

Christ Gives Joy By Removing The Curse

By

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The real joy derived from Christ and His work can be realized only in relation to the condition of the world as it stands without Him. The idea is set forth in Isaac Watts' great hymn, "Joy to the world":

"No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessing flow
Far as the curse is found."

It is common among men to think of the ills that plague us as due to poverty, or ignorance, or bigotry. We speak of the curse of war or disease or crime. But all of these are by-products of the curse, and not the curse itself.

It was God who pronounced the curse, after man, the crown of His creation, had determined to become self-centered, to do his own will, and thus rebel against his Creator. In wrath God thundered His judgment: "Cursed is the ground for your sake, in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life: thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to you; and you shall eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken; for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return" (Gen. 3:17-19).

All sorrow stems from that curse. It was, first of all, personal. Man was driven from the Garden, away from the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Adam was to have dominion and to cultivate the garden as one in God's image. But now he must carry out the commission stripped of his original glory and power, corrupted, weakened and alienated from God. In one stroke of sin he lost his deathless state, now to be mortal, deteriorating and ultimately destined to die.

Second, relationships are under the curse. Lying, cheating, covetousness and finally murder, as in the case of Cain and Abel, all had their seed in Eden.

Third, the earth is included. Under the curse it yields up its treasures only after man expends himself in energy and effort that often result in his own sorrow (Black lung, for example). Adam was given dominion over all the earth, but that was in his state of glorious innocence and harmony with the will of God (Gen. 1:31). When man fell under the curse all that was under his rule fell also, so that it is ultimately destined to be destroyed by Fire (II Peter 3:7-12).

The curse was upon man in the flesh, with the ultimate result being his death. Therefore the one to lift that curse also had to be flesh and blood in order to undergo the flesh and blood curse of death in man's place and release us from its finality. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree'; that upon the Gentiles might have come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus; that we might receive the promise of the spirit through faith" (Gal. 3:13-14).

The entrance of the God-man, Jesus Christ, into the stream of human life was for the purpose of removing the effect of the curse by receiving the full impact of it upon

Himself. God, who pronounced the curse in the first place, also gives the cure through His Son. Had there been some way for man to throw off the curse himself and return to innocence and a deathless state, there would have been no need for Christ to bear our sins and suffer the full jolt of the curse in His death. All the efforts at reform and social progress have only highlighted the presence and power of the curse. As God imposed the curse upon man in rebellion, God is the one who lifts it from man who repents.

Where conversion to Christ takes place, there immediately follows changes which override the effects of the curse. The mind which was filled with selfish and evil thoughts now turns outward to God and to wholesome desires. Fear is replaced by faith, acts of wickedness cease and works of righteousness begin, and one's life is turned from despair and futility to hope and purpose.

The cure, therefore, is applied individually. Jesus rescues us from the curse one by one, as we personally come to believe Him and commit our lives to Him. In Christ we retrace Adam's downward steps back toward the image of God. Where Adam believed the Serpent and doubted God, we must believe God implicitly and reject totally the temptations of Satan. Where Adam sought to choose his own way and make his own rules of good and evil, we must depend solely upon God to decide for us what is right and wrong. This means, among other things, that the schools must reject "value clarification" systems in which children are left to set up their own morals without the benefits of God's laws. It means that we also reject the popular "alternative life-styles" as a Christian option. God offers only one life-style, and calls it "the Way." Where Adam disobeyed the commandment of God ("You shall not eat of the tree...") we must become obedient, after the example of Jesus, "who became obedient even unto death" (Phil. 2:8).

The final effect of the cure will be realized only in the day of the resurrection, when for the Christian the curse of death is fully removed and he is restored to a deathless state. Besides curing the effects of the curse, Christ raises His patient up to a plane of health he never enjoyed before. Not only will he be restored to the life which Adam lost, but exalted and glorified, perhaps far above anything Adam knew, for the resurrected children of God are glorified to a level of Christ's glory and given bodies of power and spiritual qualities like His, and without any possibility of ever falling again as Adam fell (I John 3:2-3).

While the cure is applied individually, yet it has its effect generally, and works in the world toward a partial release from the symptoms of the disease. Where the Gospel is embraced by a part of the populace it has a great effect on the whole, as salt seasons a great mass and a small beam of light focused on one object gives some illumination to other objects around it. It is a common thing for one devout lover of God to change the atmosphere and attitude of a whole office or shop.

The other side of the coin is the fact that when anyone is released from the curse he begins to stand in contrast to all the rest. The better he understands the Divine purpose of the Creator the more vividly he sees the disarray in the creation caused by the curse, and the greater his desire to do something about it. For not only did Christ command His disciples to follow a different pattern and direction than the world, but He also commanded us to preach the whole business to all the rest, to make disciples, to baptize them and teach them all His commandments.

But those who have remained aloof from the Holy and Eternal have a totally different viewpoint. The problems which are products of the curse appear to them

solvable by the application of practical good sense (pragmatic humanism). The Christian is seen as an agitator, the one trying to turn man from himself and his choices, from all that he loves and counts as precious and essential to attaining his (humanist) goal. The result is confrontation and persecution of the Christian. This is to be expected by all who are not longer under the curse. Jesus said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own: but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (John 15:18–19).

Not only is the curse applied one by one, but also step by step. For example, sickness is part of the curse, but we are not healed immediately or totally. Jesus healed only a few, and that only temporarily. All of us will get sick and die, unless Christ returns before we get too old. When He appears the next time it will be to cure us completely and permanently in the resurrection.

Until then, the redeemed are blessed with peace and freedom from the guilt of the curse but we still sojourn in the world, where it lies heavy upon Adam's race.

The curse will continue to run its course in the unbelievers of the world and in nature until at last it will culminate in the final dissolution of all temporal things, both unredeemed man and the creation itself (II Peter 3:7–11). This leaves no place for a millennial "Utopia," for the corruption remains on the world until Judgment and the glorification of the saints (Vs. 19).

In the final working of God, He promises there will be a new heavens and a new earth for all those who are saved from the curse (II Peter 3:13). Then will be fulfilled the promise of Romans 8, "that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:21).

In describing the new creation where the redeemed are to dwell, John writes, "and there shall be no curse any more" (rev. 22:3). Death, the bottom line of the curse will have done its work in ridding the universe of all the rebels, but Christ's substitute death for the believers will have wiped out the curse for all God's people.

We cannot imagine the glory that God intends for His people in the eternal world to come, but we get some idea of it as we consider the world before the curse. He created man in His own likeness, deathless and glorious. He created a Garden where flowers and trees must have been beautiful beyond anything we have seen among God's wonders. Man was given dominion, so that he could reign in perfect peace and harmony with all creation, and God Himself was present in His full glory and love. That Garden gives us an idea of the majestic purpose of God to be fulfilled in all those who come out from under the curse to the cure that Jesus brought.

Therefore, Christians ought not to give their prime time to all the side issues of the day. All the problems come under one heading: the curse. The only solution to them is one person: Jesus Christ. It is our commission to apply this cure and demonstrate it. Where there is meanness we must apply goodness. Where there is greed we must be generous. Where the world practices hate, we must practice love. Instead of war we must promote peace. Instead of disobedience, we must obey. Instead of selfishness and self-centeredness, we must center on Christ and offer ourselves to Him and others.

The blessings of Christ are limitless, but they begin at the point where He lifts the curse for those who deny self, and bow down to Him. There is where joy and blessing

begin. The greatest miracle medicine is the cure of the curse through Jesus Christ. “He comes to make his blessing flow far as the curse is found.”

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