

“Christ became a Curse” (Galatians 3:13): A Study in the Context of Healing Ministry in Nigeria

Casmir Chukwuemeka Obi

Introduction

It is a common practice among some pastors and even priests who take part in healing and deliverance ministries to identify curse in almost all the cases brought to them for spiritual attention by their clients. It is no longer “news” to hear someone these days reporting a story of the sad experiences he/she had in an encounter with a “man/woman of God”. It is not a strange thing also to hear some Christians narrate the story of the mental torture they are going through because they feel that their families are suffering from inherited curse.

It is against this backdrop that this paper takes up the study of Gal 3:13 in the context of Healing and Deliverance Ministries in order to mitigate the danger posed by the problem so that many of our people perhaps can be liberated from the spiritual and mental agony they put themselves in the process of search for solution to their challenges. This text actually should be “a vital catalyst to rethinking some of the primordial assumptions”¹ on curses and their effects by some healing agents in Nigeria.

The topic of our consideration says: “Christ ransomed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse for us”². The business of this paper is to x-ray and explore the exegetical and theological contents of the text for the purpose of making it relevant to the target audience of this study. One may not notice, of course, at the first reading, the point this paper is making. What one has to note is that in the “field”, the fact remains that many of our people are in complex problems which some healing ministers, “some new-generation pastors and charismatic Churches” in

¹ Emmanuel O. Nwaoru, “The Case of Eldad and Medad in Numbers 11:26-29 and its Hermeneutical Issues”, A Paper given at CABAN Conference, Calabar, 2017, 1.

² Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress 1979), 148.

particular manipulate to their advantage by “curse breaking” which they recommend in virtually every case. This practice has become a source of worry to the Church due to the fact that it has left many of our people in the trauma of self-inflicted bondage that manifests itself in serious guilt feeling, self-rejection and condemnation.

This paper argues that Gal 3:13 the exegetical and theological implications, if understood and harnessed, could liberate our people from the bondage caused by the primordial concept of “inherited curse”. Secondly, the ministers as well would be liberated from the bondage of spiritual ignorance that does a disservice to the power of the gospel.

Delimitation of the Text

This text belongs to the wider pericopé of Faith and Liberation which Paul discussed and attested in 3:1-4:31. Some commentators say that “these two verses: 10, 13 are best treated together not only because they share the combined lexical (and conceptual) elements *Law* and *Curse*; but also because both verses quote from the book of Deuteronomy”.³ “In addition, it can be argued that these verses form an *inclusio* that brackets the paragraph, though from another perspective 3:14 could be thought of as marking an *inclusio* with the larger section that begins at 3:6”.⁴

The researcher, however, marks out 3:13 as a study unit because it appears in the wider pericopé as an independent unit. This verse appears to be the theme and the main argument of Paul in the whole pericopé. Paul’s threat that began in 3:1 is the starting point of the premise built by him to draw the attention of the Galatians who may not have known that relapse to the law means abandonment of their new Faith in Christ which would create a dichotomy between them and the merits of Christ’s death.

A Brief Background to Galatians

Paul had earlier during his Second Missionary Journey (cf. Gal 4:13; Acts 16:6-7) taken the Gospel of salvation to the Gentile city Galatia, an ancient town in the highlands of Central Anatolia in modern Turkey.

³ Silva Moises, *Galatians* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), 795.

⁴ Moises, *Galatians*, 795.

There he proclaimed the gospel which other “Super Apostles” contradicted. Now he writes to defend the gospel he preached and what God has done through it.

Literary Genre of Galatians

A critical look at this epistle reveals that the author employed apologetics which was common in the Greco-Roman world. The language is laden with emotional overtones. Its style is rhetorical, which has its function, to persuade its audience, that the gospel Paul presents is true and superior to the law. It is very important to take note of the rhetorical style of the letter so as not to oversimplify the position of Paul regarding the Jewish Law and accuse him of being anti-Semitic due to his violent declaration against the Mosaic Law.

Literary Context of the Galatian Epistle

Getting into the context in which Paul drafted the Letter to the Galatians is contingent to understanding the exegetical problem he created in 3:13. During his Missionary Journey he, accompanied by Silas and Timothy (Acts 16:6), visited the region of Galatia, where he presented the message of the Good News which the “Super Apostles” later contradicted by presenting an alternative gospel that argues that circumcision and obedience to the Torah is the way to salvation, not necessarily the crucifixion, death and resurrection of Christ. The membership of the Churches in Galatia was comprised of the Jews and the Gentiles. “Accompanied by miracles (cf. Gal 3:5), Paul founded communities of mixed ethnic, cultural and social groups based on acceptance of this gospel. The Gentiles’ acceptance of this Gospel was the basis for the wonderful relationship between them and Paul, and also the basis on which Paul became true to his vocation as the Apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15-16)”⁵. Here in Galatians, Paul says that in his own lifetime (Roman Period) “he was once a Torah-observing Pharisee, that is, he studied and lived the Torah. He perceived and understood it to be the normative Jewish custom legitimated by God. But when he realized

⁵ Bernard Ukwuegbu, “The Works of the Flesh and the Fruits of the Spirit: Gal 5:19-24 vis-à-vis the Fragmentation in the Nigerian Church Today”, in *The Holy Spirit and Charisms in the Bible*, Acts of the Catholic Biblical Association of Nigeria (CABAN), vol. 10 (2017), 250.

that Jesus is Messiah, that God raised Jesus from the dead (Gal 1:1), he also realized that the normative Jewish Customs enshrined in Torah lost divine approval”⁶. “For Paul, Torah now became a normative story, the Sacred Scripture, telling readers how they arrived at the present, but offering nothing more since God has abrogated it as normative custom. We are therefore made right with God by faith and no longer by legal observances”.⁷

Paul does not regard this Torah as a bad thing. He regards it as part of one vital stage in God’s secret plan. That stage has now been put into operation and has been completed. The time has come for a new stage: not that Paul (like the heretic Marcion in the second century) has come to believe that Judaism and the Law were evil, or the creation of a lesser god, or anything like that; but that in Christ and by the Spirit the one God is now extending salvation to all, irrespective of race. That was the message that both Antioch and Galatia Christians needed to hear.⁸ This salvation has insulated the believers in Christ from the curses associated with the law. Contextually, this salvation safeguards believers in Christ who are in constant loyalty to him from the curses associated with the ugly past when our ancestors submitted to the elemental powers of the world. It is in this literary context that Paul writes and warns the Galatians not to submit to the yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1-2; 4:31; 1 Cor 7:21; 1 Pet 2:16).

The audience of the correspondence was faced with the problem of doctrinal confusion caused by two diametrically opposed teachings they received concerning salvation, whether going back to the Law by accepting circumcision and other practices prescribed by the Torah is the key or the gospel of Paul. Actually, many accepted the doctrines revolving around the Law and practiced them while still clinging to Christian faith. However, Ukwuegbu Bernard in his view, sees a dispute regarding who Paul is referring to in the text. According to him, the dispute centres around the issue of whether Paul is referring to people who are trying to attain their own righteousness through good works, or

⁶ N.T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997)? 122.

⁷ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 122

⁸ Wright N. T. *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 122

to those who, although they believe in Christ, mistakenly think that they must adopt a Jewish way of life as well”.⁹

This paper follows the argument of Paul in the text with a little inculturation of his gospel, that Christ has cancelled on the Cross the curse brought about by idolatry, human sacrifices, ritual killings, cult memberships and all other wicked acts handed on by some dirty traditions in Nigeria. Christians have been ransomed from the curse elicited by these ugly past; and going back to them resurgences in a curse. The ugly past as enumerated above include surrendering of oneself to the diabolic powers of the world. If the law reminded Israel of sin and does not have the capacity of dealing with it, in the same way surrendering oneself to the powers of the ugly past refreshes it and defiles one.

Analysis of Text (Gal 3:13)

The Text

Kristos hymas ekzgorasen ek tes kataras tou nomou

genomenos huper hymwn katara,

hoti gegraphatai epikataratos, pas ho kekatermenos epi zului.

- a. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law
- b. by becoming on our behalf a curse
- c. because it is written cursed everyone who is hung on a tree.

The above three elements make up the central theme of Paul’s argument in the letter, and they will be seen in the analysis below.

A Brief Look at Keywords and Phrases

The use of the term *ekzgorasen*, which is an aorist indicative active, third person singular, could be translated as “He bought back”, redeemed, purchased by giving something in exchange. These meanings give the reader a clue to the point the author is making in the text. The word, *hotis*

⁹ See Ukwegbu Bernard contribution in this present volume: “Can a Curse be a Source of Blessing: Another Look at Galatians 3:10-14 in the Light of Paul’s Attack on the Identity-Markers of the Opponents”.

is “a causal conjunction that introduces a clause which expresses the reason for the action of the main clause”.¹⁰ The above two key words are explained because of the important roles they play in the text. They are essential and act as vehicles that carry the idea the author is selling to the audience.

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law

Despite the fact that this verse is introduced abruptly in the text without any connective, it provides the reader the answer to the problem of the curse of the law in the preceding verses (10-12). Whereas the Greek text begins with the statement of Christ’s act of redemption, follows by the means therefore, others like (TEV) rearrange the clauses and begin by explaining the means by which Christ accomplished this deliverance from the curse of the Law, namely, by becoming a curse for us”.¹¹

By becoming on, our behalf, a curse

Becoming a curse for us should be understood primarily in the sense that for our sake Jesus Christ suffered on the Cross as one who was accursed by God, rather than in terms of any particular doctrine of atonement in which the phrase may be thought to defend”.¹² Christ in his death is described as “having become a curse” (RSV, NASB)- a conclusion Paul arrives at by the use of the rabbinic exegetical principle of “equal category” (already mentioned in regard to v. 12), which in the present instance works in the following manner”.¹³ In the LXX, both Deut 27:26 (quoted in v. 10) and Deut 21:23 (quoted in v.13) begin with word based on the same verbal stem (“curse”). Deuteronomy 27:26 pronounces a curse (*epikataratos*, verbal adjective) upon everyone who fails to render perfect obedience to the law.

The word “curse” in the expression “having become a curse” is evidently used by metonymy: Christ “became a curse” in the sense that he submitted to the curse pronounced by the law of God, or it could be an

¹⁰ Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 122.

¹¹ Betz, *Galatians*, 148.

¹² Betz, *Galatians*, 148.

¹³ Betz, *Galatians*, 148.

instance of *abstractum pro concreto*: “curse”= bearer of the curse”.¹⁴ According to Fung: “It is significant that Paul avoids using of Christ the expression that is used in the LXX of Deut 21:23(“accursed by God”): the implication of such an expression would conflict with Paul’s view of Christ’s death as his supreme act of obedience to God’s redemptive will (cf. Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:19)”.¹⁵ Christ submission to the curse is said to be for our sake.

Because it is written cursed everyone who is hung on a tree

Deuteronomy 21:23 declares to be accursed (*kekateramenos*, perfect participle) everyone who hangs upon a tree”.¹⁶ In this respect, Paul seems unique; but in all likelihood his intense concentration on God’s activity in Jesus’ death and resurrection reflects the principal emphasis of the faith and preaching of many first-generation Christians”.¹⁷

Evidently, in 3:10, Paul had shown “that those who base their salvation upon “works of the Torah” are really “under a curse”. The observance of the Jewish Torah does not lead to “justification before God”¹⁸(3:11). For Paul, Law and faith must be radically separated (3:12). How then, can Paul say that as Christians “We” share the blessing of Abraham (cf. 3:9, 14). Who are the “we”? “According to the context, Paul means by “we” are those who through Christ were delivered from the “curse of the law”,¹⁹ that is, Jewish Christians who were “under the curse” described in 3:10 (cf. 2 Pet 2:14). The Galatian Christians were not under this curse, because before they converted to Christianity they were not “under the Torah” but under “the elements of the world”²⁰ (*hupo ta stoikeiatoukosmou*(Gal4:3).

¹⁴ Ronald Y.K. Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988), 148.

¹⁵ Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 148.

¹⁶ Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 148.

¹⁷ Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 148.

¹⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 148.

¹⁹ Betz, *Galatians*, 149.

²⁰ Betz, *Galatians*, 149.

The Theology of Text

Paul assumes that being under the Torah is only another way of being under the “elements of the world”.²¹ The Galatians would only be caught in this web (curse), when they decide to accept circumcision and Torah for only then would they come under this curse of the Law (cf. 1:8-9). In other words, Christians in Galatia would deprive themselves of the blessing of Abraham received by faith, if they accept circumcision and Torah which is an equivalent of being under the enslavement of the elements of the world that hitherto created a barrier between them and the blessing inherited by Christians through the death, resurrection and the “glorification” of Christ. In Fung’s view, Gal 3:13 “represents Christ’s death as a vicarious bearing of the curse of the law which delivers his people from the same curse. This is, in simple terms, Paul’s Christian interpretation of Christ’s death on the Cross”.²² Like the early disciples before him, Paul, after his conversion, had to rethink the meaning of the Cross. The confession of Jesus’ messiahship involved in his conversion (cf. 2 Cor 5:16) made it imperative for Paul to explain Jesus’ accursed death on the Cross in a way consistent with his glorious resurrection and exaltation.

It is important to note that the concept of the “curse of the Law” is strange in the sense that it occurs only here in Paul. What does he mean by it? How can one resolve this exegetical problem created by Paul? In the context of the Letter, he certainly assumes that the Law becomes a curse for those who seek justification before God “by its works”, because by doing so they deprive themselves of the blessing of Abraham given to “People of Faith” (3:9). According to Paul the Torah was limited in time and function. In other words, the Torah presently, has outlived its usefulness. Compared to the blessing of Abraham, it is inferior. The concept of the Law as *paidagogos eis kristou* (“custodian up until Christ”), keeping everybody imprisoned and being in no different state than the enslavement under the “elements of the world”, comes very close to being a curse. “The covenant consequences of Christ’s death are revealed: on one hand, Christ willing consent to crucifixion – prefigured

²¹ Betz, *Galatians*, 149

²² Fung, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 148.

by Isaac – uncovers the deepest dimension of the *Aqedah*, that is, the pre-enactment of what God alone must do to bring about “the Blessing of Abraham” for Israel and the nations, even it calls for his own sacrificial self-identification with Abraham’s “seed” (and only beloved son)”.²³“On the other hand, Christ’s curse-bearing impalement “on a tree” – also prefigured by Isaac – reveals God’s Pre-emptive strategy and merciful resolution to remove the legal impediment of the Deuteronomic curses that hang over unfaithful Israel (Gal 3:13). In sum, the laws and curses of the Mosaic covenant will not cause or prevent the promises and sworn blessings of the Abrahamic covenant from reaching Israel and the nations”.²⁴

In this text Paul presents a Christocentric soteriology. The liberation from the “curse of the Torah” is taken to be a benefit of Christ’s death on the Cross. Paul affirms this by a reference to a Christological/soteriological paradigm (Gal3:13): “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law”)”.²⁵ The very concise formulation of this doctrine employs several concepts which were brought together to define what is meant by “redemption”. Presupposed is a situation of humanity before redemption: unredeemed humanity is “enslaved” by “elements of the world” which for the Jews specifically means “being under the curse of the Torah”. In order to redeem humanity from this terrible state or fate, God sent his Son Jesus Christ into this world. By becoming a human being (“born of a woman”) and by having “come under the Law” (Gal 4:4), Christ purchases the freedom for those “under the Law” (4:5a) and makes it available to those “under the elements of the world” (4:9b) the adoption as sons and daughters of God. For the Apostle, the adoption as sons and daughters of God and the granting of freedom amount to the same: both sonship/daughtership become manifest in the gift of the Spirit. This concept implies that the language of purchasing freedom for the slaves is used as religious metaphor, a transposition known also from other sources. The application of this religious language to Christology is

²³ Hahn Scott W. “Covenant, Oath, and the *Aqedah*: *Diatheke* in Galatians 3:15-18”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 67, No 1 (January, 2005), 99.

²⁴ Hahn, “Covenant, Oath and the *Aqedah*”, 99.

²⁵ See Betz *Galatians*, 149.

probably pre-Pauline in origin. Most likely, this Christological and soteriological doctrine comes from Jewish Christianity”.²⁶

This becomes apparent from the next component, according to which Christ accomplished that redemption by “becoming a curse” (*genomeno hupe hemon katara*, Gal3:13). This statement presupposes sacrificial ideas which are however, not spelled out: Does Paul mean that Christ became the object of the curse in place of us, or “curse offering” as a means of propitiation “for us”?²⁷ A definitive answer may not be given here. Most likely, the statement is based upon a pre-Pauline interpretation of Jesus’ death as a self-sacrifice and atonement (see Gal 1:4; 2:20). Due to Christ’s incarnation (Gal 4:4-5), he suffered his death as a human being. Since he was free of sin (cf. 2 Cor 5:21), his death was in Jewish terms uniquely meritorious. The result is that “we” (Jews and Gentiles) are free from the “curse of the Law”²⁸(or elemental powers of the world) and indeed from the Law itself. Therefore, Paul can say that Christ is the end of the Law and elemental powers of the world (Rom 10:4; Gal 2:19-20; 3:25, 5:6; 6:15). Although this last conclusion was drawn most likely only by Paul, one can still see an underlying concept of Jesus’ death interpreted by means of Jewish concept of the meritorious death of the righteous and its atoning benefits.

Paul, again, in order to support his Christology quotes a passage from Scripture. The introductory formula is *hoti gegraptai* (Gal3:13) (“for it is written”). The quotation is from Deut 21:23, although it does not fully conform to the LXX: --- (cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree).

Issues raised by Paul in the Text

Two main issues are raised by the author’s argument in the text. The first is Law as the transmitter of curse and second is the benefit of Jesus’ death on the Cross.

Law as the Transmitter of Curse.

For Paul, curses are transmitted by the act of going back to the law. When the Galatians, who have received the Gospel of salvation through

²⁶ See Betz, *Galatians*, 150

²⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, 150

²⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 151

their faith in Christ, revert back to the law for salvation, then curse is incurred. Curse is incurred because the law lacks the capacity to do away with sin and it has declared curse upon anyone who does not carry out in full the legal provisions. The law was like a “Baby Seater”, whose function had ended with the growth of the baby. The coming of Christ is likened by Paul to the growth of the baby, who is now a full-grown person that has taken his/her responsibility. The law had served its purpose; therefore, going back to it leads to self-entanglement, slavery and curse. Since the law has no power of its own to remove sin, it multiplies it, renders one a slave and makes righteousness impossible to obtain. According to Ukwuegbu, “Paul shows that the law propagated by the opponents brings curse rather blessing”.²⁹ For Ayodele Ayeni “a cogent way to construe the “law” as obstructive to God’s design can be seen in the different observances required by the laws extant in Israel (Gal 3:10b)”.³⁰

In Pauline perspective, curse is transmitted by going back, that is, when the Galatia Christians condescend and submit themselves to the dictates of the law. The law is morally and spiritually bankrupt as regards dealing with sin. A curse accrues to a person who goes back to the law to seek salvation.

The Benefit of Jesus’ Death on the Cross

By his death on the Cross, Christ purchased us back. We are bought for a price. The death of Jesus is an act of buying us back from the yoke of slavery under the powers of the law. The following texts buttress the point Paul is making: 1 Cor 6:20a states: “for you have been purchased at a price”. 1 Cor 7:23a: “you have been purchased at a price. 1 Pet 1:18-19: “you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers (cf. Acts 20:28; Heb 9:12; Rev 5:9). Concerning the benefit of Jesus’ death on the cross, Ukwuegbu expresses its joy that “those under such curse imposed by the law should count themselves fortunate

²⁹ See Bernard Ukwuegbu’s presentation in this volume.

³⁰ Ayodele Ayeni, “Deut 6,4 and its Contextual Utilization in Gal 3:20: From the Oneness of God to the Fatherhood of One God”, M. de Lovinfosse, E. Durand and M. Allards (eds.), *Fins et Commencements. Renvois et Interactions: Melanges offerts a Michel Gourgues*, Biblical Tools and Studies 35 (Leuven-Paris-Bristol: Peeters, 2018).

since Christ has redeemed them from the curse of the law”.³¹ For Ayeni, in Christ, “the curse of the law” has to yield to the superiority of “faith” (Gal 3:11);³² so much so that “the personality of Christ and what he stands for changes the dynamics of justification. Moreover, human legal reasoning seemingly arrived at that conclusion before the Jewish faith, since an heir’s right to inheritance promised him was “irrevocable”. Ayeni maintains that “Paul understands God’s covenant with Abraham as a “covenant-of-promise” – the heirship of Christ as the seed or descendant of Abraham opens the way for the rise of a new family of God through Christ”.³³

The full understanding of the message of the Cross is the fundamental here, and it is indicative of the growth of the faith. This text should play a pivotal role in the standardization of the Christian faith, in the sense that Paul’s theological argument is focused on the redemptive function of the death of Christ on the Cross. This death brought about the liberation of humanity from the scourging curse of the law; and anyone who turns to Christ should never look back.

Christ’s death on the cross would mean nothing to anyone who serves the cause of the Law and the elemental powers of the world. The suffering, death and resurrection of Christ put to an end their rule and their tutelage. The understanding and the appropriation of this divine gesture, this configuration of our Christian status, standardizes the faith, without which the believers in Christ would be limping between the ugly past and the spiritually optimized present.

The return to legal legislations would negate the configuration of Christians whose lives should transcend the legal provisions. The external function of the law and its inability to effect internal cleansing of the human person, does not guarantee real circumcision that would empower one to keep the legal requirements to the full. Therefore, the relapse to the law that pronounces curses on the persons that fail to keep it to the full as Paul warns the Galatia Christians is an act of backsliding that messes up the Christian faith. On the other hand, the relapse to the

³¹ See Ukwuegbu’s contribution in the present volume.

³² Ayeni, “Deut 6,4 and its Contextual Utilization”.

³³ Ayeni, “Deut 6,4 and Its Contextual Utilization”.

elemental powers of the world: belief in inherited curses, ritual killings, fear of evil powers or spirits, superstition, possession of charms, idolatrous practices coated with Christian faith e.g. “prophecies” and other practices that negate the Christian values, more importantly the value of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ which is the fundamental, the reason of our belief, messes up the faith and questions its credibility among unbelievers.

Researcher’s Argument

This paper argues that the principal actor in bringing about a curse is the person whose way of life negates Christian identity and rejects indefinitely the benefits of Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection. This statement may be disputed by those who have a different opinion on the subject matter. Xavier Leon-Dufour in his view says “Though conquered by Christ the curse remains a reality, no longer a deadly fate as it was without Him, but still a possibility”.³⁴ He point out that one cannot ordinarily and thoughtlessly place a curse on someone without having to incur upon oneself the same curse one places on another because one need to possess the following authorities: legal authority; parental authority; a claim of suffering or unjust oppression (Ps 137: 8; Job 31:20,38; James 5:4) and a claim of God”.³⁵ A curse can be transmitted through surrendering oneself to the power of evil, or through claiming a curse (Paul calls it submitting to the elemental powers, Col 2:20). According to Anthony Ewherido what formed Israelite spirituality and ethics is the maxim that “the one who chooses the way of the Lord will be blessed and will prosper. The one who chooses evil is accursed and his path leads to doom”.³⁶ When an individual or group submits to a certain power, such a person or group surrenders their identity and everything that defines them. Curse also can be transmitted from one person to another through family ties or parental line when such a curse is attracted by a way of life that links the ugly past to the present. The

³⁴ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (London: Burns & Oates. 2004), 108.

³⁵ Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 106.

³⁶ See Anthony Ewherido’s “Blessings and Curses in the Book of Revelation: A Study of the Seven *makarioi* Oracles (Rev 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14) and their Corresponding Curses” in this present volume.

past and the present must have a real tie that binds them together for the initial curse to be activated and effective. If there is no link between the past and the present, there will be no continuity. In such a case, no previous curse can take effect. This is just like what Paul is arguing that surrendering oneself to the pedagogy of the law brings a curse to those who have turned to Christ in faith.

Effectiveness of curse is enhanced by act of wickedness exhibited by the one who is believed to be cursed. The person who possesses legal authority is the innocent sufferer of an act of wickedness. For example, the right to life is fundamental and God-given right which every individual enjoys. No one is permitted by Divine Law or Human Law (Exod 20:13) to take it away. Consequence of spilling of innocent blood is also a contentious issue among different schools of thought. The NT thought is that Christians are enjoined not to curse but to bless (Luke 6:28; Matt 5:44). In exceptional case, an innocent person who is killed may, in the process of his death, pronounce a curse on the killer or killers. The efficaciousness of such a curse may not be doubted. The same goes for such acts as ritual killings and the sale of human parts prevalent in our society today. Mere preaching of the gospel cannot shield the perpetrators of such heinous crimes against human life from the consequences of such ugly and brutal acts, especially when they show no sign of remorse and repentance.

The case of parental authority is another area that generates a controversy among scholars, whether a curse pronounced by parents can have an effect in the life of a child. Considering our African context, a Parent can place a curse on a child if such a child repeatedly breaks the hearts of the parent, though such curse is not easily placed. If that person turns to Christ in repentance and change, the curse becomes ineffectual.

A man came to me some time ago and narrated a story on how he vowed that none of his children will be more than him and that thing he said is playing out in his children now, “what am I going to do, he asks”? This case happened in real life situation. Secondly, I was discussing with a young man on October 18, 2018 and he said Fr, “we have a common shrine in our place and the thing was seriously affecting me until I had a deliverance prayer, renounced it and recommitted myself to Christ”.

Possession of authority is not a thing that occurs without a procedure. Authority has rules and power has no rules. The term used in this paper is authority. For one to possess authority over someone else, one has to fulfil the condition, namely innocence of life. Curse may not be effective without one having the authority. The three dimensions of authority are: legal, parental and claim of suffering/unjust oppression specified above are ineffective in the state of guilt. Guiltlessness nullifies a curse and makes it impotent. In other words, the theological content of our text of study refutes the argument of inherited curse without a personal role of bringing upon oneself such a curse.

Galatians 3:13 and the Healing Ministry in Nigeria

Issue of Inherited Curse

From the beginning of this paper, one would have noticed that the main problem identified by the researcher is the indiscriminate tagging of cases as consequences of curse by many agents in the Healing and Deliverance Ministries. If there has been any period in the history of the Church that had passed through most challenging times, it is our own time. The Church is passing through challenges because many priests, pastors and indeed other healing agents do not seem to have spiritual insight or cognitive knowledge of the ministry they are called unto. Some, out of sheer ignorance, cannot differentiate between the cases clients brought before them for counselling. Others, due to the ulterior motive they have in the Ministry, do not seem to guide their clients aright. Many peddle the Gospel for material gains and, as a result, every case brought before them is an opportunity for profit making. The gullible members of the Church have become prey in the hands of those priests and pastors and they manipulate them to their advantage. They see every problem as a consequence of curse. They have indoctrinated and brainwashed some Christians in a way that they no longer use their sense of judgment in religious matters. They are usually told, what they are passing through today is as the result of the sins of their forefathers. By expatiation, sickness, bodily ailments, business setbacks, disappointments, marriage cases, lack of work, death etc, are results of parental or intergenerational curses. As a remedy, these malicious agents propose curse breaking and release which would bring their victims healing and restoration of lost fortunes. The sufferers of the problems

would be driven as the case may be, into mental agony, stereotyping themselves as “cursed” and as those who need liberation done by external agents, precisely the “pastors or priests”.

Reading curses into every case is dangerous to the Church because it is an area an ordinary member of the church may not have the capacity to understand the spiritual complexities. When there is a statement from the pastor or priest, it is taken seriously. When the opinion of the minister confirms the presence of a curse in a case, the client would begin to seek solution and when it is not forth coming, the person perhaps would begin to feel cheated and disappointed

The hermeneutics of Gal 3:13 are problematic within the healing ministry in Nigeria in the sense of discovering the actual meaning of its contents. Many view it as a guide statement by Paul and some others see in it a text to be dispensed.

Tips to those who take part in Healing and Deliverance Ministries and to the Clients

1. Those who minister to people during counselling should use Gal 3:13 as a working document to avoid confusing their clients on the root causes of their problems.
2. The issue of inherited curse should be revisited. Every case should be treated according to merit.
3. Indiscriminate tagging of every case as consequence of curse is a relapse to the ugly past; therefore, pastors, priests and healing ministers should be conscious of this fact and be discrete in their judgment of cases brought before them.
4. The value of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ should be emphasized instead of the destructive power of the devil.
5. The idea among some healing ministers that destructive power of the devil unleashes serious and irredeemable harm to humanity questions the message of Jesus Suffering, death and resurrection. Gal 3:13 should be read reflectively.
6. Demon consciousness should be deemphasized, and God consciousness should be emphasized.

Conclusion

Deuteronomy 27:26 places a curse on the person who did not do all that is written in the book of the law. With a critical analysis of the text, one “can easily see that the curse of the law was the withdrawal of divine blessing which exposed human beings to various types of evil. Since keeping the law is the condition for remaining within the covenant community and enjoying the benefits of such a covenant, one who breaks the law loses his covenant benefits which are the blessings and protection of God”³⁷

The death of Jesus on the Cross has cancelled every curse pronounced by the law, by him becoming a curse for us, says Paul to the Galatians. What one should understand is that “in Galatians, Paul is not defending the origins of tenets or the verbal content of his message. From his phrase “is not of human origin” (1:11) and what he goes on to say about being pleased to reveal his Son to him so that he might proclaim him among the Gentiles (1:13-16)”;³⁸ what Paul means by revelation is the knowledge about what God has done in Christ and its positive effects in human life and history, among which is cancelling of inherited curse. Its attendant freedom is enjoyed by those who believe in Him. Therefore, going back to the Law, as he states clearly in Galatians, revives the curse and questions the validity of his passion/death and resurrection. Christians in Galatia have been bought back from the elemental powers, by Jesus’ crucifixion and death on the Cross. In the same vein, going back to ugly traditions i.e. resorting to elemental powers of the world, handed on from the past to the Christians in Nigeria before they turned to Christ, means revival of the curses associated with them. Therefore, priests, pastors, “men and women of God”, and others who engage in the healing and deliverance ministries should not rewind the hand of the clock by seeing the effect of curse in every case brought before them for spiritual attention.

³⁷ Peter Chidolue Onwuka, *The Law, Redemption and Freedom in Christ: An Exegetical-Theological Study of Galatians 3,10-14 and Romans 7,1-6* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 2007), 135.

³⁸ Twelftree H. Graham, *Paul and the Miraculous: A Historical Reconstruction* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2013), 107-108.