

The Weekly Word

August 22-28, 2016

Another month is flying by, but God's Word holds securely. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, August 22: Deuteronomy 13- The surest foundation is God's word...

The Lord is getting serious now, NO OTHER GODS... it is as if the Lord is shouting His command this time.

If a prophet tries to lead you to other gods... Say 'NO' and rid the land of him/her.

If a close family member or friend –child, sibling, close friend –tries to lead you away from the Lord to other gods... Say 'NO' and rid the land of him/her.

If a town follows other gods... DO NOT JOIN THEM, rid the land of them and all their possessions and livestock, destroy the town and never build there again.

The Lord is speaking one of His most strict words... there is no getting around this one. Follow the Lord and only Him or else.

I was particularly intrigued by the comment regarding prophets, verses 1-4: *If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder spoken of takes place, and the prophet says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him.*

It struck me; we are always to follow the Lord and never signs, even miracles. Signs and miracles can be counterfeited! Now the Lord does give signs or miracles many times, but we DON'T ever follow the sign or miracle, we follow and obey the Lord.

I am all for a confirming witness, but the clear teaching of God's Word is ALWAYS the best foundation upon which to build our lives.

Thank You, Jesus, for this great reminder today. I love You, Lord, and I devote my life to loving, serving and obeying You and You alone. Through Your name, Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, August 23: Deuteronomy 14- Treasured by the Lord...

I was touched by the opening line, verses 1-2:

You are the children of the LORD your God. ... for you are a people holy to the LORD your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the LORD has chosen you to be his treasured possession.

I found myself contemplating being the treasured possession of the Lord!

What an incredible statement. As the Lord's children we are His treasured possession.

I take excellent care of those things I treasure; I believe most people do. And if we, mere mortals, take excellent care of the things we treasure, I tried to imagine the care the Lord would take of the things He treasures. WOW!

Things I treasure are special to me... we are special to the Lord! Another WOW!

Today I found myself marveling in the truth that through faith in Jesus we are God's treasured possession. What an amazing thought, amazing truth, and wonderful morning with my Lord.

God, thank You for the affirmation that this word brings my heart. I am blessed to be Your son... Praise You my Lord and God –Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit. Amen

Wednesday, August 24: Deuteronomy 15- a God who cares for everyone, rich and poor alike ...

The picture of God setting up structures among His people to care for the poor is impressive. Canceling debt after 6 years, imagine that!

Imagine living debt free. What a burden would be lifted off most people's shoulders.

I realize that our modern world is very different than the ancient one. In many ways we are a credit-based society. Even if we eliminated consumer debt like credit cards, the purchase of a house and a car is accomplished on credit. Then add to this, loans due to college expenses. Debt for many people is a fact of life.

Fact of life or not, debt is a burden we carry on our shoulders. It is a weight that is always there and the poorer you are the more the burden weighs on a person. An illness necessitating time out of work can devastate families on the margin.

Debt can be a killer. Now add the rampant consumerism that plagues our society and the weight of debt grows even more.

Again we are not the ancient world...

God looked down and said people on the lower end need a chance to survive... the Sabbath year, a year to cancel debts. It certainly wouldn't drive an economic engine but increased quality of life would be tremendous, especially for people on the margins.

God's heart is that people do not need to feel or be marginalized... a God who cares for everyone, rich and poor alike.

O Lord, if only we could live closer to Your heart and create systems and structures that lift the burden from the down and out and poor among us. I know that no system would be perfect. After all sin-filled human beings are involved but we could do a better job and move a few steps closer to Your ideal. I pray so, Lord. I pray so... in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, August 25: Deuteronomy 16- Celebrate...

Devotionally I was attracted to the word 'celebrate' in verses 10 and 13. *Celebrate the festival of...*

It struck me that celebration is the appropriate posture of praise and worship.

Earlier this year we celebrated the wedding of my daughter. There was laughter and conversation and smiles and lots of enjoyment. But there were also moments of reverent wonder and sharing of vows and even a few tears. It was a wonderful celebration.

Six weeks before the wedding the family celebrated the life, death and resurrection of my mother-in-law. While the tone of the service was more somber, due to the occasion obviously, many of the same relational qualities were found at the event and the after events... laughter, conversation, smiles, tears, reverent wonder.

The doses of each were different for these two events but there was a similar underlying goodness and, yes, even joy for both events. One celebrating the new life of a marriage, the other celebrating the ultimate homecoming for a child of God.

Moses invites the people of Israel to celebrate the Lord at the festivals of Israel. And I thought, “Yeah, we get to celebrate weekly the resurrection of Jesus and all that means for a child of God. And we get to celebrate periodically the great events of salvation, birth, death, resurrection of Jesus and giving of the Holy Spirit throughout the year.” And it is healthy if these weekly and periodic celebrations include laughter, conversation, smiles, tears, reverent wonder... the enjoyment of our God in appropriate doses.

Think about this... I am.

Lord, show me how to celebrate You today, a Thursday, and to celebrate You with my church family on Sunday. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, August 26: Deuteronomy 17- The rule of law...

I have been thinking lately about the gift I have living in the US with the rule of law and our right to a trial of peers. Now to be sure the legal system in my country has some issues. It takes too long to prosecute, there appears to be a bias against the poor, public defenders have ridiculous caseloads that do not allow for fair representation, etc. Inequities noted, our system is an incredible gift compared to countries where there is no rule of law except “might makes right.”

Reading the Word today, I grew in my appreciation for the Lord and the gift He gave Israel with their legal system. It showed me God's heart for truth, honesty and justice. Admittedly this example is a capital case, but it is in those situations where the outcome is most severe.

*If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God ... and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it **thoroughly**. ... On the testimony of two or three witnesses a person is to be put to death, but **no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness**. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. ... (2-7).*

First I note that any investigation must be thorough. In a world and culture where the big person matters more and generally can do what he wants to require thorough investigation is a huge step forward in jurisprudence. It suggest truth is what is being sought, not vengeance.

Next requiring the testimony of two witnesses –obviously corroborating witnesses- raise the bar of truth significantly while also limiting corruption. This is another large step forward in protecting individuals from abuse by the system or by the rich and powerful.

Requiring the witnesses to be the first involved in executing the capital punishment is a third step forward to seeking truth and offering fairness regardless of a defendant's wealth. Certainly this doesn't absolutely ensure honest testimony, but a person with any shred of conscience, I would think, would have problems putting someone to death with their own hands for a crime they were not 100% convinced the person committed.

Lastly, if the judge presiding the case doesn't discern truth, he has the ability to move the case to a temple priest. The inference here is that the Lord will determine the verdict. For the accused this should bring comfort if they are innocent.

All in all Israel's system was a major step toward equity, honesty and true justice, especially given the state of affairs in the ancient world from which this comes.

All of this shows me God's heart for integrity and justice in His land.

Thank You, Lord, for Your heart for truth and for teaching Your people this and for setting up a system that would help insure it for all the people of Your land.

Praise to You, Lord, God... Amen and amen.

Saturday, August 27: Deuteronomy 18-The occult...

This is not a particularly devotional topic, but for some reason this paragraph seemed to command my attention as I read my daily chapter.

When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD; because of these same detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the LORD your God (9-13).

It seems strange but these kinds of practices seem to be growing in my culture. Whether it is serious involvement, dabbling or something 'fun' to do I cannot say. And likely this will vary from person to person. Reading this passage, any involvement, even the mildest involvement, is categorically forbidden by the Lord. They are detestable to the Lord.

I don't know of anyone who has sacrificed a son/daughter in the fire; but new age influences are growing. Things like finding your energy or spirit guides are growing in influence in my culture. So the concern Moses raises has its connections to my world.

Bottom line, Moses says NO involvement. In words and behaviors that would make sense to people I know, no dabbling with horoscopes, taro card readings, going to spiritist fairs, reiki healing or meditation in the eastern, sense of emptying oneself and the like. These behaviors are not benign; they open doors to God's enemy who is masquerading behind these kinds of behaviors.

The Lord expects fidelity from His followers and these kinds of behaviors are affairs with the devil that can only lead to trouble. The Lord is warning us, giving us a guardrail we should not cross.

Think about it...

Lord, give me eyes to see the subtle inroads of Your enemy in my world. Help me to wall off any personal involvement and then give me appropriate words for warning for others. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, August 28, 2016, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@pcogonline.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.