

The Weekly Word
August 29 – Sept 4, 2016

Enjoy Labor Day weekend. God honors the labors of hands. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

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

Monday, August 29: Deuteronomy 19- What an interesting punishment...

What an interesting punishment. *If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. ... (16-19).*

Do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. It seems to me that this would be a pretty good deterrent. Instead of simply facing the punishment for perjury, the perjurer receives the punishment that the perjured victim would have received if he/she had been convicted.

Truth telling, especially in court, is important if a society is to function well. How does one enforce truth telling... it prosecutes lying (perjury). With this law God is telling His people how important truth telling in court is.

I have never testified in court so what do I do with this passage? 1) It tells me how much God honors and expects truth telling, not only in court but in life. 2) It begs me to examine my life. Am I a truth teller or do I s-t-r-e-t-c-h the truth to fit my situation?

Introspection is an important part of maintaining honesty with the Lord.

How are you doing in the truth telling department?

Lord, 'thou shalt not lie', pretty much sums up Your view in truth telling. May I honor You in all my speech. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Tuesday, August 30: Deuteronomy 20- Who gets honor for the victory?...

The response of the officers to battle is a strange one. Tactically you want the largest army you can muster. Strength in numbers, especially in hand-to-hand combat wars, is a clear advantage. And yet we read:

The officers shall say to the army: "Has anyone built a new house and not yet begun to live in it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else may begin to live in it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not begun to enjoy it? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else enjoy it. Has anyone become pledged to a woman and not married her? Let him go home, or he may die in battle and someone else marry her." Then the officers shall add, "Is anyone afraid or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his fellow soldiers will not become disheartened too."

Stop and think for a moment, build a new house and you get to go home. Plant a vineyard and not yet enjoyed its fruit (about 3 years), go home. Remember this is a farming culture. Engaged to be married, go home. Scared and fainthearted, go home. I have no idea what percentage of able bodied soldiers this would add up to be but I imagine it is a significant percentage and it includes the younger most able bodied men at that.

What's the deal? I suspect there is a psychological component to keep the distracted men off the battle lines where their distraction can negatively influence others.

But even more so, the Lord seems to be in the habit of whittling down the Israelite forces (remember Gideon) so that the Lord gets the honor and glory for the battle victory not Israel itself. This is why David's counting of the fighting men was so heinous. Knowing 'his' strength would lead to vain glory and trust in self rather than the Lord.

God's whisper to me... the Lord is why I succeed in life and in work. This truth is not meant to undermine hard work and thoughtful actions; I am to bring all I am and all the gifts and abilities I have and place them at God's disposal. But ultimately success is in God's hands. *Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6)*

I have been reading about WWII lately and certainly the United States entry into the war was a massive advantage, but the number of battles won by a turn of fate here or there is astounding... these belong to the Lord...

Again, not by might... but by the Lord... victories are won and successes are gained.

Think about it...

Lord, keep me mindful that You deserve all praise and honor. Whatever "I" have gained in this world, You are the giver of these good gifts. Thank You, Lord. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, August 31: Deuteronomy 21- Sacredness of human life...

Establishing a people and a country is very different than giving laws or rules for life to an individual. Much of Deuteronomy is pointed at establishing a nation so the laws do not necessarily have personal import, but they can help me understand God's heart on various concerns.

I found myself mulling over the opening 9 verses and the issue of a homicide with no leads regarding the perpetrator. The Lord was not satisfied allowing the unsolved homicide to have no closure. While bringing a person to justice would not happen, there remains the matter of intentional murder with no atonement. A human life has been taken and the Lord is not pleased! A significant stain of sin remains on the people.

So the Lord decreed a process of atonement for such cases. Certainly this was not wholly satisfying for the family of the murdered individual but at least the guilt before God of the people is assuaged.

As I wrote this last sentence, I realized that guilt before God does not enter my thinking very often. I think about guilt against the victim or the family, maybe even the state, but I rarely think of God's perspective. The murder has prematurely ended the life of a human and death of an innocent requires atonement.

Human life is sacred; we forget (I forget) that God weeps at a murder.

I wonder if I am growing numb to death of innocent people due in part to the barrage of senseless deaths in my country and around the world lately.

Today's reading is a sobering reminder of the sacredness of every human life.

Oh, God, I hope not. Lord, if my heart grows callused to crimes against innocent people I fear I will lose part of the flicker of the Holy Spirit within me. But, Lord, I don't know if I can sustain the full onslaught that the voices of innocents are crying around the world. So I don't know how to pray. Should I pray to feel the full brunt of humanities' crimes against innocents or should I pray to have my heart broken of on slice of the whole? I don't know. I don't know.

I just know, Lord, I want to embrace You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thursday, September 1: Deuteronomy 22- Things not to mix...

Verse 9-11: *Do not plant two kinds of seed in your vineyard; if you do, not only the crops you plant but also the fruit of the vineyard will be defiled. Do not plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together. Do not wear clothes of wool and linen woven together.*

These verses have always been a bit of an enigma for me. I don't understand them nor do I get why this is such a big deal.

I was so perplexed that I did some research but that added nothing particularly useful. History apparently has lost the reason for these distinctions being made. This of course doesn't mean that there were no reasons back in Moses' day for these distinctions.

Certainly God had His reasons for these laws, even if it was a 'test' of sorts; something God required to create distinction between His people and the rest of the world. And were I a follower of the OT covenant I would need to follow them because they are God's Word. Since they aren't repeated in the NT nor would one come up with these as a way to love God and love others, they are not laws I need to follow.

One interesting side note. These texts helped lead the elders and me to a decision years ago. We were discussing how to pay for some church improvements and one thought was raise the money and pay as you go. Another was raise the money but also get a line of credit so we can do everything needed even if all the funds didn't come in. The issue wasn't contentious, we just didn't have a unifying way forward. As is our custom, we paused to pray and after a few minutes of prayer I asked if anyone heard anything from the Lord. One elder said, "I heard Deuteronomy 22: 9-11."

They looked it up and read it. Honestly, I and a number of elders were still perplexed. Then another elder (different from the one who received the guidance about the Scripture) said, "I know what it means." The elder went on to say that by raising money and taking out a line of credit we were mixing two things that we shouldn't do together.

In that moment we all had an 'ah ha' and a divided board became unanimous; we would raise what we needed with no line of credit.

Looking back God honored that decision, the campaign and renovations were a success.

I think this story came to mind because God can use any portion of His Scriptures, even parts I don't fully understand.

Keep reading the Word and trusting God, who is its Ultimate Author.

Lord, thank You for Your Word and the way You can break in and move a group to follow Your Will if we will stop and listen. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Friday, September 2: Deuteronomy 23- Illicit money and the worship of God...

Verse 18: *You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.*

If I read this ancient rule correctly, if I were to make money through a means God detests, then I should not use that money to pay off a vow to the Lord, and likely by extrapolation my tithe.

The more I muse on this the more it makes sense. Since the Lord is not pleased by participating in this activity in the first place, why would I think that using its proceeds to make good on a vow would please God.

The Lord desires integrity... meaning the whole of my life is committed to Him. If my whole life is committed to Him then I would not be involved in illicit activities in the first place, right?

As I sit with these words before me, God's prompting is to examine my life from the 200-foot level, taking the full view and asking, "Am I honoring God in my endeavors? Are my actions, relationships and even my motivations honoring to the Lord? Am I the same person in the shadows as in the light? Am I a man of integrity?"

These are powerful questions to ponder...

How about you?

Search me and know my ways. See if there is any wickedness or hiddenness in me. And Lord as You find things, please do whatever surgery is necessary to root the evil and wrong from my life. I pray this with fear and trepidation in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, September 3: Deuteronomy 24- The Lord never wastes experiences...

Three times Moses exhorts the people to remember their past. Verse 9... remember how God dealt with Miriam's skin disease? Verses 18 and 22...remember you were slaves in Egypt... I have read injunctions like this before in the Scriptures.

The thought struck me, God never wastes our experiences. Where we have been, what we have done and God's activities in the midst of our lives is a treasure trove that can guide us or warn us as we move into the future.

As a parent I can think of countless times I have prevailed on things I learned in life to attempt to steer my children in wise directions. Sometimes they listened and learned. Sometimes they needed to make the very mistake I warned them against. Hopefully they learned the lesson that second time.

It has been said, those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it. While that is not exactly what the Lord is speaking to my heart this morning, it is certainly connected.

As I listen to Moses' exhortation to remember their past, the Lord is reminding me that He has led me in my life for a reason. And things I have learned and experienced are often useful as I move forward. And these experiences are useful when I mentor and guide others along the way of Jesus.

As a believer now for 40+ years, I have much to draw on from my time with Jesus. Sometimes it is helpful to reach back to before I became a disciple and recall some of the generally less positive ☺ lessons from those days, too. I believe God was there, unseen and unacknowledged for sure, but present nonetheless.

Take some time today to recall some lessons from your past. How might they help you live faithfully today?

Lord, thank You for lessons learned and for Your presence with me throughout my life. Thank You, Lord, for never giving up on me, but for being the 'hound of heaven', pursuing me even when I had turned my back on You. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, September 4, 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.