

Series: Legalism. License. Liberty!  
Message Title: ***The Curse and the Covenants of Grace***  
Date: Sunday, October 22, 2017  
Scripture: Galatians 3:10-29  
Speaker: David H. McKinley  
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## Introduction

When you hear the word, *curse*, what comes to mind? Most people today would probably think of cursing—foul language or profanity.

In days past, curse = “a solemn utterance intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone or something.”

A curse is the work of a witch, a witchdoctor or one with powers to apply, magic, darkness and or bring doom on others. It is some sort of a dark manifestation of sorcery and witchcraft.

Western minds rarely give any real credence to the possibility of dark spirits, sorcery, witchdoctors or curses being placed upon them, but if asked, you might hear the first line of these words:

*Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and caldron bubble.  
Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the caldron boil and bake;  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting,  
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.*

*Double, double toil and trouble;  
Fire burn and caldron bubble.  
Cool it with a baboon's blood,  
Then the charm is firm and good.*

—William Shakespeare, *MacBeth*

Shakespeare (1564-1616) lived in the latter part of the 16th century, days following the Reformation. Martin Luther died in 1546.

The history of the world has been marked by curiosity, practices and beliefs in sorcery, magic and wizardry. Even in our day, *Harry Potter* is the best-selling book series in the history of the world—500M copies.

The Bible has much to say about curses, not because it is a book of superstitions, but because it is a book of revelation and truth. While there are multiple references to the magic of Egyptians and Chaldeans, sorcery with Balaam and Saul, Jannes and Jambres, and others, there is a matter for us to consider and a core issue of Scriptural instruction for us to understand.

In Galatians 3, Paul comprehensively condenses the entire storyline of the Bible in a sequence of three personalities and events that all have to do with a curse.

“You crazy Galatians! Did someone put a hex on you? Have you taken leave of your senses? Something crazy has happened, for it’s obvious that you no longer have the crucified Jesus in clear focus in your lives. His sacrifice on the cross was certainly set before you clearly enough. Let me put this question to you: How did your new life begin? Was it by working your heads off to please God? Or was it by responding to God’s Message to you? Are you going to continue this craziness? For only crazy people would think they could complete by their own efforts

what was begun by God” (Galatians 3:1-3 MSG).

Paul uses strong language to shock and awaken the Galatians who are being deceived and falling prey to darkness that should be dispelled through the light of the gospel.

Is Paul caught up in superstition or black magic? Let’s investigate.

In Galatians 3:10, Paul speaks of a curse.

“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’” (Galatians 3:10 ESV).



## **The Curse—Us**

Note the universal application of *everyone* and *all*. No one likes or wants to hear that we are cursed. It’s easier to talk about blessing. We all want to know how to be blessed, but

we cannot know God's blessing until we deal with the reality of the curse that concerns us.

This curse upon humanity is not one of hex caused by witches, witchcraft or even Satan himself, but of sin and rebellion. We are cursed by God and by His holy standard.

It is the result of deception and defiance seen in Genesis:

"Did God actually say...?" (Genesis 3:1a ESV).

"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:4b-5 ESV).

Original sin has devastating effects on creation and humanity, and individual sin compounds this reality daily in our world. We are all under the curse of sin. It is a universal application.

"...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 ESV).

The consequences of sin are clear.

“The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (Ezekiel 18:20 ESV).

We are granted the worst of all outcomes: death and damnation—eternal separation from God.

“Death is the defining and enduring evidence of the curse of God upon humanity. Sin has separated us from the life of God.

‘Fear the curse of God. This truth needs to be proclaimed. Everyone is under a curse, which means even in the present we are under the curse of God and will be after death through eternity; and then the implications and results of that curse will escalate into incomprehensible suffering. Cursed is everyone.’ —John MacArthur

To remove the curse, we must deal with the defining issue of human sin and consider how to reconcile this with God’s holiness and righteousness.

## The Promise—Abraham

How can the curse be broken? Through the gift—the blessing of God—a promise made to Abraham.

“... just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’? Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 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.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith... Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” (Galatians 3:6-9, 11 ESV).

God demonstrates His goodness and grace in the life of Abraham. God initiates and acts on behalf of a fallen world by calling out a man to whom He makes a promise and then fulfills a promise to overcome the curse of sin and condemnation.

This promise was made to Abraham, but not just for Abraham. Abraham did nothing to

merit or deserve this promise. He did not hit a certain level in the “merit rewards” for a good life.

Abraham was a man chosen and called by God for a purpose and with a plan that would break the curse! The result would be blessing, beginning with Abraham (new life, new land and new lineage) with this result: the blessing of all peoples!

Note this was a one-sided promise:

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing... But Abram said, ‘O LORD God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?’ And Abram said, ‘Behold, You have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.’ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.’ And He brought him outside and said, ‘Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then He said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed



the LORD, and He counted it to him as righteousness" (Genesis 12:2; 15:2-6 ESV).

It was impossible for Abraham to assist, but possible for God to intervene. And God did intervene in the life of Abraham, and through him in the history of humanity and the world.

If you are a believer, you are an heir of Abraham—faith. God's promise was and is a radical and overwhelming work of grace.

By grace, through faith, the promise of God was "credited" to Abraham for righteousness—what man needed to overcome the curse was given by God's active work of grace for him and for us.

... so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith. To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his Offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your Offspring,' who is Christ" (Galatians 3:14-16 ESV).

Abraham did not do anything; he believed something God said and God provided the Offspring. Who? Jesus Christ!

Thus, through faith alone, we can receive the blessing of forgiveness and righteousness. We embrace the promise by faith and experience blessing in life.

Blessing illustration. Suppose I gave you the key to a new car and said it is in your name. It is ready for you to drive. Take it and go. Then suppose you thought about it and said, "Here is \$10," and then drove away and told everyone we bought it. Crazy, right?

"This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise" (Galatians 3:17-18 ESV).

## **The Law—Moses**

"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**" (Galatians 3:10 ESV).

See Deuteronomy 27. After crossing the Jordan River, these people were to stand on two mountains—one to pronounce blessing and the other to echo cursing.

Why the law? The law exposes and intensifies the reality of our own sin.

"Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the Offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed" (Galatians 3:19-23 ESV).

All the law does is show us the failure of human performance. There were moral, ceremonial and civil laws. All exposed human weakness and wickedness. The law cannot bring life, only death!

If life depends on a chain of 10 links and one breaks, what happens? We stand cursed under the law of God and cannot save ourselves.

So was this a contradiction to Abraham's promise? No! The curse exposed sin so that we can see and understand how devastating and far reaching the impact of sin is our lives and how deep and dependent we are upon God's grace to deliver us from the curse of our sins.

The law provided a "temporary security/support"—to provide awareness and affirm hope. But the Jews were looking at Abraham through Moses rather than the other way around.

Like a temporary crown in dentistry, the crown covers and reminds us of our need for something to permanently cover a decayed

and deteriorating tooth. You don't need something that approximates, but something that is accurate and perfect for your teeth.

## **The Redeemer—Christ**

“So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24 ESV).

Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise of God to us and the law of God for us.

What God did in His gracious initiative toward Abraham and what God revealed about His holiness and righteousness through Moses all pointed to the apex of history and the action of grace that has reached us. Christ took on the curse that we might experience the blessing.

“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’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Galatians 3:13-14 ESV).

I hope you get this because it changes lives forever.

“It was on the cross that the kindness of God and the severity of God met together and Jesus paid it all.” No cost too great.

Christ redeems and buys us out of the bondage to the law and gives blessing

“So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:9, 29 ESV).

How? By faith!

## **What is this blessing of God?**

- **Freedom From the Curse**

Instead of living under the shadow of darkness and craving satisfaction, you and I are brought into a new realm called, *blessing*. What is this blessing? Knowing and experiencing God. You were made for God and in the image of God. Sin with its curse distorted and separated you from your original identity.

“There was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent to help he does not obtain things present... But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.” —Blaise Pascal

The blessing is knowing and experiencing God because He made you for this purpose and everything else is a curse upon your existence.

## • **Identity Within God’s Family**

For the Jews, their whole identity was in their Judaic system and ceremony. *Identity Politics* has become a big subject for discussion in our day: “a tendency for people of a particular religion, race, social background, etc., to form exclusive political alliances, moving away from traditional broad-based party politics.”

We have a new identity based upon who we become in Christ.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28 ESV).

So our church is to take on the look and character of this new identity in the Lord. While we can't deny the obvious nature of our differences, we must not make them the obstacle of our lives either.

### • **Security Apart From Performance**

“And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29 ESV).

Our standing before God is not dependent upon our daily “donations” to gain merit badges. In the end, Christ's work demands total surrender in humble faith. God isn't looking for a people with good behavior, but for people who are wrecked by the consequence of the law and look to His eyes of grace and His redemptive work on Calvary to become heirs according to the promise!

“The promise to Abraham was not fulfilled in Isaac or Israel, but Immanuel—God with us.”



“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:4-5 ESV).

Have you responded to this promise of blessing? Have you received Christ that you might receive adoption?

How?

“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in Him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing His riches on all who call on Him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:9-13 ESV).

Conviction—Confession—Commitment—  
Covenant participant.