

Thoughts on the Readings of February 12, 2023

The Common Thread The immature believer thinks, *What should I do?* The mature Christian asks, *What should I hear?* For there is often a deeper word than, "Thou shalt." This is when we hear the Lord say, "But I say to you." The Spirit gives us a spiritual understanding of the commandment. This is the meat of the word, where there is an inner change that matches the outward action. The implanted word ([James 1:21](#)) grows into the outward life but the work of the flesh will never nurture the inward being. This comes by the grace of God in an ongoing, steady inquiry into the word, so that the whole-hearted seeking of God's will begins to permeate the whole life. The fixed eyes of the heart brings one to walk—and sit and lie down and rise up—(Deut 6:6-7) in the ways of the Lord. This walking with the Lord, like Adam did in the garden, is the way of life. Choose life.

First Reading - [Deuteronomy 30:15-20](#) The Deuteronomistic principle comes in to play in our lesson. In the contemporary terms of computer programming, this is a basic "if-then" statement: If one obeys the commandments, then she will receive life. On the other hand, if one turns away from God, then she will certainly perish. The choice is for life or death, for good or evil, for blessing or curse. The choice seems clear enough, but keeping the choice is sometimes difficult. Loving God with one's whole heart, keeping his commandments, and obeying his voice are not natural inclinations. So we must hold on even when we sometimes choose poorly. Holding fast to God (v. 20) is the key to the principle. He provides the grace to do so ([James 4:6](#)).

Psalms - [Psalm 119:1-8](#) Sometimes the scriptures are, at first, depressing. Here is one such case. How may one live up to the example given by the psalmist, whoever he might have been? Blameless? Seek him with a whole heart? Do no wrong? If the author was David, we are especially blessed to know a bit of his history — for he was not blameless. At times, he sought his own desires instead of the heart of God. David did wrong things; he was a poor sinner like us. This history helps us when we arrive at verse eight. The psalmist knows he deserves to be deserted, so he cries, "Do not forsake me," as he resolves again to keep the Lord's statutes.

Second Reading - [1 Corinthians 3:1-9](#) When we try to follow David or Paul — let alone a bishop or pastor — we are setting ourselves up for a loss of heart. Following men is something worldly people do. Christians, however,

are to be followers of Christ. If a believer follows a man, he gives evidence that he is still a person of the flesh. He is directed by his humanness and cannot be sustained in the faith. When he follows Christ, he is spiritually directed and sustained by the grace of the One he follows.

Gospel - [Matthew 5:21-37](#) Jesus provides us with the ultimate catechism. In his explanation of the commandments, he goes beyond the letter of the law. He acknowledges the law but then goes further. "You have heard that it was said" transforms into "but I say to you." The teaching of Christ embodies the spirit of the law, not merely the letter. Jesus is always calling us deeper. You have heard that it was said that you must go to church, you must read your Bible, you must pray, you must share your faith, you must support missions. But what is the "but I say to you"? The catechism of Jesus is calling us beyond what has merely been said.