

“Bearing the Curse for the Gospel”

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Jesus Christ was made a curse for us (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13), they spit in His face (Deut 25:9; Mark 14:65), and there was none to save Him (Deut 28:31; Mark 14:15), but should Christians expect to be made a curse for Christ for evangelizing the Gospel of Christ?

Through the curses of Deuteronomy 28, God explained how He would curse the Israelite people if they did not keep His commandments. Amazingly, the Apostolic church in Acts, as well as believers throughout the history of the churches have faced some of the same curses as found in Deuteronomy 28, and that because of obedience to the Great Commission. There seems to be some interesting parallels involved.

The removal of property for the sake of the Gospel is mentioned in Hebrews 10:34, the same is mentioned as a curse of God in Deut 28:31, 33. Deuteronomy 28:31 (NAS) reads, “and you will have none to save you.” Even so, there was none to deliver Stephen when he was being stoned in Acts 7:58-60. Likewise, Paul was deserted by all (2 Tim 4:16).

Christ’s Commission sends Christians out to proclaim the Gospel to a lost world, many of whom will hate them for it according to John 15:18-21. Likewise, God would curse His disobedient people by driving them all over the world and making them the subject of ridicule, stating, “You shall become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all nations where the LORD will drive you” (Deut 28:37, NKJ). God would also curse His disobedient people by scattering them from one end of the earth to the other (Deut 28:64). And yet is this not what Christ commanded in His commissioning of his followers? “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15). “And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8b). From a naturalistic point-of-view, it is readily evident that “Staying” is much easier than “Going.” And yet, Jesus commanded His followers to “Go and win disciples from [among] all nations” (Matt 28:19a).

Of great interest are three words: hunger, thirst, and nakedness. These three words are mentioned by Paul 2 Corinthians 11:27 regarding his ministry experiences, “in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” These same three are mentioned as curses in Deut 28:47-48:

Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies, whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in need of everything; and He will put a yoke of iron on your neck until He has destroyed you.

Interestingly, these same three words conceptualize the opposite of what Jesus promised to those who “Seek first the kingdom of God” in Matthew 6:33. The context of “these things” is verse 31, which lists, “‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’” So there seems to be a deeper application involved. Due to the proclamation of the Gospel, Paul was made a curse, forewent the promise of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, and as a prisoner, literally had a yoke of iron placed on his neck. Paul’s obedience to Christ led him to share in the curse of Deuteronomy 32:48!

Amazingly, due to evangelizing, the Christian was/is actually made a curse for the Gospel, using God’s definition of a curse in Deuteronomy 28! Is this not the teaching of Paul regarding the offense of the Gospel in Galatians 5:11, “And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offense of the cross has ceased”?

Some may try to rationalize the foolishness of the Christ crucified to the Greeks, and others may try to extricate the stumbling block of the cross for the Jews (1 Cor 1:23). However, is not the cross of Christ made void when one seeks to remove its curse by clever speech (1 Cor 1:17)? How many evangelism methodologies today try to avoid the offense of the Gospel? How many try to make the cross palatable to all people? Has it been forgotten that the curse of the Gospel must be borne?

“We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but you *are* wise in Christ! We *are* weak, but you *are* strong! You *are* distinguished, but we *are* dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with

our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now (1 Cor 4:10-13)

Paul's poignant use of "offscouring" in 1 Corinthians parallels the curse in Deuteronomy where the people would become "outcasts" as they were scattered "to the ends of the earth" (Deut 30:4). The words of Jesus in the Great Commission of Acts resonate here: "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

So there seems to be a deeper meaning in the curses of Deuteronomy 28. Not only were these curses applicable to those who did not obey the commands of God, but these curses applied to Christ, "having become a curse for us" (Gal 3:13). And the same curses become the legacy for all followers of Christ who gladly bear "the reproach of Christ" (Heb 11:26).

Perhaps this was what Paul had in mind when he wrote, "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (1 Corinthians 15:19).