

## **Life or Death? \* Galatians 3:10-14**

### **June 28, 2015 \* Rod Fultz**

We have finally come to a definitive divide in our country. In mandating state recognition of homosexual “marriage,” the line has been formally drawn. A line which effectively forces each of us to decide who gets to determine right from wrong, who gets to legislate what is natural and what is moral. The line formally establishes us as a nation where everyone does whatever is right in their own eyes. And it leaves each of us with a choice about who gets to determine who gets to be the final interpreter of right and wrong in our lives.

In our text today from Galatians 3, Paul sets a similar line before us. A clear choice each of us must make and the alternatives could not be more extreme. No matter what society calls good or how people feel about themselves, the choice of what we rely upon in this life will either yield:

#### Life or Death

As we prepare to read these verses remember that Paul is in the middle of an argument. He is contending with Judiazers who want Gentile converts to Christianity, to add the Old Covenant to their faith in order to be considered part of God’s people. They want them to try and be justified by keeping the Law. In this paragraph, Paul says not only are you who rely on your own ability to be good before God mistaken, God says you are under His curse.

#### Galatians 3:10–14 (ESV)

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.”

<sup>11</sup> Now, it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

<sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

<sup>13</sup> 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”—<sup>14</sup> so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

This is not an op-ed article in the *Washington Post*, or a blog post in response to something he saw online. Paul is not voicing “the truth” of his inner opinion (Ralph Waldo Emerson style). He is quoting what God Himself said in the Old Testament. The context of these quotes is from what God instructed His people to do as they crossed the threshold of the Jordan River into the Promised Land. Prophetically, through Moses, God established before them a great divide. In fact, the Divide was one mile wide, a natural bowl (which archeologist say served as a perfect amphitheater). It was between two mountains: Mt. Gerazim (blessings) and Mt. Ebal (the curse), which represented the consequences of the choice each Israelite was facing.



The two mountains today: Mt. Gerazim on the left and Mt. Ebal on the right.

Joshua obeyed this command when Israel came to this spot. He had half of the tribes stand on the slope of Mt. Gerazim and the other half of the tribes on Mt. Ebal. Then the Levitical Priests recited the prescribed blessings of obedience and curses of disobedience to the Law and the people said amen (loudly) after each one. “We agree.” That is true. We understand and will obey.

This was a critical moment because Israel was about to take up residence, as you are right now, in a pagan society. As they entered the land of Canaan, they were daily going to face a choice: Blessing or Curse. They could either learn Canaanite ways and make the Canaanite’s

godless views their own and go with the flow, imbibing their entertainment, laughing at what they find amusing, hooking up with their women, approving of what God says is an abomination in the name of tolerance, learning to talk like they did and generally enjoying fitting in with the culture

OR —

they could become a subculture (what we are endeavoring to do) and walk in God’s ways and receive His blessing. Even today, is that not the choice in front of us? As God said to Israel:

Deuteronomy 30:19 (ESV)

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live,

Choosing Life is not just something you do for your unborn baby (while you should do that), it is a daily choice you have as you live in a fallen world.

## Life or Death?

### 1. Recognize the Curse of Sin

Curse = an oath to bring evil. When you think of curses being pronounced you probably (and rightly) think of witches or other practitioners of the occult because Scripture says that God is not the author of evil. He is not even capable of evil. God dwells in light and in Him is no darkness at all.

However, God is sovereign over all things. He superintends everything that happens, including evil and calamity. Otherwise, he is not God. He upholds all things (including evil and calamity) by the Word of His power. Evil (personified by Satan) is a force God gave His creation over to as a result of the first man and woman breaking His law in the Garden. It is essential for the days ahead in our country that you understand that dynamic. God has given America over to the evil America’s sinful hearts desired.

The curse of sin we continue to experience entered the human race through our rebellion. It is God's response to Adam / Eve's willingly joining forces with the liar. In Genesis 3, you will see God not only curses the serpent, He pledges that life for mankind will be unbearably hard from now on. God pronounced adversity (a curse) upon Adam and Eve because instead of being content to allow Him to lovingly provide every good thing for them to enjoy as they trusted Him, the head of our race (Adam) and his wife (Eve) wanted to be god. We see that in our world today. We want to decide what is right and wrong. Everyone is doing whatever feels right to them.

But we don't even have to look as far as the news or to our neighbors. Do you not see that same tendency in your own heart? That is the curse of sin. The wages of that sin is death. You might remember the popular saying "Life is hard and then you Die." It is actually quite biblical. Through the curse of sin God made life intentionally hard. (pain in childbearing, marital strife, ) The earth itself was cursed with thorns, thistles, hard labor, and frustration. In short, what we call Murphy's Law became the norm for day-to-day operations on earth. And (God said) this will be true until you die.

Genesis 3:19b (ESV)

till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;  
for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Well, you might say that's a morbid way to think. I prefer to think positive. I contend that by recognizing and embracing the biblical reality of the age in which we live, only then will you not underestimate your own sin nature. And only then will you stop expecting a fallen culture to behave in moral ways. Best of all, only then will you be able to enjoy and appreciate and love the One who has redeemed you from this curse of sin and promised you paradise restored in the age to come.

Right now in America, we are entering into a season of tremendous opportunity for the gospel to become clear and (at the same time) unprecedented challenges. We have officially become Sodom and Gomorrah. We not only celebrate sin, but have (Piper) institutionalized it. To understand why that is the case, I want you to learn to recognize the curse in operation right now in our fallen world, to stop assuming people are born basically neutral. None of us are. Each of us is a direct descendent of Adam and Eve, and their free choice to sin has placed each of us by birth under the curse of sin. You were not born innocent. And because of your sin nature, it is impossible for you to swim upstream and conquer the waterfall of the curse.

The Curse = apart from trusting in God we are fighting against Him. Even when we try to be good by our own effort, He will not allow sin stained intruders into His holiness. That is what Paul wants these Galatians to understand. If you try and earn right standing before God by your own actions, by your own goodness, you have forgotten the curse of sin.

Galatians 3:10 (ESV)

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."

The curse Paul is referencing was more than just an immediate rash of bad things happening to you. The implication is if you rely on works to save you, you are professing a commitment to remaining under the curse. Just as someone refuses a free airplane ride to Europe saying, “No, I believe I can swim there.” Law-keeping attempts to establish your own holiness, but you can’t keep the Law well enough to satisfy God. “Do you mean to tell me that all the ultra religious effort that Muslims have just put forth in keeping Ramadan is in vain? That all the prayers, and incense of diligent Hindu’s are of naught? Even worse, that all of the good works that I do to try to feel good about myself before God are cursed? Yes, by God Himself. Because the only passing grade for right standing with Him is 100%

Proverbs 20:9 (ESV)

Who can say, “I have made my heart pure;  
I am clean from my sin”?

Only one man has ever perfectly obeyed. Only Jesus (our second Adam) has scored 100. That is why the Gospel is such good news. Like a bright full moon on a dark night, God sent His Son into the blackest of skies to live the righteous life we all need in order to be right with Him.

Romans 8:3–4 (ESV)

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Can you now see why Jesus is the only Way? Why Jesus is the only Truth? Why in Jesus is found the only Life? Can you see why we are not free to adjust the Law of God? Make up our own version?

The Great Divide between people who think they can be good on their own merit and those who run to and cling to the righteousness of Jesus Christ is not going to be blurry from this time forward in our culture. It will become increasingly clear. That distinction will benefit the spread of the gospel. True faith will become more distinguishable from cross-less gospels. Just like you now see companies, not wanting to miss out, taking advantage of the marketing opportunity of this moment, you will increasingly see churches also flying the rainbow flag in an effort to be considered relevant and accepting.

The call of the Gospel is to realize that under the curse of sin that we are all (heterosexual, transsexual, homosexual, bi-sexual) lumped into one heap of corruption and in need of the same merciful Savior. We are all stained with the indelible black ink of sin and stand in need of: the curse remover!! Listen, here are the glorious facts:

1 Corinthians 6:9–11 (ESV)

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were

washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

When we moved into our house in 2010, the carpet was very nice. But now, having raised three puppies in it (since then) it is not nice. We have had it cleaned numerous times, but if you have ever dealt with pet stains the spots we paid to have removed and which appeared to be gone have now come back darker than before!

The sin stains of our life are very similar. It is our minds and our consciences which need cleansing and no matter how hard we scrub (with our good works), the spots keep coming back. Jesus is the only stain remover for our souls. Only His righteous life as a replacement for our own can cleanse us from the curse.

Isaiah 1:18 (ESV)

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:  
   though your sins are like scarlet,  
 they shall be as white as snow;  
   though they are red like crimson,  
 they shall become like wool.

Our society is in denial that we are living under the curse of God, that we have a stain problem, because they have set themselves up as god. Don't you be lulled into the same deception. Cry out now for the One who removes the curse! Trust in Him Who gives you a new nature and makes you white as snow.

Paul was emphasizing to the Galatians that the Law can't adopt you into God's family. The Law can't justify you before Him. The Law is powerless to set you free from the groaning of the curse. The Law only makes cursed people appear religious. Only the grace of God in the gospel can make you righteous as you trust in Christ

Galatians 3:11 (ESV)

Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”<sup>12</sup> But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

You know how, when you plug in an address to a place you want to go into the GPS, on my phone the display will show a green route with the time it takes, as what the GPS thinks is the best choice. But alongside it, it shows one or two routes in gray which always take longer and sometimes have you making a big circle (construction / traffic hazards). Paul is being a spiritual GPS for his Galatian friends and he is presenting two routes to “life.” Both statements are quotes from the Old Testament. Both are the Word of God, and both promise that the man who takes them shall live by them.

The difference is that the second route, which involves keeping the Law, involves a trip up the vertical face of Mt. Sinai, which no man can achieve because the curse of sin has weakened our flesh. We slip and fall every time we try.

So, the first route (Paul says) is the only real option: to live (eternally, in fellowship with God) by trusting in what Jesus has done. “The righteous live by faith.” We believe the Promises God makes about those who trust in His Word

Our connection to the life of God is by faith

At least until this day comes, which we trust is hastily approaching:

1 John 3:2–3 (ESV)

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

The life of faith is a journey of relying on the Savior and resting in His finished work. Christ’s Righteousness is our Life. Stott – “The only way to escape the curse is not by our work, but by His.”

So, Step One as we approach this Great Divide between Life and Death is to recognize the curse. The second exhortation is a response to believing that God has sent our curse Remover! Who, in the fullness of time was born under the Law and kept the Law. He paved a new route over top of Mt. Sinai which leads to Zion. He came to redeem us from the curse of sin.

### **Life or Death?**

#### **2. Receive the Blessing of Redemption!**

Paul Tripp tells the story of how, after one of their children was born, the hospital bill was enormous. They knew they could not afford to pay it. Their savings were depleted and they had no idea what they were going to do. A few weeks later someone from the Billing Dept. at the hospital called. Paul said he answered the phone with a knot in his stomach He was dreading what the lady was about to ask To his surprise she said that they had been examining his account and that his family qualified for one of their assistance programs. The Hospital Board has decided to forgive your debt. He could not believe his ears! He and his wife cried for joy afterwards. They were unbelievably grateful that God would do this. In fact, their rejoicing was evidence that they believed what the news the lady had shared with them. That is an analogy of how the redeemed should respond to this news:

Galatians 3:13 (ESV)

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”—

Not recommending this for you one way or the other but I always watch the videos online that show the actual murders which ISIS commits. This past week, they had one of men they drowned in a pool. Another showed men burning to death all for crimes the Caliphate said they had committed. In their view, these men deserved the worse death possible and they wanted it public. Had GoPro cameras existed on the Day of Christ’s crucifixion, I assure you the Romans would have filmed it, and the Pharisees.

What you would have witnessed would have been him absorbing the horror of the very curse of sin into Himself on the cross. You would have witnessed the most horrific human suffering the planet has ever seen, not merely because of the physical torture (real), but because the Innocent and Righteous Christ who had never known sin actually became sin (take that in). The curse of death for sin (our sin) was poured out on Him by God. This was a fulfillment of the law because our sin is punishable by death . God said:

Deuteronomy 21:22–23 (ESV)

“And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, <sup>23</sup> 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.

How can we rejoice in that? Because it is the greatest display of love ever imagined. God made His own Son to be sin to take our curse in order that we could be redeemed from what we deserve. Does that include you? Has your iniquity has the curse of death for your sin been laid on Jesus? Then, would you own that today? Especially if you are feeling condemned over mistakes you have made sins you have committed but can't seem to feel forgiven for

Isaiah 53:5–6 (ESV)

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for (my) transgressions;  
 he was crushed for (my) iniquities;  
 upon him was the chastisement that brought (me) peace,  
 and with his wounds (I am) healed.  
<sup>6</sup> (I) like a sheep have gone astray;  
 (I) have turned—every one—to (my) own way;  
 and the LORD has laid on him  
 all (my) iniquity.

All over the country confused people right now are celebrating, because they think they have been liberated to be who they really are without shame: flying flags, marching in parades. But you who believe that God alone has the right to decide what is sin and what is not, and that God alone has sent the redeemer to pay for our sin, have Someone and Something far more exciting to celebrate. You (who are in Christ) have been raised from the dead! Your crimes have been paid in full your soul has been redeemed. The Supreme Court of Heaven has declared you righteous. And the blessing of eternal life has come to you.

Galatians 3:14 (ESV)

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

The Holy Spirit has come to dwell in you so that you can continually be aware of and rejoice in the Blessing of fellowship with God. Just as Abraham was a friend of God, your life is now wrapped up in relationship with the Life Giver No earthly court no government can take that away! Receive and rejoice in that blessing, given to you freely as a love Gift from God.