

Christ and Citizenship 2023  
Deuteronomy 8:12-19

Deuteronomy 8:12-19 (New Revised Standard Version)

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. If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

A friend, a pastor I know, received notice to report for jury duty.  
Then during the time of jury selection for an upcoming trial,  
one of the attorneys noticed that she was a pastor and asked,  
can render a verdict on this case  
without your religion affecting your decision?"

"Do you think you

She paused and thought for a moment, then she replied,  
"I can be fair, but I hope that I wouldn't make any decision,  
without letting my faith and my religious beliefs  
guide, influence and affect the decision I make."

With the 4<sup>th</sup> of July coming up, the day our nation celebrates  
the anniversary of signing the Declaration of Independence,  
it seems an appropriate time and opportunity to consider  
**how does our Christian faith relate to our citizenship?**

Do you realize that at least 12 of the original signers  
of the Declaration of Independence were Presbyterians,  
including John Witherspoon, the only pastor to sign.  
King George III of England, with disdain, described  
the American Revolution as a Presbyterian rebellion.  
Yes, Presbyterians were in the thick of the battle for independence.

From the very beginning,  
our theological understanding and relationship with God  
has had a lot to do with our sense of American citizenship,  
that is say, how we relate to both our God and to our country.  
John Calvin wrote several chapters of the Institutes of Religion  
focused on our Christian responsibility to serve our community.

For many of the patriots, everything in life, everything about life  
was always related and connected to their relationship with God,  
**and a biblical perspective was the lens  
through which they perceived everything.**

Many of the ideals and values that bind us together as a nation,  
are primarily derived from our shared biblical belief and trust  
that we are Created by a God who cares about how we live,  
and that we treat our neighbors with justice and mercy.

We hope that the place where we live, make our home & raise families,  
will operate and be governed in ways that are consistent  
with what we believe to be the will and purpose of our God.

As a nation and as a people we have been blessed most abundantly  
with vast resources, with great wealth, power and opportunity,  
yet many who live, raise families & make their homes here  
are not living and using those blessings as God intends...

... which is the main point and message of the Deuteronomy 8 text.

All through the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy,  
God instructs the people of Israel,  
in how they are to live as a people of God, as a godly nation,  
whose experience, faith and relationship with the Lord  
is to guide & influence their perspective and behavior.

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 once in the Promised Land, able to provide for themselves,  
the manna they'd been eating in the wilderness would stop,  
for now they would have a home, their own land & nation.

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

So the author warns and urges them that once they have arrived  
and are feeling secure, successful and prosperous  
don't forget who provided all of those blessings.

**You must remember the Lord and don't be distracted, 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...

There are 2 very clear and pertinent warnings to Israel and to us.

1<sup>st</sup>, as you live into the gifts and blessings of your life,  
when life is filled with good things and going well,  
don't forget that it was the Lord God who blessed you,  
and don't let all that good and prosperity distract you.

Scripture, our faith and our relationship with God through Jesus  
should still always be the lens through which we perceive & do life,  
and even when life is good and going our way, remember,  
it is the Lord who makes our opportunities possible.

2<sup>nd</sup> Since it always the graciousness of the Lord who provides,  
don't let our accomplishments and our successes and pride  
cause us to think or assume that it's all us, our hard work,  
for such ego & arrogance will surely lead to disaster.

The basic theology, the essential truth and message of Deuteronomy,  
is that Israel did not earn or deserve God's mercy and blessings,  
but that God chose to love the weak, the powerless and outcasts,  
so that when the nation of Israel prospered & did well,  
it obviously had to be because of the God of Israel,  
and so Israel would serve as a shining light to other nations,  
drawing them toward God like bugs toward a light at night.

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

So when God commanded the Israelites 'to remember and not forget'  
it meant to strive continuously to follow & obey God's commandments,  
and 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.**

**Yes, we live in this world for now, but our true citizenship  
is elsewhere, our true home awaits us in the Kingdom of God.**

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

That is how it is for the Christian living in this world ---  
for we are loved and precious recipients of God's mercy,  
and so our heavenly home which is wonderful awaits us.

One of the reasons that regular weekly worship is so important,  
is that we can become too comfortable & acclimated to this world.  
Living comfortable and prosperous lives in this world,  
we can be distracted, taking on the values of this world,  
and start to live as if this were our permanent home...  
... and forget the promises that await us in the Kingdom of God.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, Independence Day, it seems appropriate to consider,  
how do we as Christians relate to state and patriotism?

**We are called to reflect the light of God's grace and truth.**

In 1630, when John Winthrop was on his way to Plymouth  
to serve as the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony,  
in an important and defining sermon, he urged,  
warning about the wrath of God toward the unfaithful.

“Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the  
counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God.

For this end, we must be knit together,... We must uphold together in all meekness, gentleness,  
patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice  
together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, as members of the same body.

The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people. He shall make us  
a praise and glory that men shall say, "may the Lord make it like that of New England... For we must  
consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill.”

As Christians,  
we serve our national interests well by letting our lives shine,  
by reflecting God's love, grace & goodness out into the world.

God isn't calling Christians to a political world domination,  
but simply to live faithfully in the world as who we are,  
by reflecting God's love and reflecting to whom we belong,  
for to support the interest of our nation best, is first  
to be faithful, active & obedient in our walk with God.

Jesus came into our messy world, and chose to live among sinners.  
Jesus calls us to follow him - as his holy beloved people  
serving him in our messy world tainted by sin and evil,  
yet filled with the people, whom the Lord dearly loves.

**These are changing, confusing and challenging 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.

& what a wonderful opportunity we have to stand distinctly Christian,  
with warm grace, welcoming love and hope in a broken-corrupt world.  
Today our times and the culture around us are a mess,  
polarized by fear, distrust, bitterness and depravity.

But we are not called to withdraw or blindly reject the world,  
but because God values and loves all the people of Creation,  
we are called to connect, to look out & care for one another,  
to graciously & generously respond to the needs around us.

**Our call on this American patriotic holiday as the people of God is  
gratitude, then generosity, sharing the abundant blessings of God.**

**As together we approach and come to the Lord's Table today,  
let us come in gratitude to our God who loves & blesses us.**