

## **13.07.2019 BLUEPRINT FOR A BETTER WORLD**

***You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord. Leviticus 19:18***

The Fall of Man had many consequences— spiritual death, sickness, suffering, injustice, crimes against other human beings and physical death.

In such a broken world where mankind is ruled by Satan, man's inhumanity to man is very evident. But throughout the ages, God has chosen a people (the nation of Israel in Old Testament times and the Church – spiritual Israel in New Testament times and until Jesus returns) to be a witness to the world of a better way of living.

### **The God who is the 'I Am' is the God who Hears:**

The basis of our witness to the world is the fact that there is a God. He is the 'I AM'; the God who IS, and He is there in all times and all seasons.

***And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" Exodus 3:14***

Not only is our God a God who is there; He is a personal God who is intimately interested in us and our well-being. He hears us; He sees our suffering and is moved to pity by it. He is the God who sees and speaks to us. When we recognise that He sees our afflictions and visits us, we are moved to worship Him (see Exodus 4:31).

***"I have surely visited you and seen what is done to you in Egypt..." Exodus 3:16***

This is the greatest need of the world today. Many in our society either do not believe that God exists (He is not there) or they believe that even if He does exist, He is not interested in the affairs of mankind (He is Silent).

Francis Schaeffer, one of the outstanding Christian apologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century addressed this issue very well in two books, 'The God who is There' and 'He is There and He is not silent'. Here is a quote:

*Man, made in the image of God, has a purpose - to be in relationship to God, who is there. Man forgets his purpose and thus he forgets who he is and what life means. Francis Schaeffer*

This is the purpose of our lives – to be a people who witness to the God who is the 'I AM'; the God who speaks. We are a people who listen to, and obey His word. In living thus, we will be a witness to the world around us; to people who live desperate lives because they do not know God.

*Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Exodus 19:5, 6*

*"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me; that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' Deuteronomy 4:5, 6*

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:9-12*

## The Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments are an expansion of the 2 Great Commandments – to love God and to love our neighbour. It recognises that God is our Creator (Exodus 20:11) and Redeemer (Deuteronomy 5:15). Though short, the Ten Commandments lay down the principles by which life must be lived. Jesus explained the true meaning of the Ten Commandments in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

Many commentators, particularly those who know ancient history, state that the principles of the Ten Commandments are found in most ancient cultures. Christ, our Creator, is the Word. He is also the Light that lightens every man who comes into the world (John 1:9)

“The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honoured them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the Decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellow man; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love”. *Patriarchs and Prophets: p 305.*

“Now this Law or Rule about Right and Wrong used to be called the Law of Nature. Nowadays, when we talk of the “laws of nature” we usually mean things like gravitation, or heredity, or the laws of chemistry. But when the older thinkers called the Law of Right and Wrong “the Law of Nature,” they really meant the Law of Human Nature. The idea was that, just as all bodies are governed by the law of gravitation and organisms by biological laws, so the creature called man also had his law—with this great difference, that a body could not choose whether it obeyed the law of gravitation or not, but a man could choose either to obey the Law of Human Nature or to disobey it... This law was called the Law of Nature because people thought that everyone knew it by nature and did not need to be taught it...

I know that some people say the idea of a Law of Nature or decent behaviour known to all men is unsound, because different civilizations and different ages have had quite different moralities. But this is not true. There have been differences between their moralities, but these have never amounted to anything like a total difference. If anyone will take the trouble to compare the moral teaching of, say, the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hindus, Chinese, Greeks and Romans, what will really strike him will be how very like they are to each other and to our own... Men have differed as regards what people you ought to be unselfish to—whether it was only your own family, or your fellow countrymen, or everyone. But they have always agreed that you ought not to put yourself first. Selfishness has never been admired. Men have differed as to whether you should have one wife or four. But they have always agreed that you must not simply have any woman you liked”. *CS Lewis: Mere Christianity*

### Slaves, Widows, Fatherless, Foreigners

*A father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in His holy habitation. God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity. Psalm 68:5, 6*

*“You shall neither mistreat a stranger (sojourner) nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot...” Exodus 22:21-24*

*“Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Exodus 23:9*

*‘And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you (a native), and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 19:33, 34*

*Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge. Deuteronomy 24:17*

*For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:17-19*

**It is only as we recognize God's grace to us that we will extend it to others.**

*Therefore remember that... you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. Exodus 2:12, 13*

True worship consists in working together with Christ. Prayers, exhortation, and talk are cheap fruits, which are frequently tied on; but fruits that are manifested in good works, in caring for the needy, the fatherless, and widows, are genuine fruits, and grow naturally upon a good tree. The 'doing' principle is the fruit that Christ requires us to bear; doing deeds of benevolence, speaking kind words, and manifesting tender regard for the poor, the needy, the afflicted. *EG White: Review and Herald, August 16, 1881*

### **Generosity and Tithing**

A 'tithe' by definition is 'a tenth'. In the Old Testament, people were called to bring a tithe for the upkeep of the tabernacle and the temple (Malachi 10:8) and every 3<sup>rd</sup> year the tithe was given 'to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, so that they may eat within your gates and be filled' Deuteronomy 26:12

In the New Testament, there is no mention about giving a tithe; the only references to it are references to Old Testament stories e.g. Hebrews 7:7-10. Instead, there is one phrase that runs consistently through the New Testament: **cheerful giving**. God loves a cheerful giver. Give according to how much God has given you. Give without measure. Give in your poverty and God will abundantly bless you.

*Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away. Matthew 5:42*

*Freely you have received, freely give. Matthew 10:8*

*Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. Luke 6:30, 31*

*Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. Luke 6:38*

*Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. Acts 20:35*

**This attitude of cheerful giving arises in a heart that has first given itself to the Lord:**

*We make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints. And not only as we had hoped, **but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.** 2 Corinthians 8:1-5*

*But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work... Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, 10, 11*

Our Generosity Reveals our Commitment to the Gospel and brings Glory to God:

*For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men. 2 Corinthians 9:12, 13*

**Conclusion:**

We all belong to God by virtue of His Creation and Redemption. We are all partakers of the riches of His grace. In and of ourselves we are poor, needy, wretched and blind; strangers and enemies to God, whom He has reconciled to Himself.

He desires that His people should bring glory to His Name by revealing His character of unfailing love and generosity to those who still bear the consequences of sin and evil. Though we are waiting for our true home in heaven, God has graciously come and made His home with us (John 14:23). Let us spend our time on earth revealing to mankind the grace of God so graciously given to us.

This vision of glorifying God motivates the faithful to risk everything to relieve the world's suffering: caring for plague victims, defending the rights of children, guiding slaves to freedom, breaching war zones to feed the poor.

"If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next world". *CS Lewis: Mere Christianity*

*And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:9, 10*

-----

**Additional Note on the Jubilee Year and how we can interpret it for Today:**

**The Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25)**

Leviticus 25 ordains a Sabbath year, one in every seven (Lev. 25:1-7), and a jubilee year, one in every fifty (Lev. 25:8-17), to sanctify Israel's internal economy. In the Sabbath year, each field was to lie fallow, which appears to be a sound agricultural practice. The year of jubilee was much more radical. Every fiftieth year, all leased or mortgaged lands were to be returned to their original owners, and all slaves and bonded laborers were to be freed (Lev. 25:10). This naturally posed difficulties in banking and land transactions, and special provisions were designed to ameliorate them (Lev. 25:15-16), which we will explore in a moment. The underlying intent is the same as seen in the law of gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10), to ensure that everyone had access to the means of production, whether the family farm or simply the fruits of their own labour.

It is not fully known whether Israel actually observed the jubilee year or the antislavery provisions associated with it (e.g., Lev. 25:25-28, 39-41) on a wide scale basis. Regardless, the sheer detail of Leviticus 25 strongly suggests that we treat the laws as something that Israel either did or should have implemented.

**What Does the Year of Jubilee Mean for Today?**

The year of jubilee operated within the context of Israel's kinship system for the protection of the clan's inalienable right to work their ancestral land, which they understood to be owned by God and to be enjoyed by them as a benefit of their relationship with him. These social and economic conditions no longer exist, and from a biblical point of view, God no longer administers redemption through a single political state. We must therefore view the jubilee from our current vantage point.

A wide variety of perspectives exists about the proper application, if any, of the jubilee to today's societies. To take one example that engages seriously with contemporary realities, Christopher Wright has written extensively on the Christian appropriation of Old Testament laws. He identifies principles implicit in these ancient laws in order to grasp their ethical implications for today. His treatment of the jubilee year thus considers three basic angles: the theological, the social, and the economic.

Theologically, the jubilee affirms that the Lord is not only the God who owns Israel's land; he is sovereign over all time and nature. His act of redeeming his people from Egypt committed him to provide for them on every level because they were his own. Therefore, Israel's observance of the Sabbath day and year and the year of jubilee was a function of

obedience and trust. In practical terms, the jubilee year embodies the trust all Israelites could have that God would provide for their immediate needs and for the future of their families. At the same time, it calls on the rich to trust that treating creditors compassionately will still yield an adequate return.

Looking at the social angle, the smallest unit of Israel's kinship structure was the household that would have included three to four generations. The jubilee provided a socioeconomic solution to keep the family whole even in the face of economic calamity. Family debt was a reality in ancient times as it is today, and its effects include a frightening list of social ills. The jubilee sought to check these negative social consequences by limiting their duration so that future generations would not have to bear the burden of their distant ancestors.

The economic angle reveals the two principles that we can apply today. First, God desires just distribution of the earth's resources. According to God's plan, the land of Canaan was assigned equitably among the people. The jubilee was not about redistribution but restoration. According to Wright, "The jubilee thus stands as a critique not only of massive private accumulation of land and related wealth but also of large-scale forms of collectivism or nationalization that destroy any meaningful sense of personal or family ownership." Second, family units must have the opportunity and resources to provide for themselves.

In most modern societies, people cannot be sold into slavery to pay debts. Bankruptcy laws provide relief to those burdened with unpayable debts, and descendants are not liable for ancestors' debts. The basic property needed for survival may be protected from seizure. Nonetheless, Leviticus 25 seems to offer a broader foundation than contemporary bankruptcy laws. It is founded not on merely protecting personal liberty and a bit of property for destitute people, but on ensuring that everyone has access to the means of making a living and escaping multigenerational poverty. As the gleaning laws in Leviticus show, the solution is neither handouts nor mass appropriation of property, but social values and structures that give every person an opportunity to work productively. Have modern societies actually surpassed ancient Israel in this regard? What about the millions of people enslaved or in bonded labor today in situations where anti-slavery laws are not adequately enforced? What would it take for Christians to be capable of offering real solutions?

*Theology of Work Bible Commentary, Volume 1: Genesis through Deuteronomy.*

-----