

# The Cross and the Giving of the Spirit

by G.W. North

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*The sermon explores the significance of the cross and how it redeems us from the curse of the law, making us righteous and giving us the promise of the Spirit.*

**Scripture:** Galatians 3:13

**Topics:** "Redemption", "The Cross"

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## Description

G.W. North emphasizes the significance of the cross in relation to redemption, explaining how Christ's crucifixion was necessary to lift the curse of sin that originated from Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. He illustrates that the cross represents both the depth of human sin and the height of divine grace, transforming the curse into a blessing through Christ's sacrifice. North highlights that the law, while revealing sin, was ultimately a temporary measure until Christ fulfilled its requirements, allowing believers to receive the promise of the Holy Spirit through faith. He underscores that righteousness comes not from works but from faith in God, as exemplified by Abraham, and that the Holy Spirit is essential for true sonship and spiritual life. The sermon concludes with the assurance that through Christ's sacrifice, believers are redeemed from the curse and can embrace the blessings of God.

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## Transcript

The third mention of the cross is in connection with redemption: 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law .... cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree'. It may perhaps seem a little strange to us that God should have made such a pronouncement until we realize that He never decides on anything arbitrarily. God does do things because He wishes to, but He never says or does anything just because He wishes to; He never does anything against His will either! God always has a reason for everything He does, so when He said, 'cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree' there was a reason for that, in fact more reasons than one. The most ancient of these reasons goes back to the beginning of time and the coming of sin into the world and the fall of man and the heartbreak of God. Most unexpectedly the tragedy resulted from man's disobedience to the expressed will of God in relationship to a tree. Adam and Eve were forbidden to partake of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil standing in the midst of Eden. They could eat of the tree of life -- that was not withheld from them and they did eat from it and gained thereby both life and the knowledge of it. They were not commanded to eat of that tree, it was for them. In common with all the other trees its fruit was good for food; all that is, except that one tree. The command of God was not to eat of that, for if they did so it would be death to them: God's will was against it and for a while the will of man was not to eat of it either.

But there was another voice beside God's speaking in Eden, it was very subtle and most persuasive and Eve listened. Under the devil's flattery desire got the better of curiosity and, against God's will, His creatures partook of the fruit and died as God said they would. What a curse sin is: in every way it is a curse and how cursed a creature is the devil. Because of what happened in the garden between the devil and man Christ had to be nailed to the tree. No name save the one Pilate wrote has been put upon that tree; it cannot be named really, it is not possible to name it, it is so complex, so incomprehensible, so all-inclusive. It could be called the tree of death, it could as equally be called the tree of life, it could be called the tree of Satan or the tree of God, the tree of sin or of righteousness, of evil or of good, of hatred or of love. Paul could have called it the tree of man, 'my tree, I was crucified there'; it could be called nobody's tree or everybody's tree for it belongs to everyone, but chiefly to God. The tree, just THE TREE: that is what He calls it, and that is all we need to call it. By it and by Him who hung upon it countless multitudes of men have been brought to the truest understanding of good and evil. By the cross we learn the exceeding sinfulness of the sin which came into the human race by man's wilfulness in the garden; because of it He who knew no sin had to be made sin and the curse.

Sin is much more evil than we know. If a sinless, blameless man, without spot on His character or even a wrinkle on the surface of His visible life, who fulfilled all righteousness and kept every spiritual, moral and civil law, had to be made sin; if the perfect man had to die because of sin, then sin is more vile than men know or can know. Sin was revealed by God for what it was when He introduced the law into the world, but only partially -- it could not be revealed fully by the law. Sin was only seen to be so terribly evil when at last it could be contrasted with Jesus who was so good. By Jesus and by what happened to Him, sin was shown up in all its unrelieved vileness. For what a man did thousands of years before and for what myriads have continued to do ever since, Jesus was crucified. Sin is evil; evil is the nature of sin and good is the nature of Christ's sinlessness, more -- of His positive righteousness. Jesus Christ was nailed to the tree so that the nature of sin could be slain by the nature of good; by His sheer goodness He overcame evil and turned the tree of good and evil into the tree of life, thereby turning the curse into blessing, for He was both cursed and blessed of God there.

Paul, however, is not particularly referring here to the curse pronounced by God in Eden, but to the curse which came in with the law of Moses. God did not give the law to be a curse but to be a blessing. He pronounced blessings upon blessings to the obedient; by and large the law was altogether a commandment unto blessing. One of its greatest blessings was its power to expose sin, both toward God and man, in much detail. But side by side with the blessings, God pronounced curses upon the disobedient as well. This was not done in a spirit of vindictiveness but in love, to warn men and women of the consequences of disobedience; the blessings are only for the obedient. The ethic of law may perhaps best be summarized as follows: 'blessed is everyone that continues in all the things written in the law to do them' and 'cursed is everyone that continueth not in all the things written in the law to do them'. Just as the law itself was in two parts and can be summarized into two commandments, so may all the blessings and the curses be summarized in the same way. Moses' law in effect was given to reveal in detail the human, social, moral and spiritual power of evil by specifying the sins by which it is manifest. By the law God attempted to offset sin and contain evil; Israel were 'kept under the laws in great blessing, safeguarded by equally great and terrible curses which acted as deterrents.

This was nothing but sheerest grace in operation, for the law was an interim measure intended by God to protect His people from leprous evil and contagious sin until He should send Christ to remove it all. When the Lord came to this earth and was crucified here He was made both the sin and the curse for us by God.

That death was so great and comprehensive in effect and so fulfilling and compensating to God that all evil and all curses, as well as all sin (with the exception of one) were taken away. That is both the immeasurable fulness of God's provision and the extent of His blessing in Christ toward us. The only sin from which, for obvious reasons, His death cannot deliver is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit; the person who commits this sin cannot be blessed, he is evil beyond redemption and must suffer the curse without reprieve. But to all other the message is clear and positive, 'being made a curse for us'.... Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law.

God has done this so 'that the blessings of Abraham might come on the gentiles (us) that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith'. The blessing to which Paul refers came upon Abraham from God in the simplest of ways, he just believed God; that, simply that, was accounted to him for righteousness. It was almost unbelievably simple: he did not have to work for it, he did not have to pray for it, there was no need to, he did not have to earn it in any way, he just went along with God in what He said, that is all. Sweating to achieve something came in with the curse, no man has to labour to receive what is being poured upon him, no struggle to hear when God speaks. Quietness, stillness, the opening of the heart is all God requires -- in other words faith.

What God did in Abraham's hearing was to make a commitment to him, He promised to fulfil the unspoken longings of Abraham's heart. Isn't God good? He did not ask Abraham to believe anything horrible or distasteful or make any big demands of him then. He came to Abraham in love, with purpose to bring him joy and untold blessing, blessings far more exceedingly wonderful than justification by faith, though that is the point Paul is making here. God is greater than the points we make about Him. This is another example of His ways with men. In this instance God is summarizing the unspoken blessings upon blessings in His heart. He is hiding His beatific face behind a veil of promise, He is making one promise the promise of many more promises. Faith in Him is the key to many thousands of blessings. Abraham is always the one chosen by the Lord when He wants to illustrate faith. He did not only believe God once for one blessing or for thousands of blessings, he believed God continually for constant blessings.

All the blessings of God are of similar nature to those God gave to Abraham, and they all hold similar potential. What may be considered lesser blessings are always summed up by and contained in the greater and most important blessings and they must all be received in the same way. Abraham believed in God and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness; he was thereby accounted to be a righteous man. What good news this is for us! It is not so much the fact that Abraham was blessed, but that he was accounted righteous, not because of any works he had done but because he believed God. It is most important here to note that this blessed state is contrasted by Paul with the works of the law and not with the righteousness of the law. This is a very important distinction sometimes overlooked. Elsewhere he explains that this righteousness of the law is fulfilled in them who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. The righteousness of the law is the same as the righteousness of faith; there is no difference. Righteousness is righteousness, whether it be under the law or under grace, because it is the righteousness of God. It is not the righteousness of man, yet it is the first and most basic requirement of God for every man: righteousness is the basis of our salvation. The beginning of a man's righteousness in God's eyes is heart faith in God. It is a righteous thing to believe God; it is a demonstration of unrighteousness when a person chooses to not believe Him. Stimulation of the heart to believe God is the work of the Holy Spirit, it is the prelude to salvation.

The purpose of God in redeeming us from the curse of the law into the blessedness of justification by faith is that we should receive the promise of the Spirit. This is God's order and we must beware lest we believe

He has made the promise and fail to receive Him about whom the promise was made. Only when we receive the person of the Holy Spirit are we made sons; justification is not the end -- it is a beginning. It was for this reason that Christ gathered up all the curses of the law unto Himself on the cross and died to them. On the tree Christ was made both the embodiment of God's curse upon Adam and the world and His curse upon sin in all its forms also, that only the blessings of God should remain for His people.

What a way to think about Him -- Christ the Curses Only temporarily though, praise God, but while it lasted it was very real, it broke His heart. By the power of God the curses that should have descended on our heads descended on His, crushing and piercing like the thorns wherewith He was crowned on the tree. Thorns came in with the original curse pronounced by God in Eden; for man's sake He cursed the very earth itself with a curse which still holds power in every realm of man's existence and shall do till earth is no more. Christ who without remission, had borne with the works of the cursed satan ever since he fell in heaven did so continually till He hung on the cross. There He bore the curses of God, whether they were pronounced on the ground or on rebellious law-breakers or against ignorant sinners and He bore all away. The tree ensured that; He was nailed to it by men, but God transfixed Him to the tree like the wilderness serpent Moses made and fixed to the pole in the midst of the camp. It is terrible but true when understanding dawns on us that Jesus was crucified and punished mercilessly as though He were the cursed serpent, the original cause of all sin, the one whose workings made God curse His creation. Dear Jesus bore it all uncomplaining. He was lifted up that He should attract all eyes to Him on the cross, the focal point of deliverance and life. Ultimately He bore the curse right away and He did so while pouring out the blood of redemption. The curses still stand against all who rebel against God and disobey the gospel. We needed to be redeemed from all that as well as the curses. Believing we receive full release, exoneration, exemption, because we have been brought back to God. We have received the Spirit.

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