

Cherishing the Breath of Life: 4. Pervasive Justice- For a Rightly Ordered World of Human Flourishin

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Date: 20 August 2017

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles and to Deuteronomy chapter 22 in our visitor's Bibles, that is page 164. And we're reading together the first 12 verses, which really round off this long section we've been studying from the beginning of chapter 19, which is all about life.

Remember, these central chapters of Deuteronomy essentially just go through and apply, flesh out, explain the implications of the Decalogue, of the Ten Commandments of God, the Ten Words, which put it also succinctly.

And these chapters here, 19 to chapter 22, verse 12, are really all bound together by the same concern, and that is for conserving and cherishing, protecting human life in all its different aspects. We've seen that in several chapters, and now these final verses tail it off and give us some further wisdom. So we're going to read together from chapter 22 at verse 1.

You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. And if he doesn't live near you and you do not know who he is, and that, by the way, makes us realize that it's not a brother just in the immediate family.

[1 : 25] It's a brother you can not know who they are. It's a fellow Israelite in the land who might not be known to you at all, but it belongs to the people of God. Well, if you don't know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it.

And then you shall restore it to him. And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find. You may not ignore it.

You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.

A woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.

If you come across a bird's nest in any tree or the ground with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting on the young or on the eggs, you shall not take the mother with the young.

[2 : 24] You shall let the mother go, but the young you may take for yourself, that it may go well with you and that you may live long. When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house if anyone should fall from it.

You shall not sow your vineyard with two kinds of seed, lest the whole yield be forfeited. The crop that you have sown and the yield of the vineyard. You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together.

If you remember from a few chapters back, the lists of clean and unclean animals. The ox was a clean one, the donkey was an unclean one. So they shouldn't be unequally yoked.

That's where Paul gets his expression, doesn't it? Isn't it? From 1 Corinthians 6. And you shall not wear cloth of wool and of linen mingled together. You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of the garment which you cover yourself.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. If you're puzzled about that last bit, then during the offering you might like to read through Numbers chapter 15 and it might illuminate a little further, but we shall look at it together later.

[3 : 44] Well, let's turn, shall we, to Deuteronomy 22, page 164 in the Church Bibles. As we said now many times, our God is the Lord of Life.

And he created life and he loves life, especially human life. And he created this world with an order in which all life can flourish.

And that commitment to order is very plain in the creation account in Genesis chapter 1. It narrates God forming the world according to a distinct and perfect order.

Day is separated from night. Sky above separated from sea below. Earth separated from waters. And God saw that this order was good.

And then, of course, you have God filling his good world with vegetation. All manner of vegetation, likewise, each according to its own kind. And then all manner of creatures, each according to their kind, in order.

[4 : 48] And then the crowning glory of humankind made in God's own image and likeness. Male and female he made them. And God saw everything that he had made and behold, it was very good.

God's good and perfect ordering of creation is very good. Good not only in its intrinsic purity and perfection, but good in that living within this order is the way of blessing for humanity.

This is how man can flourish, filling the earth, subduing it. That is, bringing the beauty of God's perfectly ordered garden to the whole of the very ends of the earth. So it is in obedience of mission to God's holy, good, created order and to his holy, good covenant order, that is, heeding his instructions for life, that is the way and indeed the only way for human flourishing.

To walk in God's way is the way of life. Life in its fullness. Indeed, life which is unending. But to refuse God's way, to abandon God's way, well, God says to man in Genesis chapter 2, when you get a taste for that, you will surely die.

And of course we know that that is precisely what man chose right back at the beginning and what so many people are still choosing all over the world today. I did it my way, sang Frank Sinatra.

[6 : 19] How ironic that that song is one of the most popular songs to be played at funerals today. I did it my way. That is man's song, isn't it?

In defiance of God. And it is precisely that that leads to death and funerals. But God is the creator of life and he is also the redeemer of life.

He is saving life for a renewed world because he loves and he cherishes the life that he's made in his own image. And his kingdom is the realm of life.

And he calls his people back to his created order and to his covenant way in order that they might flourish again. And so from the beginning, God's people Israel in his land, it is a land of life.

And they are to showcase to the whole world the creator's pattern of life as he purposed it to be.

And since we've seen all these chapters about cherishing the breath of life, showing the positive force of the sixth commandment, not only to destroy human life, but to protect it, to dignify it, to cherish it, to love it and bless it in every way conceivable.

[7 : 34] And so these chapters apply that principle in all sorts of ways. And here, at the beginning of chapter 22, Moses is rounding off this section with some further commands that just underline the whole trajectory of God's concern for life.

And urge his people to make that care for life truly pervasive in all their thinking and in all their daily lives in every possible way.

God's concern to bless human life must be something that pervades every aspect of our lives.

Because the more we honor and cherish his perfect order, the more truly human and therefore the more blessed our human lives will be.

And how much more important that is for the church today. For us as the true Israel of God, who are to showcase his ways, not just in the land of Israel, but all over the whole world. So we really need to take these verses seriously.

And they call for pervasive justice, pervasive rightness, for a rightly ordered world where human beings may truly flourish. And verses 1 to 8 give these pervasive requirements of God for his people's distinctive life.

[8 : 50] And then verses 9 to 12 outline what I think are pervasive reminders that God gives to them so that they will never forget that they have a distinctive life as lights in a dark world.

So they don't drift from his righteousness. But we're going to focus chiefly on verses 1 to 8, where this pervasive nature of God's distinctive ordering of life comes across in, I think, four clear commands which show a cherishing for life.

Life that is to be lived this way if it is to flourish. And so often, as we'll see here, it is against the natural sinful inclination of human beings.

So first then, verses 1 to 4 tell us that for human life to flourish, especially in a fallen world, there must be distinctive caring for the welfare of others and not a selfish hiding from our responsibilities towards them.

It's the Lord Jesus himself, wasn't it, who repeatedly affirmed that to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself, these things are inseparable because the latter is evidence of the former.

[10:06] And it's clearly, isn't it, that real love for people that pervades these commands in these verses. Derek Kidner rightly says that these commands are good examples of the true partnership of love and law because love is the motive in each case, but law directs it into wise and practical forms.

And here in verses 1 to 4, that means giving active help instead of just passive sympathy or neutrality. It's the very opposite, isn't it, of Cain's attitude to Abel.

We are to be our brother's keeper, says God, not our brother's killer. And we must have a real care, therefore, for all the things that might impinge on their lives and cause them to suffer harm or loss. That's the concern. Five times here, it's your brother that's repeated. Your brother's welfare. It's not principally a concern for animals. Sometimes people think that.

It's a concern for oxen and sheep and donkeys and so on. It's not that. Although, Proverbs 12, verse 10 says, whoever is righteous has regard for the life of his beast. The mercy of the wicked is cruel.

[11:14] Cruelty to animals cannot be part of the mark of a child of God, can it? Though, of course, confusing animals with people. And treating them just the same way is an equally unchristian attitude.

We need to be clear about that. But here the concern is principally for your brother, for his prosperity, and for his property, therefore. His ox and his sheep are his livelihood, as are his donkey and his garment, verse 3.

Or any other thing that he might lose, like his credit cards, or his purse, or his wallet, or anything else. So when somebody has lost that and you find it, says the Lord, you don't just say, finders keepers.

You take it back to them. Or you keep it for them until they come and seek it and find it. An implication, of course, is that you make it easy for them to find you so that you can give it back. You don't make it hard. Your aim is to restore, not to ignore. Literally, that word ignore says, don't hide yourself from it.

[12:13] Three times we're told not to do that. Don't be passive. Don't say, oh, it's not my fault, it's his fault, why should I bother? No, actively involve yourself to help your brother.

It's reinforced very clearly, isn't it? In verse 4. When you see your brother's property at risk, whatever it is, don't hide from it. Don't pretend you don't see so you don't have to get involved. You must go and get involved and help.

To see trouble, he's saying, confers upon us a mandatory obligation to help. It's obvious, isn't it? So if you see your neighbor's house being burgled, you don't just close the curtains and pretend not to see it.

You do something. You don't feel you can go and challenge the burglar yourself, well, at least call 999. It's obvious. If you're driving, if you see a road accident and cars are coming the other way and they're likely to drive into that and cause more carnage, you don't just do nothing and drive on. You flash your lights, you honk your horn, you maybe stop and hold your hands up. I'm not sure whether we should stretch that to, you know, when you see a mobile speed camera trapping people on the road and other people are coming in.

[13:22] You flash your lights and honk your horn to stop getting a fine. That's a bit of a moral dilemma, isn't it? You'll have to work that one out yourself. But you see the clear principle here. It's obvious. It's the very opposite of don't get involved.

The attitude that we so easily acquiescent, don't we? I don't want to know. They don't want the hassle of getting involved in somebody else's problem. But God says, you can't ignore it. That was Jesus' piercing words, wasn't it, to the lawyer in Luke chapter 10.

He said to him, it's not enough to know the commandment, love the Lord and love your neighbor as yourself. You actually have to do it. And he tells the story of the Good Samaritan where it was the foreigner who went past and stopped and got involved and helped the man who'd been beaten up

on the road.

And the priest and the Levite, the pious teachers of the law, ignored it, walked on the other side, hid themselves from it. You can't do that, says the Lord Jesus.

You can't pretend so as you don't have to get involved. Now, don't misunderstand the scope of this command. It's not placing an impossible burden on our shoulders for every single problem in the world, for every person who needs help, for every victim, for every unfortunate.

[14:40] Sometimes Christians with a very tender conscience can be overwhelmed by that, that sense of huge responsibility. God is not saying that we have to go looking for every problem. He's saying, if something comes into your path that you can do something about, you need to help.

You don't have to feel guilty if you haven't helped somebody that way for days and days. He's saying, just don't be the sort of person who actively turns your eyes away where you could be giving significant help.

Don't hide yourself from such things. And as Christians and as churches today, it's important, isn't it, we take this seriously because some Christians do have a sort of holy huddle mentality, hiding from the world's problems, from things that cause active harm to fellow citizens.

But no, God says, you are your brother's keepers. And in a democracy, that means, doesn't it, that we must be willing to do things to help, to bring about change where things are happening to harm people around us.

Where public policy perhaps needs to be challenged and we've got an opportunity to do it. Or a host of other ways. We are not to escape from the world and close our eyes. We're to engage with the world.

[15:54] That's what the Bible teaches us. But perhaps the biggest challenges in our personal lives were to have a pervasive attitude to care for our brothers and sisters.

Verse 3, you see, do the same with any lost thing. You don't say, okay, the ox, the sheep, the donkey, the cloak. That's my obligation. I've done it. That's what we naturally do, isn't it?

The legal minimum. That's why the lawyer was saying to Jesus, who is my neighbor? Define it so I can limit my involvement. No, no, no, no, no. Do you see the trajectory that Moses is setting here in these commands?

He's saying, look, this is the direction of travel. Keep going this way in every situation you can think of that is like this and get involved and help. And that's what God's law always does.

It's exactly what Jesus states so clearly, isn't it? where he sums up at the end of his Sermon on the Mount. And that is the authoritative, ultimate exposition of God's commands.

[16:58] He says, whatever, no limit, whatever you wish that others would do to you, so also you do the same to them and for them.

For this is the law and the prophets, what it's all about. And that attitude must be the distinctive mark of the Church of Jesus Christ. The word brothers here is important.

He's speaking about attitudes principally within the people of God, isn't he? Of course, kindness isn't exclusive to other Christian believers. The whole Bible is clear on that. Paul says in Galatians chapter 6, do good to all as we have opportunity.

That's plain. But he does go on to say especially to those who are of the household of faith. Well, of course, because we're brothers and sisters in Christ. We have everlasting bonds of family between us.

What does the Apostle John say? If anyone says, I love God and hates his brother, he's a liar. For he who doesn't love his brother who he can see cannot love the God he cannot see.

[18:06] This command we have from him, whoever loves God must love his brother. That's pretty clear, isn't it? As is this, if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us love not in word or talk, but in deed and truth. And that's a challenge, isn't it, for all of us in the professing church?

But it is also a challenge for the world because if you read Jesus' words in Matthew chapter 25, it is lack of deeds of love towards Christ's people, towards his brothers, that indicates an absence of love for God himself and a rejection of his commands and therefore that can only mean certain judgment.

And perhaps the resolute defiance of God's commands in his created order is nowhere more obvious today than in this whole realm of sexuality and gender, which makes verse 5 extremely

pertinent, don't you think?

Because second, you see, God is saying here that for true human flourishing, there must be, according to God, our maker, there must be distinctive complementarity between the sexes and not a pagan perverting of God's created order of life.

[19 : 32] A woman shall not wear a man's garment nor a woman put on a man's cloak. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.

The word garment there refers not only to clothes but to anything typically carried by the opposite sex. And so the meaning is absolutely plain. There's to be no deliberate perverted crossing of the genders.

No confusing of the sexes whatsoever. Gender distinction is an integral part of God's good created order. In fact, it's much more than that.

Because the sexual distinction between male and female is a crucial aspect of the very image of God himself displayed in humankind. And that is why it must not be obliterated.

Because to do so is not just a violation of nature, but it is a crime against the very person of God himself. That's why there's this very extreme language of abomination here.

[20 : 37] The same language of abomination that's used against burning your children in a sacrifice to idols, or consulting the dead, or sorcery, or all sorts of other heinous things like we saw back in chapter 18.

It might be, as some have suggested, that this kind of transvestitism and so on was part of pagan worship, part of fertility rights. And it's no accident, actually, in the Bible that sexual perversion and idolatry are so often together.

But the heart of the issue is that of defiance of God's created order, of his ordering of this world.

Notice how distinct verse 5 is. You see, all the other commands begin with a you, that is, you Israelites shall not do as others do. But here it's everyone and anyone, a woman and a man, because this is a matter basic to all human dignity.

All people are created in the image of God. And so Derek Kidner rightly says, since this is an abomination to the Lord, we are to regard this law as permanent and to respect its wisdom.

[21 : 47] And the New Testament is no less emphatic against all tampering with sexual distinctives. Friends, we need to be crystal clear on this, especially in the light of the massive assault that there is today in our culture all around us on this very issue.

And I know that that's something that has touched very painfully, very deeply the lives of some who are sitting here this morning. But we must be absolutely clear, mustn't we?

The Bible is absolutely clear that this is not just defiance of God as creator, but it is also the way of disaster for human beings and for human society.

It's the very opposite of the way of human flourishing. any society which insists on pursuing this course will find itself on a road to ruin.

The New Testament is clear when people insist on willful defiance of God's way. Paul says God gives them up to the impurity and the dishonoring of their bodies and to receive in themselves the due penalty for their error.

[23 : 01] This insistence on pursuing and promoting the total confusion of the genders, the perverting of sex, will not lead to freedom, but to bondage.

It will not lead to human flourishing in society, but to human misery. The statistics tell us that when they're not being suppressed by the media. those who have gender reassignment surgery, for example, in the only long-term study that's ever been done, show a massively increased rate of suicide and attempted suicide among those who have had that.

So in the face of this increasing confusion and this dangerous folly in the world around the church of Jesus Christ must be absolutely clear in this whole area and not in any way carried into submission by this calamitous defiance of God's good and healthy order.

Let me read to you something written decades ago now by the late William Still who expresses real biblical clarity and also real pastoral wisdom. He says there are people who grow up as masculine women and effeminate men.

And this problem is no doubt partly solved by the complementariness of marriage in which the chosen partner compensates for the mate. This doesn't excuse the man naturally effeminate from assuming the headship of his house and family or the manish and naturally overbearing woman from submitting to her husband.

[24 : 29] But when the problem assumes far greater proportions than merely accommodating natural types and becomes a fashion, when the latest craze is for men to unman themselves and women to unwoman themselves, then this should be seen as the work of the devil to undermine and destroy the Christian and biblical roots of our civilization.

Let us be on our guard against trends which are not only against nature but are demon inspired with intent to undermine what is natural in society.

The Bible has very plain things to say in both testaments about this. And you see friends, the church must be a pillar and a buttress of truth against what is ultimately demonic because it is God defying.

The unmanning of men and the unwomanning of women. We must preserve that distinctive complementarity of the sexes, both in sexual relationships and in gender distinctions.

And indeed in the complementary roles that God has given men and women in the household, in the home and in the church. God has created us male and female and we image God in that created complementarity, not by seeking to blur it, to undermine it.

[25 : 53] And that's why the apostles are utterly clear, isn't it, in distinguishing appropriate roles for men and women in the household and in the church. And you see, once you begin to confuse that in any way, you are on a path which will lead in the end to more and more extreme departure from the order that God himself has pronounced as good.

The order upon which true human flourishing depends. It's no surprise, it shouldn't be a surprise, that the very same approaches to the Bible, which a generation ago were used to justify female headship and leadership in the church, are now being used to justify homosexuality and gay marriage and gender crossover, even in the professing church.

And these things, we're told, are an abomination to God and will certainly incur his judgment. How ironic it is that people who rejoice today to wave that rainbow flag, and you have to, don't you, even in the National Trust, that they forget that the rainbow recalls the aftermath of God's terrible and complete judgment on an entire civilization, a civilization whose wickedness was displayed in large measure in perverted sexuality.

go back and read Genesis chapter 6. This is hard, friends, but God will not be mocked. How desperately our society needs to rediscover that fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom, and that only fools despise his good instruction for life.

A flourishing society and a flourishing church will honor the God-given distinctive complementarity of the sexism, will not undermine or defy God's good order.

[27 : 51] And likewise, thirdly, the flourishing of human life requires that there must be distinctive conservation of the resources for life that God has given and not foolish short-termism fueled by instant gratification in a consumerist society.

That is what verses 6 and 7 are about. God's good may be an element here of the inhumane nature of killing a mother and her young, but the chief concern is about conserving the needs for human life.

It's just like in chapter 20 with the trees being preserved in wartime. It's a stewardship of future food supplies for the land. If you go out and you see some quail and the mother and the young all sitting there and you think, oh, whoopie-doo, I can get the lot today and have an absolute feast and gorge myself tonight, then your immediate gratification will destroy the future provision and deprive others of that food source in the future.

Well, look around us today and see how that short-termism and how that greed and how that immediate gratification so dominates our whole Western society. In business, it's so often, isn't it, short-term gain that drives the policies of chief executives to boost their share options, loading up companies with debt, getting all their gains and then leaving.

Well, the company then collapses under a pile of debt. Our governments have been doing exactly the same thing, overconsumption, financial leverage, that is, debt, which means spending the earnings and the resources of the future today, that is what caused the financial collapse ten years ago that's being remembered today.

[29 : 31] The economic historian, Neil Ferguson, has argued cogently that the principal factor in the dominance of Western civilization, especially in the last 500 years, has been its Protestant Christian roots.

And the biblical emphasis that gave on both a responsibility to work and to strive for gain and profit, combined with a restraint on unbridled consumption that comes from the Bible.

Exactly what these verses are saying. And the inevitable result of that outlook on life is the accumulation of capital, the accumulation of prosperity. But by contrast, he says, we have just lived through an experiment, capitalism without saving.

The decline of thrift turned out to be a recipe for the financial crisis. And that's the truth. We live in a world, don't we, that is awash with debt, where insistence on immediate gratification and consumption is raping the resources and the earnings from future generations.

We are a society that is consuming the mother with the young. And according to God's warning here in verse 7, that is not the way of prosperity, nor is it the way of longevity for any society.

[30 : 47] It's very chilling to read Professor Ferguson's sobering comments. He says, it's important to remember that most cases of civilizational collapse are associated with fiscal crises, that is, debt crises, as well as wars.

So politicians and economists would do well to ponder the text of Deuteronomy. Because part of the very order of God's creation for humanity is self-control, is restraint, is patience, is looking to the future, not just to the present.

And we as Christians need to remember that too, don't we? Our eyes must always be upon the future, not just on the present. The prosperity gospel, which is so ravaging the church all through the world today, is doing exactly that, focusing on the present, wanting everything now.

The biblical gospel speaks about patience, about endurance, about restraint, about even suffering now, because our eyes are on a life that goes on in the future, and that will be long, and that will be ultimately satisfying God's way in God's time.

time. So you see, we should not be surprised, should we, that there is an eschatological impulse, that there is a deep-rooted looking to future satisfaction, that is woven into the very fabric of our created order.

[32 : 14] In order to live in defiance of that, for instant gratification for greed, should undermine human flourishing, and should invite societal calamity.

well, fourthly, verse 8 here brings us to the end of this whole long section on life, with a reminder that we all personally bear responsibility.

We mustn't personally bring blood guilt upon our own house. There's a need, he says, for distinctive conscientiousness in all our personal work and enterprise that values and cherishes human life above all other considerations.

of cost, or convenience, or fashion, or whatever. Obviously, this is another paradigm verse that has a pattern for all sorts of other things. Not just not to kill, but to care for life, even when it costs us.

A flat roof was a living area, all sorts of things happened there, it mustn't be a dangerous place.

That's a clear point, isn't it? God doesn't need to give us 50,000 pages of a health and safety manual to make the point.

[33 : 22] One verse is perfectly sufficient. We must be conscientious in all these things and God will hold us to be responsible. And elsewhere in the law, very similar things are there.

In Exodus chapter 1 to 21, there's a verse about the owner of an ox. If it gores somebody and kills them, well, if he's never done that before, he's not responsible. But if he's done it before and hasn't put that ox down, then he is criminally liable.

And just so here. And our world, of course, today is very big on this, isn't it? I can't turn the radio on these days without being told I've got to sue somebody for making me ill on holiday or for running me down in a traffic accident or for selling me PPI insurance or whatever it might be.

And of course, conscientiousness can very quickly in a sinful world lead to total confusion and exploitation. And we have to be careful, don't we? Because, well, take, for example, the awful fire in that building in London, the Grenfell Tower.

At least in part, it seems to have been due to this overwhelming political pressure there is today for environmentalism, for the need to reduce CO2 emissions and all the rest of it.

[34 : 31] That means all these buildings had to be clad. And in order to save the greater good of humanity, in fact, many real existing living human beings died in that fire for that so-called greater good.

We do have to be careful. We have to be realistic in our desire for this conscientiousness. Because history has shown that very often human beings have twisted it so wickedly and so-called greater

good actually leads to the very great harm of many real human beings.

Just think back to what happened in the communist era in Eastern Europe, where the greater good of society was actually so often served by the massacre of many hundreds of thousands and millions of living human beings.

But Christian people have always been distinctive in their conscientious desire to value the lives of real living people. And they've worked tirelessly to protect them, to preserve their lives, to keep them safe, to keep them healthy.

In the 16th century in Geneva, John Calvin used this verse as a reason for pushing through sanitation reforms and building safety reforms and drainage and ventilation and all sorts of things to help human life be protected and to flourish.

[35 : 47] In the 19th century, the Lord Shaftesbury, a Clapham sect and many other Christians used exactly this reasoning to promote health and well-being in the workplace and so on.

And actually, our country owes a very great deal to this single verse in Deuteronomy chapter 22 and to the people who took it very seriously. And so, of course, today, Christians and the church should be marked by our conscientious desire to protect life and to preserve life, especially the most vulnerable of life.

And it hasn't always been so. It's a tragedy. It's shameful that sometimes the church of Jesus Christ has been known for not adequately protecting children from sexual abuse, for example.

It's absolutely right that we should be distilled instinctive, exemplary in these sorts of areas. But, of course, how much more are we as Christian people to cherish not only life, but the life that is everlasting?

How much more conscientious must we be to ensure that we also have adequate barriers in place so as not to put the little ones for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died at risk, not only of death, but of eternal death?

[37 : 08] And in the light of verse 5, there is surely a clear warning here for the church today and for leaders and for teachers. Indeed, for anyone who would want to remove the protective barriers that God has given us in this whole sexual arena, God will not hold them guiltless for lives that are led astray.

Jesus said, didn't he, such stumbling blocks are sure to come, but woe to those through whom they come. Better for him, a millstone hung around his neck and cast into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble.

So pay attention to yourselves. Christian people must show distinctive conscientiousness to preserve all human life, but above all, never ever to be guilty through carelessness or worse, through design, from causing any to stumble and fall away from eternal life.

Well, these are all pervasive requirements for God's people's distinctive life, and they're so important. That's why this section ends off in verses 9 to 12 with insisting that there will be equally pervasive reminders woven into Israel's daily life so that they will never forget that they do have a distinctive witness to the world.

The key to these verses is that they are symbolic reminders. I think it's very clear, isn't it, from verse 12, especially if you read Numbers chapter 15, about the tassels on the cloaks.

[38 : 48] It shall be a tassel for you to look at and to remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, and not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after, says Numbers 15 verse 39.

That's what this is about. It's like tying a knot in your handkerchief so you always see and remember to do what you're going to do. I suppose today it's like having a persistent reminder on your iPhone.

So that day and night you will never forget that the Lord and His word will dictate all that you do. You wore your cloak in the daytime, you covered yourself with it at night. Always those tassels reminded you.

Just like in chapter 7, God's law was to be seen like a front between your eyes so that all your thinking was dominated, like something written on your doorpost. So when you go out and you come in, all through your life you're reminded God's word is what we live by.

And it's the same here. You see in work matters in verses 9 to 12, they're to be distinct. Not doing apparently as the Egyptians will want to do, sowing rows of crops in between their vines.

[39 : 54] Not plowing with unequally yoked, clean and unclean animals. And in their clothing, likewise distinct. Again, it seems a deliberate injunction not to do as the Egyptians did.

This word of mixing together is an Egyptian word. Apparently it was some sort of mixing of materials that indicated some sort of magical religious properties. It doesn't matter about the detail, the principle is so clear.

Be distinct from the world. And these are to be pervasive reminders in your life, in how you work and in what you wear. Even if they're quite arbitrary in themselves.

Reminding you of things that are far from arbitrary. The vital importance of God's commands, his instruction for a good and rightly ordered life. That alone will prevent harm.

That will promote blessing in life and for life. When you see these things and when you do these things daily, all through your lives, even as when you see these tassels on your cloaks morning and evening, so you shall remember, says the Lord, to do all my commandments and be holy to the Lord your God, says Numbers 15 verse 40.

[41 : 09] And friends, if that was so for Israel, how much more so for us as the people of the Lord Jesus today? To remember when we wake and when we go to sleep and amid all the normal routines of daily life, such as when we sit down to eat and we give thanks and say grace and thank God for all that he's provided in distinction from the rest of the world that pays no attention to him.

And above all, when we don't give up meeting together, but regularly as we're doing today, remind ourselves to whom we belong and whom we serve, the true Lord of life. And we remember how he has loved us and cherished our lives so greatly that he gave his own life blood for us so that we could know his life, life that's everlasting.

And how much more have we been given by way of reminder to gaze upon, to remind us to bind our hearts to him in obedience in his path of life?

We don't just have the tassels of a cloak. We have the testimony of the cross. the great reminder of his great love for our lives.

Inscribed upon the cross, we see in shining letters God is love and he loved our lives. And the cross is the great reminder, isn't it, that we belong to Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and the giver of life.

[42 : 42] And the reminder that those who belong to him will love like him and will cherish the life that he so cherished. And above all, we'll love the way of everlasting life which he came to bring.

Every time we see the cross, every time we speak of the cross, every time we sing of the cross, we remember his love and we remember his commandment.

this is my commandment, says the Lord Jesus, that you love as I have loved you, cherishing the breath of life and cherishing that life everlasting.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that you so loved the life that you had made, that you gave your own life as a ransom for many, that we might know life in all its fullness, that we might know life without end.

So help us, Lord, we pray, to shine that life and its light in this dark world, that we might walk only in your ways, that we might lead others also to the way of flourishing in this life and to the way of life that is without end.

[44 : 17] For Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.