

Good Life & Leadership: 2. Honouring God's Revelation Always

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Date: 16 July 2017

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to Deuteronomy, chapter 18. Willie Philip is continuing his series in expounding this great book from the law of Moses, Deuteronomy, chapter 18. And you'll find that on page 161, page 161 in our hardback Bibles.

So the Lord is speaking and he's passing on his rule, his law through Moses to the people of Israel.

So Deuteronomy, chapter 18 and verse 1. The Levitical priests, all the tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel.

They shall eat the Lord's food offerings as their inheritance. They shall have no inheritance among their brothers. The Lord is their inheritance as he promised them.

And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep. They shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach.

[1 : 1 0] The first fruits of your grain, of your wine and of your oil and the first fleece of your sheep you shall give him. For the Lord your God has chosen him out of all your tribes to stand and minister in the name of the Lord, him and his sons for all time.

And if a Levite comes from any of your towns out of all Israel where he lives, and he may come when he desires, to the place that the Lord will choose, and ministers in the name of the Lord his God, like all his fellow Levites who stand to minister there before the Lord, then he may have equal portions to eat besides what he receives from the sale of his patrimony.

When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering.

Anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer.

For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord. And because of these abominations, the Lord your God is driving them out before you. You shall be blameless before the Lord your God for these nations which you are about to dispossess.

[2 : 3 2] Listen to fortune tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do this. The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers.

It is to him you shall listen. Just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God or see this great fire anymore, lest I die.

And the Lord said to me, They are right in what they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him. But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.

And if you say in your heart, How may we know the word that the Lord has not spoken? When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken.

[3 : 47] The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and we shall hear more of that a little bit later.

We'll turn with me, if you would, to Deuteronomy, chapter 18, page 161, if you have a church Bible.

And it's a chapter about honoring God's revelation always. We come back this week to Moses' unfolding of the implications of the fifth commandment, which is to honor not only parents, but all those in leadership and authority, in family, church, and commonwealth.

That's how the Westminster Catechism puts it. And it's quite right. The scope of this command is a very necessary thing. It's essential for good life, for leadership in any human community, but very especially in the church, and especially when God's people face the challenge of a very pagan culture roundabout.

That's certainly what faces the church today. But it was what faced God's people Israel way back in the land of Canaan. Look at verses 9 to 14. That's the backdrop for everything we read in these two chapters.

[5 : 10] The reality of a world far adrift from God, a world mired in sin, in evil, and in sheer horror. Think back to Genesis chapter 1 and 2.

The truly God-like pattern of leadership as the world is supposed to have. God and man dwelling in harmony. Human beings charged with filling creation with progeny to rule the earth, to subdue it, to live as lords of creation, as lords of life in God's land of life.

And now contrast that with these verses. Here we have human beings murdering their own children, offering them as sacrifices to horrible gods and goddesses. Man enslaved to the powers of evil, to dark powers, sorcerers, charmers, fortune-tellers.

To the power of death, consulting necromancers and mediums to channel spirits from the dead. God's perfect world, as the story in Genesis and Exodus tells us, descending into chaos, the natural order under a curse, the social, the political order likewise.

And the tyrannical rule in Egypt, the slavery of Pharaoh, was just a manifestation in that era of the slavery, the bondage of every human generation since.

[6 : 36] But now, Israel is on the brink of the promised land. God's rescue has begun. And they're about to enter the beachhead of God's kingdom here on earth.

A friend of mine is on holiday in France, and sent me this week a photograph of Omaha Beach, one of the beaches of the D-Day landings. And that is what the land of Canaan was.

It was the first beachhead of the earthly kingdom of God, which one day will fill the whole world and bless all nations, as God promised way back to Abraham. And that's why we have this book of Deuteronomy in our Bibles.

It's God's command to his people for life in that new land. Human beings, once again, are to begin to know the leadership and the good life under God's rule.

The orderliness, the blessing of God's creation is being re-realized on the earth in the land of Israel. And part of God's good order for humanity is therefore seen in what we saw last week in the need for civil government, judges and kingship for Israel.

[7 : 40] But of course, it is still a fallen world, still a sinful world. And this is just the beginning. It's not the end of God's great reversal of sin. And so if the social order in Israel was to flourish and to prosper, the spiritual order must be preserved and protected and provided for.

God's word must rule over absolutely everything. Because unless that is so, there can't be good and pure and right rule among human beings.

Because God's pure and perfect rule is just not possible naturally, is it, for human beings? Not even among God's chosen people. Because we're all flawed. We're all fallen by nature.

And hence the need, as we see here in chapter 18, not just for judges and for rulers in Egypt, but also for priests and for prophets. That is, for the mediators of the word of God.

This chapter tells us absolutely plainly that if God's rule is to be honored alone in his land, then God's revelation must be honored always in his land.

[8 : 52] And if God's people are to live and to survive, let alone flourish in a pagan world, then verses 1 to 8 here tell us very plainly, the ministry of God's word must be preserved and provided for.

And verses 15 to 22 tell us equally plainly that the minister of God's word must be prophetic and pure. Now don't make a mistake of thinking that this is all just ancient history and doesn't apply to us.

No. Paul the apostle says all these things are written for us, for the church in these last days. And Paul writes to the Ephesians, doesn't he? About the ministry of God's word, which alone is what will make the body of Christ grow.

So we need to look, as Paul directs the Ephesians, we need to look into the scriptures to find out what pleases the Lord. What pleases the Lord in terms of that ministry of God's word?

That's what this chapter is about. I could sum it up very plainly, just in four words. Look after word ministry. First, verses 1 to 8 then, the ministry of God's word must be protected and preserved and provided for, so that his word always is being taught and heard and done among his people.

[10 : 12] That's what this business of the priests and the Levites is all about. I want to show you why. I want you to notice, too, the contrast between what we saw last time about the king.

That was just permissive legislation. God didn't command the king. The people asked for one, and he said, well, this is how you can have one. But here it's very different. He very clearly prescribes duties and insists upon this ministry of priests and Levites.

Because they were the bearers of God's Torah, his law, his instruction for his people's lives. The world around us gives honor, doesn't it, to the ministers of the crown.

That's what all AMPs want to be, ministers of state. But God is much, much more concerned with the ministry of his church. And Christians should notice that and note that because we are not to be people who are more concerned with the state of our country's politics than we are with the state of the church's preaching.

If we are, then we are not following the priorities that God himself has. So verse 1. The NIV translates this more helpfully, I think.

[11 : 24] Here's what it says. The priests, who are Levites, indeed the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel. It's all the Levites who are in view here, whatever particular role they play.

So we need to think about the Levites' purpose so that we can understand about their provision here and indeed about their privileges. First, what is the purpose of the Levites? Well, Levi was the tribe that was set apart by God to have that role as covenant teachers, teachers of God's law.

They had a dual role. Some of them served as priests in the temple, in the central sanctuary. That's what verse 1 envisages. But others, look at verse 6, they had more local roles in the towns and in the villages.

And verse 7 would seem to indicate that some of them moved between one and the other at times. But all Levites, no matter what they were doing or where they were, all of them shared the common task and that was to instruct God's people in his word.

So when Moses blesses the tribes in chapter 33 of Deuteronomy, he says of the Levites, For they observed your word and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law.

[12 : 38] They shall put incense before you and hold burnt offerings on your altar. They taught God's word to his people and they brought the prayers of God's people to God.

You could say they had leadership in the ministry of the word of God and of prayer. That's why in chapter 31, when Moses wrote down all the law, he gave it to the sons of Levi.

They carried the Ark of the Covenant in which the tablets of the law were kept. And they were instructed, weren't they, that every seventh year at the Feast of Tabernacles they were to read the whole law of God to all the people of God publicly.

Remember when we studied Nehemiah some months ago in Nehemiah chapter 8, that's exactly what happened when the Israelites returned to the land. And here's what we read of the Levites. They read from the book clearly and they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading.

They expounded the word of God in scripture so that the people in every generation understood God's word. That was the purpose of the Levites.

[13 : 41] It was a ministry of God's word and it came with authority, verse 5, because God had chosen them. And they carried this great responsibility for all the people. You go back to Exodus chapter 32, you'll find out why that was.

Levi and the Levites stood with Moses when so many of the people rebelled and went after the golden calf. That's why Malachi in his prophecy says of Levi, That's the purpose of the Levites and the priests, to speak and to teach God's holy word, to give knowledge of his law to the people of God.

A high calling, a vital calling. And hence then, in this section here, their provision. Look at verse 1 at first sight. It looks as though they were being penalized.

The Levites would have no portion or inheritance with Israel. Verse 2, no inheritance among their brethren. But actually it's not so. They were to have no personal lands from which to grow food, to eat, to live on.

But they were very definitely to share in the blessings of the land of Israel. We've seen that repeatedly in the many commands for the festivals and rejoicings and so on. You're to rejoice and eat you and your family and all your people and the Levites.

[15 : 15] You'll see it there just in chapter 16, verse 11. At the Feast of Booths, you shall rejoice before the Lord, you and all your people and the Levites. So the Levite is not penalized.

In fact, he's privileged. You can read all about the detailed provision for the Levites in Leviticus chapter 7 or in Numbers chapter 18. But in verse 4 here, it rather sums it up.

They are to get the first and the best of the land. It's freely to be given to them because, as verse 2 says, the Lord is their inheritance. And so they are to share in all of the first and the best that is given to the Lord.

The best of the meat, verse 3, and the first of the field. In a sense, the provision for the Levites was something of an acted parable of God's provision for all his people Israel because Israel, they depended upon God.

And that's reflected in the Levites' dependence on the largesse of the people. Israel was blessed by God. And that's reflected in the people sharing the blessing of God with the people of Levi.

[16:20] So the Levites who forfeit homes and lands for the sake of the service of the word of God, in fact, they are not losers, but they are gainers. That's an abiding principle, isn't it?

God is no man's debtor. What does the Lord Jesus say? Everyone who has left homes or brethren or sisters or father or mother for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

That's what we see here. There's a determined provision for the Levites so that they can exercise their ministry that God has called them to. That explains what you see here in verses 6 to 8, the privilege of the Levites.

If a Levite moves from where he's been ministering to another place or to the central sanctuary to serve there, whether it's because he desires to do that, as verse 6 translates here, or as the footnote has it, because he's particularly enthusiastic about this new ministry, maybe it's that.

The NIV says, because he's earnest about this ministry. Whatever it is, the point is, he is not to be constrained in that ministry by fear of not being adequately supported when he goes to that new place.

[17:33] Oh, verse 8. You see, he's to have an equal provision with all of those who are serving there, not just what he can provide for himself by selling up his patrimony, his family possessions, or whatever it is.

You see, it's all about ensuring this vital ministry of teaching God's word to his people is preserved and protected and provided for so that always and everywhere God's word is being heard and taught and done among his people.

Because the health and the future of the whole community depends upon that. They don't live, do they, by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

Now, is that important for us in the church today? Well, the New Testament appears to think so, doesn't it? Of course, the New Testament doesn't ever refer to the ministry of God's word as a priesthood in the New Testament.

Of course not. The Lord Jesus Christ is the last and great high priest. He has done away with all sacrifices forever. He alone intercedes for his people forever.

[18:47] So no church that is Christian should talk about priesthood and priests today. That's to act as if Jesus hasn't come. That's sub-Christian. But the New Testament does emphatically insist that the ministry of God's word must continue in the church today.

Indeed, as Ephesians 4 makes clear, that is the priority for God's gifts to his church. It's through the ministries of the word of God that the whole body of Christ is built up and that the saints, all of them, are equipped for their works of ministry.

And so Paul, unsurprisingly, directly applies the teaching of this passage here in Deuteronomy to the Christian teacher today. Galatians 6 verse 6, he declares that those who are taught in the word must share all good things with those who teach them.

In 1 Corinthians 9 verse 13, he refers directly here to our passage this morning and he says that in exactly the same way as the priests were able to eat from the sacrifices on the altar, so also God has decreed that those who proclaim the gospel must earn their living from the gospel.

Same thing. 1 Timothy 5, he speaks about the honor or the honorarium, indeed the double honorarium, that's to be given to those who labor in preaching and teaching.

[20 : 07] For, he says, the laborer deserves his wages. In other words, he's saying not only is that work, it's hard work, it's vital work for the church. And this ministry of the word is to be honored and protected and provided for so that God's people will not be untaught and God's word will not be unheard because those who ought to be teaching it are being distracted about worrying where the next meal is going to be coming from.

So that means, doesn't it, that the church has a responsibility for the ministry of the word, whether it's for pastors or evangelists or missionaries or youth workers, whoever it is, all these ministries are not to be curtailed by questions of whether they're being adequately supported so that people can give themselves to them.

It's all very well to be terribly pious about it and say, well, I'm going to live by faith or even worse, to say to somebody else, oh, God bless you in your ministry, go and live by faith. The Christian minister can only live by faith if the Christian church is living by obedience and taking responsibility for providing for that word ministry.

And I would say by prioritizing that ministry, God clearly prioritizes it all through the Old Testament and through the New Testament. Now, of course, that assumes that such a person is called and gifted by God to do that ministry.

Often people think they have a right to support from the church when they don't have that calling and don't have that gifting. They're just deluding themselves. So in the New Testament it's the church that must recognize these gifts and commission those who have these gifts to these tasks.

[21 : 52] But having done so, the church has a responsibility to make sure these are supported. Of course, the other side of it also is true. The dependence on those in ministry.

The priests and the Levites here were not able to prey on the people's piety, not able to exploit honorable Israelites. They weren't able to become wealthy landowners and therefore powerful figures in the land and politically and so on.

That was the mark of pagan priests. The pagan priests in Egypt were very powerful because they were very wealthy. Of course, that was a corruption, wasn't it, of the medieval church, the vast wealth that flooded into it and gave the clergy vast power over people?

No. The church has erred often through history and actually in both of these directions. You've got bishops becoming prince bishops and living in palaces and at the other extreme, you've got pastors becoming paupers and living in penury and unable to do their work.

But God's pattern is to guard against both of these evils equally. And that principle holds true today. The ministry of God's word must be protected and provided for properly so that God's word is always and everywhere being taught and heard and done among his people.

[23 : 17] That means we need to think about that, don't we? We need to think about how we prioritize our budgets as a church. How we think about our own Christian giving and prioritize it. Not to enrich pastors, of course not.

That's what the prosperity gospels actually are all about, aren't they? In the prosperity gospel churches, the prosperity only exists in one place. That's among the leaders. You're exploiting the people of the church.

No. But to encourage the preaching of the gospel, yes, to enable the preaching of the gospel everywhere and always, yes, yes. And to ensure that ministry is not curtailed through lack of basic provision.

People wonder where they'll be fed or housed or clothed or how they're going to live. No. If God's church is to flourish, then the ministry of God's word must be preserved and provided for so that always and everywhere his word is being taught and heard and done.

But look at verses 15 to 22 because it's equally clear here that the ministers of God's word must be prophetic and pure so that it is God's living word alone that is proclaimed and heeded and trusted among his people.

[24 : 35] It's no accident, I think, that the prophet comes last in this list of the leaders in Israel because just as the judge and the king must submit to God's law and the Levites and the priests must teach that law if any of them or all of them go astray and that happens sadly very, very often in Israel's history.

And as one writer puts it, the last word was God's and God would put that word in the mouth of his prophet. Again, it's vital to note that this passage speaks against this backdrop of what goes before in verses 9 to 14.

These verses make so clear the great need that the man of God meets as the mediator of God's living word in a world of darkness, in a world of delusion and false and foul spiritualities.

Verse 14, the second half, but as for you, Christopher Wright comments, the contrast is immense and stark from the foul fog and darkness of occultism to the clarity and authority of the prophetic word, from the futility of human attempts to penetrate the confusions of alienation from God's will and purpose to the direct communication of God on his own initiative.

But as for you, verse 15, God will raise up for you a prophet. I think foul fog and darkness doesn't overstate the picture of the pagan world there, does it, in verses 9 to 13.

[26 : 05] And notice, please, carefully, that God places the hideous crime of child abuse and murder and sacrifice alongside all these elements of occultism.

So don't think that charms and fortune tellers and mediums and all these things are harmless things, trivial things. No. God refuses all of that to his people because behind these things lie dark, dark powers.

That is what's ultimately behind the dehumanizing behavior, the murderous abuse of little ones and things like that. That happens still in our world today. But in the face of this pagan filth, this pagan falsehood, God's prophet is to be a medium of God's sufficient word.

Verse 18. He speaks God's word of truth, all that I command him. And in the face of God's unapproachable majesty, the prophet is the medium of God's majestic word.

Verse 16. Just like at Sinai, God will give his word to his people in a way that they can receive it without dying. That's what would happen if his word was unmediated.

[27 : 19] Ralph Davis puts it this way. The man of God is to be a channel of truth to keep them from corruption and a channel of mercy to keep them from destruction. There's only one mediator of truth from beyond our world and that is the word of God.

But notice, we don't have to seek, we don't have to search in strange places through magic, through mediums, through mumbo jumbo to get the word of God from heaven. No. God reveals it himself through his mediator.

God's truth is not over the seas and far away. It's not beyond the clouds and the heavens that we have to go searching. It's what Moses says later in chapter 30. His word is very near us. God has brought it near.

It's in our mouth and in our hearts so that we may do it. It's the irony, isn't it? The world goes seeking for supernatural words in all sorts of places, obscure places, but it ignores flatly the plain word of God right in front of our faces.

But not so with you, says the Lord. Here is God's merciful provision of his word made known to keep his people in life, to keep his people through life.

[28 : 30] Peter says God has given us everything we need for life and godliness through his great and precious promises in his word. How are we to recognize it then?

How are we to know what God has spoken and through whom? And through whom he hasn't spoken, the people he hasn't authenticated. That's a real issue, verse 21. And it's what the whole passage is about actually, not just verse 22 there.

So let's look carefully at what he says here in this passage. Two things to note. First, verse 15 to the first half of verse 18. They tell us the authentic model that the people are to recognize over against the filth of pagan spirituality.

The true spokesman of God, he says, will be like Moses. Verse 15, a prophet like me. Again, verse 18, God will give a prophet like you, he says to Moses.

Rather like the king, there's a commonness about him. He'll be one of your own brothers. He'll be an ordinary Israelite. You see, those who speak the truth of God, they don't come from some special mystery class of people with some particular magic.

[29 : 42] They're just ordinary men. We should be suspicious of those who claim some sort of special spiritual accreditation. No, no, no. But there is, at the same time, there is also a uniqueness about the true prophet of God.

Because like Moses at Sinai, verse 16, in the splendor, the majesty, he is the mediator of God's living and active word of power. Power to bless and power to destroy.

And that's why the title of the prophet all through the Bible is Man of God. Moses was the man of God. Moses was the first prophet, the archetypal prophet.

Deuteronomy 33, verse 1, speaks of the blessing which Moses, the man of God, blessed the people with before his death. Joshua chapter 14, Caleb refers back to Moses, the man of God, the servant of God.

Psalms 90 is the prayer of Moses, the man of God. And so all the way through the Bible, after him, true messengers of God were called back men of God.

[30 : 51] Back in Judges chapter 13, do you remember when the angel comes to the parents of Samson and they say, a man of God has come to us. The widow of Zarephath speaks to Elijah, O man of God, she says, and so on.

And that's because, as Peter says, no prophecy ever came merely by the will of man, but God spoke. Men spoke from God as they were moved by his Holy Spirit.

And so it's very significant, I think, that that is exactly the term that the apostle Paul uses of Timothy, the model Christian leader in the New Testament.

In fact, if you look at verse 14 here, Paul virtually echoes that verse in 1 Timothy 6, verse 11. But as for you, O man of God, he says, flee these things.

That is, the depravity of those who claim spirituality but are devoid of truth. But as for you, he says, pursue righteousness, goodness, truth, and love. Keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach.

[31 : 57] Keep it pure. Guard the good deposit entrusted to you. It's the same in 2 Timothy 3. But as for you, continue in what you have learned, knowing from whom you learned it.

And he says, all scripture is breathed out by God. That's to be your instruction so that the man of God may be equipped and complete for every good work.

So he tells him to preach the word in season and out of season and go on fulfilling your ministry for that is what a man of God must do. He's an ordinary man but he is speaking God's own very words.

That's the authentic model that God's people are to recognize in every age. And when it is that, then secondly, you see the second half of verse 18 to verse 22 make equally plain that it is an authentic message that must be revered over against the falsehood of all pagan so-called guidance and seeing.

Notice something very important here in verses 18 and 19. twice we're told it. It's God's words, plural, that the prophet speaks, not just God's word.

[33 : 16] The man of God speaks for God, in other words, with very great accuracy. It's not just God's message in general that he declares, but it's God's message in God's own chosen words.

I will put my words in his mouth and he will speak all that I command him. Now that is very important. Paul says of all scripture, that is the words of the prophets and the apostles and of course of Jesus himself, that it is all God breathed.

Not just generally inspired, but expired as it were. Breathed out, articulated exactly by God himself with total accuracy.

Now many people today think that the Bible is God's word, but God's message is in there somewhere. We've got to find it.

It's contained within scripture. But we, of course, we put our interpretation on it. And often that interpretation actually contradicts completely the exact words of God that are in scripture.

[34 : 24] But you see, Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 that just like here with the prophets, the apostles, he says, God has revealed to us through his spirit all the wisdom of God.

And he says, and we impart this in words, plural, not taught by human wisdom, but words taught by the spirit.

You see, we do not have in God's revelation to us something inaccurate, something vague, a general truth. we have the very words that God himself wants us to hear through his apostles and his prophets.

It's the height of absurdity, isn't it? It's the height of arrogance to think that God is somehow incapable of speaking the exact words he wants to speak to us and we need to be clever human being Bible interpreters to put a different construction on it so we can really understand what God was trying to say but couldn't quite get right.

Now, God's messengers speak with accuracy. His words and therefore they speak with absolute authority.

[35 : 33] Verse 19, his word must be heeded and obeyed or else God himself will require it. What a contrast to all other forms of supernatural revelation and guidance in the world around about us because people are seeking guidance, people are seeking knowledge of the future from spiritual means in order to give their life success but they are doing so without any regard for any moral responsibility but God's revelation is the precise opposite.

Deuteronomy 29, verse 29 says that the secret things are God's to know and not ours to know but the things revealed are the things that God has given us to do, to obey.

God is concerned with us doing what he tells us to do. It's a mark of the charlatan, the so-called prophets and apostles that you sometimes find in the church today that they are taken up with the secret things, offering guidance, often personal prophecies for your future and so on.

Very often it's all to burnish their reputations if it's not to boost their bank balances. But the true man of God as Peter says will constantly be reminding people of the commandment of our Lord and Savior through your apostles.

And there have always been, there always will be false prophets, verse 20, presuming to speak in God's name but actually not God's messengers at all. But all through history, if you read the Bible, it was the true prophet who was in the minority, a lone voice against the whole bank of presumptuous false prophets.

[37 : 14] And the Lord Jesus has warned us that always it will be so. And it is so today still. Especially in the Christian West where so much of civic Christianity is so corrupted, is so bankrupt.

How do you know the difference between the true and the false? Well, verse 22, clearly if great claims are made but never materialize then the man is a fraud.

And that goes for all kinds of things in the life of the church. Many a zealous new church member promises all kinds of willing service when they join the church but it just never materializes.

Others promise all sorts of great things, great things about giving to the church but it never materializes. A lot of wind but nothing wagging as my father would put it.

And Jesus says it's by their fruit you will know them. And James the apostle echoes that, doesn't he? Let's see your faith by your works, by what you actually do.

[38 : 15] Now notice here the opposite though is not necessarily a guarantee of true ministry. Remember back to chapter 13. Some people can do great and impressive things but actually still they are far away from being true prophets of God.

We're to watch people's life, we're to watch what they say. And of course it can take a long time can't it? For the words of a true prophet to come true. So how can that true ministry be recognized so that it is trusted, so that it is obeyed?

Well again it's back to that genuine model. The true man of God will be like Moses. He was a leader who loved God's people, who sacrificed much for them, who labored patiently with them and for them, who interceded with God for them, who gave to them and didn't take from them, didn't exploit them, who suffered patiently with them, who even died outside the land and didn't even enter the land so that he could fulfill his ministry and the people would inherit.

False prophets are not like that are they? They're self-seeking. They will pander to people's wants, they won't challenge them with things they don't want to hear, they won't speak about unpopular things, they won't tell them about God's anger and God's judgment, they won't speak the very words of God when those words will offend people.

They're not like Moses. Though they might be very, very popular in the world and will be much, much more popular than Moses ever was. That's why Jesus says to us, doesn't he, woe to you when all men speak well of you.

[39 : 57] That's a danger sign. That's why Paul in his letters was warned against the un-Moses-like ministry of the false apostles in Corinth and elsewhere. That's why Paul could say, I seek not for myself but for others that they may be saved.

So be imitators of me as I am of, well not Moses, but as I am of Christ. The one who has actually been greater even than Moses, the man of God.

And of course that is ultimately the deepest message of this chapter, isn't it? About honoring God's revelation always. Because these verses don't just speak of God's merciful provision of his word made known in the world.

They're also a marvelous prefiguring, aren't they, of God's word made flesh in the world. They're a wonderful adumbration of what was fulfilled ultimately and forever in the person of our Lord Jesus.

Remember in Luke's Gospel chapter 7 the widow of Nain says a great prophet has arisen and God has visited his people. Just a couple of chapters later that prophet, the man of God, greater than Moses, greater than Elijah, he stood, didn't he, on the mountaintop with Moses and Elijah and outshone them completely.

[41 : 19] And the voice from heaven said, this is my son, this is my chosen one. Listen to him. Listen to him. Look at verse 19.

If we are to heed and to honor God's merciful revelation always, then how much more are we to honor and revere his marvelous climactic self-revelation in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ?

To reject him, to reject Jesus, there could be no more terrible and heinous way, could there, than to reject the God who made heaven and earth. Hearing God's words is always a matter of destiny and it's therefore always a matter of danger.

Jesus himself warned his people, didn't he? Because they always rejected God's prophets. Oh yes, they built monuments to them and tombs for them when they were long dead, but when they were alive, they didn't want to listen to them.

Just as today in 2017, all over Europe, there'll be great celebrations, won't there, for 500 years of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, especially in Germany, Martin Luther. Monuments to Martin Luther, programs about Martin Luther.

[42 : 33] When Martin Luther was alive, the whole of Europe hated Martin Luther. They tried to kill Martin Luther. And the whole world today hates Martin Luther's message still, but a dead Martin Luther is fine.

Friends, the New Testament is clear. The ultimate prophet, the Lord Jesus Christ, the man sent from God, he has come and he has spoken God's word to us once and for all and forever.

And Peter is absolutely plain, isn't he, in Acts chapter 3 where he says, Moses and all the prophets proclaimed the day of his coming and this Jesus has come.

To turn you from your wickedness. He comes to the Jews first, but also to the whole wide world. And to reject him can mean only utter destruction, absolute, ultimate destruction.

Because there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Jesus, who like Moses, suffered much for his people, who interceded for his people, who loved his people, who gave himself for his people, who spoke God's truth to the people about God's terrible judgment and his wonderful mercy, about his wrath against sin and about his love for sinners.

[44 : 01] Listen to him. Follow him. And never listen to or follow those who diminish him or who dishonor him or who despise him.

And listen to and follow only those whose message clearly exalts him alone and whose manner clearly emulates him alone.

That's the authentic model that we're to recognize and that's the authentic message that we're to revere. And that's what this chapter teaches us about honoring God's revelation always.

Well, let's pray together. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that into our dark world, a world that is alas, full of filth and of falsehood which emanates from the hearts of men and women, yet you have sent light and you've sent your word of life not only in the words of the prophets but in the person of your own son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

How we praise and thank you that we don't have to seek to the ends of the earth, over the seas, up into the skies, but that you have come near to make yourself known to us.

[45 : 31] Help us, Lord, never to resist, never to reject your great word of truth, your gracious word of mercy, your powerful word of salvation and your word of judgment and of warning.

May your word and your true workmen always be heard in your church in this place, in our city, across our nation, to the ends of the earth, that there might be light in the darkness, that your church might indeed be a pillar and buttress of truth in a world of falsehood and lies and the saving light and salt in a world of decay and of death.

So open our hearts, we pray. Make us ready recipients of all that you have to say to us and lead us in your righteousness. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.