

God's Chosen, Holy and Beloved 2021
Deuteronomy 8:11-18 Colossians 3:1-3, 12-17

Deuteronomy 8:11-18 (New Revised Standard Version)

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today.

Colossians 3:1-3, 12-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

One of the greatest and most positive blessings of my childhood
was my father's aunt, a remarkably committed Christian woman.
For her, everything seemed to have a biblical connection
and she'd have an appropriate Bible reference or phrase
for almost every situation and conversation she had.

Now it wasn't that she was trying to impress anybody,
or pushing to impose her biblical understanding on anyone,
but it was just how she saw and interpreted the world.
For her, everything in life, everything about her life
was always related to her relationship with God,
**and a biblical perspective was the lens
through which she perceived everything.**

She wouldn't have dreamed of making a decision without pausing
to consider how it might impact her faith and walk with God,
and what truths from Scripture might have to say about it.

The word of God was **so infused** into her mind, her life and worldview,
that she saw herself primarily as **a blessed & precious child of God**,
as one who is **defined by** the love, grace and promises of God...
... or as described in vs. 12, one of *God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.*"

Those three words, “chosen”, “holy”, and “beloved”
help define, characterize and describe who each of us are,
the children of God’s grace, forgiven to follow Jesus Christ.

*chosen, meaning that the gracious love of God
preceded any righteousness on our part,
and that we didn’t chose him, but the Lord God chose each one of us.

There is a strong sense of being favored and blessed,
that’s not earned or deserved, but God simply choses to love,
and that **we are defined by God’s grace toward us**.

So in response,
we’re called to live as **advertisements out in the world**,
declaring by the way we live and relate to others,
that God’s love and healing **can change human lives**,

for knowing & trusting we are loved and secure in the Lord,
leads to a different perspective than that of this world,
especially **how we treat others**, also loved by God.

*holy, meaning that we have been and are still being set apart
according to God’s healing and redeeming purpose,
**and called out from this world’s corruption and darkness
to live lives that reflect God’s light and compassion.**

*beloved, meaning that regardless
of our past or present problems and failures,
our God never gives up on us or stops loving us.

There is always another second chance to receive grace afresh
and to participate in the abundant life God intends for us
by changing **our response to things that happened in the past**.

Because of the grace, healing and mercy that God offers to us all,
for those who do respond and receive, **it changes everything**,
about who we are on the inside, and how we live out our lives,
our goals and values, our attitudes and perceptions,
how we relate to this world and to other people.

When this letter of Colossians was written,
it was to relatively recent and inexperienced converts,
who were struggling with challenging issues that
were bringing strife & divisiveness into the church.

The city of Colossae was along a major trade route in Asia Minor,
and was a mix of every nationality, status, race and culture,
with lots of religious diversity from many backgrounds,
which was reflected in that very mixed congregation.

At first it was wonderful that their shared faith in Jesus Christ
brought them all together unified by the gracious love of God,
but with time, old animosities & cultural jealousies arose...

... and this passage from Colossians was written as a corrective
and reminder that the power of God’s love & grace in Jesus Christ
is what makes us a Christian, and not something we’ve accomplished.

So because we are *God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved*, vs. 2, 12 & 14,

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And be thankful.

As the chosen, holy, and beloved people of God,
those verses describe how we are called to relate to others,
and what it means and looks like
and to be a community of the faithful,
a community of those truly grateful for the gift of God's love,
and for the gift of grace through Christ which we all share.

But that new life in Christ can be complicated and difficult.
It's not always easy to trust and live out that life of faith fully,
and at times we will continue to fall back or wallow in our old ways—

**- our old self of sin, ego and selfishness are still lurking around,
and can still influence our attitude, behavior and perspective.**

Instead of living joyful, and hope-filled lives, **transformed
by the gracious love of God and the Holy Spirit at work in us,**
sometimes we slip back into our old dead and defective ways,
taking up the ways & values of this broken & corrupt world...

... and **living far less than the blessed lives intended by God,**
which is the main point and message of the Deuteronomy 8 text.

The setting of this passage is that the people of Israel
were finally just about to enter the Promised Land.
For 40 years in the wilderness, manna had been **a daily reminder**
of their relationship and dependence on the Lord for everything.

But the manna they ate in the wilderness would stop coming
once they could provide for themselves in the Promised Land.

The danger was that as they labored and prospered in the land,
they might forget that everything **was still a gift from God---**

--- so don't let God's blessings **become a distraction,** vs. 12~18

When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, ... Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth." But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power...

In the ancient Hebrew of the Old Testament,
'to forget' is not just mental forgetfulness or drawing a blank
but failing to keep focused & fresh on the goal or objective.

When God commanded the Israelites 'to remember and not forget'
it meant to continuously strive to follow & obey God's commandments,
and to live a faithful, useful and meaningful life as God intends.

That is also our ongoing challenge of distraction and complacency
**that sometimes we fail to live transformed & exceptional lives
that truly proclaim the truth and Gospel of Jesus Christ,
and that faithfully reflect the forgiveness, grace and mercy of God.**

Our call and hope, is to keep **Jesus at the center of our lives**,
by seeking first an authentic relationship with Christ
that leads to meaningful, faithful & purposeful discipleship.

As we move into a new year, our call and hope is to focus and remember
what it means that God has forgiven and is healing our every sin.

It also means that as *God's chosen ones*, holy and beloved, the people of God
God's gracious purpose and presence right here among us
encourages us, instructs us, guides us and defines us,
... so that together, **we live lives that declare, "Jesus is Lord"**.

As we approach the start of a New Year, let us reflect and reconsider,
where am I right now and where am I headed **in my faith-walk with God?**

Has your faith and commitment grown stagnant, cold and stale?
We must not allow the abundance of God's kindness and blessings
to distract or dissuade us from true Christian faithfulness.

Ask yourself what would it mean
for this year to grow deeper, closer and more faithfully obedient,
to rekindle your commitment and your response to God's promises,
so that **rather than just passing through another year,**
this year becomes one the best, most meaningful,
and most fruitful years of your Christian life?

I had a dear friend, a pastor and much older mentor early on who'd had
a long and fruitful ministry, all of it served in just one church.

As a young intern, I asked him one time,
"how do you keep fresh and vital, how do you avoid stagnation?"
He said that what had worked for him,
was to make the right little decisions, all along the whole way.

He went on to explain,
that in life we are constantly making small choices – minor things
and the trick is to evaluate each choice and option
in terms of faithfulness to God, obedience to God's word.

He found that in life, especially trying to live a Christian life,
one choice will usually bring us a little closer to God,
and the other, probably won't.

One choice requires stepping out in obedience and faith,
while the other seems safer, more secure, **but isn't growth**.
One path leads to being more useful in building the kingdom of God
and the other more likely pursues the goals & desires of this world.

One offers rewards more in terms of eternal values and worth,
the other offers pleasure, worldly success or recognition,
which last for only for a very short season.

He said it comes down to our seemingly minor decisions in life,
that more often than not are usually
quite subtle in how they build upon the little things.

It's not necessarily an obvious choice between good and evil
but more likely, one way is a little more difficult & faithful,
one way more gracious or worthy of a beloved child of God.
One has to do with our desire, and the other **submission to God's will**.

He said, that the right path and option to choose,
is the one that puts us in a place where God can best use us,
for its in being used by God -- and walking with God,
that keeps our faith fresh, growing, real & alive.

That's what is at stake today, and what is important this morning,
which has everything to do with keeping our shared vision alive.

So what would it mean, if before every decision you make this year,
you would stop, pause and consider before you speak or act,

and ask, **is this what God wants and intends for me right now?,
and what does the word of God have to say about this?**

What if at every crossroads, before every choice and decision,
we evaluated and acted in faith and grace based upon
what would best serve to draw us closer toward God?

What if, starting today, we did totally commit ourselves
to truly seeking and following God's will and purpose for our lives,
by pouring ourselves out entirely in faithful discipleship,
by choosing sacrifice rather than our own comfort & desire?

Here is a blunt and harsh challenge:

what if no one here was more committed and faithful than you are?,
and if everyone participated and served no more than you do? ...

... would this church's mission and our ability to make a difference,
our ministries be enabled to expand, or would we have to cut back?

What if our focus was, how can I best serve,
rather than the limitations or our context or making excuses?

Regardless of our age, vitality, health or other difficulties,
all of us from anywhere can pray, perhaps connect with others
such as visiting or comforting the sick and lonely
or by making a phone call, or sending a card or a note.

What if for this year,
we each really did strive to learn more about God's word,
to commit ourselves to Bible study & prayer as a priority?

What if instead of seeing problems, we offered help & encouragement,
& looked for the good in order to find reasons to thank & praise God?

What if every day we did look for ways to brighten someone else's day
and each day, we did find some way to lighten someone else's load?

These are challenging , confusing and changing times we live in.

The future is uncertain and none of knows all that lies ahead.

But like it or not, this is our world, our culture and circumstance,
and **God has placed us here intentionally**, called us & equipped us
to serve according to his will and purpose **for such a time as this.**

As the Apostle Paul wrote: *Colossians 2:6-7 (The Message)*

My counsel for you is simple and straightforward: Just go ahead with what you've been given. You received Christ Jesus, the Master; now live him. You're deeply rooted in him. You're well-constructed upon him. You know your way around the faith. Now do what you've been taught. School's out; quit studying the subject and start living it! And let your living spill over into thanksgiving.