

# The Lure of Our Earthly Affections

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 March 2026

Preacher: William Philip

[0:00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning. And we're in two places this morning. We're reading from Deuteronomy and then secondly from 1 Corinthians.

! So firstly, we are in Deuteronomy. And if you have one of the visitor Bibles, that's page 157, Deuteronomy chapter 13.

And we're reading the first 11 verses. Deuteronomy chapter 13 and beginning there at verse 1. 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, 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. 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.

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.

[1:42] So you shall purge the evil from your midst. 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 to 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 or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, 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, 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.

And all Israel shall hear and fear, and never again do you any such wickedness as this among ye. Well, let's turn now to 1 Corinthians, chapter 10.

And we're reading there from verse 11, page 957, if you have the visitor Bible. 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 11.

Now these things happen to them, as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed, lest he fall.

[3:30] No temptation has overtaken you, that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability. But with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. Amen. Amen. And may God bless to us his word this morning.

We'll do turn, if you would, to the passage we looked at together, in Deuteronomy chapter 13. And we will get there.

But first, let me remind you that our text, for these few Sunday mornings, comes from Paul's words, to the Corinthian church, that we read in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 14.

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. That might seem strange, to our ears, to hear that kind of thing.

[4:36] But in fact, it is a constant refrain, all the way through the Bible, from the Ten Commandments, right the way through, to the teaching of Jesus, and his apostles. I, am the Lord your God.

You shall have no other gods, before me. You shall have no idols. Now, there's the first two commands, that God gave to Israel, through Moses, at Sinai.

And Jesus himself, confirms that same message. That is the great commandment, he says. To love the Lord your God, with all your heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.

It's the same message, of utterly exclusive worship, of the one, and only true God, that he gives so famously, in John chapter 14, verse 6, where he says, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one, comes to the Father, except through me. There are no other gods, and no other ways, to God.

[5:40] But you might be saying to yourself, well, that's all very well, but we are, we are modern people, we're not primitive people, we don't, we don't buy down to idols. What relevance, does a command like that have for us?

Well, first of all, of course, it is worth remembering, that vast swathies, of the world's population, do in fact, bow down, to images, and statues, and gods of that kind.

I've seen it myself, many of you, will have seen that. I've seen it in India, and other places. A country that's full of wealth, full of modernity, all sorts of things, like that. And yet, full of idolatry.

And it's the same in many other, very advanced cultures. But in fact, even that, isn't really getting to the heart at all, of what the Bible really means, by idolatry.

What is idolatry? Well, it's the reverse, isn't it, of those first two commandments. It's the opposite, of the great command, to love the Lord your God, the only true God, the creator of the universe, with everything that we have, with all that we are.

[6:52] That's what we were created for. We were made to worship and serve God, to image God, to reflect His glory, and honor, in this created world.

God, at the center of the world, and us, as His cheap worshipers. That's, the purpose of our creation. But what happened, is that human beings, turned all of that, upside down.

We rebelled, against God. Put ourselves, at the center of the story. Listen to how, Apostle Paul puts it, in Romans chapter 1. For although they knew God, they did not, honor Him as God, or give thanks to Him.

But they became futile, in their thinking. Their foolish hearts, were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. And therefore, he says, God gave them over, gave them up, to the lusts of their hearts, to impurity, to the dishonoring, of their bodies, among themselves.

They exchanged, the truth, about God, for a lie. And worshipped, and served the creature, rather than the creator, who is blessed forever.

[8:09] You see, instead of honoring God, for all that He has given us, people have deceived themselves, in futile thinking. And started to live, for themselves.

And that's the reality, isn't it? We want to be, at the center, of the story of our lives. And instead of worshipping God, and serving God, we want things, created things, to worship us, and to serve us. You see, the things that, that you crave, that you desire, that you value, these are the things, that then become our gods. They become the things, that control us, and that rule us, and that enslave us.

And we end up, worshipping these, created things, things that, that we've created ourselves, things that we must have, and must have more of, and better of, and newer of, and finer of, all the things, that we, we think we need, to give us security, to give us, satisfaction in life, and meaning, identity, value, for our lives.

But of course, what we find, is that these things, that we worship like that, become, our lords and masters. And that's why, our lives are so often, beset with anxiety, with jealousies, with resentments, with obsessions, with pressures, to succeed.

[9:41] So often with a lack of, of security. Because, says Paul, they have exchanged, the truth of God, for a lie, and worshipped, and served the created things, rather than, the creator.

We sought liberation, we sought autonomy, by being our own rulers, being our own gods. But, the apostle says, we've deceived ourselves.

We've rejected, the truth, that we're made, not only by God, but we're made for God. And that is, St. Augustine famously said, our hearts will never be at rest, until we find our rest, in God.

God made us, to find our, our joy, our, our love, our satisfaction, our fulfillment, our meaning, in Him. So we, we have that instinct.

But we've deceived ourselves. We've lied to ourselves. We said, no, I, I want to find all that myself, by myself, for myself, my way.

[10:52] So we can seek all that, that God can give, and wants to give, and we seek that in mere, in mere creative things, in impotent things, in finite things.

And these things, can never, ever deliver, can they? Because they're not God. They're not the creator. And that, you see, is the very essence, of sin, according to the Bible.

It's not just, that it's wrong, that it's an offense to God, that we spurn, His amazing, goodness, and generosity, and love to us. It's not just wrong, the Bible says, it's mad, it's foolish, it's absurd.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools. They became fools. Only a fool, takes a, a good thing, that God has created, and turns it, into an ultimate thing.

Makes it into a God. Devoting your life to that. We have a word for that. It's called addiction. And you become a slave, to something.

[11:57] It might be a good thing, in and of itself. It might be, well, it might be tablets, that help you sleep. It might be your work. It might be your hobby. It might be fine wine. It might be all, all sorts of different things.

But, it can become something, that you are actually, enslaved to. And you need it, to function. You need it, to feel secure. You need it, to feel at peace. And when that's the case, it's no longer serving you, is it?

You are serving it. It's become your master. And that is the heart, of idolatry. That's the essence, of what the Bible calls sin.

It's building your life. It's building your identity, your security, your future, everything, on anyone, or anything, other, than God, himself, in Jesus.

It's making something, more important than God, in the reality, of your life. And that's why sin, is so terrible, for two reasons.

[12:56] First of all, it's an insult to God, because, it's a flat rejection, of God's goodness, his generosity, to us as creator. And it spits in his face, scorns, his extraordinary depth, of mercy and love, even further, because, it's also, isn't it, to reject his amazing salvation.

It's the scorn, the blood of his son, Jesus Christ, who gave himself, to save us from ourselves, and from the folly, of that idolatry. And as long as we persist, in thinking, that we can find, all that we need, without God, well, we're rejecting God, not just as creator, but as our savior.

We're seeking other saviors, aren't we, in our career, in our achievements, in our affections, whatever it might be, that drives us. That's an insult, to God.

But also, you see, it's to insult ourselves, because it's such sheer folly. It's so self-degrading, to seek so much, to seek ultimate meaning, ultimate satisfaction, in idolatry, in futile things.

They became futile, in their thinking, says Paul. Claiming to be wise, they became fools. But we deceive ourselves, we're in denial about it, just like an addict.

[14:22] They deny that addiction. We don't admit, to the damage, that we're inflicting, on ourselves, when we're like that, or the damage, we're inflicting, on others, or on society, by that subhuman behavior.

Because that's what it is, you see, it's subhuman. True humanity, you see, looks upward, to God. That's where, true humanity, finds fulfillment.

But, idolatry is subhuman, it degrades us, as human beings. who are God's image bearers, we're made to image him, and it insults him, as our maker, but it dehumanizes us, just like an addict, dehumanizes himself.

And that's why, idolatry is so serious, and that's why, the Bible constantly, tells us, we're to flee from it. And we're to recognize it, for what it is, however subtle it might be.

And, it can be very subtle, can't it? We saw that last time, in Deuteronomy chapter 13, in the first five verses, how, how rebellion, against the Lord our God, can actually be, be promoted, through what might seem, to be very successful, very spectacular, very dazzling spirituality.

[15:39] It's very subtle. But in the verses, that I want to look at today, verses six to eleven, I want us to see, another very powerful lure, away from true worship, a lure to idolatry.

And that is the lure, of our closest, earthly affections, our closest, love relationships, and so often, it is in our relationships, that we go astray, either by worshiping them, either by, by seeking meaning, and satisfaction, in them, instead of, in what can only come, from God himself, or, by letting these relationships, lead us, to seek things, other, than holy in God himself.

And that's what verse six here, is warning about. Look, there can be real danger, not from the, the bogeyman, not from the one, who comes along and says, I am your spiritual ruin, but, from your brother, from your son, or your daughter, from the wife, you embrace, from your best friend.

Now that's a shock, isn't it? Because, if you can't trust, your close family, your closest friends, then, well, what hope is there? But it's very real, isn't it?

Because, very often it is, our real loves, our real loyalties, that can be the cause, of, well, the agonizing dilemmas, and struggles, in our lives.

[17:17] Think of a, an eager young student, who's, come to faith, in Jesus Christ, but home, for the, for the holidays, growing in faith, keen to serve, wants to spend, some of their, their summer vacation, serving the Lord, by going to, help at a camp, or a mission, or something.

But their parents, are saying to them, well, that's a right waste, of time and money. Go and get a job, go and do something useful, instead. Don't waste your time, with that. Well, that's hard, isn't it? That's what your parents, are saying to you.

Or even harder, perhaps, if you, broach the subject, with your parents, that what you really, want to do in life, is train, for a lifetime of ministry. Well, they'll try and persuade you, out of it.

Well, at the very least, they'll hope it's just, an enthusiastic phase, that you're going through, that you'll grow out of. Or, if you're married, and your spouse, doesn't share, your spiritual enthusiasm, with you, that's very hard indeed, isn't it?

And it's very wearing, year in, year out, resenting your faith, seeking to erode it. Verse 6 here, speaks of, of enticing you, secretly.

[18:33] It's the relentless, pillow talk, isn't it? Think of Delilah, the story, back in Judges, of how she wore down, Samson, until at last, he gave in, and gave away, the secret of his strength.

And often, it is like that, isn't it? A gradual erosion, playing on your conscience, you're spending, just too much time, on those church things, aren't you? What about me?

What about the children? There's no need, to be quite so serious, about it. I don't mind you being, there, but don't be quite, so serious about it. Do you always have, to go to that prayer meeting? Surely God, wants to spend, quality time with me, and with the children, instead.

It's subtle, isn't it? It seems very reasonable. Don't be looking, for a fair compromise. What about that holiday cottage, that we can afford now? Why don't you want to get it?

We won't be away, too often at weekends. You won't miss a church, that much. But of course, you know where it will lead, don't you? It ends up, with verse seven, with you being dragged, into worshipping, the gods of the people, all around you.

[19:43] Whether from nearby, or from the ends of the earth. Well, my goodness, we live in a global village today, don't we? And all the gods of the world, are easily at our door.

Every idol, offering every satisfaction, every enticement, in the world, is open to us. Either through our direct experience, or through our screens.

Take sport, for example, that's one of the, the greatest universal idols, the world over. Remember the famous, football manager of Liverpool, Bill Shankly, the Scotsman, when he was asked, about football, and do you think it's, a religion for some people?

And he said, no, no, no, it's not a religion, it's far more important than that. Well, so it is. Look at all the, old firm nutters, in our city here. They'll follow their team, to the ends of the earth, or shell out vast amounts, of money to do so.

But, that's Glasgow's real religion, isn't it? Football. If the Christian church, had a fraction, of the loyalty, and of the willingness, to part with cash, for the cause of Christ, as there is to part with, cash for the cause, of the old firm, then our city would be, in permanent Christian revival.

[21:00] But there's endless sport today, isn't there? There's every variety of sport, from every continent. There's constant 2020 cricket, there's Formula One, there's the World Cup, there's Wimbledon. We're not going to mention, the Six Nations Championship today.

But it's often, a real idolatry, isn't it? I'm not against sport, I enjoy it as much as anybody, except for yesterday, watching rugby. But, here's the thing friends, I have seen, sport, ruin, Christian families. I've seen parents, put their children's, sporting progress, way above, their children's, spiritual progress. So much of sport, is on Sundays, isn't it?

And when you're devoted to sport, then, the worship of God, and the gathering with God's people, becomes, squeezed out, for the great idol, of the ball, or the bike, or the bat.

That's just one example, isn't it? One of many, many such. But you see, slowly and subtly, a Christian believer, can be lured away, very often, very often, by the enticement, of close affections, of family, of friends, or plenty of other things.

[22:21] to put, career gains first, to put, weekending away first, to put, pursuing sports, or music, or whatever it is, in the family first, or gardening, or sailing, or whatever it might be.

I had a friend, who has passed, for many years, in Vancouver, in Canada, and for him, he said it was, skiing. It was the lure, of living so close, to Whistler. And he said, over the years, he saw it, skiing, taking people away, for weekends, gradually, causing them, to drift away, from church, losing their bearings, and ultimately, drifting away, completely, from Christ.

It happens, all the time. And God knows that, and he knows, how it starts, but he also knows, where it will lead. You see, when what's described here, in verses 7 and 8, begins, it leads, to very difficult places.

And that's why, verse 9 is so stark, and awful, isn't it? Verse 8, you shall not, yield to him, or listen to him, nor shall you lie, pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him, but you, shall kill him, your hand, shall be first, against him.

to put him to death. That's awful, isn't it? But whatever it is, it's very clear. God must come first, is what that verse is telling us.

[24:05] Those verses are shocking, but they may seem even more shocking to us, when we realize, that this is exactly, where the Lord Jesus Christ, gets his language, when he talks, about exactly these same things.

Listen to Jesus. If anyone comes to me, and does not hate, his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brothers, and sisters, and yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

Luke 14, verse 26. I have come, says Jesus, to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a person's enemies, will be those of his own household.

Whoever loves father or mother, more than me, is not worthy of me. And whoever loves his son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me.

Matthew 10, verse 37. That's just as clear as Deuteronomy 13, isn't it? Nothing, not even our closest or dearest, can be allowed to lure us away from Jesus, into idolatry.

[25:21] But the lure of our closest affections can be so, so strong. That's why the apostle goes on warning us, in exactly the same way. He uses the same language, the apostle Paul, put to death, therefore, put to death, whatever is earthly in you, which is idolatry.

He says to the Colossians, Colossians 3, verse 5. Flee from idolatry, because it's deadly, says Christ and his apostles. It draws you away, look at verse 10 here, draws you away from the Lord your God, who alone is the true Savior from slavery.

And so you have to kill that idolatry, or it will be killing you. It can lose you the Savior, and so, therefore, it will lose you your salvation.

And the only solution, says Moses, says Jesus, says the apostle Paul, is brutal, total destruction of any such lure away from the Lord your God.

Stone him to death with stones, it says here. It's fearful, isn't it? But that's the language that Jesus echoes. That's the language that the whole New Testament echoes.

[26:41] Now, of course, now listen carefully, we are not to apply these sanctions physically today. We don't live in a theocracy, do we, like Israel did in the land in those days.

For them, and at that time, the law of Moses was also the law of the land because it was the place of God's kingdom on earth until the great fulfillment in the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ when the kingdom would extend to all nations.

So the kingdom of Christ in the world today cannot and should never be identified with any particular land or nation. For the Christian faith, there is no holy land, there are no holy places, there are no special parts of the earth which are holy.

The whole earth is the Lord's and is holy. And that's actually quite important to remember, especially all that's going on these days with the war in the Middle East.

There's no holy land in the Middle East. The holy land is the whole of the earth where the rule of Christ is writ. But indeed, what we need to remember is that this age, the age that we live in, the end of the ages as Paul calls it to the Corinthians, is the great day of mercy.

[28:01] Now is the day of salvation, says Paul. Now is the time when in God's very just and holy war with His enemies and rebellion and sin, now is the time when He has held forth His great offer of peace, of forgiveness, of reconciliation through the atoning work of Jesus on the cross.

So God's judgment does not fall instantly by our hand on those who lead into idolatry or those who profane His name.

In this gospel age, Paul says to the Corinthians very clearly, our weapons are not the weapons of this world. But friends, be in no doubt, be in no doubt that the time will come for a just judgment and punishment far, far more severe than mere stoning to death physically for those who lead others away from loving and serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen to Jesus again in Mark chapter 9. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he was cast into the sea.

And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It's better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands go to hell to the unquenchable fire where the worm doesn't die and the fire is not quenched.

[29:33] You see just how high the stakes are according to Jesus himself. Flee from idolatry, he says. It's deadly and it can be eternally deadly. You see, that's why our reaction even when and perhaps especially when the lure is from some of our closest earthly affections, that's why our reaction has to be stark, has to be brutal.

Look at verse 8 again. No yielding. No listening. No pity. No sparing. No hiding the truth. But a total rejection of every snare, every lure that would cause us to abandon our true God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Friends, that's why we have to be realists about this and Jesus is telling us that, especially in the realm of our closest affections. that's why, for example, Paul warns believers very clearly, doesn't he, not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers.

Because what agreement has the temple of God with idols, he says in 2 Corinthians 6? Someone that you're deeply intimate with, who doesn't share the true and deep worship of your heart, will always be a powerful lure to idolatry, to abandoning the Lord.

That's not rocket science, is it? So just let me be very clear and say to you, don't do it. Don't, don't get involved in a romantic relationship, for example, with somebody who really doesn't share your love for Christ.

[31:16] Don't try and tell yourself that it'll be different for you. Watch my lips. It will not be different for you. Now you may know others for whom it has had a happy outcome because of God's mercy, but you cannot presume upon God's mercy.

That's blasphemous to do that. Do not yield or listen or spare or pity that desire. Kill that desire now before that kills you.

That's what God's saying to you. I've seen it. Many of you have seen it. Kill people spiritually. Lead them away from God that way.

Sometimes a boyfriend or a girlfriend will do all the right things. Of course they will. They'll start coming to church. They'll say, oh, they're going to become a Christian. Friends, my experience is that that is a disaster.

Don't go there. Don't do it. It can especially be hard, I think, for women when so many men are so feeble and so slow to get into gear.

[32:34] But don't do it. Don't be lured by that natural and that good desire. And it's a natural and good desire for marriage, for family life and so on.

But don't be lured by that good desire to sacrifice your forever union, your forever union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't do that.

Kill that desire. And if you are married as many as you are, don't be lured away from Christ by making an idol of your marriage or of your family life or of your children.

I've seen people deny themselves and their children the real and vital blessings of the strengthening of Christian fellowship and Christian teaching and Christian training because they just want to indulge themselves in family time.

Or they want to indulge their children's interests at school or sport or music or whatever it is. And gradually these things begin to take more priority than meaningful involvement in the life of the church of God's family.

[33:45] And there becomes a great spiritual impoverishment and even eventual drift right away altogether. I've seen it. I've also seen many times the great idol of career and job attainment and satisfaction squeeze the life out of people who once were joyfully serving the Lord with all their heart but end up increasingly drifting away because their hearts have been gripped by another love that is greater.

They've been choked as Jesus said in the parable by the cares of this world by the deceitfulness of riches of all different kinds things that will choke the word render it ultimately unfruitful.

We have to take these words of Jesus seriously. I think there are particularly words here for young people. You're especially vulnerable as life begins to get more complicated.

When you're a student it's extraordinary speaking to students they think they're so busy. Let me tell you you'll never have so much time in your life again ever. If you're lucky you'll get a job and perhaps you'll get married well I hope you will.

Then you'll have a child maybe then another one and perhaps more and you'll find life is full of bills and mortgages and insurance and MOTs and in-laws and school runs and parents nights and a difficult boss and recessions and holiday plans and DIY and middle age spread and promotion at work and on and on and on and on and on and on and on.

[35:45] It's life in a world of all of these things and more and more of these things and less and less and less time. And you see the voices in your head and the voices from the world and the voices from your loved ones from your friends from your family perhaps from your firm and the boss who really values you the voices from all of these will be many and subtle and they'll say just a little bit less of that church commitment and just a little bit more of whatever this thing is that you're being lured to.

And the Bible shouts to you relentlessly flee from idolatry flee from idolatry It's a hard warning isn't it but it really is an essential one it comes so many times in the scriptures and the reason is because we're so good at deceiving ourselves But think it might be worth asking yourself this What would a discerning mature Christian friend say about you?

What would they say really is the thing that drives you? The things that really matter to you your real goals in life your real ambition your real purpose somebody who really knows you well what would they say that is?

What gets the lion's share of your time your energies? It's a question worth asking isn't it because the world and its idols are so seductive and so deceptive Don't forget Paul's words they became fools their thinking is futile they become slaves to worthless idols dangerous idols and what the Bible is saying to us friends is that can happen to us Yes it can that's why we're to put to death constantly whatever is worldly in us which is idolatry Remember what James was saying to us again and again as we were looking at his letter?

Love for the world means hatred of God You shall not yield or listen or your eye pity nor shall you spare nor shall you conceal but rather total rejection of every snare every lure that would take us away our one true God and Savior Savior Now that might very well be a a very pertinent and personal word for some of us here this morning Some of us might know that there is a very deep personal relationship that is doing that right now in your life pulling you away from the Lord Jesus Christ You hate to admit it but you may know it's true Well friend if that is true for you this morning do not let it Don't rationalize it

[38:55] Don't tell yourself I can handle this Trust the Lord Jesus He He does no better than you and He wants your heart to be reserved for Him alone He's jealous for you but He's jealous for you because He loves you so much and He won't share you with someone else or something else You don't want to betray Him do you?

The Lord Jesus your Savior and you know that His love surpasses every other love You know that as we sang knowing Jesus there is no greater thing There is no greater thing No greater thing in the whole wide world No greater thing in the world to come than knowing and loving Jesus our great Savior and King So we need one another We need to help one another Let's help one another friends to keep ourselves only unto Him for better for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health as long as our lives shall last flee flee idolatry turn away from everything that the world lures us with away from Him and flee into the arms of the one who loves us and who gave Himself for us flee from idolatry Let's pray Heavenly Father Heavenly Father Heavenly Father We know how weak our hearts are and how open our ears are so easily to the siren voices of this world that would lure us away from You We know Lord that often these things do come from our deep and closest affections and so we ask You Lord to guard our hearts and keep us only unto You as long as our lives shall last for Christ's sake Amen