

The Lure of Our Earthly Affections

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[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.

! And we're reading the first 11 verses.

So 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. 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. Now, that might seem strange to our ears to hear that kind of thing, 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.

[4 : 46] 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.

But you might be saying to yourself, well, that's all very well, but 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?

[5 : 51] Well, first of all, of course, it is worth remembering that vast swathes 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. 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.

[7 : 04] 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 the 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.

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.

[8 : 22] And that's the reality, isn't it? We want to be at the center of the story of our lives and instead of worshiping God and serving God, we want things, created things, to worship us and to serve us.

You see, the things 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 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 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. obsessions, with pressures to succeed, so often with a lack 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.

[9 : 55] 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 as St. Augustine famously said, our hearts will never be at rest until we find our rest in God.

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

We've lied to ourselves. We said, no, I want to find all that myself, by myself, for myself, my way. So we can seek all that God can give and wants to give, and we seek that 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.

[11 : 15] 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. Only a fool takes 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. 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 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.

[12 : 26] 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. life. And that's why sin is so terrible, for two reasons.

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 saviour.

We're seeking other saviours, 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.

[13 : 49] 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.

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.

[15 : 12] 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 rebellion against the Lord our God can actually be promoted through what might seem to be very successful, very spectacular, very dazzling spirituality.

It's very subtle. But in the verses I want to look at today, verses 6 to 11, 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. relationships. And so often it is in our relationships that we go astray, either by worshiping them, either 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 6 here is warning about. Look, there can be real danger, not from 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?

[17 : 05] 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.

Think of an eager young student who's come to faith in Jesus Christ, but is home for the holidays, growing in faith, keen to serve, wants to spend some of 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 try and persuade you out of it.

At the very least, they 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?

[18:17] And it's very wearing, year in, year out, resenting your faith, seeking to erode it. Verse 6 here speaks of enticing you secretly.

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?

[19:27] 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, 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 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.

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. And 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.

[22:10] Very often, very often, by the enticement of close affections, of family, of friends. Or plenty of other things.

To put career gains first. To put weekendening 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.

[23 : 10] 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. 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.

[24 : 30] 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.

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.

[25 : 43] 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. It 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.

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.

[26 : 54] 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 with 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.

[31 : 01] That's not rocket science, is it? So just let me be very clear and say to you, don't do it. Don't get involved in a romantic relationship, for example, with somebody who really doesn't share your love for Christ.

Don't try and tell yourself that it will 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.

[32 : 05] 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.

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.

[33 : 12] 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, 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.

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.

And 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.

[34 : 51] 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. 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.

[35 : 54] 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. 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. 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 are so good at deceiving ourselves. But think. It might be worth asking yourself this. What would a discerning mature Christian friend.

[36 : 53] 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.

[37 : 51] 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. 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.

[38 : 51] If that is true for you this morning. Do not let it. Don't. Rationalize it. 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.

[39 : 49] We need to help one another. Let's help one another friends. To keep. Ourselves. Only unto him. For better.

