

AUGUST 28, 1994

CHOOSE TO OBEY

One of the big battles going on in our country is related to smoking. Several years ago, all the airlines enacted rules prohibiting smoking on all domestic flights. More recently, Delta Airline put a ban on smoking on all flights to Europe. Cities are debating whether or not to enact a ban on smoking in all public buildings. The rights of smokers and non-smokers are being debated in legislatures, in the news media and many other places. There are no advertisements for tobacco products on TV. There have been similar debates on alcohol advertisements and bans on use have been debated for decades. The battles and the debates are interesting to observe, but even more interesting is the response people have to what is a clear danger to their health and well-being. There is good documented evidence that smoking leads to serious health problems. There is good evidence that alcohol use is very dangerous to the user and to others. In spite of all the evidence, people still choose to ignore it and they still smoke and drink. It is almost as if scientist are telling us, "If you do not smoke, then you should be able to avoid serious lung diseases, you will have less heart problems, the risk of mouth and throat cancer will go down significantly for you and you will have a chance of living a good healthy life." A similar list of benefits to not drinking could also be given. They might also be able to tell us, "If you do smoke or drink, then you can expect the following list of problems . . ." We do not have to limit such considerations to smoking and drinking. We could make such a list for sexual promiscuity and perverse behavior.

Why then, in the light of all the evidence and the potential for a good life by avoiding smoking, drinking, and sexual promiscuity and perversion would people not choose the good outcome over the bad? Why

then, in the light of the evidence and the potential for a miserable life that can come from smoking, drinking and sexual promiscuity and perversion would people not reject the bad outcome in favor of the good?

This is not the first time people have been confronted with such a clear choice of what to do. Toward the end of the discourse and giving of the law the second time, Moses laid out the choice of behaviors and the consequences of these behaviors to the Israelites. The choices and the results are recorded in Deuteronomy 28.

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-6 Just as surely as heeding the warnings about smoking and drinking can lead to a healthier life, hearing and doing what God has commanded us to do will lead to benefits in all areas of our lives. The general promise of blessing was directed to the entire nation of Israel. There were specific conditions attached to being able to participate in the blessing. The first conditions related to *careful listening* (hearken diligently, KJV or fully obey, NIV) to the voice of God. There are all sorts of sights and sounds we experience in the course of a day. Most of these are ignored because we are concentrating on something else or because we have learned to sort out all the stimuli that comes at us. New parents may not hear or pay attention to an airplane flying overhead, but they are acutely aware of the slightest cry from the new baby. I believe that God is speaking to us in many different ways and generally we just aren't listening because we are concentrating on something else or have tuned Him out. We need to have such a relationship with God that we are more alert to what He says than a mother is to the cry of a new born baby.

The second part of the condition is that of observing and doing (carefully follow, NIV) all His commandments. Both parts may be the

same thing just stated in slightly different ways for understanding. However, there is a distinction between knowing and doing. All our knowing will be of no benefit if we do not bring our behavior into alignment with what we know to be the right thing.

The benefit of hearing, observing, and doing for Israel as a nation was "greatness." This greatness applied to spiritual well being, the economy, it was related to military might, political influence, and peace. At the height of Israel's influence it was all of this. While this promise was given specifically given to Israel, it would appear to be a universal truth and would apply to any nation that met the conditions.

God's promised blessings would not be something they would need to go out and pursue, but the blessing would come upon them and "overtake" them. They would be blessed beyond what they would even know to ask for. Wherever they went or live (in the city or in the country side), whether it was with healthy families or productive land God would bless them. The economy was agriculturally based and their prosperity was measured in terms of the size of herds and flocks and in the produce gathered in for the winter months. God's blessing would extend even into the homes where the food was prepared and where the people lived.

We can remember the time when the home and family values were a real blessing to our own nation. We were prosperous in our economy and **everything** we set our hand to prospered.

Just as there is always the other side of the coin, there is another side to the story of blessings. What will happen if we fail to listen? What will happen if people do not do what God commands? Some may think they are really not that interested in being in a position of leadership and great economic prosperity is not that important to them. So they may want to just opt for mediocrity or

neutrality. Will that work?

DEUTERONOMY 28:15-19 I believe these two passages tell us there is no neutral ground with God. We either do obey and are blessed or we do not obey and are cursed. Notice that the Word does not say we will "not be blessed" but that "curses shall come upon thee." Just as the blessing overtake those who observe and do all of God's commandments, so do the curses come and overtake those who disobey. The curses parallel the blessings. In every area of life, there will be marked failure rather than success. It seems that God customizes His responses to us to fit our particular situation. A person may appear to have some semblance of success in one or more areas, but it turns out that the very thing that appeared to bless actually cost him dearly in another area of his life. Having too much money can prove to a curse if it is not handled properly and considered in the right perspective. The list of areas of life that Moses enumerated is comprehensive. The curses covered disease and confusion. They included the boils of Egypt, scorching heat and mildew. Disasters of every sort and even being forced to serve their enemies was included in the curses that would come upon them for failure to listen, observe and do the commandments of God.

DEUTERONOMY 28:64-66 The final curse was the ultimate dispersal of the people among the nations of the earth. God had Moses tell them exactly what would happen. They could choose to obey or disobey, but they were also choosing to be blessed or cursed. We cannot choose to disobey and then choose to be blessed. It just doesn't work that way. You would think that no one would ever choose a curse over a blessing, however, that is the choice each person makes when they choose not to follow what God has told us to do.