

Galatians: Commentary Galatians 3:10-14

In the previous passage, Paul made the apologetic defense for justification by faith. In this passage, he gives a polemic argument against justification by works. This passage also offers a chiasmic structure where verse 10 presents a problem answered by verse 13, verse 11's predicament is addressed in verse 12, and the effect of the grace answer in Christ to the law problem of works is explained in verse 14. This chiasm is best understood in the larger context (Galatians 3:10-25), where Paul deliberately engages in a discourse on the law and the curse, in response to the prevailing attack against the biblical gospel of grace through faith in Jesus alone. In so doing, he is used by God to deftly weave the thread that links Israel to the church, the Jew with the Gentile in the family of God. The Judaizers argued that this thread weaved *through* Moses and therefore required ongoing observation to traditions and obedience to Mosaic laws. They contended that Paul's doctrine sought to abjure the law and was therefore heresy. Accordingly, Paul's engagement here was necessary to correct the Judaizers' heretical misstatement of Paul's teachings, and to clarify the true purpose of the law in the revelatory context of Jesus.

10

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.”

Verse 10 follows on the heels of verse 9, where Paul reminds them that "those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith." Verse 10 therefore offers the stark juxtaposition of the premise Paul makes evident - that the law requires perfect obedience. Since such perfection is unattainable, those who determine to live by the law are therefore under the curse associated with it.

Disagreement exists regarding the widespread acceptance of the universality of the "curse of the law" among the Jews. It was a common teaching among rabbis of Paul's day, and it is thematically echoed elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. [James 2:10](#)). Contemporary teachers challenge that this teaching was universal, by pointing to the provision of and reliance upon Temple sacrifices as atonement for sins. Regardless, Paul's exposition here elucidates the essence of the curse - not just that all sin ([Romans 3:23](#)), but also that all people have an inherently flawed sin nature which makes sin inevitable and perfect compliance to the law impossible ([Romans 5:12, 19](#)). The remedy offered by the law in the ongoing sacrifices were superficial, impermanent, and inadequate. Even the most reverent, observant of the Jews would be reminded of the law's powerlessness to justify and of his own fallenness that made justification by works utterly unattainable.

11

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

The next two verses are both a standalone "interlude" that--using two familiar Old Testament Scriptures--further highlights the inability of the law to justify, and also an insertion into the broader context of the problem introduced in verse 11 that will be addressed in verse 13.

Paul holds [Habakkuk 2:4](#) as an inarguable truth. Paul quotes this Old Testament declaration two other times in his writings ([Romans 1:17](#); [Heb. 10:37](#)), and it has served as a proclamatory banner throughout Christian history to express the means for vitality as well as perseverance. In this Paul equates justification with life itself, which harmonizes with his teachings elsewhere how the law brings death ([Romans 6:23](#)) and

faith in Christ alone is the truest expression of life ([Phil. 1:21](#)).

To Paul, the problem is evident, meaning plainly visible to all people, Jew and Gentile alike. Absolute obedience to the law (with, as one rabbi has accounted, 365 prohibitions and 242 instructive commands) is uniformly unattainable. If one could live his entire life and both do everything expected and abstain from everything prohibited, perfectly, then that person could indeed stand before God...justified. But Paul makes clear, no one has done this nor can do this. In this Habbakuk 2:4 serves as the silencing rebuttal to the problem of the unattainability of the law.

12

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

[Leviticus 18:5](#) was well known among the Jewish people because it is there that God revealed the sincere promise that the person who lives by the law will, in fact, live. Two other times in the New Testament, it was referenced as an authoritative principle by which the audience's conduct was guided (cf. [Luke 10:25-28](#); [Romans 10:5](#)). In both these references, Paul's point was not to affirm the possibility of being justified by the law; rather, he was illustrating the impossibility of being justified by the law because of the utter impossibility of perfect obedience.

In verses 11 & 12, Paul presents the unsolvable problem facing the Judaizers in Galatia and elsewhere who had been poisoning the gospel of grace with an ongoing requirement to fulfill the law: the law offers life to those who fulfill it fully. No faith is required. The proof that no person can meet this standard is given in the glorious revelation the people who are righteous before God are those who live by faith.

13

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”—

In this verse, Paul addresses the problem facing humanity presented in verse 10. Because no person can meet the impossible standard of the law and thus live by it, every person is subsequently under the curse of the law. The universal lament is no rhetorical question: what hope does humanity have?

Paul declares the hope for humanity is Jesus. For the first time in Galatians, Paul articulates the work of Jesus as a transaction of redemption. The word translated for "redeemed" (*exagorazo*) contains the root *agora*, the marketplace where slaves were bought and sold, and the word literally mean "to be bought out of the marketplace." It is used in the context of one who is worthy and able paying the ransom for one who is both unworthy and unable. Simply stated: Jesus paid the ransom for everyone under the curse of the law.

The crucifixion of Jesus is an indisputable fact. The manner of his death on the cross identified him as cursed, in accordance with [Deuteronomy 21:23](#). Even though crucifixion was a detestable form of capital punishment to the Jews, its practice aligned with the Jewish practice of hanging from a tree the corpse of person killed by their methods of capital punishment (burning, stoning, beheading or strangling, [according to the Talmud](#)) as a sign to all that the deceased is indeed cursed. In fact, the great efforts to remove Jesus from the cross before sundown is in compliance with this verse in Deuteronomy, so the cursed would not defile the land (cf. [John 19:31](#)).

That Jesus was cursed is undeniable. Yet, it is vital to understand that he became a curse but was not born under the curse that plagues all of humanity. Truly, Jesus was the spotless lamb of the world, born without blemish or defect (cf. [John 1:29](#), [1 Peter 1:19](#)). His death on the cross was not a tragic culmination of a man whose aspirations wrought unexpectedly violent retribution. It was not a matter of cosmic coincidence. Instead, it was nothing less than the fulfillment of God's predetermined will where Jesus -- God incarnate -- at the ordained time

became sin for man to bear the full wrath of God against all unrighteousness, and in so doing pay the ransom that reconciled fallen man back to their righteous Father ([2 Corinthians 5:19, 21](#)).

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.

The result of Jesus' effective ransom is the provision of God's promised blessing being extended to the Gentile people. This is the work of one God, with one plan of salvation for all people. God was no distinguisher of peoples - there was not a plan of works for the Jews, one of grace for the Gentiles, much less a hybridized plan for either or both.

The evidence of this blessed provision is the presence of the Spirit, which Himself is given by faith to all who believe (cf. [Rom. 8:9](#)). The Spirit is not received as a culmination of works, but as a provision of faith, a demonstration that indeed the just shall live by faith.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 3:10-14 - God's Logic

Small Group Member Guide

Start the conversation

What are some "curse words" that are considered "safe" or acceptable by Christians to replace the unacceptable curse words said by others?

Under the Curse (Galatians 3:10)

What does it mean to "rely on works?"

Paul explains that the consequence of such a dependence places the person under a curse. What does this mean to you?

Why do you think the law is the reminder of the curse, as explained in this verse?

Faith & Life (Galatians 3:11-12)

Paul continues in verse 11 to make plain that no human efforts, regardless of how impressive they may be to others, are able to make a person righteous before God. According to this verse, why not?

How does verse 12 explain why the law is fundamentally not faith?

How do you reconcile the statement of life in verse 12 with the declaration of curse in verse 10?

Becoming the Curse (Read Galatians 3:13)

What does it mean to you that Christ redeemed you?

What does do you think it means that Christ became the curse for you?

Bringing Life (Read Galatians 3:14)

What is the blessing of Abraham?

What is the result of that blessing?

Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 3:10-14 in the Week ahead

Day 1

Consider where you have fallen short today. What commands have you broken? Where have you fallen short? Rather than sink in guilt, shame, and self-condemnation, give God thanks for His laws that reveal our utter dependence upon Him.

Day 2

The righteous shall live by faith. Examine your life and look for the aspects of your life that you live by faith, and the areas where you have been trying to do the right thing to please God's love. Ask God's Spirit to guide you in living by grace because you are approved and included in Jesus.

Day 3

One thing we can do is to be a friend to others who need grace. As you see people in your life struggling to follow the rules and mistakenly thinking they can meet God's impossible performance standard, pray for them, befriend them, and encourage them with the gospel of grace.

Day 4

The idea of redemption is understood to provide the established cost or value of something else. The established cost of your efforts is death. Jesus paid that expense so you do not have to do so yourself. In an act of worship today, pay the cost of someone else today...at a restaurant, at the coffee shop, at the cleaners. Do this act in humble anonymity, expressing gratitude to God for paying the cost you cannot pay.

Day 5

Scottsdale Bible makes many efforts to extend grace to others - by offering age and gender-specific ministries, by engaging in compassion efforts to People throughout the valley. Explore and commit to a ministry where you can contribute to this culture of grace by serving others as an expression of relationship because you have been graciously given God's Spirit by faith.

Day 6

Around the world, Scottsdale Bible is taking God's gospel of grace to people in need. Pray today for the more than 50 missionaries supported by our church to remain faithful to this mission. Ask God's Spirit to move before them, giving them favor in their efforts and bringing new people under Abraham's blessing.

Family Talk

Prior to the family talk, find a coupon in a newspaper, magazine or online. A coupon for a free item with use of coupon is ideal, but not essential. Gather the family.

Read Galatians 3:10-14.

Ask for someone to explain how a coupon works. If it is not clear, explain it.

Discuss how because we are born with a broken relationship with God, we do the wrong things. Yet, because God made us to have a relationship with him, we try to do the right things as a way pay the price for doing the wrong things. However, even the effort to pay God with our efforts is still another wrong thing. We simply cannot pay what we owe for our bad choices and broken relationship cost us.

Then, demonstrate how like the coupon redeems the "missing value" of the item being purchased, Jesus provides the missing value for what we owe God. Discuss how Jesus came to pay our costs, and that when He died, our debt is paid in full. Explain how this passage in Galatians reminds us that if we have trusted in Jesus, we have received the gift of life and have been redeemed back into a good relationship with God and are included in His family. Close in a time of prayer, thanking God, discussing salvation further, and/or interceding for family, friends, or acquaintances who are in need of redemption.

The following pages
are for small group leaders.

Galatians: The Gospel for Everyday Life

Galatians 3:10-14 - *God's Logic*

Small Group Leader Guide

Prepare: Things to do before your small group convenes

- Consider the news of the [billionaire who built a mountaintop estate](#)...including the mountain.



After reading his story (at the link above), think of this man. What pride he must feel at the accomplishment. What cost did it require. Also consider how much he can actually take credit. Don't move on before considering the danger he has placed upon everyone living there. How has this great work become a burden...to himself and to those who live under him? How is this similar to a life dedicated to pleasing God through the law? For how much can you take credit? What does it cost you? What do you gain? What are the burdens that your efforts have placed upon you? Upon those living under you?

- **Review** Galatians 3:10-14 to review the content of the biblical focus. **Invite** God to speak to you with a fresh application of His timeless truth. **Ask** God to open your eyes to see opportunity to share His love and truth with others, that you might also live by faith. **Submit** your heart to God's conviction, that you may be exhorted to experience anew the timely activity of God's Holy Spirit in your life.
- **Read** the provided [commentary on Galatians](#) 3: 10-14. **Preview** this material and engage with God's Spirit as He guides your study.
- **Pray** for your small group members by name, asking God to reveal a meaningful appreciation for their part in the family of God. **Seek** God's wisdom in leading your small group to apply

God's word to their lives. **Commit** yourself to the Lord, that you would live what you teach.

To The Point - What to impart to your small group

Key Verse: 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” (Galatians 3:13, ESV)

Objectives: Through your time exploring this passage, your small group members will:

Examine the relationship between the law and its consequences.

Discuss what it means that Jesus became the curse.

Explore the personal implications of Christ's atonement.

Leader Guide Key:

Blue - hyperlinks to other resources

Red - Reading prompts

Green - Leader headers and *sample responses to questions*

Encounter: A suggested plan for your small group experience

Start the conversation

What are some "curse words" that are considered "safe" or acceptable by Christians to replace the unacceptable curse words said by others?

Though it will be likely there is no shortage of words suggested, comedian Tim Hawkins offers a list of [101 Christian curse words](#).

Say

While the origin or history of specific words aren't being discussed here, the concept of "curse words" has a long history. The idea behind the curse word is that any word, spoken crudely as an epithet, actually invokes a curse against a person, a thing, or a situation. For example, if you hit your thumb with a hammer and shout "Razzle Frazzle!", you are invoking a curse against the hammer.

The matters of pronouncing curses has always been a more serious matter than people tend to consider. Even Jesus warned against the dangers casual use of vindictive words because of the darkness of heart revealed in such speech (cf. [Matt. 5:21-22](#)).

Our conversation is going to be more than just a discussion about forbidden phrases and provocative words. We're going to talk about curses, and specifically, the curse. We'll see where there is relationship between this curse and each of our own lives and what God offers in being free from this curse and how that impacts us in daily living.

Open in prayer for your time together.

Under the Curse (Galatians 3:10)

Say

Remember, Paul has transitioned from his effort of defending his apostleship and authenticity of his Christ-given gospel of grace to explaining how to live according to this gospel. He begins by reminding them that they received spiritual life through faith in Jesus, just as by faith God blessed Abraham. Because of this common faith, the Galatian Christians (and all Christians, too) are included in Abraham's family, as promised by God. Now, we see Paul

explain further from what you have been saved when you were in fact saved by faith.

(Read Galatians 3:10)

Ask

What does it mean to "rely on works?"

It is practical sense, it means to intentionally undertake actions expecting that the conduct will please God and be used as the basis for his approval or justification upon the doer. In a theological sense, it means to place one's faith in self rather than in Jesus.

Paul explains that the consequence of such a dependence places the person under a curse. What does this mean to you?

It is important to communicate that "the curse" is not any type of a temporary malediction of God imposed on a person to make their life miserable or to suffer in adversity as punishment for their failure. Nor is it the law itself. The law is given to make plain the impossibility of man being able to please God by effort. Man's inability to do this points people to God's grace in Jesus. The curse, therefore, is the ultimate consequence of a person's determination to strive in futility under this law that is the curse: eternal separation from God.

Why do you think the law is the reminder of the curse, as explained in this verse?

The law serves this function because the Scripture makes clear (referencing [Deut. 27:26](#)) that total adherence to the law is required to experience its salvific benefit. Otherwise, only consequence awaits, including death. As such, the law continually functions to warn you of your impending death, ushering you to choose life (cf. [Deut. 30:11-20](#))

Faith & Life (Galatians 3:11-12)

Say

Paul continues in verse 11 to make plain that no human efforts, regardless of how impressive they may be to others, are able to make a person righteous before God.

Ask

According to this verse, why not?

According to this verse, the sole basis by which a person is declared righteous by God is faith.

How does verse 12 explain why the law is fundamentally not faith?

Verse 12 explains that the law requires doing. It requires effort on the part of the person. It moves a person into a relational position of labor before God. Consequently, any results of that labor or those efforts are wages earned for doing them.

How do you reconcile the statement of life in verse 12 with the declaration of curse in verse 10?

Verse 12 is a reiteration of the promise that if one successfully does all that the law commands, life is possible. However, verse 10 is the stark reminder that it is utterly impossible to meet this standard. Consequently, the promise of life via the law is unattainable, and only death can be earned as payment for human efforts.

Becoming the Curse (Read Galatians 3:13)

Ask

What does it mean to you that Christ redeemed you?

Answers may include:

- *Jesus paid the price of my sin*
- *Jesus's death satisfied God's wrath against my efforts that wrongly, foolishly supposed I could be justified before God on my own.*
- *Jesus assumed the debt I owed God and made me presentable or right before God.*

Ask

What does do you think it means that Christ became the curse for you?

While answers may vary, it is important to recognize that Christ is not merely an example to be followed, but that in redeeming you, he assumed your sin upon himself and presented himself as the sacrifice to atone for it before God. The Scriptures declare that Jesus became sin (2 Cor. 5:21), and his death on the cross was the promised indicator of his becoming the curse (cf. Deut. 21:23).

Bringing Life (Read Galatians 3:14)

Say

Verse 14 explains why Jesus became sin, and to what effect.

Ask

What is the blessing of Abraham?

Answers may include:

- *God's blessing of righteousness attained by faith.*
- *God's blessing of Abraham making him the father of God's chosen people.*

What is the result of that blessing?

The result of God including Gentiles into Abraham's family (and by extension, being counted as righteous before God as his adopted child), is the gift of God's Spirit. God's indwelling Spirit is both a sign and His seal of one's acceptance by God and familial inclusion.

Say

The implication of what God has made available in Jesus is profound. What Jesus has done for us is worthy of a determination to not go back to old ways and failed means to accomplish what has both already been accomplished and cannot be accomplished apart from him. In the weeks ahead, we will continue to build upon this to explore it more fully, to appreciate it deeply, and ultimately, to live daily in the power of Christ's victory through the Spirit's indwelling presence.

Let's close in prayer:

Invite the group to pray for one another. Pray over any needs or issues that were shared in your time together. Pray over the content discussed in your small group, highlighting the aspects that God's Spirit revealed to your group as important.

Encourage your group to use the "Continue in grace" resources (below and on the Group Members Page) on their own or with their family, to extend the small group experience into the week. Confirm your plans for your next gathering!

Continue in Grace - Living Galatians 3:10-14 in the Week ahead

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