

Interpretation and Application of Blessings and Chastisements

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Church in Decline – WHY?

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...for concerned people about the state of the Church and the nation today in Ulster in particular and throughout the United Kingdom. As you know, the speaker will be the minister of this congregation Reverend Paul Dowling and soon I will be giving the meeting to him.

But initially, first of all, I want to lead us to the throne of grace in prayer. Let us all pray.

Almighty God, how great you are, the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We come before you knowing that you are a holy God. Holy, holy, holy, God who is different, who is separate from us, a God who does not entertain sin in any way, a God who hates sin, a God who cannot allow even his own people to come before him in that sinful condition. Oh, God, how horrible sin is. Oh, God, we come before you knowing that you are the transcendent God. You are above us. You are high and lofty. You are far away from us, far above us. Yet, oh God, you are in the same extent, you are the immanent God. You have rended the heavens. You have come down in the person of Jesus Christ. We thank you for him. We thank you for the one who has taken our sins and we cannot fully understand nor comprehend all that he has achieved outside Jerusalem, but we do know that he has taken the sins of his own people, that he has lived and died for us. Oh, God, how great, all that he has done. We know that even his Father turned away from his own Son, his eternal Son. He turned away from him because of that sin that was put upon him by his Father. We know the words "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And he did it because of that sin of ours. And, oh God, we thank you for all that he has achieved perfectly and completely, that this very [?] this Son of God, the Son of man is now seated at the right hand of God where he ever liveth to make intercession for us, that he is preparing a greater place, a place of mansions, a place of rooms, a place where one day he shall return from that place and he shall bring his people home. Oh God, we look forward to that day when the sun will represent his people, his elect people back to his Father in utter holiness and in utter purity without sin and without blemish in any of us at all. Oh God, we look forward to that day with that anticipation for that day, oh God. And yet, oh Lord, we find ourselves today in difficulty in the Church, difficulty in the nation. Oh gracious God, we pray that you might revive

your church, that you might take away the coldness of our own hearts, oh God, those of us who are so concerned with the material effects of this world instead of the spiritual things. Oh, God, have mercy upon us. Make us men and women of prayer. Make us warriors of prayer that we might understand the difficulties of the Church today. And we pray, oh God, for the nations, the nations who many of its people have turned away from your Word, turned away from your commandments, turned away from your law and your oracles. Oh God, we pray that you might have mercy upon us. Oh God, you have been patient in the days of old. We know that even you drew your people into Babylon for those long 70 years, for those days in Exodus in the land of Egypt. Oh God, we remember the land of ... in the wilderness for those 40 years. Oh God, we understand there was a purpose in all of these things and perhaps, oh God, there is a purpose today for these things. But, oh God, we cry unto you. We pray, oh God, that the man and woman of today might know that we need to know God in a far greater dimension, in a far greater way. We see in our newspapers, we see in our newscasts that man has done so much. He has been to the moon. He can understand so much technologically. He understands intellectually. Academically he has achieved so much. He has changed. He has got and he has developed his own mind in all of these things. And yet, oh God, we are still without God, without Christ, without hope in the world. This is the greatest of all. We find ourselves tonight, oh God, drifting along. Even the Church, even the nation drifting along to an eternity, for many, many people a lost eternity going to hell forever and forever and ever. And we are more concerned, oh God, about the smaller things, about minor things of the church even today. Oh God, will you not drive your men and women to the place of prayer? Cause us to be down on our knees, oh God, not like a duty, not like a responsibility, but because our very being will reverberate with that love and that grace in Jesus Christ. Oh God, we pray that you might change us and even this night may we be challenged in our own minds in our hearts, oh God, that we might be moved in our whole being as we leave this building this evening. Oh God, we pray that you might be with us, that we might know the presence of God here, that we would be serious about these things, oh God. Oh gracious God, we bless you for your greatness and your love and your truth and your righteousness and your justice, your goodness, your gentleness. Oh God, this world is going towards a judgment, a judgment day, the day every single one of us will stand before this lamb of God. And, oh God, we pray that we will take these things far more seriously than we have done in the past. We pray for the people of God in this land, in this nation, that each of us, oh God, may take these things very responsibly. Oh Lord, help us to see that this is the responsibility that you have given to us to go into all the world and to proclaim the gospel. And, oh Lord, we thank you that when that is done you will bless us. Oh God, help us to do what is right for if we do not do what is right and instead we do what is wrong, then your curse will be upon us. Lord, bless your servant now as he comes to your Word, as he helps us to understand this Deuteronomy chapter 28. Lord, bless us, oh God. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, the one who is the King and Head of his Church, Jesus Christ alone. Amen.

Let us read the Word of God in Deuteronomy chapter 28. We will read together the first 24 verses.

This is the infallible, inerrant, inspired, indestructible Word of God. Deuteronomy 28 verses one to 24.

And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways. And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee. And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD swore unto thy fathers to give thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them: And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day, to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall send upon thee cursing, vexation, and rebuke, in all that thou settest thine hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed, and until thou perish quickly; because of the wickedness of thy doings, whereby thou hast forsaken me. The LORD shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until he have consumed thee

from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it. The LORD shall smite thee with a consumption, and with a fever, and with an inflammation, and with an extreme burning, and with the sword, and with blasting, and with mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish. And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The LORD shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed.¹

This is the Word of God. Amen.

I will hand over now to the Reverend Paul Dowling and perhaps afterwards there might be an opportunity to ask some questions.

Change of Voice:

Good evening.

To approach Scripture with selective mentality is always wrong. We do not have the authority to come to Scripture with a sieve and set aside large portions of the Scripture as not having any application or relevance to us today. All Scripture is God's Word. And it is plainly revealed which parts of the Old Testament Scriptures are fulfilled in Christ as shadows and types and the ceremonial law. It is plain from the Old Testament and the New Testament that God's covenant promise to bless obedience among his people and to punish disobedience among his people, this promise has not been set on the shelf. This promise applies today just as much under the new covenant as the old.

The Old Testament passages predicting the new covenant prove this and the New Testament itself proves this. And also, as we studied last month, God's nature and character proves this. God is immutable. He is not subject to any change at all. He is the same. And, therefore, the way he deals with his people is always the same. It doesn't change. And, therefore, what God expects from his covenant people remains unchanged. He always expects obedience to his Word.

Now this is undeniable for any reader of the Bible. Repeatedly the Old Testament commands to obey God are reemphasized throughout the New Testament, so much so that Jesus Christ himself makes obedience to God's Word the proof positive that a person is really saved.

Now because God's covenant promise to bless obedience and punish disobedience continues today, that leads us tonight to a very important question. How do we interpret the blessings and punishments revealed in Deuteronomy 28, for example? In Deuteronomy 28 or any other Old Testament passage, how are we to interpret and apply these things to the New Testament Church?

For example, if you look at you Deuteronomy 28 verses two and five.

¹ Deuteronomy 28:1-24.

“Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store,”² the Lord says to them if they obey him in verse five.

Now does that mean that a believer who obeys God will always have a full larder? I don’t believe it means that at all. I don’t think so.

Or what about verse 11?

“And the LORD shall make thee plenteous in goods, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy ground, in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers to give thee.”³

Does that mean that an obedient Christian under the new covenant will have plenty of goods and riches like a prosperity gospel? And, of course, the answer is no.

The apostle Paul sometimes went hungry. He sometimes had to ask people to bring his cloak for his back. He obviously did not have plenty and he was in prison exactly where God wanted him to be all too often and it didn’t mean he was being disobedient.

I know some prosperity gospel types who would actually say that Paul hadn’t claimed the blessings and that he was disobedient and he failed and that is why he ended up there. But I have a bit of a problem with such arrogance of coming from people like that. What they are saying is I am better than the apostle Paul. I am more obedient than the apostle Paul and I know more about claiming blessings than the apostle Paul. And they say all that when driving around in limousines.

Pride like that is not the saying of a Christian at all.

But anyway there is a serious question here. How are we to interpret these continuing blessings and chastisements in under the New Testament or the new covenant in the New Testament Church without falling into the gross error of prosperity gospel?

Well, let me give you the first of a few points. Number one, we must interpret these things spiritually and not primarily physically. We must interpret them spiritually and not primarily materially. And here is why. God in the Old Testament called Israel to be his special people. They were to be different from all the other nations. Indeed, their very life was to be a witness or a testimony to the nations around them. They were God’s people. They were God’s Old Testament Church. And their nation was to reflect the glory of God out to other nations.

Now they were a special nation. They had physical nationhood. And they were brought by God to a real geographical land. You could see their land. You could point to it on a map. It was a geographical place.

² Deuteronomy 28:5.

³ Deuteronomy 28:11.

Now, because those old covenant people were a physical, literal nation in a visible, geographical land, then, of course, the blessings would be physical, material blessings for a physical, material nation.

But now under the new covenant God calls his people still to be different and God calls his New Testament Church a holy nation in 1 Peter 2:9. But is it a physical nation on a geographical map? No. It is a spiritual nation.

1 Peter 2:5.

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”⁴

And a very similar thing in Ephesians chapter two verses 21 and 22 about Christ. I will read verse 20.

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.⁵

God’s New Testament Church are a spiritual nation. The kingdom of God is spiritual. It is no longer limited to a physical nation in one geographical land under the new covenant. And God is bringing his Church, yes, to the Promised Land, but it is not Canaan. It is glory, heaven, eternity.

Well, then, of course, you would expect the blessings to be spiritual blessings for a spiritual nation.

Let me summarize and clarify what I have said so far. Does it make sense to you? God’s New Testament people, it is very simple, really. His Old Testament people are a physical nation in a geographical land. Therefore you expect the blessings to be physical and material, geographical blessings and they were. But God’s New Testament people are not limited to a physical nation, not anymore. They are a spiritual nation and their land they are citizens of the heavenly kingdom. And therefore you would expect the blessings to be spiritual or heavenly blessings and they are.

It says of God through Christ in Ephesians one verse three he has:

“...blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”⁶

⁴ 1 Peter 2:5.

⁵ Ephesians 2:20-22.

⁶ Ephesians 1:3.

The blessings are spiritual for a spiritual nation. So, therefore, we would have to interpret the continuing blessings and punishments of Deuteronomy 28 as physical, material for the Old Testament Church primarily and as spiritually interpreted for the New Testament Church primarily.

That brings me to the second point. In other words, there is sameness of motive or reason, but difference in application. What I mean by that is this. It is for the same reason that God blesses or chastens obedience or disobedience. God is the same. It is for the same motives. It is for the same reasons he blesses or punishes. God is the same. There is sameness in motive or reason, but there is difference in application. The blessings and punishments apply differently to a New Testament Church than they did in the Old, because the New Testament Church is not a physical nation, but a spiritual one.

That is why when it says in Deuteronomy 28 verse 11 it does not mean that New Testament Christians will be blessed by great material riches if they obey God. It is the blessings that we will be blessed with are spiritual blessings. We are spiritually rich. We have an inheritance reserved for us in heaven. We are co heirs with Christ. The blessings are spiritual.

So in the light of that let us come to the passage. I want to for a third point say this. One of the principles taught in Deuteronomy 28 let's summarize the whole chapter of 68 verses, let's summarize it. What principles are taught in this chapter? The whole chapter teaches two things and no more than two things. The chapter teaches, number one, if God's people obey him, obey his Word, obey his commandments, God will bless them. The second thing this chapter teaches is this. If God's people disobey his Word, disobey his commandments, God will curse, chasten or punish them.

If you want the proof you just have to read verse one, nine, 13, 14, 15. I am not going to read them because it has already been read and I think you know what it says there. There is plenty of truth in the passage. The proof is undeniable that Deuteronomy 28 teaches two things. Obey God and be blessed. Disobey God and be chastened.

Now I am going to look at some of the blessings and punishments with you tonight. And I am going to ask a few simple questions about each of them. We are going to ask: What does this mean? And then we are going to ask: Did this... how did this work out in the life of Old Testament Israel? And then we are going to ask: Well, what application or meaning does this have of the New Testament Church?

Now we are not going to look at them all this month and next month we will be doing this similar thing. We are not going to look at them all, because there are 15 blessings and there are 28 cursings. And that is 43 points in total and that works out at 14 three point sermons and we are not going to do that. We don't have time.

But let me give you a few. The fourth point tonight. This is my statement from this passage. You are going to get four more, ok? That is four of these. I am going to give you four points of application.

So the fourth point is this. This passage teaches that victory or defeat on the field of battle for the people of God depends upon their obedience to God.

Verses seven and 25. Verse seven is in the section where God says, “If you obey me, I will bless you in this way and this way.”

Verse seven, if you obey me:

“The LORD shall cause thine enemies that rise up against thee to be smitten before thy face: they shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.”⁷

Verse 25 is the opposite of that under the section if you do not obey God.

“The LORD shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth.”⁸

Now let me explain what the terminology and those verse means. What does the term mean they will come out against you one way and flee seven ways? That is simply a Hebrew term, it is a military term for a complete rout. The army comes against you as one. The battle happens. And they flee. They are scattered to the four winds. They flee seven ways. It is a complete rout. We either won or lost the battle.

So here in this passage is a picture. God is saying to his covenant people here is a picture of victory or defeat upon the field of battle. And it depended upon their obedience to God’s Word.

Now did this happen to Israel? How did God work this out with his physical nation or old covenant church of Israel? Well, yes, think, for example, of the armies of Israel. They were defeated and routed seven ways in the battle of Ai in Joshua chapter seven verse 11.

Why? It says in Joshua seven verse 11:

“Israel hath sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant.”⁹

One of the Israelites had willfully, deliberately disobeyed the explicit Word of God. And because of that, the Israelite army was defeated and routed in the battle, exactly as God has promised in Deuteronomy 28 verse 25.

And it was only when the offender was punished, he was rooted out and punished. It was then God’s people obeyed God and then they had a great victory on the field of battle. So victory on the battle field depends upon obedience to God’s law for God’s people. You

⁷ Deuteronomy 28:7.

⁸ Deuteronomy 28:25.

⁹ Joshua 7:11.

want more examples? Then just get a new one. You think of the book of Judges, the same thing. Israel had sinned. This is repeated over and over. They are defeated in battle. They are oppressed by their enemies. Then they cry to God for help. God sends a deliverer. Then they are victorious in battle again and they start obeying God and turn away from their idols. The same principle you will find in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. The victory or defeat on the field of battle for God's people depends on whether or not they are obeying God's Word.

Well, how does that apply to the new covenant Church? Well, it applies and you take the principle. The Bible is very plain in that God's New Testament Church are in a continual battle, a war and it is a spiritual war. And the enemies of God's people are the world, the flesh and the devil: the world, secular, godless philosophy; the flesh, our own sin nature; the devil, evil powers. Our enemies are spiritual. You see it in Ephesians six, 2 Timothy two, Matthew 13:25, 2 Corinthians 2:11 to name just a few passages.

But it is the doctrine of the whole New Testament is the Church's struggle and battle against the sinful nature in our own hearts, against the world's influence and against Satan our enemy. The Church is in a spiritual war.

Now ask yourselves, generally speaking, just taking the principle. That is all we are taking. Is the Church in the western world, is the Church in the British Isles, is the Church in Northern Ireland winning the spiritual war? Is the Church having great victories in battle against the world, the flesh and the devil? Or is she being defeated by her enemy and routing and giving ground before the enemy as never before?

The world, the politicians, the evil legislation, are we winning them? Are we winning in spiritual battle? Oh, the world's philosophies, existentialism, hedonism. What about the battle against the flesh? We are not winning even ministers and people in churches having affairs and so on. We are not winning it.

What about the battle against the devil? We are not ignorant of his devices, writes the apostle. Well, how come Satan's devices and schemes have penetrated churches? We are not winning these battles, not by a long shot.

The common principle is victory or defeat on the field of battle for God's people depends upon their obedience to the Word of God.

Now on that basis could it be that the Church's defeat in our day by secularism and moral perversion is not just because we are living in a day of small things? That is just an excuse. But is it possible that the Church's defeat in the spiritual battle is because the Church is being disobedient to God? And he is chastening her like he has promised that he would.

And, therefore, the Church cannot win because God will not break his covenant promise that he blesses obedience and he chastens disobedience to his Word. It is a promise. So, therefore, there must be discipline and there must be defeat. And the only way to victory

on the field of spiritual battle in our land is when the Church repents of her sin and starts getting back to obeying what God says.

Now are the churches today obeying the Bible? They are not in many areas, passage after passage. And it is when we see defeat and on the field of spiritual battle and disobedience to the Word of God, obvious disobedience by God's people and churches going hand in hand. When you see both these things together, then we can put one and one together and see that God must discipline. Repentance is needed.

That is just one avenue of application. Let me come to point number five. Let me take another statement from Deuteronomy 28 and apply it principally, the principle of it. The growth or dwindling in numbers of God's people depends upon their obedience to God.

Verse nine and verse 62.

Under the blessings if you are obeying God:

“The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways.”¹⁰

Verse 62. This is in the section if you will not obey God.

“And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God.”¹¹

What is the meaning? Well in the verse nine the term “established” if they obey God, God shall establish them as a holy people. The word “establish” means confirm, endure or be fixed. They will persist as an established people if they obey God.

In verse 62 the word “few” means little. The word “number” means adults. And as they were a multitude means they were as abundant as the stars in heaven.

So here you have got two opposite verses again. Obey and this will be your blessing. Disobey and this will be your chastisement. There is a picture of an enduring people persisting in abundance if they obey God. Or another picture of a dwindling people fading away if they disobey God.

Did it happen in Israel? Yes, it did. Of course it did. Israel, for example was blessed abundantly under the reigns of King David and Solomon. There was great growth, physical, of course. Yes, I know. Physical growth and material growth among God's people. It was a physical material nation primarily. So much so that Israel in the days of those two kings was considered one of the world's super powers. They were great in number. Other nations paid tribute to Israel. They were vassal kings to Israel. Think about it.

¹⁰ Deuteronomy 28:9.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 28:62.

But it wasn't long. You get into Kings and Chronicles. It wasn't long before there is division and idolatry. It was started by Solomon, the idolatry and the kingdom of Israel is split into Judah and Israel and by 598 BC Nebuchadnezzar comes with his army, invades the land of Judah and kills one million, one hundred thousand Jewish soldiers and one million, 240 thousand slain of the rest of the nation and takes 97,000 prisoners and Gill, the reformed Baptist says, "Scarcely 1000ths part of the people remained, one in a thousand."

They were so judged by God that their numbers dwindled to the point of extinction. And please remember that even after the exile it was not many that returned, hundreds or at most numbered in a few thousand. But that is being optimistic. Whereas once they had been as the stars of heaven for number, but they disobeyed God and God punished them and their numbers dwindled and they were then few in number.

That is just the fact, isn't it? I wonder can you not already see the spiritual application?

How many church buildings here in East Belfast, how many are full? They used to be. They weren't built for nothing. They used to be. What has happened? Where are the so-called tens of thousands of converts from the great campaigns and crusades? Where are they? Church attendance went down after the Billy Graham crusades. Do you know that? Church attendance dropped.

Are God's people dwindling in numbers in our land where once they were many... once we were known as the land of the book. But it is fading. It is evaporation away like a morning mist of sunrise. And generally speaking we are dwindling away.

The godly are disappearing from the land. That alone or by itself that alone is a sign of God's judgment according to Proverbs and Isaiah. When the godly disappear where is the God fearing man? Where are the women of prayer? Where are the children's prayer meetings that they used to have? Where are they? Where has it gone? Are we dwindling, dear ones? Oh, yes.

Then the most important question must be: Is this anything to do with a sovereign God? Of all people reformed people have the least excuse.

Does God have a hand in it? Has God any control in the situation? He has perfect control. He is doing it. He is a sovereign God and the covenant principle that is taught in the Old Testament and the in the New Testament even in Revelation two and three and 1 Corinthians 11, the covenant principle is if you obey me, you will be an established people, but if you don't, you will be few. And it is when you see both disobedience to the Bible in the Church and dwindling in numbers together you see two things. You can be sure that it is God's hand and God is fulfilling his covenant promise.

The sixth point. The ungodly's respect for the people of God depends upon their obedience to him. That is verse 10.

Under the blessing section.

“And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of thee.”¹²

Verse 30, 31 and 37. What happens if they disobey?

Thou shalt betroth a wife, and another man shall lie with her: thou shalt build an house, and thou shalt not dwell therein: thou shalt plant a vineyard, and shalt not gather the grapes thereof. Thine ox shall be slain before thine eyes, and thou shalt not eat thereof: thine ass shall be violently taken away from before thy face, and shall not be restored to thee: thy sheep shall be given unto thine enemies, and thou shalt have none to rescue them.¹³

Verse 37.

“And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee.”¹⁴

The word “afraid” in verse 10. The ungodly will revere. They will respect you, because they will know you are a holy people of God if you obey God. It is one of the blessings. But verses 30 to 31. Your ox will be taken. Your ass will be taken. Your wife will be an adulteress. Your houses will be taken. All of these things, look at them generally. They are all signs of a total disrespect for and contempt towards God’s people.

And verse 37. Your name will be an astonishment. The Hebrew word means an appallment. It will be a proverb. It will be a pithy saying. You will be a byword if you disobey God, a jibe or a taunt, a joke.

Here is a picture of God’s people either revered and respected by pagans if they obey God or despised, treated as a jibe or a joke or a taunt, an opponent mocked and disrespected.

And either of these things simply depend upon whether or not God’s people obey his Word or they don’t. It happened in Israel.

We see in Joshua when they were about to cross they Jordan the people of God obeyed God. They were circumcised and they sanctified themselves and in the inhabitants of Jericho and Canaan their hearts melted for the fear of God’s people.

¹² Deuteronomy 28:10.

¹³ Deuteronomy 28:30-31.

¹⁴ Deuteronomy 28:37.

Similar things happen throughout the Old Testament. Think about Solomon's day and the Queen of Sheba, pagan nations looked with respect upon the people of God. The half has never been told. They looked up. There was a respect. Even though they didn't agree, there was a respect.

But when God's people disobeyed God with their idolatry, gross disrespect came from the pagan nations. God's people were no more feared. They were raided. People came and took their crops. They desecrated their temple. Judges, Kings, Chronicles. They mocked their God. God's people became the object of jokes. Isaiah. The respect of fear of God's people disappeared when they started to disobey God, because if you obey God you are being revered and respected, and if you disobey God you will be despised as a joke. That is the principle that Deuteronomy 28 teaches.

And it physically happened to them in their geographical land, but what is the new covenant application? Because the principle applies, the literalness doesn't, but the principle applies to the new covenant people because God is the same.

In the United Kingdom, are God's people respected and feared anymore? Is there a reverence for the belief of God's people? Or has it gone? Would there have been a place of Jerry Springer on the opera in puritan times? Not even among the ungodly. There was a respect, you see.

What about in the 1700s or the 1800s Victorian era? Would there have been a place of Jerry Springer in the opera? Not even among the ungodly, because there was still a respect and a fear there. That fear and respect for God and God's people it hasn't been disappearing. It is totally gone. It is gone.

Blatant blasphemy is common now.

Let me give you a wee quote from the Christian Institute. A short time ago the time that that Jerry Springer and the opera was going around, a blasphemous show that says the most blasphemous ever produced. It featured the characters of Jesus, God the Father, Mary, Satan, Adam and Eve as warring guests on a special edition of American gutter TV the [?] show the Jerry Springer show. Jesus is presented as a foul mouthed man.

I could read on, but it is foul. I am not going to read it.

After the broadcast, the Christian institute began legal action against the BBC. We argued amongst other things that the corporation was discriminating against Christians because it would not dare to broadcast a show that offended any other religion to such an extent. Sadly the high court refused to allow the case to go ahead saying freedom of expression under the human rights act was more important than any offense.

Blasphemy is common. It is just [?]. There is no respect for God's people. There is no reverence. There is no fear. The man that hosted the show, Stuart Lee, is a co author of

the Jerry Springer opera. He is a stand up comedian who publicly said he hopes the comedy can stir up religious hatred. He says it again. He repeats it.

“One would like to think that comedy could incite religious hatred. That would be great.”

That is his exact words.

Respect is gone. Blatant blasphemy, perversion, incitement of religious hatred. Is that respect for God’s people? Is there even common decency? Or Martin [?] the last temptation of Christ, the DaVinci code, would there have been a place for any of those things in the past? No, because there was a fear and a reverence and at least a respect for God’s people, especially in the puritan days when the Church was trying to obey God.

Ken Ham from Answers in Genesis when he was speaking in England in one of his newsletters said—and I am quoting, “The United Kingdom is a very, very, has a very, very un... anti Christian spirit. The United Kingdom has a very, very anti Christian spirit.”

You see, men and women, the covenant principle is respect for God’s people from the ungodly depends upon the godly’s obedience to God. Respect doesn’t mean they like you, by the way. Nor agree. But you can still respect someone even that you differ from and don’t agree with. You can still show respect. But a lack of respect turns into utter ruinous and hatred and ignorance. And that is what we are seeing. Not even common decency.

Do you think it is anything to do with God? Has he any control? Is God’s hand in this? Or is it just perchance?

If you are reformed, you don’t have that option really, though. The covenant principle is if God’s people will be feared and respected when they obey God, they will be mocked and made a joke of when they disobey God. Could this be another plain symptom that God is punishing his Church for the Church’s blatant disobedience to the Word of God?

Seventh and last point. The self governing authority of the Church or her slavery is dependent upon her obedience to the Bible.

Verse 13 of Deuteronomy 28 and verses 43 and 44.

Verse 13 under the blessings, if you obey God:

“And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them.”¹⁵

Verse 43 and 44. If you disobey God:

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 28:13.

The stranger that is within thee shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail.¹⁶

Two opposites. If you obey God, you will be the head, not the tail. If you disobey God, a stranger will be the head and you will be the tail.

What is the meaning head and not the tail? I quote one of the commentators who says, "It is an oriental form of expression indicating the possession of independent power."

God's people will have self governing authority, they will have independent power. They will not be under the thumb. They will be the head and not the tail if they obey God. There will be autonomy.

But, verse 43 and 44 if they disobey God they will not have independent power. They will be ruled by strangers. If God's people do not obey him, strangers, outsiders will interfere in the governing of God's Church. Slavery, they will be under the thumb. They will lose their autonomy.

Now you know that happened Israel literally and physically under the old covenant. The principle is easily traced throughout the whole of the Old Testament. God's people governed themselves as an independent power. But when they began to disobey God, the prophets warned them. They wouldn't listen. Eventually when you read in the latter part of the kings and Chronicles you will read the kings of Israel and Judah became vassal kings under the authority of a foreign nation paying tribute to a foreign nation. They lost their autonomy. They lost their independent self governing power. And eventually they lost it to such an extent that they were invaded and exiled completely.

And the whole reason for this exile God repeats again and again and again. It is the story of the whole Old Testament, isn't it? They did not obey God. Therefore, they lost their self governing power. That is the whole of Jeremiah's message.

Any application today? Take the principle just. Take the principle to apply it to the new covenant people, the spiritual nation. When churches according to the New Testament are self governing. Elders and deacons are the only two offices. And the Church is to be governed by the Word of God. It is not a democracy. It is a theocracy. The purpose of any Church meeting is to find the mind and will of Christ. However, isn't this idea that the Church governs herself and looks after her own affairs, that is fast becoming harder in the United Kingdom, isn't it?

We want have someone that wants to teach children. Well, you are going to pay the police, pay the state 50 pounds every year now to get each person checked. Do we?

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 28:43-44.

Is there not an invasion, an encroachment in the area of the church's ability to self govern herself and especially in the area of moral perversion in our land. It is coming in under the guise and if you read the Christian Institute you will know under the guise of discrimination. We are not allowed to discriminate between certain people. We are not allowed to say certain things are right or certain things are wrong.

The pervert can no teach children in church. Well, that is what the law is.

I could give you more quotes, but you know that the... you know what the state is doing.

Schools out is a group that campaigns for gay rights and education. It wants gay rights to be written into every subject of the formal and informal curriculum to make it compulsory that all pupils are exposed to homosexual material throughout their education. It wants to force gay rights into youth groups run by religious organizations. It says organizations such as the girl guides, boy scouts, Salvation Army should promote gay rights clearly in all their work.

A primary school exam at the [?] has the question concerning sodomy. You either get it right or you get it wrong. It is in the curriculum.

This is interfering. And that is what comes when God's people disobey God.

Dictation by the state into the churches, into even whom the churches employ.

There was a thing about that not so long ago. Youth leaders and all this carry on, not that there is any such thing as a youth leader. That is a totally nonsense, unbiblical idea. But you can't employ someone like that without that you have to give consideration even to sodomites and non Christians. This is interference in the self governing authority of each church.

Dictation by the state as to what you can say is right and wrong in your own organizations. And there are more areas where the net is fast closing. The whole area of parents.

Here is what someone said. Well, listen to this. Parents should not have the final say on how the state educates their children. This is Christian Institute. According to an influential left wing think tank government, David Archer says there is a need to reconsider the state's role in a child's upbringing. He believes that parents do not have a right to dictate the education that the state provides to their children. He maintains that if the state has a view about the values that a child should grow up with, then those values should be taught to the child. He said the state is committed to the belief of that certain values organize and regulate the state and therefore children should be brought up to believe those values. We are, he said, moving away from the view that parents own their children and have the ultimate right of saying yes or no as to what should happen to their children.

Communism. God's people are losing their self governing authority. Interference by strangers, the ungodly.

The state has no right to educate anybody's children. No right at all. Never any dictation. It is not even the state's job. That only happened in the 1800s. And the things that I read to you... I don't want to read anymore. It is just the tip of the iceberg. But there are things that are coming in in our land, restrictions that are being put on God's people and they are absolutely horrendous. There is a loss of autonomy. There is a big move towards Totalitarianism. And it is all very depressing. But let's come to an important bit.

The question is this. Could it be that these more frequent encroachments into the self governing authority and the doctrine of God's people, the loss of freedom and autonomy, could it be that this is a further sign of the Church being under God's chastisement for her disobedience to the Bible in the first place?

John Calvin thinks so in his sermons on Deuteronomy 27 and 28. Let me quote from John Calvin and John Owen in a minute.

The covenant enforced, page 127. John Calvin says, and he is talking about the being the head and not the tail, self governing authority, that verse. "Nevertheless, our Lord has made a promise to all the faithful that if they walk in his obedience, they shall not be oppressed by the tyranny of men, but shall be sustained in liberty. Let us learn to serve him and give him the whole authority over us that by his governing of us we may be set free from the bondage of men. Let us mark therefore that when we yield to the railing of God over us, we shall be maintained by him in such a fashion that men will not be able to oppress us. And if at any time the wicked have their sway and seem to set their feet, as it were, upon our throats, let us understand that God is bringing us low because we have offended him, because we have not rendered to him the praise that belongs to him and that he chastises us according to our deserts."

Why do the people that love Calvin never preach this? Why does no one else say it? It is [?] don't they. God is chastening his Church. Calvin believed these things applied to the Church. So do the Puritans. You will never hear it mentioned in hardly any other pulpit of our land. The covenant principle is the Church, God's new covenant people, your self governing authority or your slavery to the world, depends upon whether or not you obey God's Word.

Does God have a hand in this, I wonder? Is he teaching his Church something today?

Let me summarize the points I have given you and then we can talk about it a bit. I have given you seven points. I didn't tell you I was going to give you seven at the beginning because I didn't want to put you off. But I have given you seven points.

Number one, we must interpret these principles spiritually and not primarily materially and physically.

Number two, there is a sameness in motive. God chastens or blesses fruit. It is the same motive, the same reasons. But there is a difference in application.

Number three, the principles taught in Deuteronomy 28, they are very simple. When God's people obey God he blesses them. When God's people disobey God he punishes them.

The fourth point I gave you is this. Your victory or defeat on the field of battle depends upon your obedience.

The fifth point. Growth of God's people or dwindling in numbers depends upon their obedience.

The sixth point. The ungodly's respect for the people of God depends upon their obedience.

And the seventh point the self governing authority or slavery of the people of God depends upon their obedience.

Is the Church in the United Kingdom winning the spiritual battle or is she being defeated? Is she growing or dwindling? Is she respected or despised? Is she autonomous or is she under the thumb of the world? The Church is losing. The Church is dwindling. The Church is disrespected and the Church is being told what to do and teach by the state.

And there may be other factors involved. I am not saying that is the only one. No one denies that. But the prime question is: When you see these symptoms and you see blatant disobedience to the Bible by the Church of Jesus Christ in our land, obvious disobedience, when you see these things together, you have to ask the question. Could it be that these are warning signs of God's chastening hand? Could it be that God is fulfilling his covenant promise? Yes. God is faithful to his promises.

John Owen, volume eight, his sermons. John Owen's sermons are easy to read. Volume eight and nine are his sermons. Here is what he says.

Concerning the church, because believe it or not there are many, most church leaders and evangelical churches in our land today if you say to them, do you believe the church is under God's judgment or chastening hand they won't strongly disagree with you and say that is impossible. Well, our forefathers didn't think that at all.

Here is what John Owen says.

"It is a dangerous thing to live in the times of declining churches when they are hastening unto their fatal period in judgment such as will inevitably befall them all and every one, churches. Though destruction does not immediately befall them, yet when they have

passed the time of divine patience, designing the reformation, they shall precipitate themselves into bloody abominations as did the Church of the Jews.”

When God’s patience runs out and God starts to judge them, they will go more into abominations and wrong practices like the Jews did. Just look around you. Purpose driven church. We are not being blessed. We need to do something to get the people in. Yes, you will run more into sin and disobedience to the Word when God start to judge, says John Owen.

It was a time where end judgments were near approaching. So our Savior himself affirms it to have been in Luke 24:42-44. If thou hadst known in this thy day, they had now but a day and that now almost ready to expire, though they saw it not nor believed it.

He goes on to say, “That in the approaching of desolating judgments on a sinful provoking church or nation, God is pleased to give previous intimations of his displeasure.”

There is a blindness. God warns them it is going to happen. But they don’t see it. And he is talking about the churches coming under judgment and chastisement for disobedience.

But if the Church is coming under God’s chastisement and I think it is undeniable that it is, what is the purpose of that? That is the slight encouragement. The same purpose as ever in the Old Testament and New Testament, to cause his people to repent and obey him. Chastening is always corrective.

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”¹⁷

It is for our good and it is a sign that he loves us. Amen. I thank you for listening.

¹⁷ Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6.