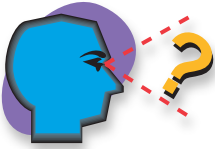


Galatians



Responses to the Questions



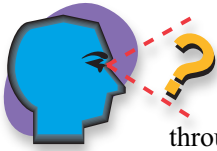
NOTE: BE SURE TO RESPOND TO ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THESE RESPONSES IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

CHRIST REDEEMS THE CURSED

GAL. 3:13-14

1. In order to fully appreciate the work of Christ on our behalf, one has to feel the full weight of the curse of the law. The Passion of our Lord makes little sense apart from that. That is why Paul has worked so hard to get to this point in his letter. He wants the Galatians to really comprehend the meaning of the Mosaic law. Being Gentiles, they were perhaps subject to misunderstanding and lack of discernment. So Paul has given them a crash course on Judaism, starting with the Father of the Jews and going on to the Old Testament Scriptures. When they understand that the law brings curse, not blessing, they will understand the unique work of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus is the answer to the dilemma of the law, so expertly depicted by Paul in his epistle. By bearing the curse of the law, which is death, He opened the door of freedom and blessing not only to the Jews but to all who would put their trust and hope in that death. Paul sees in this the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham to bless the Gentiles.
2. The image of Christ, hanging bloodied and dying on a "tree" (the wood of the Cross), starkly impresses on us the fact that the innocent died for the guilty. The passage in Deuteronomy makes reference to one who is guilty of a capital offense. This is a sentence that would be accurate for everyone except Jesus and His Mother. Yet none of us have been "hung on a tree." In addition, these verses make graphic the complete substitution of innocence for guilt—even the land is defiled by a crucifixion, so thorough and complete is its curse. Paul has made much of the curse of the law in his epistle; now he presents the amazingly unthinkable solution to that problem. The only appropriate reaction is to marvel at God's love for man and to respond in faith to Him.
3. Paul says that "the blessing of Abraham" is for the Gentiles "to receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." One might ask, "Where did Paul get that in the Genesis 12 passage?" Paul was able to recognize that in the promise God made to Abram, the blessing was to be more than just temporal blessing. Surely it would include the temporal blessing of an heir, land, and enough descendants to make a great nation. But Paul understood that the true meaning of being blessed by God is to be pleasing in His sight, to be "very good," as Adam and Eve were in the Garden. For him, it was the presence of God's Spirit in our lives, our new birth (of water and the Spirit, as in John 3:5), that blessed us in this way. It was very natural for him to connect "the blessing of Abram" to life in the Spirit, which is received through faith.
4. Answers will vary. Paul had several reasons for wanting the Galatians to understand the covenant God made with Abraham. First, it was really the beginning of the Jewish nation. To understand the relationship between God and the Jews (which is what the Galatians seemed to want), one would not start with Moses but with Abraham. Second, for Gentile converts to understand how they fit into God's plan for men, the best place to look would be the promise God made to Abraham, which specifies that ultimately all Gentiles will be blessed





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

through him (which means through Jesus Christ, his descendant). There was no promise like this made to Moses. And finally, Paul recognized that the bounteous gift of grace upon grace offered through the Good News of Jesus Christ was the same kind of gracious offer God gave to Abraham. To compare the gospel to the covenant of Moses would be to miss this essential characteristic.

THE LAW AND THE PROMISE

GAL. 3:15-18

5. A covenant, once it's ratified, cannot be changed by anything that comes later. Paul shows that simple chronology makes it clear that the covenant God made with Moses doesn't cancel out the covenant He made with Abraham. Abraham's covenant was made first; it takes priority over what came later.

6. An inheritance is not like a reward done for work. Out of his benevolent generosity, a man leaves an inheritance to his beneficiaries. He is not compelled by law or obligated in any way; his gift is given freely. Paul says that if our inheritance, which would be the blessing God promised Abraham and his descendants, comes to us as a result of our keeping the law, then it is no longer the result of a promise but is a reward based on a contract, a very different thing. To receive a blessing based on what I have done leads to this: "I have done my part, now God must reward me with His blessing." God gave His gift of blessing to Abraham not as a result of Abraham having upheld his end of a contract (as we have seen), but out of sheer grace, through a *promise*. If we are Abraham's descendants and are to receive the same gift of blessing that he received, it must come to us the same way it came to him.

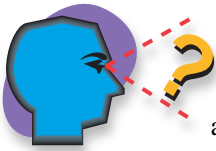
7. Answers will vary. Abraham and Mary, by their willingness to accept the great promises of God, both became the human vessels for blessing, one temporal and the other spiritual. Abraham gave birth (in a miraculous way) to the nation of Israel. Mary, in a more miraculous way, gave birth to the new Israel, which is Christ and His Church. Abraham's obedience was a foretype of Mary's obedience. Without Abraham, the nation of Israel would not exist. Without Mary's obedience, the Church would not exist. To Abraham was given the promise of universal blessing through his offspring. In Mary, the blessing took on flesh and blood, in a way that Abraham could not possibly have imagined.

WHY THE LAW?

GAL. 3:19-24

8. The law God gave to Moses began with the Ten Commandments. Those were the basic moral laws that were already written in the hearts of men (the conscience) but now codified and organized so that His people, the Jews, would be the only ones on earth who actually lived by them. Recall that incident in the desert when Moses went up to Mt. Sinai to receive the Law from God. Down in the valley, all sin broke loose. The people, in their impatience and doubt, reverted to the religion they had known in Egypt. So, in addition to the moral law of the Ten Commandments, they also received many ceremonial laws, which were meant to *restrain* their sinful impulses and practices. The history of Israel is full of this cycle—the Jews sinned through disbelief and more laws were added to the code. So, when Paul says "because of transgressions," he can be referring to several truths. First, the history of the Jews proved that their sin needed to be restrained. If they were going to be God's people, they had to be different from the pagans. Their ceremonial laws guaranteed that. Second, the law was meant to *reveal* their transgressions to them. If they were honest and humble, the law was meant to lead them to





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

an understanding that if God gave them what they deserved, they were lost. But if they counted on His mercy and forgiveness through *faith*, they had hope. Some Jews understood this; others didn't.

9. The intermediary in the covenant which gave the law to the Jews was Moses. He represented the people to God and God to the people. If an intermediary is involved, it means that several parties are involved—namely, God, His mediator, and the people. Thus, God might be said to have two voices—His own and that of His mediator. Was there an intermediary when God made His covenant with Abraham? No. God, Who is One, spoke for Himself. Paul mentions this to underscore the superiority of that covenant. In addition, the presence of a human mediator suggests conditions that need to be worked out, negotiations, contracts. Gifts of pure grace have no such conditions; such was the case with Abraham's covenant. [Note: The reference to angels in this passage is knowledge that Paul could only have gotten from Jewish unwritten "tradition," since in the biblical account of this incident in Exodus, there is no mention of angels. The Jews knew about God through their written Scriptures and through their tradition. The Catholic Church continues to maintain that this is how Divine Revelation is transmitted, through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition.]

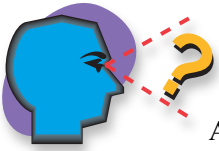
10. Paul precisely identifies the foundational problem with anyone wanting to be justified on the basis of the law. The law brought blessing or cursing. The problem arose from the fact that the law could not make men good enough to obey it. It was powerless over man's sin. If man could have kept the law, it would indeed have been able to give life. But men could not do that, so it meant condemnation instead.

11. The law kept sin in restraint, and it served as a "custodian" until Christ came. What does that mean? The law, though not able to change the sinful hearts of men, was able to accurately reveal the glory and holiness of God. It preserved for Him a people who were different from all other nations—in their monotheism, in their morality, in their rules for justice. The law, because it was a heavy burden, also worked to prepare faithful Jews to look for the Messiah. They were willing to trust in the One who finally came and said to them, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29).

12. Answers will vary. One might be tempted to ask, "Why did God wait so long? As soon as it became clear that Israel just didn't have what it took to keep the law, why didn't God send Jesus to the rescue?" Behind that question is another one that takes us right back to the Garden of Eden. Why does God allow man enough freedom to make bad choices? For God to put man and woman in the Garden, with only a verbal prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, seems a bit risky, doesn't it? Why didn't He put an electric fence around the prohibited tree, making it *impossible* for man to disobey? Why didn't He keep the serpent out of the Garden, so there would be no temptation? It is clear that God intended man to have enough freedom for his choices to really mean something. This is the mystery of free will. If we sit still long enough with it, not squirming out of fear or confusion or impatience, it will knock us over backwards with its sheer glory.

The story of redemption is the story of God protecting the free will of men *while at the same time* powerfully working to make it possible for them to escape eternal harm when they use those wills to rebel against Him rather than obey Him. We could look at the long history of Israel's struggle under the heavy yoke of the law and say, "What a waste." But we could also look at that struggle and say, "What a blessing." Why? Because through their own experience, some Jews eventually learned to choose to wait for "the consolation of Israel," as Simeon did in Luke 2:25-32. The history of Israel, difficult as it was, prepared them to have eyes to see their Savior. Through bad choices (the history of Israel under the law was full of those), something good could happen.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

As St. Augustine wrote, “For almighty God..., because He is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist in His works if He were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself” (*Enchiridion* 3, 11:PL 40, 236). Read *CCC 309-314* for more on this.

SONS OF GOD THROUGH FAITH GAL. 3:25-END

13. The One to whom the law pointed (in all the sacrifices for sin that it prescribed and in all its teaching about “clean and “unclean” and in its moral requirements) has now come. The One through whom God’s promise to Abraham can be realized, not only to the Jews but to “all nations,” is Jesus Christ. Now that He has come, there is no longer need for the custodian. It has served its purpose. The Old Covenant is fulfilled in the New Covenant, sealed with the Body and Blood of the Lord. Paul expects his readers to be able to appreciate now why a return to the Mosaic law is unnecessary and dangerous. It is unnecessary because its goal has been achieved; it is dangerous because it leaves the covenant of grace and returns to a covenant that can only end in condemnation.

14. It was their baptism that enabled the Galatians to have this close identification with Jesus. Notice that Paul doesn’t say it was an act of faith that made them one with Christ but their baptism. The New Testament teaching (and that of the Catholic Church) is that at the time of our baptism in water and in the name of the Trinity, we are reborn as children of God. The physical and the spiritual come together in the mystery of a sacrament. Of course, faith is present with the baptism. It isn’t magic! In adult baptism, the adult’s faith is joined to the sacrament to produce new life. In babies, it is the faith of their parents, godparents, and the Church.

15. In vs. 28, Paul is not doing away with all distinctions between people. The context for his statement is that now there is one and only one way for people to be pleasing in God’s sight, no matter who or what they are. When human beings have put on Christ through faith and baptism, they are one with Christ and, of course, one with each other. Some have misinterpreted this verse to suggest that Paul is saying there are no differences among people anymore. Not at all! Paul continued to recognize differences between Jews and Greeks, slave and free, male and female (just read through the rest of his epistles to see that), but he was adamant that all people everywhere are justified in precisely the same way. We are all one family, with all our differences and diversity.

16. If the Judaizers were using Abraham as the lure to convince the Galatians to be circumcised, Paul has turned their argument on its head. He has shown convincingly that Abraham’s life and the promises God made to him establish faith, not works of the law, as the source of blessing. Abraham has become the father of all who have faith like his, including the Gentiles, and they have become his heirs to the great promise of blessing given to him by God.

17. Answers will vary. If you have “put on Christ,” then you are God’s beloved child, in whom He is well-pleased. It is a gift of immeasurable love and mercy. Rejoice!

