure salvation (God’s saving grace) by obeying God’s law. Paul’s Scripture-based argument gave three reasons why those who try to be saved by “good works” are under the curse of the law.

1. Because the law must be obeyed perfectly (vs.10)

- The first reason stated as to why no one is saved (either in part, or in whole) by keeping the law is because the law must be obeyed perfectly. Since no one can obey the law of God completely, and all have sinned against God (Rom.3:10-12, 23), everyone falls under the just condemnation of God for sin (Jn.3:18, 36; Rom.5:12; 6:23). Again, as Paul made clear by citing Old Testament Scripture, this has always been true: *“... for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’”* (vs.10):

Deut 27:26 ~ “‘Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’”

- Those who set aside the grace of God, in hopes of being saved by their own righteousness (law-keeping) foolishly place themselves directly in God’s just condemnation and wrath. In doing so, they quite literally attempt to be their own savior and reject the one true Savior from God.

Gal 2:19-21 ~ “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

Gal 5:2-6 ~ “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ⁶For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

Rom 3:20 ~ “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.”

James 2:10 ~ “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.”

Matt 5:20 ~ “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matt 5:48 ~ “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

- A person can either come to God on their own merit (self-righteous, religious pursuits), or on the merit of Christ through faith. Those who come on their own merit are cursed, justly condemned, by God as sinners. Those who come to God receiving Christ’s righteousness through faith are blessed, justly saved, by God as righteous (2Cor.5:21).

✓ Illust: “The curse of God is like a flood that swallows everything that is not of faith” (Martin Luther; *Luther’s Commentary on Galatians*, 3:10).

2. Because justification is by faith, not obedience (vs.11)

- The second reason stated as to why no one is saved (either in part, or in whole) by keeping the law is because justification (salvation) is by faith, not obedience. Old Testament saints were saved by God's grace through their faith in the Christ who was to come, and New Testaments saints were/are saved by God's grace through their faith in the Christ who has come. Every believer – whoever has lived and whoever will live – is saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. God's salvation always has, and always will be, only by His grace through faith in Christ!

Gal 2:16 ~ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

Eph 2:8-10 ~ “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (cf. Eph.2:5; Tit.3:3-7; 2Tim.1:9)

Gal 3:7-10 ~ “Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Gal 3:22-27 ~ “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.”

Gal 5:6 ~ “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

- As Paul made clear, this has always been true. There has never been a time, nor will there ever be a time, in human history when God's saving grace can be earned (merited) by good works (obedience). To further prove his point, Paul quoted from the prophet Habakkuk: “*for ‘The righteous shall live by faith’*” (vs.11; Hab.2:4).

Hab 2:2-4 ~ “And the Lord answered me: ‘Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it. ³For still the vision awaits its appointed time; it hastens to the end – it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come; it will not delay. ⁴Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.’”

- True spiritual life comes by faith, and not by works. The true Christian is one who is saved by faith and lives by faith. The true Christian knows that, apart from Christ and the sanctifying work of the Spirit, there is nothing good that dwells in them (Rom.7:18). The Christian's salvation is, from first to last, a work of God. God saves and sanctifies the one who puts their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and trusts in Christ's righteousness and not their own. The only thing we bring to our salvation is the need for it.

✓ Illust: “The only thing you contribute to your salvation is the sin that makes it necessary” (unknown).

✓ Illust: “Rock of Ages”, written by Augustus Montague Toplady (in 1776):

“Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling; Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace; Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.”

3. Because faith leads to obedience, not obedience to faith (vs.12)

- The third reason stated as to why no one is saved (either in part, or in whole) by keeping the law is because faith leads to obedience, not obedience to faith. That is, true belief in God (faith in Christ) will always lead to a faithful obedience to God (to Christ).

Eph 2:10 ~ “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Luke 6:46-49 ~ “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? ⁴⁷Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. ⁴⁹But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

- Conversely, a mere obedience to God (trying to keep God’s law) does not naturally lead to true (saving) faith in Him. A person can be very religious and yet totally unsaved. Obedience is a byproduct of faith, not faith a byproduct of obedience. The law brings death and not life, whereas faith brings life and not death. This is to what Paul was referring when he wrote: *“But the law is not of faith”* (vs.12).

A salvation by faith is incompatible (contrary) to a salvation by obedience. Justification by faith and justification by works are mutually exclusive. A “works” based salvation says, “Look at me, look at all that I have done for God!”, whereas a “faith” based salvation says, “Look at Christ, look at all that Christ has done for me!”

✓ Illust: “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, written by Isaac Watts (in 1707):

“Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast / Save in the death of Christ my God! All the vain things that charm me most / I sacrifice them to His blood.” (vs.2; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, written by Isaac Watts, 1707)

Gal 6:13-15 ~ “For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. ¹⁴But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

1 Cor 1:28-31 ~ “God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

Phil 3:8-9 ~ “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”

- Paul again proved, from Scripture, that this has always been true. From the book of Leviticus, he reminded the Galatians Christians that a person is saved unto good works, not by good works: *“rather ‘The one who does them shall live by them’”* (vs.12; Lev.18:5)

Lev 18:1-5 ~ “And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²‘Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. ³You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes.

⁴You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. ⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.’”

- This passage, and passages like them, are often ripped out of context by legalistic and self-righteous Christians. As Paul made clear, it is the one who is truly saved by faith who lives according to God’s will and Word (not the other way around). A person cannot be saved by good works, but everyone who is truly saved is saved unto good works (Eph.2:8-10).

B. The redemption of Christ (vs.13-14)

- There is no salvation apart from receiving, by faith, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. All humans are justly condemned by God – under the curse of God – as sinners. In the Bible, the concept of being cursed by God is to be under the severity of His divine judgment and the “*consuming fire*” of His just wrath (Heb.12:29). The “curse of God” is the absolute (polar) opposite of the “blessing of God.”
- ✓ **Illust:** “If you really want to understand what it meant to a Jew to be cursed, I think the simplest way is to look at the famous Hebrew benediction in the Old Testament, one which clergy often use as the concluding benediction in a church service: *‘The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace’* (Num. 6:24-26). ...

The supreme malediction would read something like this: ‘May the Lord curse you and abandon you. May the Lord keep you in darkness and give you only judgment without grace. May the Lord turn his back upon you and remove his peace from you forever’” (R.C. Sproul; sermon: “The Curse Motif of the

Atonement”, 2008; copied from book “Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology”, p.141-142).

- Pulling no punches, the apostle was trying to show the Galatian Christians the error of their newfound belief in a false gospel. He was not trying to boost their self-esteem, to bolster their self-confidence, or assuage their guilt. He was trying to save them from the brink of a self-righteous and damning legalism.

This is the bad news of the Gospel, which must be understood before someone can truly understand the Good News of the Gospel [“Gospel” (*euangelion*) means good news]. That is, for those who think they are (or can be) good enough to earn (in part or in whole) God’s salvation, the message of the cross of Christ is absurd and unnecessary – “*then Christ died for no purpose*” (Gal.2:21) and “*of no advantage*” (Gal.5:2). A gospel of works is no Gospel at all; it is a false gospel which cannot save and can only condemn.

- He told them (reminded them of) the bad news so that he could (again) proclaim to them the Good News. He told them of the curse of the law so that they would understand the redemption of Christ.

Gal 3:13-14 ~ “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’ – ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”

- In these verses (3:13-14), we find three distinct aspects of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

1. What Christ did (vs.13a)

- After clearly explaining that every human is utterly sinful and completely unable to save themselves, that everyone one is a sinner and justly cursed by God, Paul simply, yet profoundly, declared: “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law*” (vs.13a). The Greek word translated “*redeemed*” (vs.13; *exagorazō*; cf. 4:5) carries the imagery buying a slave’s (or debtor’s) freedom. In this context, Christ “*redeemed*” the sinner who was enslaved to sin (Rom.6:17, 20) and thereby justly cursed (condemned) by God. God’s penalty for sin is physical and eternal death. Everyone is a sinner and justly sentenced by God with the “death penalty” of eternal condemnation.

Rom 6:23 ~ “For the wages [*opsōnion*; what one deserves or has earned] of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- As the Bible makes clear, there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. There must be an appropriate payment for sin. However, not just any death can satisfy God’s just wrath for sin.

Heb 9:22 ~ “Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Heb 10:3-4 ~ “But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

- The Old Testament sacrifices were a symbol, an ever-present reminder, of the need for there to be a perfect (spotless) life sacrificed for sin. Since Jesus Christ lived a perfect – absolutely sinless – life (2Cor.5:21; 1Pet.2:22; 1Jn.3:5), He is the one and only perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus lived the (sinless) life that we could not live and died the death that we deserved to die.

1 Peter 1:18-19 ~ “knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.” (see Jn.1:29, 35; 1Cor.5:7)

Eph 1:7 ~ “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (see Col.1:13-14)

Heb 9:12 ~ “he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” (see Heb.9:13-14; Rom.3:23-25)

- Because Jesus was absolutely sinless, and the Son of God who was sent by God the Father as the perfect sacrifice for sin, His substitutionary death on the cross completely satisfied God’s wrath toward all who would believe. Through His sinless life, substitution death and supernatural resurrection, Jesus *“redeemed us from curse of the law”* (vs.13a).

2. How Christ did it (vs.13b)

- How did Christ redeem sinners from the curse of the law? In verse thirteen we read the amazing, glorious, and sobering answer: *“by becoming a curse for us”* (vs.13b). On the cross, Jesus bore the full weight of God’s wrath for sin. Though sinless, Jesus was treated as if He committed all the sins of all who would ever believe. He incurred the full penalty for our sin. His suffering was not an illusion, nor merely symbolic. He actually “became” (*“becoming”*; *ginomai*) *“a curse for us”* (vs.13b).

✓ **Illust:** “God is too holy to look at sin. He could not bear to look at that concentrated monumental condensation of evil, so He averted His eyes from His Son. The light of His countenance was turned off. All blessedness was removed from His Son, whom He loved, and in its place was the full measure of the divine curse.

... At midday [God] turned the lights out on the hill outside of Jerusalem so that when His face moved away, when the light of His countenance shut down, even the sun couldn't shine on Calvary. Bearing the full measure of the curse, Christ screamed, “‘Eli, Eli lema sabachthani,’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (Matt.27:46).

Jesus took that occasion to identify with the psalmist in Psalm 22 in order to call attention to those looking upon the spectacle that what they were witnessing was really a fulfillment of prophecy. ... His cry was not ... the cry of a disillusioned prophet who had believed that God was going to rescue him at the eleventh hour and then felt forsaken. He didn't just feel forsaken; He was forsaken. For Jesus to become the curse, He had to be completely forsaken by the Father. ...

It was as if there was a cry from heaven, as if Jesus heard the words ‘God damn you,’ because that's what it meant to be cursed and under the anathema of the Father” (R.C. Sproul; sermon: “The Curse Motif of the Atonement”; 2008; copied from book “Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology”, p.141-142).

- ✓ **Illust:** “All the prophets of old said that Christ should be the greatest transgressor, murderer, adulterer, thief, blasphemer that ever was or ever could be on earth. When He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, Christ was no longer an innocent person. He was a sinner burdened with the sins of a Paul who was a blasphemer; burdened with the sins of a Peter who denied Christ; burdened with the sins of a David who committed adultery and murder, and gave the heathen occasion to laugh at the Lord. In short, Christ was charged with the sins of all men, that He should pay for them with His own blood. ...

Our merciful Father in heaven saw how the Law oppressed us and how impossible it was for us to get out from under the curse of the Law. He therefore sent His only Son into the world and said to Him: ‘You are now Peter, the liar; Paul, the persecutor; David, the adulterer; Adam, the disobedient;

the thief on the cross. You, My Son, must pay the world's iniquity.' The Law growls: 'All right. If Your Son is taking the sin of the world, I see no sins anywhere else but in Him. He shall die on the Cross.' And the Law kills Christ. But we go free" (Martin Luther; *A Commentary on Galatians*; 3:13).

- By His love, mercy and grace, God sent His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for our sin (Jn.3:16-18; Rom.5:8) – and Jesus went willingly to the cross (Jn.10:18; Heb.12:2)! Though perfect, Jesus *"became a curse for us"* (vs.13b). Though sinless, He became sin for us. Theologians refer to this as "the great exchange" or "the blessed exchange" – his perfection is imputed (or credited or reckoned; cf. 3:6) to us, and our sin is imputed to Him. Through His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross, Christ bore the penalty for our unrighteousness and gave to us His righteousness.

2 Cor 5:21 ~ "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

1 Peter 3:18 ~ "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit"

Isa 53:4-6 ~ "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

- Jesus is the only person to be absolutely sinless. Jesus is the Savior; He never needed a Savior! He perfectly fulfilled all of God's requirements, obeyed all of God's commands. He, therefore, died on the cross not for His own sin but for the sins of all who would ever believe. This is referred to as His "substitutionary death" (or the "substitutionary atonement" of Christ). Meaning, Jesus died in our place for our sins. God treated Jesus as if He had lived our sinful lives, and God treats those who are saved as if they lived Jesus' perfect life.

Once again, Paul supported his assertion with Old Testament Scripture: *"for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'"* (vs.13b).

Deut 21:22-23 ~ "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance."

- This does not mean that every person who is ever crucified is cursed by God, but that crucifixion is a sign (a symbol, a reminder) of God's curse and punishment for sin. For the Jews did not crucify criminals, but stoned them to death. To be crucified, therefore, symbolized being cast out of God's chosen people as condemned by God. Crucifixion was a sign pointing to our need for the sinless Savior to be condemned in our place, and for our sins.

✓ Illust: "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", written by Isaac Watts (in 1707):

"See from His head, His hands, His feet / Sorrow and love flow mingled down! Did e'er such love and sorrow meet / Or thorns compose so rich a crown?" (vs.3; "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross", written by Isaac Watts, 1707)

3. Why Christ did it (vs.14)

- In verse fourteen, we read the answer to the question, "Why did Jesus redeem us from the curse by becoming a curse for us?" The immediate, obvious, answer is that Christ redeemed us so we could be redeemed – He became a curse for us so that we would no longer be cursed! That is, Jesus died on the for our sins so that we could be freed from the penalty of sin.

Notice how Paul (writing words inspired by the Holy Spirit of God) explained the reason for Jesus becoming a curse for us: *"so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles,*

so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (vs.14). Once again, Paul is showing that salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is, and has always been, God’s redemptive plan for mankind – for both Jews and Gentiles. The *“blessing of Abraham”* (vs.14) was God’s promise to save Abraham, and all his descendants, if they truly put their faith in God (Gen.12:1-3).

Gal 3:6-9 ~ “just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’? ⁷Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Gal 3:28-29 ~ “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

- Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ (alone) as Lord and Savior will be saved – no matter their ethnicity/race, social status, or gender. The Christian receives *“the promised Spirit”* (vs.14) – the saving and sanctifying work of the Spirit of God indwelling in us – *“through faith”* not by works (vs.14).
- Through the redeeming work of Christ – His sinless life, sacrificial death, and supernatural resurrection – those would receive Him as Lord and Savior are no longer under the curse of sin. For Christ became a curse for all those who would believe, bearing the full weight of the penalty of sin and the wrath of God – the righteous for the unrighteous.

Rom 8:1-4 ~ “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

- Christ came to save us because we could not save ourselves. No amount of good works (or law-keeping) can warrant or secure God’s salvation. The only way a person can be truly righteous before God is in and through Jesus Christ. Salvation is by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

Conclusion

- So, how should we respond to “The Wondrous Cross” of Christ, “on which the Prince of glory died”? The apostle Paul declared:

Gal 6:14 ~ “... far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

- In his great hymn, Isaac Watts gave us this personal exhortation:
“Were the whole realm of nature mine / That were a present far too small; Love so amazing, so divine / Demands my soul, my life, my all.” (vs.4; “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, written by Isaac Watts, 1707)