

August 12, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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DON'T ADD, DON'T SUBTRACT
Deuteronomy 12:29-13:18

A few years ago, I taught a class on preaching to students in Saipan. On the return trip from Saipan to Japan, my seat-mate was the elder of the Mormon church on Saipan. He was also a high official with the Mormon church which required him to make frequent trips to Salt Lake City. He was one of the kindest, gentlest people I have ever met. We argued very nicely throughout the entire four hour trip. At some point in the conversation, I brought up the warning Jesus left us with near the end of the Revelation, the last book in the Bible: *"I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book"* (Revelation 22:18-19). I argued that the Mormons breached this warning by essentially exalting the *Book of Mormon* to equality with the Bible. The elder responded by bringing up verse thirty-two of Deuteronomy twelve: *Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it (v.32).*

So who is right? Is it permissible for the Mormons to add the *Book of Mormon* to the authority of the whole Bible just like we Christians add the New Testament to the authority of the Mosaic Law? Is this comparing apples to apples or is it trying to compare apples to oranges?

The important question is, "Does the New Testament contradict the law of God given through Moses?" No, it does not. In fact, Jesus made it very clear that the New Testament completes the law, carries out the law, explains the law. Jesus Himself said that not the slightest

part of the law will be removed until God fulfills everything in His plan (Matthew 5:18). Does the *Book of Mormon* contradict anything in the New Testament or Law? In fact, the doctrine taught in the *Book of Mormon* thoroughly contradicts both the Law and the New Testament. In Genesis (part of the Law), God promised that the Seed of the woman (Jesus Christ) will destroy Satan. The *Book of Mormon* denies Christ that victory. The New Testament clearly reveals that salvation is by faith in Christ alone, not by works of righteousness. The foundational teaching of Mormonism is that salvation is gained by works.

This is the very kind of thing Moses warned the people of Israel not to do when they went in to possess the Promised Land, the blessing of God. The temptation to replace God with our own version of God is perennial. There were plenty of pagans in the land God was giving the people. God knew the propensity of His people's hearts would be to just sort of consider this alternative expression of worship. God also knew the deadly consequences of such curiosity and severely warned the people to cut off all such leanings immediately.

The warnings in this text seem to be stark, uncaring, and unnecessary. Because of the lure of the flesh to be satisfied with false worship, the warnings against it must be very blunt. We will hear the warnings and must heed them still in our modern landscape of false teaching.

Do Not Apostatize in the Land of Blessing (12:29-32).

The foundation to Moses's words at this point is the certainty that the LORD will give the promised blessing. Moses repeated the promise that the Lord will deliver the nations. *When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess (v.29a).* He reminded the people that their God will cut off the nations. The "nations" were the enemy of God's people because they were God's enemies. God showed His disfavor for them by destroying them.

This is a fitting picture of God's opinion of sin in His creation. That the world is completely immersed in sin is unarguable. That God desires for His people to have complete victory over sin is also

unarguable. Consider John's argument, *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith (1 John 5:4)*. Jesus also promised, *“The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne” (Revelation 3:21)*. Our Lord expects us to enjoy victory over the enemy.

Furthermore, Moses reminded the people that they would possess the blessing. The Lord would dispossess the enemy, *and you dispossess them and dwell in their land (v.29b)*. The people, in obedience to God, empowered by God, would possess God's blessing by driving out the enemy. So, too, we who are born again will only know victory over sin as we, through the power of the Holy Spirit, resist the devil and submit to God (James 4:7). Or there are times when we must say “No” to the flesh and “Yes” to the Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

Possession of full salvation is a question of levels. We are fully born again at the moment of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. Also at the moment we receive all of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. However, while we have the entirety of the Holy Spirit, He does not always have the entirety of us. While we have all the benefits of salvation granted to us, we do not appropriate them as we should. We are so like the Israelites to whom God gave the entire Promised Land. But they were slow and reticent to fully possess all of God's possession. Learn from the ancient Israelites this important principle: **The less we appropriate the blessings of salvation, the more we will be tempted to engage in false worship.**

Because God was going to dispossess the enemy and would indeed give the blessing of the land to His people, they in turn needed to take care not to copy paganism (vv.30-32). God warned them to not even be curious. Moses told them, *Take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, “How did these nations serve their gods?— that I also may do the same” (v.30)*.

Often a horrible slide into the deep pit of sin began with curiosity. Occasionally we read about someone who, being too curious and desiring to see more, falls over a cliff or into a creek that sweeps them over the falls. The end is typically fatal. Just last

September an 11 year-old-boy in Italy became too curious and stepped too close to the edge of a volcanic crater. He fell in. His parents tried to rescue him, but they also fell into the pit and all perished.

Curiosity about false worship will ensnare the careless person. All they wanted to know was, “Why do they do what they do?” or “What is their worship like?” If we do not understand the inquisitive nature of humanity, we will slip into apostasy. How many young people were reared in Christian homes, maybe even attended Christian schools or colleges, and were on their way toward knowing God through faith in Christ. But along the way they got swept up in the supernatural spirit world through supposedly innocent things like Harry Potter's magic or video games that highlight the dark side? Today they are agnostic at best and proclaimed atheists at worst.

Why is it so difficult to help people see that worship of Satan and the flesh is the essential character of the Rock music scene and the Hollywood scene which, therefore, is the essential character of our society? As the old advertisement used to say, “Inquiring minds want to know!” And God says, “Stop it!” Why? Inquiry too easily leads to adapting to false worship.

Therefore, God also warned His people not to try to adapt pagan ways of worship. *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods (v.31)*. Notice that the problem may not be full-blown pagan worship, but trying to adapt the worship of sin and the flesh to worship of God: *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. You cannot worship God with that which He deems abominable.*

Here is what I consider to be a logical argument: Specifically the love of money is an abomination to God. *“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. And he said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:13-15)*. More general is the argument that the

works of the flesh are an abomination to God. Most specific is the fact that giving God second best is an abomination. *“You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep in which is a blemish, any defect whatever, for that is an abomination to the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 17:1).*

The second premise is that entertainment is an appeal to the fleshly desires, which the first premise identifies as an abomination to God. Therefore, entertainment of the people presented as worship of God is an abomination to God.

By specific example, God pointed out to His people that the pagans throwing their children into literal fire to please an imaginary god was an abomination to the true God. How is sacrificing your child to Molech different from sacrificing your sons and daughters to hedonism? Hedonism is the pursuit of pleasure and self-indulgence, the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life. Again, that is the essential character of our society. To allow your child to embrace hedonism, much less to encourage that end, will destroy your child spiritually as surely as a pagan throwing his child into the fire of Molech destroyed her physically.

Instead, we need to strive to do what God said. *Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it (v.32).* God’s rules are not just important – they are critical. Knowing and obeying God’s rules is critical for staying in fellowship with Him. It is critical for avoiding apostasy. To try to adjust God’s rules is to destroy them. God’s rules are just fine the way they are. We must know them by reading them and hearing them preached. We must submit to them.

A Key to Prevent Apostasy: Judge the Preachers (13:1-18).

First we need (as the Israelites needed to do) judge the professional prophet (vv.1-5). God’s people must be quick to check for error connected with signs. *If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, “Let us go after other gods,” which you have not known, “and let us serve them” (vv.1-2).*

Signs can be pretty convincing. False preachers have been known to do signs throughout Bible history. The magicians in Pharaoh’s court could copy some of the signs God did through Moses. Elymas the magician opposed the truth of God that Paul preached by performing “signs.” (Acts 13:8). The Pharisees accused Jesus of doing miraculous “signs” through the power of Satan. No doubt Satan is able to do some pretty astonishing stuff.

Therefore, when the preacher/teacher/prophet tries to convince us by performing a hard to explain sign, we must stop to think what the prophet is suggesting we do or embrace. If he is a false teacher, he performs signs in order to get God’s people to follow a false god. Maybe the false god is like one of the pagans’ imaginary gods the Israelite’s had to deal with. Maybe the false god can be the prophet, the preacher, the person doing the sign. Always the false god is connected with Satan, the enemy of our God.

Now listen to this very frightening principle in light of the reality that some people who profess to be God’s people seem to have no discernment in these matters. God actually allows this test to make distinctions. *You shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul (v.3).*

The question is whether a person or group of people love the Lord supremely. If we don’t, then how can we claim He is our God and we are His people? A few years ago there was a great and divisive debate about Lordship salvation. Some teachers at Dallas Seminary taught that a sinner can be born again but not really recognize God as their Lord in life. Other teachers argued that if God is not the Lord of all, He is not the Lord at all. They argued that salvation is a new creation who truly does love the Lord. That is not to say that a person is fully mature spiritually at the moment of salvation. However, it is to say that it is impossible to love the world, the flesh, and the devil and love Jesus too. Even though there are many professing Christians who attempt to live just like that.

Here Moses warned the millions of people who were about to enter the Promised Land that not all of them genuinely loved the Lord. Therefore, God would allow His people to be put to the test regarding false worship. Those who love God will reject fleshly

worship and avoid it. Those who love self will embrace fleshly worship and separate from the ones who insist on worshiping God according to His rules.

That same principle is found in the New Testament regarding the Church. John explained, *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us (1 John 2:19)*. Paul said that is why there were divisions in the church at Corinth. *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized (1 Corinthians 11:18-19)*.

We land on the right side of the issues if we reject all that is contrary to God's commands. This requires that we know the commands and obey God's voice. *You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him (v.4)*. Simply stated, we must know the Bible. We must walk in close fellowship with the Lord by obeying what we know.

Knowing what God says, knowing His rules and teaching, desiring to obey Him, we must eliminate the false teaching. The instruction from Moses was severe. *But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst (v.5)*.

God's required action against the false preachers was to be swift and decisive. This is the right response to clear rebellion against God. But we who do not live in the theocracy cannot exact the precise punishment, while the spirit of the punishment remains constant.

But what if it is dear old Dad or Uncle Jake who tries to steer us awry? When the family member is the problem, God's people were to respond consistently. *If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," which neither you nor your fathers have known, some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near*

you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other (vv.6-7).

Family and friends can easily influence us away from fellowship with God. Children can be very influential to their parents. Our children will do things differently than we do. That is to be expected. It is partly cultural and partly due to their desire to be different. Again, these differences for the most part are fine and expected to a point. However, we must carefully and honestly assess whether their desire to be different is in reality the forsaking of the true God to embrace worship of a false god, like the gods of this fallen culture in which we live, or the god of self-pleasure.

The right response even if family members encourage us to forsake God is to not show pity. *You shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him (v.8)*. And even more extreme, we must eradicate the temptation. *But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery (vv.9-10)*.

Okay, we can't kill people because they promote a false god. No, we do not live in the theocracy. But still, knowing the response God required for those who did live in the theocracy helps us maintain proper respect. Fear is good when we are afraid of sin. *And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you (v.11)*.

This kind of response also applies to anyone in the city (vv.12-18). There is the possibility that worthless people will encourage idolatry. *If you hear in one of your cities, which the LORD your God is giving you to dwell there, that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods, which you have not known" (v.12)*. Our first response in such cases is to investigate. *Then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently (v.14a)*. Don't assume or presume. Don't take someone's word for it. Check it out, not to be curious, but to discover the facts.

And if there is rebellion against God and His rules, eradicate the sin. *And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination*

has been done among you, you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again. None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand, that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy and have compassion on you and multiply you, as he swore to your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of the LORD your God (vv.14b-18).

Again we must remember that this was God's plan for the theocracy. Some have tried to build utopia on earth without success. Calvin tried and failed in Geneva. The Pilgrims tried and failed at Plymouth Colony.

God does not expect us to establish utopia in this world. However, within the Church, He expects us to apply the foregoing principles. The Church is the closest thing to the theocracy in life. Therefore, Church discipline is the closest we come to implementing this principle of identifying, rejecting, and eradicating false worship.

First, we investigate. Jesus taught the principle of investigating sin, *If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector (Matthew 18:15-17).*

Even if sin is discovered, our goal is not retribution (or execution) but restoration of a true brother. Paul taught, *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with*

the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Corinthians 5:1-7).

However, if the person encouraging sin and rebellion against God is not a brother, but a false teacher, a wolf in sheep's clothing, we respond differently. In those cases we *avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 3:9-11).*

Our world offers innumerable substitutes for God. The world of religion offers many different forms of worship. We must carefully distinguish what or who is the object of worship. If the object of worship is not truly the one and only God who saves us, we must avoid the false worship and, we not only avoid it, but we hate it.