

8. Blessing and curse

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I like having choices. If Karen and I walk into a restaurant and find out that there is only one entry to order in their menu, unless that one entry is what we want, we probably would walk out of that place. I don't think that I am the only one who'd like to have many choices. Just about everybody.

Life is full of choices. But some of the choices we make can change the outcomes significantly in our lives – good or bad. Those who choose to do wrong will find themselves running from the law, like those border bandits who shot and killed a Border Patrol Agent on Tuesday night. Now he has just about every law enforcement officer chasing him from ground and air.

The Bible makes it very clear to us that we can bring God's blessings or curses to ourselves by whichever one we choose. It seems obvious and simple, yet the majority of us often make wrong choices.

Tonight we find Moses telling the Israelites about the rewards of obedience that come in blessings and the consequences of disobedience that come in curses.

A. A BLESSING AND A CURSE

Deuteronomy 11:26-32 "Behold, I set before you today a blessing and a curse: 27 the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you today; 28 and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way which I command you today, to go after other gods which you have not known. 29 Now it shall be, when the Lord your God has brought you into the land which you go to possess, that you shall put the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal. 30 Are they not on the other side of the Jordan, toward the setting sun, in the land of the Canaanites who dwell in the plain opposite Gilgal, beside the terebinth trees of Moreh? 31 For you will cross over the Jordan and go in to possess the land which the Lord your God is giving you, and you will possess it and dwell in it. 32 And you shall be careful to observe all the statutes and judgments which I set before you today.

Moses was reminding them that their future victories depended on their present decision, the determination in their hearts to love the Lord and obey His Word. But as children defy their parents' commands, knowing fully that they disobeyed and defied the Lord's commandments for them. Why did they do that? Because they don't have fear of God and really think that they will escape His chastening hand. That is what the Bible calls 'tempting God.'

The three main elements to the OT covenant were the Law, the sacrifice, and the choice. The Israelites had a choice – to obey and be blessed; or to disobey and be cursed.

It is important to recognize that we who are in Christ Jesus, do not have an OT relationship with God. Our relationship with Him is based on our position in Christ through His grace and mercy. Our curse was laid upon Him and, in turn, we received the blessing of His righteousness. Of course, we still have the curse of consequences that come from our own disobedience or even in the correcting hand of God.

After the Israelites entered the land and began to conquer it, they were to have a special ceremony at Shechem, which is located between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. This instruction will be given in Deuteronomy 27-28 and will be fulfilled in Joshua 8:30-35. I am sure that by now you remember Mount Gerizim that was mentioned from our previous study on this past Sunday morning.

At Mount Ebal, Joshua was to write the words of the Law on some large plastered stones and also build an altar. Mount Ebal was to be “the mount of curses” and Mount Gerizim “the mount of blessings.” The tribes on Mount Gerizim would be Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph – Ephraim and Manasseh – and Benjamin, and the remaining tribes would gather on Mount Ebal.

In the valley between the two mountains Joshua, the priests and Levites and the tribal leaders would stand with the ark of the covenant, and from that location the Levites would loudly address the people and recite the curses and the blessings. After each curse was spoken, the people on Mount Ebal would shout, “Amen,” meaning, “So be it – we agree!” After each blessing was read, the tribes on Mount Gerizim would shout, “Amen!”

The priests would offer on the altar on Mount Ebal burnt offerings, symbolizing dedication to God, and peace offerings, symbolizing fellowship with God. Then, they would eat “before the Lord” and enjoy a covenant meal. This important ceremony would be a reaffirmation of the covenant which Israel accepted at Mount Sinai and heard a second time in the Plains of Moab in Moses’ farewell address.

Spiritually speaking, believers today live between two mounts: Mount Calvary, where Jesus died for us, and the Mount of Olives, to which Jesus will one day return. But God hasn’t written the Old Covenant Law on stones and warned us about curses; rather, He has written His New Covenant on our hearts and blessed us in Jesus Christ.

B. COMPLETE DESTRUCTION IS REQUIRED

Deuteronomy 12:1-4 “These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. 2 You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. 3 And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. 4 You shall not worship the Lord your God with such things.

The religion of the Canaanites were both false and filthy, much like the religion of today’s world from Hollywood. They worshiped a multitude of gods and goddesses – its main god was Baal and his consort, Asherah. Their religion demanded its worshipers to bring their sacrifices to their temple and have sex with temple prostitutes.

Their temple and shrines were often built on high hills so as to get closer to the gods or under large trees that were symbols of fertility.

The Lord made it very clear to the Israelites to eliminate the entire nations and their religious places, customs, and paraphernalias. As we read the Book of Numbers, we find that every single Jewish tribe allowed these nations to survive and left their reli-

gious customs and artifacts in their territories. Because they were disobedient to the Lord's commands, these nations eventually destroyed Israel from within. They became snares and strongholds of false religions within the hearts of the Israelites.

We live in a world that has abandoned absolutes and promotes so-called plurality, tolerance, and relativism, but definitely is against the Christian truth. When we became Christians, we ought to remove all strongholds of the worldly influences from our lives even if they cost us a lot.

But many Christians allow them to reside in their hearts and lives. It is no wonder why they constantly have spiritually defeated lives. It is a matter of time for them to be captives of those ungodly habits and lifestyles unless they remove them out of their lives with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 12:8 You shall not at all do as we are doing here today--every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes--

This is exactly what the Israelites did during the time of the Book of Judges. It is a mind-boggling thing for me to see some Christians who attend churches on a regular basis, still live like heathens. Their favorite excuses are, "I am not perfect," or "God will forgive me." How about the idea of not sinning against the Lord from the first place?

Inherent in Israel's disobedience was idolatry. Whenever we walk in disobedience, we exalt ourselves against God – and declaring that our rules, our standards, our desires, are all more important than His. This is idolatry in its most base – and common – form.

C. UNGODLY CURIOSITY CAN DESTROY YOU

Deuteronomy 12:29-32 "When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30 take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' 31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

There is an old proverb that says, "Curiosity killed the cat." It is one thing to have a childlike curiosity to learn new things. However, when a grown-up Christian was told not to get into a certain thing by the Lord, but he still chooses to go ahead, it is downright stupidity and disobedience to Him.

God would not accept just any offering of worship. He had to be worshiped in Spirit and in truth as it is mentioned in John 4:24.

One of the most despicable Canaanites' religious practices was offering their children by placing them alive on a burning hot metal statue of Molech. The descendants of these Israelites practiced this as well:

- King Solomon sanctioned the worship of Molech, building a temple to this idol. – 1 Kings 11:7
- King Ahaz of Judah gave his own son to Molech. – 2 Kings 16:3

- One of the great crimes of the northern tribes of Israel was their worship of Molech, leading to the Assyrian captivity. – 2 Kings 17:17
- King Manasseh of Judah gave his son to Molech. – 2 Kings 21:6

However, this portion of the Scriptures brings up an important point we must think about:

Does this mean that we are supposed to ignore the local people's custom or culture when we go to a place for a missionary work? No, absolutely not. Missionaries must know the religious mindset of the people to whom God sends, so that they can communicate effectively with them. It is like chemists who handle poisonous chemicals. They should know what it does and how to prevent or cure in case a person gets affected by it, but not be poisoned. With the Lord's help, it is possible for Christian missionaries to contact the local people without being contaminated.

D. DEALING WITH FALSE PROPHETS

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 "If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, 2 and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, 'Let us go after other gods'-- which you have not known--'and let us serve them,' 3 you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 You shall walk after the Lord your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice, and you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. 5 But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the Lord your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

It has often been said that prophets weren't just "foretellers"; they were primarily forth-tellers who declared the Word of the Lord in the name of the Lord. The faithful prophet spoke in God's name and gave only God's message for God's glory and for the good of God's people.

Did you notice the phrase, "Let us go after other gods"? This prophet or dreamer speaks the truth or gives the signs or wonders and they come to pass. Then he tells people to follow other gods – idols – instead of the one true God.

For the same reasons formerly orthodox religious leaders in the church will abandon their calling and get involved in cults or even organize their own cults: pride, the desire to have a following and exercise authority, and the desire to make money. The Israelites knew that God's Law prohibited the worship of idols, but there are always unstable people who will blindly follow a "successful religious leader" without testing their decision by God's truth.

What are we supposed to do with the doctrines and stories of the Bible teachers, dreamers, and prophets? Don't put them against another teacher's teachings, rather we should put them against the Word of God in context.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

V3 is very important. This explains one of God's reasons in allowing such deceivers to exist among His people – to allow the hearts of His people to be tested and proven, to see if they really love the God of truth, or are merely seeking a spiritual sign or experience.

V5 makes it clear what the Israelites were to do for these false prophets – put them to death. In other words, make them to be non-prophets.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) The concept of the OT “blessing and curse” by our own choice still applies in our Christian life. We receive rewards from the Lord for our obedience as well as ugly consequences for our disobedience.

2) Ask yourself whether you have any worldly stronghold in your life that no one knows and you don’t want them to know. If you do, remove them at once.