

Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28

June 8, 2008

¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ¹⁹ Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, ²¹ so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. ¹

²⁶ See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse— ²⁷ the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; ²⁸ the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known.”²

What difference does it make? Sometimes very little. Each morning you may have many pairs of shoes, sandals from which to choose. It may make very little difference which ones you wear. When you order food at McDonalds you can select a hamburger, cheeseburger, a fish or chicken sandwich. It's all food. What real difference does it make what you order?

That's really true of so many things in life; it makes very little real difference what we chose. But then, again, in some critical areas of our life it does make a great deal of difference when the choices are between life and death. And that is exactly what they are in our text this morning, the difference between a curse and a blessing, the difference between eternal death and eternal life. That makes all the difference in the world. Especially will that be true when we see that the one choice, choosing death rather than life, is a sad choice human beings can make. The other, the blessing of eternal life, is not our choice at all but a precious gift from God. And so, let's ask this question, as we recognize the secondary school graduates of our congregation. Godly Education, What Difference Does It Make?

At the time when the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write our text, Israel was standing on the edge of Palestine, about to enter the Promised Land. The day, without Moses, they crossed on dry ground the Jordan River, entering Palestine, things were going to be different for them. But it wasn't outward differences that would make the biggest difference of all. All would still be good for them if inwardly, in their hearts, they still remained faithful to the One True God.

That's what the first verse of our text is talking about. ¹⁸ Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.”³

That seemed easy enough to do. Some took these words Moses spoke and wrote for God quite literally. They wrote the commands of God on little strips of paper, put them in small leather cases and actually attached them to their wrists and foreheads.

Rather, what God through Moses is suggesting here, they were to write the words of God in their hearts, fixing them firmly in their memories. Then what their hands found to do daily would be governed by what they knew was how God wanted them to live. The principles by which they lived would be fixed, following God's ways. The principles by which they lived would then not be loose, ignorant of the way God wanted them to be.

What difference does it make? Just look around you in our world today and you tell me what difference it makes when the principles by which people live are loose rather than fixed by what God says.

As an example just take what God says about marriage and the home. Remember how happy Adam was when God brought him Eve, made from one of Adam's ribs? "Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh", Adam excitedly said. He recognized Eve's creation and God's creation of marriage and the home for the blessing God meant for it to be. Here was a fixed principle for living: one man, one woman, for life living together, becoming one flesh, being fruitful and multiplying.

In regard to marriage and the home what is the principle by which many live today? Well, to begin with, marriage may not be for life; there may be more than one husband or wife in a person's life. In fact the partner for as long as they determine may not even be one of the opposite sex. Some US states are making same-sex marriages legal. And as far as the physical living together part of it is concerned, marriage is not seen by many as necessary for physically living together.

There is a difference between loose principles for living and God's fixed principles for living given us in the 10 Commandments. And it does make a difference. The lives of people are seriously affected by loose principles of living. Earthly happiness and security, two blessings of God's principle for living together, are gone. Replacing them is bitterness and insecurity. Just from an earthly point of view, the difference between God's fixed way and the loose ways of human beings surely ought to be evident. But in just a moment we will talk about an even more serious difference, the difference between an eternal curse and an eternal blessing.

As God's people, Israel, were entering the Promised Land, God intended this new experience to be a blessing for them. And that is why God wanted his principles for Godly living to be written in their hearts not just on their hands. And because these principles for Godly living are not naturally found in the human heart, God wanted them taught to each succeeding generation. Listen to the words of the next verse of our text. "19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up⁴ "

People recognized that young people need to get a good education to get ahead in life. If a good earthly education can make all the difference in the world when it comes to earthly things, what about the religious education of children? Do we as Christian instruct or ignore godly education? Does it make any difference?

The phrase 24/7 has become widely used to mean something is available constantly, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. God might use the expression 24/7 to speak about the Christian training of young people. God means for it to be constant, always available 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Here, in the verses of our text, teaching Christian principles was to go on continually in the Christian home. It was to be part of the daily routine at home. And when parents and their children left home, the parents were to look for opportunities, in what their children were seeing and experiencing, to bring more of God's teachings to the attention of their children. When the day began and ended with prayer, the children were to learn what a difference it makes to have God be a part of our life continually.

Is it any different today? You know that it is! Now, not infrequently, we hear it said that even young children ought to be free to choose their own way in life, even their own religion. That could only work if deep inside of us all, in the human heart, true religion was naturally known. The sad fact is God and his holy way is not naturally part of human nature. God's way has to be taught. It was taught to us; it needs to be taught by us to others especially our children.

When children do not receive a good earthly education, we now the sad difference it makes. It's hard for them to have a better life in this present world. If that's the sad difference ignoring education makes in this earthly life, what about the difference it makes in the spiritual life of a child? Ignoring religious teaching is not a blessing, it's a curse as we shall see more in a moment.

God meant, through godly education to bring us the blessing of an eternal life with him. But as much as God cares and loves each one of us, God also cares and loves other people, in fact all people. And that is why, through the display of our Christian faith, God wants others to be brought to the knowledge of the Truth about God. You can certainly see, then, the difference between displaying and denying the Christian faith? Listen to these words of God through Moses. “²⁰ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates,”⁵

Once again some in Israel adopted a very mechanical view of this verse. Again, those little leather packets containing the written commands of God were attached to their doorframes and gates. Is this how God meant the Christian life to be different?

Yes, God meant for the Christian's life to be different even outwardly, the way the world sees Christians. But first of all the Christian's life, again, starts with being different inwardly. The Christian thanks God the principles of life are fixed, written down for us in God's Word. The Christian thanks God some Christian person, a parent or a friend, a pastor or Christian teacher did not ignore our religious education. From God's own Word they taught us the religious Truth we would have no other way of knowing or learning.

And this 24/7 teaching translated into 24/7 living. The reference to writing something on our doorframes and gates was to remind us how continuous and consistent the Christian life is meant to be. Daily, whether inside or outside the home, it makes no difference. The principles of godly living are to be evident, first of all in our hearts and then in our lives. Living by Christian principles is to remind us, first of all, of the difference God makes in our lives. And then, others, seeing that difference, may give us an opportunity to teach them the principles of Christian living, too.

But why is this all so important, what difference does it really make? As the last verses of our text tells us, it makes all the differences in the world. It's the difference between a curse and a blessing, between eternal death and eternal life.

Here is the most important difference of all. The difference God's blessing makes in our lives, giving us eternal life, really had nothing to do with us. We see that clearly when we recognize clearly that a curse, eternal death is what we really deserved.

Every time we did not follow Godly principles in our lives, the eternal curse is what we deserved. Whenever we ignored the religious instruction of the next generation, we fall under the curse of God, death for ignoring what God says to us. Each day our outward lives seemed no different from the ungodly world around us, we were denying our Christian faith. Jesus said, “Whoever denies me before men I will deny before my Father in heaven.”

The Truth is, because of our inconsistent Christian behavior, all of us deserve a curse rather than a blessing. But, still, thankfully, a blessing is what we all do receive. The biggest difference of all is our Savior, Jesus, kept every one of God's principles perfectly. Our Savior Jesus, though he was totally innocent, went to the cross,

paying the penalty for our sins, winning for us God's pardon. And because we've been pardoned, forgiven by our God, a blessing, a gracious gift from God, is what we all will receive.

That blessing will make an eternal difference for all of us; heaven will be our future home. And, as long as we live here, it does make a difference. This eternal blessing is what motivates us to follow Christian principles in our lives. It makes the Godly education of our children seem really important; we want the same eternal blessing for them. And for those around us this difference in our lives may make a difference in their lives, leading them to the Truth about God.

For some of you today, another chapter in your education has been completed or it may be just the beginning of even more training for life. At the start, when the educational process was just beginning, recess and gym class, the lunch break, too, might have seemed to be the most important periods of the day. Little by little, though, as our educational knowledge grew, as we approach closer and closer to a life without school, the work a day world, we realized how important an education would be for us in the future. At times, secular subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic may have seemed to have no Godly connection of any kind. And yet, as we gained greater and greater respect for the role of Godly influence in our lives, for not just earthly success but for eternal success, we saw that a Godly Education Makes all the Difference in the world.

After graduating from high school or college, your working life is just about to begin. But even at this early stage in life, years down the road, it's true, you may envision retiring, living a more leisure filled life. That may be the ultimate goal of your education, completing school, getting a good job and, finally, one day retiring. It can make a lot of difference having this long range goal in mind already now.

But isn't there something more than that, don't you desire something more than just this earthly life? After completing this earthly life, don't you desire to spend an eternal life with God in heaven? Having that goal for the end of your earthly life, also makes all the difference in the world right now. Having God as the focus of your life now, prepares you for more than a profitable earthly life. It provides you with the certain hope, thanks to the blessings of God's grace, for an eternal life spent with him in heaven.

A Godly Education, makes all the difference in the world. Putting God in the center of things now, prepares you for a productive life now. And putting God in the center of the life to come, prepares you for the eternal life that comes next. And that is why a Godly Education, Makes All the Difference in the World!