



# 2021 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Oct 4<sup>th</sup> - Oct 10<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: October 3<sup>rd</sup>





October 4

**Judges 17:1-6 & Acts 2:42-47**

Yesterday we spoke about the vision for Smyrna in the future. Our desire is not all that creative, nor is it new, instead our hope and desire is that our church will indeed be a city on a hill. As we began our journey of walking through the various components that comprise a city on a hill, we noted the importance of informed citizens. A city does not, indeed it cannot, prosper without a knowledge of the laws that govern its civilization and an understanding of the world around it that is leveraged to bring God the glory.

Unlike many in our culture today and in contrast to several churches in our corrupt world, we believe that the law of God is a gift. It is the law of God that teaches us what we should, and should not, pursue. It is the law of God that gives us a window into what God values, and it is the law of God that reveals God's character for us to imitate (Ephesians 5:1). When the law of God is loved and cherished, God's people prosper, and the surrounding world can see the wisdom and joy of the Lord. When it is neglected, God's people fall into ruin. Our two texts for the day demonstrate the discrepancy marvelously.

In our first passage, we read a familiar and unfortunate refrain as Judges 17:6 tells us "In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." The statement follows a narrative about the blatant idolatry that was rampant in the nation of Israel at the time. This idolatry was explicitly prohibited by the law of God, nevertheless, God's people abandoned the law and therefore ceased to be the shining example of God's wisdom and character to the surrounding nations. You will notice that the abandoning of the law necessarily leads to chaos as the law is the objective standard by which everything else is ordered. We will either follow the Lord's revealed will in the law or we will all do what is right in our own eyes.

The above passage is marvelously contrasted with the description of the life of the early church as the people were "devoted" to the teaching of the Apostles. The church was built on the teaching of the Apostles and their communal life was structured around the authoritative Word that they were hearing. In stark contrast to Israel at the time of the book of Judges, the early church was a vibrant and multiplying group who had favor with the rest of the community and who experienced great growth as God saw fit to add to their number daily those who were being saved.

I suppose the point of the first devotion of the week would be this, our desire is for Smyrna to look far more like the early church than like Israel at the time of the Judges! The consequence of the fact that there was no agreed upon standard in Israel and everyone did what seemed right according to them was immense suffering and a dimly lit witness of God's character. The reward of biblical fidelity and a desire to see God's precepts obeyed and lived out in the early church was a vibrant community that was growing and powerful in its witness.

Church family, as we teach and preach the Word of God, we do so believing that it forms the very foundation upon which a true city on a hill is built. If there is no standard, if there is no law upon which the civilization functions, chaos, disorder and tragedy are sure to follow, just like it did in Israel's history. Conversely, when we do see the wisdom and necessity of following the law of God in our personal lives, our churches are used as powerful heralds of the Gospel truth. This law of God is imperative in our midst, and it is an entity that all of us must come to know and apply faithfully. Whenever God's people stray from the truth, disaster ensues but whenever we build on the truth, prosperity is sure to follow! May we be faithful to ground our church in the unchanging truth of God's Word such that the Lord could rightly say of us that we too "devoted ourselves daily" to the teaching of God's Word.

October 5

**Genesis 1:26**

Yesterday's text really taught us about the necessity of the Word of God for a city to even get off the ground. There is no city on a hill if there is only chaos. In fact, the thriving of a culture in general requires agreed upon standards and truths that inform the lives of the members of that society. However, we are to be more than mere dull rule followers, our conviction at Smyrna is that God has ordained for us to live all aspects of our lives for His glory. This means we should know and study the Bible deeply, but it also means we must not divide our spiritual lives from the rest of our existence as if being biblical scholars is the sum of the purpose of our lives. No, we know and understand that God has given us this world and the talents that we possess in order to cultivate wonderful, durable and beautiful things with the gifts and understanding that He has given.

This idea is found in God's assignment to Adam and Eve in our text today. They are to exercise "dominion". What does the term "dominion" mean? R.C. Sproul gives a helpful answer when he writes that exercising dominion is the call to "reflect the character of God's righteous rule over the universe. He never ravages or exploits what He rules, but rather reigns in justice and kindness. Those who exercise dominion endeavor to use their talents in every discipline in order to bring glory to God" The ruler subdues all that is around him, but he also leads that which is under his subjection to bring forth glorious things from underneath his authority. A human who is exercising dominion over his land doesn't harm it, but he does till the soil, plant the crop, water and work the land with the goal of seeing a plentiful harvest not desiring to harm what is there but laboring towards improving what would be without his oversight and sweat. The builder exercises dominion over his craft as he takes the raw materials the land gives him and forms and fashions them into homes. The chef exercises dominion as he takes various ingredients from the earth and combines them in a scrumptious meal and all of this brings glory to God as we thank Him for the raw materials, praise Him for the gifts He's given and enjoy the product of His kindness and the ability He has given us to work.

Folks, the city on a hill is a city full of people who are exercising dominion daily. It is a city that functions with great productivity and creativity. It is full of the finest wood workers, tradesmen, businesses, farmers and the like. All the rest of the world looks at this city with envy because it displays the very best of human effort and ingenuity all the while reflecting the wisdom of the God who gave us all that we have and commanded us to steward and leverage it well for progress.

Exercising dominion is man's mandate but it is only done well when we take the time to understand the world and how to best leverage our time and energy for our desired results. This means that a city full of those who are faithful in carrying out their dominion is a city full of individuals who are educated supremely on the world around them and their expertise. A carpenter who does not understand mathematics, and woodworking and who does not have a deep grasp of the way a structure must bear weight will not be very successful. A doctor who does not understand biology and how the human body functions would not be able to successfully diagnose, let alone treat, a patient. No, those who are going to exercise dominion well, bringing the world into subjection to their appropriated rule, must do so with sound minds which means that a city on a hill who exercises dominion must be a city full of educated men and women! Knowledge is not the enemy of spirituality; knowledge is the unpacking of the world around us so that we can see more of God's wisdom and so that we can identify different ways to use what He has given us to bring Him glory.

October 6

**1 Corinthians 10:31**

When we understand our call to exercise dominion rightly, the command of 1 Corinthians 10 comes into clearer focus. In this famous text, Paul commands us to do all that we do for the glory of God. This certainly includes formal worship, Bible study, prayer and other spiritual disciplines but you'll notice that the Apostle has in mind more than the overtly spiritual. Instead, Paul reminds us that we should "eat and drink" to the glory of God and, if that weren't enough, he goes even further to state that all that we do should be aimed at God's glory.

We should grocery shop for the glory of God and enjoy extracurricular activities for God's glory. We should work for the glory of God and recreate for His glory as well. How do we do such a thing? How does my recreation bring God glory? There is a famous scene in the movie Chariots of Fire in which the main character, a runner named Eric Liddell, is the focus. Liddell is asked why he runs and what motivates him to be so involved in developing his talent and his reply is beautiful as he says, "God made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure." Do you see the logic here? As Liddell utilized the gifts that God had given him, he knew that the Lord was pleased!

This kind of thinking must consume all our lives. As we enjoy our children, God gains glory because He entrusted them to us. As we eat good food and worship the Lord who created our taste buds and these marvelous ingredients, God gains glory. As we enjoy fellowship with one another we glorify God as He has created the people in our midst. On and on we could go with this wholistic idea of what it looks like to steward all our lives for the glory of God.

Folks, we must get out of this mindset that spirituality and worship are isolated and separated from the totality of our lives. You are not simply a worshiper on Sunday mornings or during your quiet time, you worship the Lord in all things, at all times and literally every activity in which you partake, that is not overtly sinful, is an opportunity for you to give God the glory that He deserves.

May everything we do be done with the Lord's glory in mind and may we cognitively and purposely give Him glory for what He has accomplished. Furthermore, may we live with joy, understanding that all this world is meant to be our field of dominion. This place is an arena that God has entrusted us to oversee (in His plan and underneath His providence of course) and when we do so well, we are glorifying the God who entrusted us with the task in the first place. I firmly believe that when we view the world through this prism, our joy increases as we see the purpose of life. The city on a hill is full of men and women who joyfully and consistently worship God by enjoying what He has given and doing everything (activity, job, formal worship, etc.) with God's glory in mind.

October 7

**Ephesians 6:10-17**

The first three devotions were directed towards the first point in the sermon which stated that a city on a hill should be comprised of an informed citizenry. Cities simply cannot function without a group of people who know the law of the land and cities are not appealing if they are full of men and women who do not know their various crafts and work to leverage their talents and gifts for the glory of God and the benefit of their fellow citizens. We travel to cities because of the culture they have created. We marvel at the magnificent skyscrapers of New York City, we love the glorious food in New Orleans, we enjoy the cultural wonder of the Amish and so forth.

All this being the case, a city on a hill must have other components if it will survive and thrive and one of those necessities is a measure of protection. Our city on a hill exists during a chaotic, fallen and adversarial world. We are attempting to build God's Kingdom in a world that is still full of the demonic and carnal and this means we should anticipate pushback. Stated succinctly, a church that is a city on a hill should expect spiritual attack and fortify itself accordingly. If we are going to talk about such spiritual warfare, then Ephesians 6 is a marvelous and necessary passage to consult.

I pray that you linger in this text today for some time, but I want to focus on one important aspect of what Paul teaches us about the armor of God. You will notice that all the listed components for battle are defensive in nature... except one. In the midst of shields and helmets and breastplates, Paul tells us that our weapon to utilize in the attack is the sword of God's Word. Literally, the thing we have that will put the enemy at bay, driving him back from his onslaught is God's Word. This means that any city who hopes to stand against the evil one must be equipped to counterattack with the Word of God.

Why would Paul reference God's Word as a weapon? The answer is found only when we understand the nature of spiritual attacks. I've rarely met a true believer who does not anticipate spiritual warfare, but I've met many who misunderstand the real battlefield on which those skirmishes are contested! Many folks see spiritual warfare as a total copy of physical warfare. They therefore prepare in the same way that the U.S. military would get ready for a war. They might stockpile weapons, ration food and the like in order to sustain themselves during the battle but this misses the biblical teaching that true spiritual warfare is almost always fought on the battlefield of the mind. The way that Satan creeps into a church and destroys her witness is almost always through false confessors and false teaching. The way that Satan destroys cultures is first and foremost through faulty worldviews that give rise to gross sin. The decision to abandon morality is always cognitive before it is physical.

This means that we must be ready to defend the purity of our church by equipping ourselves with the very thing that allows us to think correctly. If Satan will assault our city with false ideologies, then the city must be prepared to fight back with the truth, and this is why Paul says the Bible is the sword of the Spirit. The Bible is what God uses to penetrate and destroy the lies of the enemy, rendering his attacks impotent. This means we must study the Word of God and use it to evaluate all we hear in order to protect our precious city from enemy advances.

October 8

**Hebrews 5:14**

So, how do we go about recognizing the assaults of the enemy? The answer is simple, the enemy attacks the church with evil, unbiblical ideologies and the Lord has provided for us the Word of God by which we are to measure every assertion, thereby distinguishing between the two.

This is the point that the author of Hebrews is making in our verse for the day as he tells us that the solid food of the Word of God is for the “mature”. The admonition in this chapter is an important one as the author is imploring the people of the church to move on from their elementary understanding of the Word of God to maturity. They must study and think deeply about the Word of God and if they do not, they will be subject to great error.

The effect of the study of the Word of God is the ability to distinguish truth from error. Do you see the connection between this devotion and yesterdays? What we need to understand is that Satan assaults us with lies, he did so in the garden, and he continues to follow the same plan of attack today. While these lies can be persuasive, God has given us His Word which, when rightly understood helps us to discern the difference between truth that we should let in the proverbial gate and falsehood that we should reject and destroy.

Church family, I will be somewhat bold today in my admonition to you, too many Christians today have NO ability to discern good and evil. Anything that is told them by those that they like to hear and listen to is considered gospel truth. If a preacher stands up and preaches heresy, very few know the tenets of the faith well enough to identify the blatant error. If a political party, or news network, that we naturally like tells us something, we take it as gospel truth even as we deride the other side of the aisle for listening to their version of “fake news”. We are so infantile in our thinking that our gates are totally open to whatever, or whoever, wants to come through them into our midst.

What do we do to fortify our walls? The author of Hebrews tells us we must study the Word of God... constantly. Did you notice that term in the verse? We are told that it is by “constant practice” that we can distinguish between good and evil. It is not through reading a few chapters a month but through the daily discipline of taking every thought captive, evaluating every idea and situation by the Word of God and distinguishing what is true from what is false that our sense is sharpened and the attacks of the evil one become more apparent to us.

The good news is this, you have time today to begin to practice! I pray you read God’s Word deeply and intently, I pray you speak to God’s people, and I pray you live with the understanding that all things in this world are not as they seem. Subject everything to the Word of God, discard what is false and hold tightly to what is true. This is the way forward and this is the way we maintain the integrity of our city on a hill.

October 9

**1 Chronicles 12:32**

We must first and foremost be students of God's Word if we hope to fortify ourselves and our collective city against enemy attacks, but we cannot discern the attacks if we live in a vacuum. Instead, God's people must study the Word and the world around them in order to know how and when to apply the Word of God in a current situation.

Let me try to illustrate this truth by telling a brief story of how this can go wrong if we aren't careful. I was a high school student in the early 2000's (graduated 2005). My youth group at the time was full of all kinds of students from various backgrounds and our student pastor felt it would be wise to bring in someone who had been saved out of a secular music background... in 1975 (or so). This man came in with long, gray hair and immediately began to tell us the threats and dangers of various Journey songs. Here's the problem... Journey was popular before any student in the room was born! I don't doubt the veracity of his claims, but I do know that his concern was of no interest to me whatsoever. I wasn't listening to Journey; I didn't care what Journey said or did.

The danger that I'm trying to illustrate is the danger of not discerning the times. We must live in this world. We must understand what is happening at this moment in history. We must discern what this generation is thinking and how this political scene is moving. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't be students of history, but it does mean that we can leave ourselves open to attacks and irrelevance if we are not aware of the existential threats in our moments.

In order to live wisely, we must "understand the times" exactly as the men of Issachar did in the Old Testament days. Understanding the times means understanding the pervasive worldviews behind the decisions that are being made, it means understanding the culture in which we live and the values that it espouses, it means navigating the political moment considering the system as its constructed and the major players who are the primary influencers.

The simple truth is that we must not live like the world, but we must be in the world. We need to be aware of what surrounds us, and we need to formulate logical, biblical responses to the issues of the day. This task is never over. Every issue that arises is, in some ways, a new challenge to the church and, therefore we must be vigilant in looking for the various topics that arise and ardent in our desire to articulate a biblical response to the problems at bay. Parents, are you aware of the tenets of the sexual revolution that is sweeping our nation, and do you have a biblical and logical response to them so that your children know why marriage is between a man and a woman (as an example)? If not, we do not understand our times and we will suffer accordingly! The Bible has the answers but only if we understand them considering our culture and articulate them clearly! The city will only survive generationally if we understand who and why we are in the midst of the darkness that abounds.



October 10

**John 13:35**

So, we have discussed the need for an informed citizenry and a fortified city and now we pivot to the final point of the sermon which was an appealing community. As the world looks at us, they should see orderly lives and creative/industrious people, but they should also see more than that. The verse we are using to finish our week is taken directly from the lips of our Savior and He walked this planet.

You will notice the direct nature of the statement, “by this...”. Jesus doesn’t beat around the bush here, what He is clearly saying is that this characteristic or component of His disciple’s lives together is the benchmark or defining characteristic that will separate His followers from the surrounding world.

What is that attribute? It is the love that His followers have for one another. The world should be able to look at us, church, and see that we are followers of Christ by our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus is literally saying that the community of faith’s love for one another is the means whereby the city on the hill shines brightest.

Think about this for a moment and it makes perfect sense. This world is full of all kinds of things, but true, genuine, sacrificial love is not on the list! There is little, if any, true community left on this planet, and this is why the city on the hill shines brightest when the world can look at us and see our love for the brethren.

Church if we are going to shine, we are going to do so in community, and this has many implications. Let me give you two. First, it means you must be apart of the community. You simply cannot love people whom you are never around! Those who think they can be faithful Christians without attendance and involvement in the church have missed the point that love is expressed in relationship. Second, it means that we must be dedicated to developing friendships amongst the brethren. We do so by spending time together, studying the Word together, learning about one another and serving as we identify needs. This is why small group Bible study is so crucial to our existence as a fellowship. You don’t grow in love for one another sitting in rows, surrounded by people you barely know. You grow in love and affection for one another as you sit and hear their hearts, learn their issues, grow to love their personality and serve one another.

Church, I pray that as this world grows darker, the love that we have for one another will shine brighter! I pray that you take it seriously that we are apart of a fellowship that should demonstrate God’s love to the surrounding world, and I pray your life is marked by love for your brothers and sisters in Christ!