

## ***CHRIST OR THE LAW?***

### ***GALATIANS 3:10-14***

Christ or the law? This is the basic choice in religion. Those who choose the law are seeking to gain acceptance before God on the basis of their obedience to the law. Those who choose Christ are basing their hope on what Christ did on the Cross. What is your choice?

Before you finalize your choice into a life commitment, you surely need to consider these words of the Apostle Paul. In his presentation of the doctrinal truth of justification by faith, he lays the way of the law and the way of Christ before us side by side. He wanted his friends in Galatia to know the facts before they chose to seek righteousness on the basis of their obedience to the law. You need to know the facts, too. What are the facts we need to consider?

#### ***I. THE LAW IMPOSES A CURSE ON US WHEN WE DISOBEY.***

The Old Testament law is a beautiful revelation of the character of holy God. However any law carries with it a penalty for those who break it. You observe the speed laws because you are aware of these penalties that disobedience brings. The penalty for breaking the law of God is called "the curse". This curse is death. The death is both physical and spiritual. Disobedience to the law of God brings death of the body of man in time. It brings death to the spirit of man at the time of disobedience. The moment a man breaks the law of God his relationship with God is broken. He is separated from God spiritually. Unless something is done about the transgression of the law, in the day of judgment it will impose eternal death, which is separation from God into the prison of damned forever. This is one of the basic functions of law --- impose a curse.

To set forth this truth about the law, Paul turns back to some basic statements in the Old Testament. These statements demonstrate beyond any doubt that a person cannot gain the approval of God by keeping the law. "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse." "Of the works of the law" stands in contrast to those he has presented earlier as being "of faith". This means that the thing which characterizes their lives is their commitment to the law. They are committed to the way of the law. The result can only be the curse, the condemnation of the law. Why? "For it is written, Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." This statement is taken from Deuteronomy 27:26, where it appears at the end of the statement of the blessings and curses at Mount Ebel and Gerazim. After promising blessings to those who do the things found in the law, the encounter closes with this threat of curses upon those who do not keep the commandments of the law. The key words in this statement seem to be "everyone", "continueth", "all things", and "to do". "Everyone" indicates that the law makes no exceptions in its curses. "Continueth" means that there can be absolutely no lapse in the

obedience. One act of disobedience cancels out all of the obedience that has gone before. You can love God with all your being for thirty years, and then for one day not love him with all your being, and that one day puts you under the curse. "All things" means that the obedience must be complete. There are more than six hundred specific precepts in the Old Testament law. If you keep six hundred and twelve of the six hundred and thirteen, you are still under the curse. Partial obedience still brings the curse. "To do" calls attention to the basic nature of the law. The law does not call on you to believe, but to do. You do not meet the demands of the law by faith, but by obedience. Nothing less than active obedience will meet the demand of the law.

Do you see the importance of this? This surely indicates that when you chose the law, you chose the curse of the law. For not one man has ever been successful in keeping the law of the Lord --- not completely. Some have come closer than others, but "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

This agrees with the Old Testament. "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith." "And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them." By the use of these two Old Testament statements the Apostle demonstrates the basic conflict between the law and faith. The prophet promised righteousness to those who have faith in God --- just as Abraham experienced, but the law promised righteousness to those who "do" the things written in the law. One is by trust and the other by trying and works. Since man is not able to "do" all of the things written in the law, it offers absolutely no hope of eternal life.

Do you see where this leaves us? If we choose to seek to be right with God on the basis of what we do, on the basis of our obedience to the law, we have no hope. The law offers no mercy. It demands, perfect obedience. Disobedience at even one point brings us under the curse imposed by the law. This surely reveals to us that each of us apart from Jesus Christ is personally under the curse of the law. O that you will feel the weight of this curse. One of the basic spiritual problems of our day is our not taking the law of God seriously enough. Our neglect of the law has produced a generation of "little sinners", that is, they are little sinners in their own eyes. They do not take sin very seriously. This is a tragic mistake for the law does impose this eternal curse upon those who disobey.

Have you chosen the way of works, the way of the law? Then friend, be aware of the hopelessness of your situation. You are without any real hope of ever gaining the favor of holy God.

## ***II. CHRIST REDEEMED US FROM THE CURSE BY HIS DEATH.***

O what a glorious fact! "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law." Paul states this as a matter of wonderful history. Jesus Christ came and redeemed us from the curse of the law. The emphasis in the statement falls upon "Christ". He stands over against the law. The choice to be made is between Christ and the law, between faith and works. The Judaizers were tempting the new believers to turn their back upon Christ and to commit themselves to the law. Paul wants them to know that while the law imposes a curse, Jesus Christ removes the Curse. Surely they will choose Christ.

"Redeemed" is one of those blessed Gospel words. The root idea in that word is to "buy back", to ransom from slavery. The idea in this context is that we were prisoners on death row due to our transgression of the law of God. All of our legal recourses had been exhausted. Because of His love for us the Lord Jesus came into the world, and by the giving of His own life, he purchased our release from the death row. He removed the curse from us. It was literally "out of the curse" that he redeemed us. He did not remove the law, but the penalty which the law had pronounced upon us, the condemnation it had imposed.

Are you not glad that the Apostle used personal pronouns in the passage? "Us" is a beautiful word. Paul includes himself, and all of his Jewish relatives. But he also included all of those Gentiles in Galatia-and you and me. He "redeemed" us.

How did Jesus Christ bring about this "redemption"? The Apostle explains, "by being made a curse for us." "Being made" is a participle of means, which indicates that Paul is here giving us the means by which Christ redeemed us. "For" is the preposition often used for substitution. The root idea in the word is to be over. The picture in the word is that Christ protectively became a curse over us to protect us from the curse that was about to fall on us. By being over us the curse fell on Him rather than on us. There is mystery here. What really happened upon the Cross? Many modern theologians tell us that on the Cross God revealed His love toward sinners so that sinners would feel free to come to Him for mercy. Surely this text points to more than just a revelation of the love of God. In some mysterious way Christ Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was made a curse for us. He became accursed before God in our stead. To support this, Foul quotes another interesting statement from the law. "For it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." Whenever a man was stoned to death as a criminal in Israel, his dead body was hung on a tree publicly. This was a witness to those passing by that the penalty of sin, the curse, had been imposed. Paul sees importance then in the public manner in which Jesus Christ was hung on the tree. So did the Jews. Through the years they have expressed their scorn for Jesus by using the very word found in that verse in the law. They have called Him the "hanged one". This was their way of saying "He is the accursed one." And right they are. Only He was not accursed for His own transgressions for He had none. He is the only Man who has ever gained the "I am well pleased" from the heavenly father. He was

without sin. Never was He heard confessing any awareness of transgression to the Father, yet in His death He is heard to cry, "My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?" The answer is that He is standing before God in our stead. Since we deserved justly to be forsaken of God, if He is to redeem us, He must experience our forsakenness. He must undergo the agony of being thrust from the presence of God, I say it reverently, "Our Hell".

Whenever I speak of this, it makes me want to get on my knees and worship Him. O what He did on that Cross!

The purpose for all of this stated by the Apostle in the text, "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." Two great results are set forth here --- the same two we have already considered in this chapter. The "blessing of Abraham" to be enjoyed by the Gentiles is the righteousness which Abraham received by faith. The death of Christ upon the Cross, His being the curse for us, was necessary if we were to have this righteousness as a gift of God. This was a basic reason for the whole ordeal. The other is that we might receive the "promised Spirit". The Old Testament prophets had promised an outpouring of the Spirit, then Jesus had spoken of the coming of the Holy Spirit. But before the precious gift could be given, the curse must be removed. God cannot give the Spirit to those who are still under the curse.

Does this help you appreciate the folly of the Judaizers? They were suggesting to the Galatian Christians that they could merit these precious things on the basis of their works. By keeping the precepts of the Mosaic law they would put themselves in a position where God could grant to them righteousness and the gift of the Spirit. Indeed, how much reproach can one present to God? Do they imagine that they can earn by their finite works what really cost the eternal Son of God his life upon the Cross? Will they try to purchase from God what Christ has already paid for in full? Oh the shame of it!

***Conclusion:***

Are you ready to make your choice? I made mine long ago, and my only inclination today is to reaffirm it. I understand it better now than I did then. I do not want to be under the law. I do not want to stand on the basis of what I can do. I readily admit all I have merited is the curse of the law. I want my case to rest on what Jesus has done, what he has finished upon His cross.

Have you ever made this choice? If you have not, then I want you to make it this morning. Sitting right there in your pew, would you bow your head, and tell Jesus Christ that you are choosing Him. Admit to Him your inability to do those things required in His law. Admit your shortcomings to His glory. Your hope of eternal life can be settled this very day.