

Restraint

Scripture Reading — Deuteronomy 20

Do not destroy its trees by putting an ax to them, because you can eat their fruit. — Deuteronomy 20:19

In this passage in Deuteronomy we find the Lord giving his people guidelines about going to war. We might wonder why God allowed his people to go to war at all. That is a challenging and unsettling question, but the main point of this passage is that if God's people had to go to war, they were to use restraint and not destroy everything in their path.

This was a revolutionary idea, and unfortunately still today we often see that wherever war takes place, nearly everything in the area is destroyed. So God instituted new ways of doing things that introduced justice for created things, including trees.

People have often reasoned that if they are going to introduce a new order, it's easier in some ways to totally overhaul or bulldoze everything rather than to preserve some elements of the old existing order. But doing that, according to the guidelines in Deuteronomy, would only cause undue harm and unnecessary damage. If the Israelites put a city under siege and destroyed all its fruit trees, for example, then no one, either in the city or in the advancing army, could benefit from the fruit.

The ethic being outlined here has to do with mercy and compassion, wisdom and restraint. As we view this passage through the lens of Jesus Christ, we recognize that Jesus also calls us to a way of life that shows restraint, mercy, and compassion.

Prayer

Creator God, we can see that you care for every-thing you have made. Help us to appreciate the ethic of care you instilled in your people, and enable us to live wisely in the way of Jesus. Amen.

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