

Deuteronomy 30:15–20: ¹⁵“See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹I 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, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

“Life Is God’s Choice”

INTRODUCTION

It’s not easy to stand here and talk about things that make you uncomfortable. We all would rather be entertained than confronted with reality. But it’s necessary sometimes—and today is one of those days. Speaking through Moses, the Lord says in our text: “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. ¹⁶If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. ¹⁷But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish.”

As a people, a culture, we have turned away from God’s commandments—and we suffer for it. Pope John Paul II coined the phrase, “Culture of death,” to describe western civilization. That’s what we have—that’s what we live in—a culture that sees death as the answer to our

problems. Don't want to be pregnant: abort the baby. Don't like your spouse, kill the marriage. Don't want to care for mom: euthanize her. Don't like your life: end it.

But God says Life is important—Life is sacred—Life is His gift. We know this because we cling to life—we fight for life. But then we sin. And when we sin, we die—maybe not right away, but eventually as our bodies and our minds pay the price for sin.

If we could only walk in God's ways, then we could live, just as the Lord says: ¹⁹"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, ²⁰loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

DEATH IS ALL AROUND US IN A CHRISTLESS CULTURE, FOR APART FROM CHRIST, DEATH IS THE ONLY "CHOICE" HUMAN BEINGS CAN MAKE; BUT IN CHRIST, GOD EMPOWERS YOU TO CHOOSE LIFE FOR LIFE IS GOD'S GIFT AND CHOICE FOR HIS PEOPLE.

I. We choose death.

As I prepare to teach at Lutheran High School each year, it's very sobering to see the effects of this culture of death. It's not just the death of the body and the soul that lives under the wrath of God, but death to what is good, right and salutary.

The devil is a liar, a deceiver, a murderer from the very beginning. The devil deceives you into thinking that his way is life and God's way is death. The media are under his influence—that

is for sure! It says that there's nothing wrong with alternative lifestyles—they're actually fun and healthy and good for society.

But the truth is different.

As I do my research for LuHi, it isn't pretty what I see. I see aborted babies torn limb from limb. I see bodies wracked with sexually transmitted disease. I see young people whose only pursuit in life is pleasure. I see human embryos destroyed for research.

If we didn't have such good health care—with our antibiotics, antivirals, antiparasitics, and anti-depressants, alternative lifestyles wouldn't be such a great idea.

Then we see what divorce and living together has done to marriage and the family—it has been the death of the institution that God gave us for the purpose of nurturing children in a disciplined and loving environment. Now the schools have that job—and they're just not up to the task. It's not their fault—teachers do the best they can.

But it's not just sexual sins that God condemns. Death has become a form of entertainment, as movies and video games drench their viewers in an orgy of blood and guts. Greed is the death of trust and prosperity. Gossip is the death of reputations—and it does a pretty good job of killing churches, too. Stinginess is the death of generosity and charity. Laziness is the death of the body and the mind.

II. God says, "Choose life."

The culture chooses death—it can't help it! But what about Christians? Can't we choose life? The world beckons you to follow it. The culture makes sin look attractive and death the easy way out—even for Christians. Even believers are deceived to living together apart from marriage, to abort their children, to put parents to sleep.

It's because sin still clings so closely to us, and with sin, death. We can't help but sin—Jesus makes that point clear in the Gospel reading—even our thoughts are sinful and bring us death.

If only we would do things God's way, we'd live! But the world would really hate us. You see, whenever you stand for what is good, right and salutary, whether you realize it or not, you accuse the world of sin. Try to save your own children from the culture of death by guiding them in the way of righteousness, and you'll be called judgmental. Answer someone's question about marriage and you're called a bigot. Stand of moral principles and you lose your business and income. The dying world hates to have its blinders removed.

III. God gives life.

What to do?

1) Repent and turn to Jesus, for the forgiveness of sins and the strength to prevail against the culture. Repent from listening to the siren song of death and turn to the Words that give you eternal life. Jesus is proof that life is God's choice for you. God gave His only-begotten Son into death on the cross that you may have life—and have it abundantly. Life with God in the here and now—where the Holy Spirit—the author and giver of life—guides you in the way of righteousness and protects you from falling into sin. But also life in the world to come as a redeemed and forgiven Child of God who lives in Christ.

2) Go to Church. The Church is the culture of life in the midst of the culture of death. Here is where God gives life through His Word and Sacraments. Here, the death-dealing lies of the devil are smashed by the life-giving truth of God's Word. Here, the Baptismal Font reminds you that God chose life for you. And here, the altar with the Lord's Supper is where God renews and refreshes your life in Christ.

3) Trust that God's Word is right and the culture of death is wrong. The Church has lost souls because they got that backward—God is wrong and the culture is right. But the proof is in the pudding, as they say. You don't have to look very far to see what the culture of death has done to people's lives. While idolatry wreaked havoc on the nation of Israel, the sexual revolution has done the same thing to this nation. God's Word is truth and life, and it will endure long after this culture has bit the dust.

And 4) Have the courage to put your baptismal life right here on your sleeve where everyone can see your life in Christ. What do we admire most about Luther? His courage! "Here I stand," he said to those who wanted to recant his teachings or die. The culture of sin is a murderer, a killer. Ask God to give you the courage to stand against it—to shed holy light on its unholy darkness. Be prepared to make sacrifices so that the next generation will know what God considers life and death. Who knows, you may save someone from his or her deathly choices because you had the courage to love them by speaking the truth.

The worst thing that can happen to you in this culture of death is that it kills you—either your reputation, your income—or your life. But what does that matter? What can the world offer you that is more precious than your life in Christ? And what can the world really take from you when your life is hidden with Christ in God? You have the hope and promise of resurrection to eternal life.

CONCLUSION

God says, "Choose life." Because we are slaves to sin and death, God has made that choice for you by giving you a Savior from sin and death—and joining you to Him in faith and empowering you to choose life—to walk in the way of righteousness through the power of the Holy Spirit—the Lord and giver of life.

And though sin and death cling so closely to you, you have the forgiveness of sins — where death is dealt a fatal blow, because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Matt Walsh: My podcast this week extends on the piece I wrote a few days ago. The point I want to explore is this: Our country is very dangerous for Christians. In fact, our country, and western culture as a whole, may be more dangerous for Christians than any other place anywhere in the world, at any time.

By this I'm obviously not referring to physical dangers. Clearly, our situations could hardly be more comfortable and luxurious. Yet if we were to compare, by percentages, how many Christians abandon their faith in our culture with how many abandon it in places where they are killed for keeping it, I think we would find that our percentages are much higher. Our dangers are spiritual, not physical. We may not be sent to the gallows but we do send ourselves to Hell.

Why is that? Well, as I said before, a lot of us have adopted a false Christianity, and we don't realize it's false because we've never put it to the test. It would be relatively simple (though not easy), in the face of physical persecution, to figure out whether or not your faith is false. If you know that professing it may result in death, and is certain to result in great suffering, you would only proceed if you actually believed it. Only Christians who truly love Christ would say that they love Him when saying so may result in immediate martyrdom. The words are their own proof in that circumstance.

What about us? For us, the words don't prove anything. It takes nothing to say "I'm a Christian" in this country. And that can be a hazardous situation because it allows us to delude ourselves. We say that we believe the bridge is sturdy but nobody is putting a gun to our heads and forcing us to prove it by actually walking across. So we stand off at a comfortable distance and convince ourselves that we believe it. But how confident can a person really be in a bridge they categorically refuse to step foot upon?

That's why it's so important that we force ourselves across that bridge, as it were. That we force ourselves to walk the faith, to take up our cross, to fulfill the duties Christ assigned to us. Only then can we really know with any confidence whether our faith is fact or a fantasy. As St. Paul told the Corinthians: "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves."