

### 3: Flee Idolatry: The Lure of a Progressive Society

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now, Deuteronomy 13, we're in page 157, I think, in the Bible, is that right? 157? And we've been three weeks in this chapter, this is the third week, and we're going to read from verse 12 to the end.

Verse 12 to the end. And you remember it's a chapter all about the powerful lures that face us and draw us away to idolatry, to false worship.

And so verse 12 says, 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, then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently.

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.

And 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.

[ 1 : 1 6 ] 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 our fathers.

If you obey the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all his commandments that I'm commanding you today and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God. Well, keep your Bible open and let's pray together and ask God's help, shall we?

Heavenly Father, as we read your word, we ask that you help us to take it seriously. These are hard words for us to read. But your word is to us a lamp and a light to our path.

It is your word to us that you might have compassion and mercy upon us. And so we pray that you would turn our hearts to you and attune our ears to you as we listen now.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as I said, this is the third and last study on this chapter, Deuteronomy 13, a chapter all about powerful lures to idolatry, to false worship and to abandonment of the one true God, the God of Scripture.

[ 2 : 3 5 ] The God, of course, who is made known to us most fully and finally in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we've already seen that it's a very ancient chapter. It's written to God's people in Moses' day.

But our text for these three studies has been from the New Testament, from Paul's letter to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 10, 14. Here it is. Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry.

So Paul is just as concerned as Moses was about this matter of idolatry, isn't he? And Paul, in fact, directs us back to Moses' time and to Moses' words so that we will learn, as New Testament Christians, as believers today, so that we will learn not to fall into the same sins that they fell into.

Because, Paul says, as human beings today, we're just as vulnerable. We might not like to think that. But, of course, if you read 1 Corinthians 10, according to Paul, we are exactly the same.

And so we need the warnings that God graciously gives us to flee from idolatry. And, again, remember that we've been seeing, haven't we, that idolatry is actually pretty subtle often.

[ 3 : 52 ] That's the whole point, isn't it? We don't see it coming. It doesn't come with a billboard saying, follow me this way to apostasy. Of course not. It's very subtle. It's deceptive because that's the nature of sin, isn't it?

That's the form of the author of sin, the ancient serpent, the devil. He's the inventor of idolatry. And he peddles his wares, doesn't he, with the most consummate skill.

We hardly notice what's going on until we're drawn right into it. That's the point. And yet, actually, idolatry is something so enormous and fundamental that it turns the whole world upside down.

Remember how Paul put it in Romans 1 we read last week. They, that's us, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and they worshipped and served created things instead of the creator.

That's a total reversal, isn't it? Of the life, of the universe, of absolutely everything that God has made. We don't realise it. But the whole human race has actually totally reversed and inverted the natural order of God's creation without noticing it.

[ 5 : 06 ] Isn't that an astonishing thing? It's extraordinary, really. It's really just as radical as if all of us started walking upside down and nobody really noticed. But that's the truth.

Paul says they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools.

Upside down. Fools because we've deceived ourselves so often into thinking that we can live by ourselves and for ourselves. We reject God and instead of loving and worshipping God as the one who is truly the source of all the life and the joy and the satisfaction that we seek in life, well, we seek that, we seek what is ultimate, but we seek it from things that are merely passing, things that are just part of this created world.

That's utterly foolish, isn't it? But the Bible says we've deceived ourselves. We've turned created things into things that we think will be the source of our fulfilment, our salvation.

And in fact, we've enslaved ourselves. We find that these things that we worship and seek salvation from and significance from and fulfilment in, whether it's our relationships or our career or our possessions or our learning or our wealth, whatever it is, we find that these things that we seek salvation from, of course, they become our masters, they become our gods.

[ 6 : 37 ] And the truth is, friends, these are gods that won't ever, ever offer us the salvation that we seek. But what they will do and what they do do is they make us their subjects, they make us their slaves.

We become ruled by them because we make our lives dependent on them, don't we? We stake everything on them. But it's just absolute folly. To look at a mere created thing and think that somehow that is going to be my saviour, that's going to be my future, my security, instead of the God who made the heavens and the earth.

But you know, that's what human beings do all the time. All the time. Let me just give you one example of the folly of idolatry. Take the housing market. Now, over the last decade, vast numbers of people in this country and in others have been lured into seeing their home not just as a roof over their head, but really as their saviour.

They've been encouraged, of course, by the madness of central bankers. They've stoked that particular idolatry by printing money and pumping the world full of easy credit. And so people like us, we've seen our house prices rocket.

And we believe that in that we've found a great salvation. We've seen property values soar and people have jumped on the bandwagon. You've seen it, haven't you? You've heard it.

[ 8 : 03 ] Maybe you've said it yourself. It's my pension. It's my future. That's all in our newspapers just now, isn't it? But alas, the bubble is bursting.

People who have also said, ah, it's my prosperity. They've borrowed huge amounts of money against their property so that they could live way beyond their means. Well, you put your trust in an over-inflated property market.

You stake your future on your house. Oh, dear me. The chickens are coming home to roost, aren't they? And the papers tell us it's only beginning. Suddenly, our saviours, our future, our pensions, they look very fragile all of a sudden, don't they?

Prices are dropping. Everybody's panicking. What's happening? Well, all the great politicians of the world are going around having meetings together trying to prop up our gods once again. Reinflating their egos.

Comforting their worshippers and strengthening their faith again. Oh, things won't be nearly as bad as you think. Prices will be up again quite soon. The power of your house to secure your future will be back again before you know it.

[ 9 : 12 ] Just vote for me, by the way. It's rather like the story in 1 Samuel 5, isn't it? Do you remember that story when the ark goes visiting the Philistines? They put it in the temple and, oh dear, great god Dagon in the morning is found to have fallen off his perch and is all smashed in pieces in front of the ark of the covenant of the true God.

What do the people do? Well, of course, they run and they bow down and they worship the true God, don't they? No, they don't, do they? They get the band-aid and the sticking plaster and the paracetamol out and they put Dagon all back together again and they put him back on his pedestal and bow down to worship Dagon.

Claiming to be wise, they've become fools, says Paul. No, it's just one example, one among hundreds and thousands of the endemic propensity to idolatry that's within the human heart and therefore, which will permeate every single human culture and, listen, endanger every single Christian church and every single Christian believer.

And that's why Paul says, flee idolatry. And that's why Deuteronomy chapter 13 is in our Bibles. Maybe you're wondering if we're ever going to get to Deuteronomy 13.

Well, let's get back there now, shall we? Because this chapter helps us, doesn't it? Unmask the lures to false worship and idolatry. We saw it, first of all, in the first section, in the lure of spectacular and successful spirituality, didn't we, in verses 1 to 5.

[ 10 : 44 ] Impressive and dazzling new thing in the church that really is impressive and yet underneath actually leads astray from the true God and the gospel.

Remember, we saw the hallmark of every single movement like that. It's there in verse 5 if you look at it. Rejecting the true redemption of God, the God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you.

In our terms, of course, that means rejecting the work of the cross and rejecting the rule of God, the way that your Lord commanded you to walk. Every lure to idolatry in the church, every false spirituality at its heart leads you away from the true work of the cross and the true way of the cross, doesn't it?

Nothing's changed. Plenty of that around today. Then in verses 6 to 11, we saw the subtle and the powerful lure of our closest family affections, our earthly relationships, the pull of family, of spouses, of loved ones who entice us in secret.

We don't notice it. Maybe even they don't realize it, but it's relentless and under the pressure so often of relationships close to us and the demands of these, we drift away from the Lord.

[ 11 : 57 ] Verse 10 is a very vicious verse, remember? Stoning to death all such lures. It seems pretty primitive and awful, doesn't it? Until, of course, you remember the Lord Jesus' words, unless you hate your father or mother or brother or sister or children, you're not worthy of me.

Nothing, no one can dethrone God as Lord over your life. And any attempt to do so, says Moses and Jesus, any attempt must be put down with brutal force or else, yes, your very salvation is in jeopardy.

That's what Jesus is saying. Jesus, you know, is very black and white. He would not go down at all well today in the media, would he? There's no shades of grey with the Lord Jesus. He's full of those nasty things we call dogmatism.

But that's Jesus. But so, you see, these last verses 12 to 18 that we read, they show us this time the powerful lure of a progressive society, don't they?

This isn't the secret enticement of the nearest and dearest. This is the force of numbers. Look at verse 13. All the inhabitants of the city have been drawn away into a different way of thinking here.

[ 13 : 17 ] Now, you see, every society, every culture has its own corporate idols. The gods of the day, that are celebrated and promoted. I saw that not too long ago when I was in India, a country of multiple gods.

But what you find there, which I didn't realize, was that in each different area, you find that one particular god of the Hindu pantheon is the main god. So you'll find in one place lots of statues of Ram because Ram is the main god.

You'll find in other places it might be Shiva and so on and so on. Very striking. But of course, it's just exactly the same too in our Western secular culture, isn't it? I guess we're living in an age today in a time of a transition, a passing age really, from the modernist to what they seem to call the post-modern.

Now, in the modernist age, the age of science that's passing, the latter part of the 20th century particularly, well, we idolized human reason and rationality and science.

And maybe today it's changing a bit. The rising idols are those of relativism, of human autonomy, of self-determination. We idolize, don't we, our right to personal choice.

[ 14 : 27 ] Now, the politicians have recognized that. That's why their mantra all the time is more choice. All the policies about schools and hospitals and all these sorts of things, it's about more choice to the consumer, more choice to the voter.

We want freedom of choice about our bodies and our behavior in every way imaginable. So, the recent debates in Parliament about embryo research and lowering the abortion age and so on, loud voices always were raised with the mantra of pro-choice.

If you don't like it, you don't need to do it, but don't dare try to curtail my choice. It's my life. It's my body. It's the same as sexual preferences, isn't it?

It's my choice. It's my right to choose my sexual preference. It's my right to choose my behavior. It's even our right, it seems now, to choose the impossible.

It's our right, now, to choose to have children without a heterosexual relationship. We can choose impossible things because science and the medical services, by the way, paid for by the state, mind you.

[ 15 : 38 ] We don't have any choice about contributing the taxes that pay for it, but it must provide my choice. Well, you see, it's very obvious, isn't it, where gods of relativism and autonomy reign in the culture, then there's not going to be any room for a theology of uniqueness about the one true God of the Bible, is there?

Or, is there going to be any room for a single authority, a unique word from God to people on earth about how to behave? And, you know, when these gods reign in the culture, sheer force of numbers can be very hard to resist, can't it?

When the whole city thinks one way, it's very powerful. It's very pressing, even on the church, and the social argument is so very persuasive. And it gives great respectability to the whole culture, doesn't it, when the whole culture speaks against the truth of God.

Everybody thinks like this today. Nobody believes that stuff anymore. That's what we hear all around, isn't it? I remember recently on the television watching Question Time and the issue of homosexual practice came up.

And the only panelist to dare to voice that they agreed with the biblical view was booed loudly by the whole audience. See, when the whole society says, this isn't idolatry, this isn't sin, it's culture, it's progress, it's development, it's sophistication.

[ 17 : 14 ] Well, it's very hard to stand against that, isn't it? But that's our world, isn't it? And it absolutely automatically begins to influence and creep into the church.

I can just hear the Israelite theologians of the post-Moses day. Well, of course, we've been in the land for a while now, and naturally, we've grown.

We've moved on. We're very grateful for our early evangelical experiences under that man, Moses, of course. He was a great evangelist for his time. Oh, yes, I think back to those great mosaic rallies and the Kelvin Hall at Kaddish Barnea.

And yes, they were very memorable. And yes, I remember myself going forward for counselling. But of course, I've done a few degrees now and I've read a few things. I've moved on.

I've matured in my faith journey. I've gained some wonderful insights too from the richness of the temple sex culture in Canaan and the contemporary insights from these other faith traditions of the land that we've been exposed to.

[ 18 : 18 ] They've enriched my understanding of God. No end. And so we've moved on, you see. We've left the narrowness of the past behind. There were things that, well, quite embarrassed to say, really.

We used to call them idolatry. Of course, we've seen the valuable insights that they offer. We've seen how the visual and the sensory and all of these things are so important in our contemporary worship in a Pomo world, a post-Moses world.

That's what people want, you know, sensory and visual. A familiar ring, isn't it? You've often heard that sort of thing from, alas, once evangelical churchmen and theologians who have been lured by the power of a progressive society, by sheer force of numbers, by pressure to conform in the ecclesiastical ladder or in the academy or in the media.

But just notice verse 13. It's interesting, isn't it, by the way, how the world monopolizes all the nice words, liberal, progressive, tolerant, inclusive.

As if, if you didn't have that view, you were backward and bigoted and racist and sexist and that kind of thing. You always see it, don't you, on the religious television programs or the radio programs.

[ 19 : 40 ] Somebody who stands for the Bible's position is always called the hardliner. They're never called the person of firm convictions. Never called the person who's honorably consistent.

They're the hardliner. But look at verse 13. It's very clear, isn't it, about the reality of those who lure the culture away from God's truth.

God doesn't call them liberals or progressives. He calls them worthless fellows. You've got the NIV. It says he, wicked men. And we mustn't be cowed by the sheer pressure of the so-called secular progressive society so that we're taken in ourselves by what God calls by the name of wickedness.

or to welcome these things as helpful additions to the rich tapestry of the worship of the church. No, says God.

Call these things what they are. Look at verse 14. An abomination has been done. Things that must be utterly rejected by God's people in the church. And that language in verse 15 there about devoting to destruction, it's very, very strong.

[ 20 : 51 ] It's the same language that God used of the utterly wicked Amorite nations that the Israelites were to cast out and destroy when they were taking into the land. And it's a warning, isn't it, for God's people?

It's very stark. Don't presume that just because you call yourself the church, somehow you're going to be immune to God's judgment on wickedness. What matters is real, ongoing heart faithfulness and worship of the true God, the one true God, and worship his way.

So you see, when today theologians or pressure groups within the church, by sheer force of numbers, by the power of a progressive society and a pluralistic society, when they say things like, oh, we must play down the uniqueness of Christ alone as Savior, we must change our stance on things that the culture today has moved on from, like the Bible's sexual ethics and so on.

Moses says to us and Paul says to us, flee idolatry. Beware, call it what it is, it's not progress. It's wickedness.

There are some things that God's people just simply can't have to do with. And our message can't be to affirm the lifestyles of idolatry and wickedness in the world.

[ 22 : 14 ] You know, our gospel must be quite the opposite. Save yourselves from this corrupt generation. That was Peter's words, wasn't it? On the day of Pentecost. Look at verse 17. None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand.

See, God's mercy and his compassion comes to us as we turn away from his fierce anger. Turn away from the fierceness of his anger so that he may show you mercy and compassion on you.

There's no cheap grace with God, is there? You can't have the mercy of God and have the things of idolatry sticking to your hands. That's what he's saying. So verse 18 says, you have to obey the voice of God.

You must get rid of all of that. That's what fleeing idolatry truly really means. Let me conclude. At the heart of the faith that the Bible teaches is the great command, isn't it?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength. And God says, I am the Lord. There is no other. Beside me there is no God.

[ 23 : 24 ] To me every knee shall bow and every tongue shall swear allegiance. That's what he said through Isaiah. And the New Testament tells us plainly, doesn't it?

God has exalted the Lord Jesus Christ so that at his name only every knee shall bow. So friends, don't be lured away from him into idolatry by anything or by anyone.

Not by the spectacular or successful spiritualities that constantly spring up in and around the church. Not even by the closest and deepest affections of your heart to those you love.

Not by the presser of a progressive but worthless culture. No. Colossians 3 verse 5 says this, Put to death what is earthly in you which is idolatry.

And know this, because of these things the wrath of God is coming. That's the message of the gospel to the New Testament church again and again. Flee from idolatry.

[ 24 : 34 ] Don't make anything ultimate in the place of God. Love the Lord your God alone with your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength. Remember, Paul says to a church just like us, these things happen to them as an example but they were written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come.

Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry. Let's respond as we sing the words of the hymn on the sheet. O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end.

Be now and ever near me, my master and my friend. and our friend is just like me to Aberone for the truth and man to the rest of the these genres and to use to be all and ever to the end for the angels to murder and ever for the others and services to be visited