

The Lure of Dazzling Spirituality

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Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] And we're now going to turn to our Bible reading. Willie Philip, our senior minister, is going to be starting a new mini-series in Deuteronomy 13. If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and 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.

So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And then one continues. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them, God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

[2 : 23] Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were, as it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did. And 23,000 fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents, nor grumble as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

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

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to men. 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. Well, amen. May God bless to us this word. May God bless you. We do turn in your Bibles with me to Deuteronomy chapter 13.

[3 : 48] And we will get to that in due course, but a little bit of introduction first of all this morning, because we're turning from quite a lengthy study together in the letter of James for a brief foray back here into the book of Deuteronomy.

Although, as I hope we all see, really the theme is much the same. It's that of God's gracious warnings to his people in order to keep his people, and to keep their precious relationship with him pure and healthy.

The message, I suppose, is summed up by two New Testament texts very succinctly. The last verse of John's first letter, 1 John 5, verse 21, which sums up his great concern for the Church of Christ when he says, little children, keep yourselves from idols.

And perhaps more urgently, in the words of Paul that we read there just a few moments ago in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 14, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

So just like James, both Paul and John, and all the Bible writers, from Moses and the prophets to Jesus and his apostles, they all emphasize the same great command, which is to love the Lord with

all your heart and soul and mind and strength.

[5 : 19] We are in him who is true, says John, in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. And so we must keep ourselves from idolatry, or to use James' terminology to remember, to keep ourselves from spiritual adultery.

Now, why is there such a huge emphasis on that all through the Bible? Well, because at the very heart of the Christian faith is the unequivocal truth, that we must worship only, only the one true God.

And that means that for the Bible, every other God is a false God. It's a non-God. Or indeed, as the Bible says, it's demonic.

Now, to say that in our world today, of course, is immediately to fall foul of the kind of progressive liberalism that we're so used to in our culture that wants to outlaw all kind of talk of exclusiveness like that.

Because inclusiveness and pluralism is very much the order of the day. That's the mantra, isn't it, that's constantly pumped into our minds by our own cultural elites?

[6 : 39] Despite the manifestly obvious contradictions that all religions can really be equal and the same. I mean, it is absurd in the extreme, isn't it, when we see on our streets so regularly, most Saturdays here in the city center, we see people marching with LGBT plus pride flags alongside Hamas flags, as though gays for Gaza would last any longer than the blink of an eye if they actually lived under an Islamist regime.

It's a similar thing, isn't it, when we see the vegan greens vociferously voting together for Sharia law and for halal slaughter in the recent bi-election down south. And yet, we're told that all of these things can happily coexist and be the same.

Well, foolish Western liberals may like to think that all religion is much the same, but if we take the Bible remotely seriously, then there's simply no avoiding the fact, is there, that the Christian God says, not so.

There is only one, and there will only ever be, one true God in whom is eternal life through Christ the Son. And therefore, that is why all through Scripture we find the same repeated warnings about the exclusivity that is absolutely central to any true worship of God.

And the essence of sin for the whole Bible is not so much broken rules, but it's broken relationship. That right relationship between God, our Creator, and ourselves as His creatures.

[8 : 32] And that relationship throughout the Bible is likened to marriage. In fact, actually, it's the other way around, really, because marriage, human marriage, is given to us as a reflection, as an illustration of that far more important fundamental relationship, that relationship between God and His people, between Christ and His church.

And sin, you see, at its heart, for the Bible, is adultery. It's breaking faith. It's cheating and abusing. It's spoiling in the most harmful and destructive of ways, that most precious and beautiful of all relationships. Sin, at its heart, is a vicious, a callous crime against God's faithful and beautiful love. And it is that before it ever becomes a crime against God's law. Behind all law-breaking is actually love-breaking. And that's what idolatry is.

It is spiritual adultery. It's giving the love that we ought to be giving exclusively and completely to God, our Creator, our Maker, the Sustainer of our lives, our Savior, the Lover of our souls.

[9 : 44] It's giving that love instead to an interloper, to someone or to something that we've been seduced into seeing as more beautiful, as more satisfying, as more exciting and more fulfilling than the one who made us for himself.

To love and to cherish exclusively and forever. And Paul puts it that way at the beginning of his letter to the Romans in chapter 1 where he describes the very essence of mankind's original sin. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, he says, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator. That is that we seek our salvation, we seek our meaning, we seek our identity, our sense of self-worth, our sense of happiness and fulfillment in life.

We seek that in something or someone other than God. And that thing, that person, that cause, that ambition in life, whatever it is, that becomes what you worship.

It takes the place of God in your life whether you realize it or not. It's your idol. And the Bible says that is a tragic self-deception.

[11 : 10] Paul says there in Romans 1, their thinking became futile, their foolish hearts darkened. And that leads, you see, to a tragic self-destruction, to worshipping and serving mere created things

instead of our Creator.

creator. But of course, created things can never save us. Mere things can never satisfy us, can never fulfill us, can never give us the real security, the significance, the meaning that we need. And that's why the anxiety and the drivenness and the dissatisfaction of our world is so plain to see. And it's evidence of that.

These things can never save us, but they can, of course, enslave us because we serve these things and we come to be controlled by these things. They rule our lives with our demands, with our expectations, with our possessing power.

And so, idolatry is not an ancient thing or a far away thing. Idolatry is alive and well in 21st century Britain. Always has been. And we're awash, aren't we, in our society with personal idols, with corporate idols.

[12:34] For many, it's a political idol and I suppose in days of political flux and change that can be a very real danger, can't it? Where people put so much trust, so much hope, so much expectation in some new political party or some new policy, they can come to dominate their life.

For many today, it's the world of beauty and fashion and the need for all these things that the so-called influencers, that new group of people who seem to be so important, the influencers, are putting down our throats all of the time.

Things that we then will consume in order to give us the sense of belonging or status or attraction that we think we need.

And these things consume our money, vast tithes and offerings given gladly and given lavishly often in return for the right look or the right body image or the right whatever it is.

for some, it can be the idol of family, it can be the achievements of our children that will give us the significance, the sense of achievement that we long for and perhaps haven't had in our own lives.

[13:51] Or it might be the right marriage partner, the right prospects, whatever it could be. For some, I suppose, today for many of us, it's just the idol of autonomy, that I'm free, I'm in charge of my own life to live it my way and I'll guard that freedom jealously.

For some, and here's a real danger for Christians, it can even be the idol of our ministry or our Christian service or our church. See, often, it's not a devotion to bad things.

As my friend Tim Kelly used to say, it's making good things into ultimate things that is so often how idolatry manifests itself. It's building your life and your meaning and your identity and your sense of worth on anything, even a good thing, more than God himself.

Tim said, whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry. Sin is primarily idolatry.

And here's the point, you see, as believers, we still sin, don't we? And we're still tempted, we're still drawn to these things. And we're prone to idolatry, we're prone to violating the preciousness of God's love to us in Christ.

[15:19] To damaging, to even destroying that marriage, if you like, that we have with our Savior. And all marriages need protection against adultery, against destructive anti-love.

Well, how much more should our exclusive love relationship with the Lord be protected? Because the problem is, as John Calvin, the great reformer, so famously put it, our hearts are perpetual factories of idols.

Perpetual factories of idols. And that's why the Bible tells us, you see, again and again and again, that we need to flee from idolatry.

So way back when Israel of old was on the brink of the promised land, Moses warned the people, be very careful, he said, there must be no idolatry, because the Lord your God is a consuming fire and a jealous God.

So flee from idolatry. And you remember at Mount Sinai, the very first commandment in the awe and the trembling of that great appearance of God before the people to give him the Ten Commandments was this.

[16:31] What was the first commandment? I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. And what's the second commandment?

You shall therefore have no idols of any kind. Because, as Deuteronomy 5 verse 9 says, I, the Lord your God, I'm a jealous God.

Visiting the iniquity of the forefathers on their children to the fourth generation, as well as the covenant love to thousands of generations of those who love and obey me.

Strong words, aren't they, from the Lord? I guess some of us might be thinking, well, thank goodness, we're New Testament Christians. We're not under the terror of Sinai. We're not listening to a voice from the mountain like that.

But, hold on a minute if that's what you think, because what does the New Testament say to us? Have a read of Hebrews chapter 12. If they did not escape, he says, when they refused him who warned them from the earth, how much less, how much less will we escape if we reject him who warns us from heaven?

[17:44] For, what does the apostle say? Hebrews 12 and 29, our God, and this is the God who in these last days he has made most fully and completely known to us in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as he's just said.

Our God, made known in Jesus Christ, is a consuming fire. He burns with jealousy to protect his marriage to his people.

And God hasn't changed in his desire for his people's total love. And people haven't changed either. Certainly true, of course, that as New Testament Christians living in these last days, we do indeed have far greater privileges than any of the Old Testament saints.

But what comes along with greater privileges? Far greater responsibility. But we still face these same temptations, you see.

the same dangers of drifting away from the one true God, drifting away into false worship. And that's why Paul, in the passage we read in 1 Corinthians, why he has to warn this vibrant church, this gifted evangelical church, one of the jewels of his crown, the church in Corinth, he has to warn them, flee from idolatry.

[19:04] Don't be presumptuous, he says to them. Don't think that all your knowledge and all your gifts, all these things somehow make you immune. Be careful, he says, if you think you're standing firm, in case you fall.

Flee from idolatry, flee from that great transgression. And so Paul says to them, one of the ways that you flee from idolatry, keep yourself safe, is to be humble and to learn from the past.

Learn what your forefathers had to learn. Very, very important, isn't it, to remember from the past.

People who say history is bunk are wrong.

And certainly in the church, it's when history's been forgotten that heresy has gained a foothold very easily. So what Paul says to the Corinthians there in that passage we read is look back to the Old Testament, look to the history of God's people because these things, he says, were written down for our instruction in these last days to help us not to fall in the same way as they did.

So look back, he is saying, for example, the chapters like Deuteronomy 12 and 13 where Moses picks up and Moses fleshes out and applies that second commandment not to have any idols very carefully to God's people.

[20:26] That's worth you reading over these two chapters 12 and 13 carefully. We're going to be in them for the next couple of weeks. But look at Deuteronomy chapter 12. If you read it during the offering, you'll see it's all about exclusiveness.

It's all about the exclusivity of true and faithful worship. And it's crammed, isn't it, with great big negatives. Just look at verse 2 there of chapter 12.

You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess serve their gods on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their asherim with fire.

You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way.

You shall not. God does not want to be worshipped in the way that the pagan world worships. But look at verse 5.

[21:30] God says there's only one place and one way to worship me. You shall seek the place the Lord your God will choose out of all the tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.

And there you shall go and worship. Look down to the very end of chapter 12, that last section that in our Bibles has a heading there, warning against idolatry, from verse 29 to the end.

You see, he says so clearly that when you enter the land, verse 30, you are not to inquire about their pagan gods and say, oh, how do they serve their gods? That's not enlightened thinking.

That's not gaining some fresh insight through other religious traditions or through anthropological research. No, what does God say it is in verse 31?

It's an abomination. It's an abominable thing. That's what they were doing. You're not to go there where that kind of religious curiosity can be absolutely lethal. Now, what are you to do?

[22 : 32] You are to flee from idolatry, flee that kind of pluralistic interfaith jumble of confusion. It is all an abomination to the true God of earth and heaven.

Now, what I command you to do, verse 32, is what you are to do. Everything I command you, you should be careful to do. Don't add from it. Don't subtract from it.

Well, that's pretty clear, isn't it? It's well worth reading that whole chapter very carefully, chapter 12. But you see, as ever, the Bible is full of realism because the Lord recognizes that even if we know the truth and if we want to serve God, we are in a battle because it's hard, isn't it?

If you don't find that, by the way, if you don't struggle to be true to God, then that actually makes me quite worried about you. If you don't find it a struggle, I'd be really quite worried that perhaps you're not really a Christian at all yet because that is the mark of the true believer, isn't it?

That God has put enmity into our hearts, struggle. It's the very first definition of real faith in Genesis chapter 3. God says, I will put enmity between you and the serpent into your heart.

[23 : 45] a believer is someone in whom God has put a struggle against the world, the flesh, and the devil. So that you're in a struggle with sin, you're not happily going along with sin.

So if you're struggling, that encourages me. Real worship, you see, real service of God, living for God, which is what worship means, living for God in every part of life, it's hard because there are many lures to false worship, many lures to idolatry, many lures away to false loves, to spiritual idolatry.

Of course, we don't set out to desert God, do we? Any more than you would ever set out to commit adultery or destroy your marriage. But we're so easily led astray.

And we have an enemy who's prowling around seeking whom he may devour us, Peter. And our enemy, here's the thing, friends, our enemy knows our weaknesses.

He knows how to tempt us, he knows how to trap us. The devil has got multiple PhDs in human psychology. He knows your mind. He is the sharpest and shrewdest reader of your psychological flaws and mine.

[25 : 02] He knows how to trip you up, knows how to trip me up. He targets his temptation. They're like laser-guided missiles. He doesn't waste ammunition. He knows how to trip you up best and he knows how to trip me up best.

And that's why the Bible is always warning us. We have to be streetwise. We have to be alert. We have to be ready to flee and to fight. So that is why Moses doesn't stop at the end of chapter 12 here.

But that's why he goes on to chapter 13, which is a chapter that alerts us to some of the most powerful lures to false worship, to idolatry, to spiritual adultery.

The things that we face in life that can beguile us, that can lead us away from worshiping the one true God, the Lord whom we love, the Lord whom we serve, and to cause us to chase after other loves.

And the real question at the very heart of all of this, you see, is, is the Lord really, really the only God in your heart, the only one that you love, the one who truly does have your heart and your soul and your mind and your strength?

[26 : 19] And, you see, what Moses is telling us here is that the Lord allows us to face lures, a way to false gods, to idolatry, in order to test us, to find us out.

Look at verse three. The Lord is testing you. He's testing us to see whether we really do love him with all our heart and our soul. So, is the Lord your God really the only God to you?

Is he your only great love? That's what this passage is asking each one of us this morning. Or, in the start language, I suppose, of this chapter, which is very stark, do we really love God enough to execute the opposition?

Because that's the way it's put here. Because God himself takes it that seriously. Now, we can be a bit squeamish about that kind of language that we see in this chapter, can't we?

Verse five, that prophet should be put to death. We find that very difficult. But if we feel like that, here's what C.S. Lewis, the great writer, says, it's not because of our greater Christian sympathy, but because of our appalling moral apathy.

[27 : 32] Or as Christopher Wright puts it in his commentary on Deuteronomy, it's not because we have greater appreciation of human life, but because we've lost all sense of the awful majesty of God.

God. Well, friends, we face many temptations that will lure us away from a life of true faithfulness to a life of true love to God.

And this chapter, I think, is very helpful in just teasing out some of these for us. So in the timeline this morning, I just want to look at these first five verses of Deuteronomy 13. We'll come back in the next couple of weeks to the rest of the chapter.

But what we have here is the lure of what appears to be very spectacular and successful dazzling spirituality. Something very spiritual can be a powerful idol.

And that may be rather shocking to us. But you see, verses one and two here describe a prophet who arises among you and does signs and wonders, real signs and wonders, things that actually come to pass, not fakes.

[28 : 42] And there's an amazing power, isn't there, in the glitz and the success of real signs and wonders. Whether that's in ancient Israel or whether it's in Corinth or whether it's today.

And sometimes these things actually do come to pass. They're not just fakes. Of course, there are plenty of fakes, plenty of charlatans out there exploiting the naivety of Christians.

You see it in the tele-evangelists across the Atlantic. You see it in many parts of the world, rampant across so-called Christianity in Africa, where people will send their money in in order to get prayers for healings or for miracles or whatever it might be.

There are fakes everywhere in the Christian world, but sometimes movements appear that really do seem to have something special. Maybe there are real miracles. And there may be a very great success.

There may be a very great success in a particular doctrinal or spiritual emphasis. And there may be great church growth because of it.

[29 : 47] Huge churches, perhaps. And real prosperity really does seem to be genuine. Sometimes it will result in global acclaim.

And in our world of the internet and so on, that's ever more possible, isn't it? Christian leaders getting guru status all around the world because of things they do that really are dazzling.

And so convincing it is that people will begin then to listen to everything that they say, to anything that they say, even if it begins to take you away from the biblical truth and the orthodoxy that you've always known.

That might be very subtle. It might be very surreptitious at first, but underneath it, is it really saying what is there in verse 2?

Let's go and serve other gods. Now we know that that happens, don't we? And it's very easy to see how that happens because there's a great appeal, isn't there, for fresh experiences when perhaps you might be feeling very spiritually dry and nothing's happening in your life.

[30 : 57] There's a great appeal to success when you're feeling a failure, when nothing seems to be happening or growing in your own life or ministry. But look at verse 3.

God is testing you. Testing your real love and commitment to him. Testing the love of your heart.

And you are also to test these things, he says, according to all that God has taught you in his word. Look at verse 3. It's very clear, isn't it? The true test is never in the power, even if it's real power. It's in the doctrine. It's in the truth.

It's in the words that have been spoken. And if these words, these teachings, go astray from the truth, no matter what power there is or what success there is, even if it's real, verse 3, you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer.

They're a real prophet and a real dreamer, but you're not to listen to them. You're to test all such movements, not by their claims to bring new blessing from God, not by their success, not by their growth, but by the words of God himself in Scripture.

[32 : 15] So it's not miracles, it's not signs and wonders, even genuine ones. It's not theological success or a claim that God honors or God cares about. It's verse 4.

It's walking after him and fearing him and keeping his commands and obeying his voice, holding fast to him. That's the word cleaving to him that's used in Genesis chapter 2 of the man cleaving to his wife in an indissoluble bond of faithfulness.

That's very clear, isn't it? However spectacular, however successful, however dazzling it may be, if it leads you away from that, then according to God it's not a fresh insight of the Spirit.

It's not a great new theological advance. It's not fresh expressions you've learned from other religious traditions. What is it? Look at verse 5. They've taught rebellion against the Lord, your God. Adultery against the Lord. And it is an evil to be purged from the midst. That's pretty strong language, isn't it? Because we often will tend to say, well, what's the harm?

[33 : 28] Let's not be negative. We don't want to quench the Spirit just in case. But the Lord is not afraid to say it's idolatry, it's rebellion.

Flee from it. Now, what do you think of that? We can't just write this off, can we, as being for primitive times in ancient Israel because all through the Bible these same warnings recur. Moses tells the people there will always be false prophets, false teachers, people who will lure them away from God with their very attractive and very successful alternative ways. And that's the way it was all through their history.

Read the prophet Jeremiah 23. God says, don't listen to all these contemporary prophets. They constantly say to those who despise the word of God, it will be well with you. To everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, oh, no disaster will come upon you.

That's very contemporary, isn't it? We see it all around the world today in so-called Christian professing churches. You don't need to take the Bible so seriously. God won't judge you for being who you are.

[34 : 41] He's a God of love. It's all around us in the church today as well. Do you remember when we studied Ecclesiastes? Ecclesiastes chapter 13, the prophets who were declaring, peace, peace.

God doesn't mind your lifestyles. God doesn't mind all your religious experiments. What does God actually say? No, there's no peace. I'm very angry about this. And by Jesus himself tells us in Matthew chapter 24 that right to the end there will be such deceivers, deceiving even though it were possible the elect, says Jesus.

And so many of the New Testament letters warn about exactly these kind of things. Movements arising within the church offering some kind of advanced spirituality, spiritual experiences and so on, but actually undermining and destroying the true gospel of grace alone.

But it's very beguiling. It's very alluring. Especially, of course, when it's attended by all kinds of exciting happenings, all the trappings of success in a great new movement. But God is saying to his people, be realistic about the subtlety of sin, the deception in spiritual life.

But it's so attractive, isn't it? A message that says peace, not a fight daily with sin, not a struggle for obedience, but a special blessing that you can get with hands laid on you or a special prayer made for you or a discovery of a deeper theology.

[36 : 08] It will bring immediate fulfillment and advancement. It's very attractive. A message that says, oh, Christian service, Christian ministry, Christian church work will be spectacular, not hard if it's really blessed.

Growth will be vast, not slow and patient. That's very attractive to a Christian pastor, I'll tell you that. Especially if a church nearby is mushrooming in numbers, there's a great buzz.

It's got the praise of everybody. There's no odium for being too obsessed with the Bible and fundamentalist and so on. It's very, very hard for the many lures of the idols of spiritual success.

It's very hard for these things not to tempt your way to depart from the truth or to just play down the more offensive parts of the truth to our societies today.

But you see, God is saying here, you've got to trust me, there's only one judgment that counts.

Verse 4, it's God's view. It's his commands. It's his voice. Contrast that kind of spectacular, dazzling spirituality with boring old John the Baptist.

[37 : 27] There's a wonderful verse in John's gospel, John 10, verse 41, about people recalling the ministry of John the Baptist. And it says this, John, this is what they said of John the Baptist, John did no miracle.

But everything that he said about this man, Jesus, was true. Not powers, not success, not glitz, but truth about Jesus.

That's what God loves. That's what God loves. I suppose that's a good test for us, isn't it? What would you like your epitaph to be? I don't suppose many of us, probably not any of us, will have an obituary in the national newspapers.

But if you were to have one, if you could write it, we could write it for you, what would you want it to be? Would you want it to tell of your brilliant success in your professional sphere, in your work, the influence that you have, terrific business that you built up, the money you made, maybe the great public service that you offered, or your achievement in music, or in the arts, or in science, or whatever it might be, or even as a Christian epitaph, that we built this, that we achieved that, that we pioneered this next thing, started a powerful movement, whatever it was.

What would we want our spiritual reputation and epitaph as a church to be, that we did mighty and marvelous things, that we grew our numbers, that we multiplied services and locations, that we rebuilt buildings, that we trained people for all over the world, or whatever it is.

[39 : 09] Or would we be content, would we be thrilled, in fact, if it just said of us what it said of John the Baptist? He did no miracle, no sign or wonder, nothing to dazzle, to impress, to burnish his name.

But everything he said about Jesus was true. And for God to say of us, as verse four here is true of us, he walked after me, she feared me and kept my commandments and obeyed my voice.

He served me and held fast to me all the days of his life. He fled all idolatry and kept himself only unto me for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and cherish and obey until death ended his earthly pilgrimage.

See, many times, friends, we will find in our lives times when God is testing us to know whether we truly do love the Lord with all our heart and with all our mind and all our strength.

Maybe for some of us he's doing that right now. We're going through that very time of testing. But just as we close, notice verse five here.

[40 : 33] I want you to notice what always lies at the heart of every kind of path to spiritual idolatry. In the New Testament, particularly, it's always, always together as a drift from two things, a drift away from the gospel of the work of the cross.

And a drift away from the challenge of the life of the cross. And the New Testament is so clear. Those two things always go hand in hand. People will reject the message of the cross because they do not want the demands of the cross, which is obedience to God's way and to God's rule. And that's why Paul says to Timothy, watch your life and your doctrine, because drift in one is always accompanied by drift in the other. And it's exactly that way here, too.

Look at verse five. See, it's rebellion against the historic gospel, the redemption of God out of slavery, isn't it? 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.

Rebellion against the redemption of God and against the rule of God, keeping the way of the Lord, the way he commands you to walk. End of verse five.

[41 : 49] To make you leave the way in which the Lord, your God, commanded you to walk. That's always the pattern. That is very much the issue that you see today in the mainline denominations in the Western world.

The doctrine of the cross and the way of the cross undermined and jettisoned. It's always the pattern. So don't be lured away from loving the one true God by dazzling, spectacular, even spiritual movements.

These things visit the church constantly. They have throughout the ages. Don't be dazzled. And don't be dazzled by seductive words. Don't be dazzled or beguiled by signs and wonders, says the Lord.

But discern. Listen out. For any disinterest, any departure from the centrality of Christ's redemption, the true doctrine of the cross.

And from the certainty and the centrality of Christ's rule, the true life of the cross. And it can be very subtle. It can come, as we learned from James, from deep within the desires of our own hearts.

[43 : 11] But it can also come from many who want to win your hearts and lure you out of the way of truth. We need to know the voice of our one true God, don't we?

We need to fear him. Keep his commands. Obey his voice. And anything or anyone who would lead you any other way, however alluring it is, that influence has to be executed out of our minds.

Put to death. It's the language of Moses. It's the language of the Apostle Paul. Flee from idolatry.

Paul says, These things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come.

Therefore, let anyone who thinks he stands firm take heed lest he fall. There's no temptation that's overtaken you that's not common to man. God is faithful.

He will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with that temptation will also provide the way of escape, so you may be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

[44 : 22] Flee from idolatry. Well, let's pray. Lord, as we are about to sing, we ask that you indeed would be our true vision.

You alone, the true Lord of our hearts, that nothing would ever be all else to us, save who you are. Our best thoughts, the day and the night, waking or sleeping, may it be your presence, and your presence alone, that is the light of our lives.

We ask it for the glory of our great Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.