

Anyone heard of Juicero? Juicero was a company that started about 5 years ago with every promise of success. Their startup budget was nearly unlimited, with eager investors like Google Ventures and Campbell Soup handing them \$120 million of venture capital. Their research and development team was unparalleled—12 PhDs, 50 engineers, 7 food scientists. The press gave the company flattering reviews. And their product seemed to fit the profile of a sure seller. It was techy and trendy. It promised health and wellness. And it had just the right touch of elitism necessary to inspire jealousy from your friends.

Juicero's single product was a Wi-fi enabled, internet connected, countertop juice press that used single serving packets of fresh fruit and veggies sold exclusively by the company by subscription—iow, a Keurig for juice. When the product first came on the market in March 2016, it sold for a whopping \$700, although slow sales prompted the company to lower the price to \$400 10 months later. What really doomed the product was a Bloomberg report in April 2017 that you could get nearly the same amount of juice from Juicero's own proprietary food packs if you didn't use the machine at all but just squeezed the packet by hand. Juicero corporate responded that their press wielded 4 tons of squeezing force, that it was cleaner and easier to use the machine, that its internet connectivity could protect you from using a packet with expired ingredients. But the damage was done; and to no one's surprise, last September, Juicero announced it was discontinuing operation, laying off all employees, and seeking a buyer. It's a great example of a solution without a problem.

...which is exactly how many people view the gospel. The gospel is good news—amazing, incredible, life-changing news. The most important news anyone could ever possibly hear! But if you actually came out and told people that or lived your life in light of that even for a day, most people would say: "What's the big deal? Why are you all lathered up? I don't understand the problem."

Paul lays out the answer for us in today's text. He demonstrates clearly

that the gospel is absolutely not a solution without a problem. It's the only possible solution to the greatest problem every person will ever face.

Notice how Paul sets it up:

vv8-9 *And 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." ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.*

God wants to talk to us about BLESSING—His blessing, the blessing He promised Abraham 4000 years ago, a blessing that can be ours for free simply by faith. What? Justification (v8): "The Scripture, foreseeing God would JUSTIFY Gentiles by faith, said to Abraham, 'In you shall all nations be blessed.'" The Holy Spirit says God's promise of blessing to Abraham has now reached its fulfillment in the justification of the Gentiles by faith (v8). Those who believe like Abraham participate in the blessings of Abraham (v9).

Justification is acceptance. It's acquittal. It's being put right with God. It's the ancient blessing God promised Abraham, and it opens the door to life. Notice how v11 equates justification with life:

v11 *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*

Justification means real life, the only life that can truly be called "living." And most people don't even know they need it.

A story is told of Henry David Thoreau on his deathbed. Thoreau was an American poet, philosopher, naturalist, and writer ("Self-Reliance," *Walden*). Better known even than the man himself today are several of his pithy, inspirational quotes:

- It's not what you look at that matters; it's what you see.
- Be not simply good; be good for something.
- I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.

Thoreau suffered from tuberculosis for most of his life, until it eventually confined him to his bed in his early 40s. As his impending death approached, his aunt asked him if he had made his peace with

God. "I did not know we had ever quarreled," came the reply. His reply is more witty than most could muster, but it captures their attitude exactly. Why make peace with God? "I'm quite satisfied with the state of things between me and God; He should be too."

The Bible would answer, "No, there's a problem. There are two alternatives to fix the problem. But really, given all the facts of your case, there's only one real solution." Those are the three points Paul makes in our text: problem, alternatives, solution.

The Problem

v10 *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."*

Paul asserts: "All who rely on works of the law are under a curse." Why? He explains why with a quote from the Law itself (p168):

Deuteronomy 27:26 *"Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them." And all the people shall say, "Amen."*

Deuteronomy 27 describes the great ratification ceremony Moses commanded the people to perform once they were settled in the Promised Land: pile up stones, paint them white, write the Law on them. Then assemble, half the people on one mountain, half on the other, Levites in the middle. The Levites would call out a law (Dt 27 offers a representative list of a dozen laws) and the people would shout "Amen!" Every one of the statements was a curse—"Watch out for this! Don't do that! Danger, danger, danger."

Yes, the Law promised blessing (that's the point of ch28), but it also threatened with deadly curses. What was required to enjoy one and avoid the other? Perfection.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 *"And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God."*

It's the point Paul emphasizes in our own text by inserting the word "ALL" into his quotation of Dt 27:26: "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by ALL things written." The original context gives him good

warrant for the addition.

The Law was a gift to God's people. It was their national charter. It was a one-of-a-kind covenant between them and the living God. It revealed the character of God to them. ***But it also revealed their shortcomings, and therein was the problem.***

Everything changed for Israel after they received the Law. God delivered them from Egypt, started them on their way to the Promised Land, but then took them on an 11-month detour to Mt. Sinai where they received His Law and voluntarily accepted its terms. And then everything changed.

On their way from Egypt to Sinai, Israel had complained about their food (Ex 16), broken the Sabbath (16:27-30), murmured about water (17:1-3), challenged Moses' leadership (17:4-7), and even doubted whether the Lord was with them (17:7). Every time, the Lord had mercy on them and met their need. On their trip from Sinai to the Promised Land, the same incidents recur: people complain about their food (Num 11), break the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36), murmur about water (Num 20), and challenge Moses' leadership (Num 16)—and every time, people die.

Before Sinai, Israel's sins were treated with warning and reprimand; after Sinai people die for these same offenses. The Law has had a profoundly negative effect on God's people, because it suddenly put them in jeopardy of tasting God's anger themselves. The biggest roadblock to Israel's blessing is not Egypt; it's Sinai! That's because the Law reveals their sin and God's holiness, and THESE are their biggest threats. ***God is happy to deliver sinners from Egypt; but who will deliver sinners from God?!***

The Alternatives

w11-12 *Now it is evident [i.e., "this should be obvious, if you know the history I've just recounted"] that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."*

Notice the contrast and the comparison Paul sets up in these two verses. The single point of comparison: both promise life:

v11 *"The righteous shall live by faith."*

v12 *"The one who does them shall live by them."*

We want to live! Notice in v11, Paul is talking specifically about living before God, being accepted by God: "No one is justified before God by law, for the righteous live by faith." That's the kind of life he's talking about—the life of being put right with God.

And there are two different options for achieving that. Faith (v11) or Works (v12).

v11 *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*

v12 *But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."*

In both cases, Paul is quoting from the OT. Even in the OT, God wanted His people to live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 *Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.*

In context, God has revealed some future plans of His to Habakkuk which mystify and challenge him. So God says, "Listen, I have reasons for what I'm doing. Just trust me. The thing I want from you—the thing I always want from people—is faith. The righteous shall live by his faith." The prophet responds with a prayer of confidence and rest in God (ch3). THIS is the first alternative for being put right with God.

But there's an alternative: work for it. Keep the Law. There's life there, too, if you can get it:

Leviticus 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. ³ You 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. ⁴ You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. ⁵ You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*

The Lord demands His people behave differently from their former neighbors in Egypt and their new neighbors in Canaan. Why? Because of who He is: "I am the LORD your God" (v1,v4,v5). Sure, the Law offers life, but only on 1 condition: to be good enough for God, you have to be perfect. Anything less would force Him to change who He is.

Christ had to save us from our badness, yes. But He also had to save us from our goodness – our attempts to earn God's favor.

The Solution

vv13-14 *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"- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

So what about the curse of the Law for disobedience? Jesus "became a curse" for us. This language is intriguing. Jesus didn't just bear the curse or become cursed; He "became a curse." Paul wants us to feel the impact of that. Jesus became a curse for us. He embodied the curse in the atonement – all of our sin poured into His body, and all of God's wrath poured out on Him. Our curse was transferred to Him. He took it voluntarily upon Himself to deliver us from it.

How does Paul know that is what was going on on the cross?

Deuteronomy 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, ²³ his 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.*

Capital punishment in the OT was usually performed by stoning. Then after the execution, the criminal's body would be hung on a tree as a sign that this person had committed an offense so egregious, God cursed him. Being hung on a tree was the sign—not the cause—of God's curse.

Paul sees that and concludes that Jesus' mode of death demonstrated that He was actually bearing God's curse, the curse of the Law. His crucifixion—i.e., hanging on a tree—implied something powerful for all the world to see: namely, this man was paying for crimes that deserved the very curse of God. **The how implies the why.** The fact that Jesus was killed hanging on a tree indicated the cause for His death. The cross symbolized an idea—namely, that the one on it was a curse in the sight of God. He was bearing the curse of God pronounced against the sin of the world.

It's been suggested that in the early days when the gospel was preached, Jews would shout out "Jesus was cursed!" (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). Thus the cross is an insurmountable obstacle to many Jews—to suggest the Messiah was under God's own curse?

It's been suggested that the connection between curse and tree goes back to the Garden of Eden. Our problem began at a tree; it's only fitting that the solution involve a tree once again. Our first parents sinned by reaching for the forbidden tree, so God willed the Second Adam reverse the curse by putting Himself on that tree.

Why? "So that in Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith." There it all is: justification (the blessing of Abraham), fellowship with God (the Spirit), faith. All yours, if you'll renounce the folly of trying to earn God's favor. Come humbly to the cross where Christ became your curse. Surrender yourself completely to Him in faith.