

## God's Word Commands Exclusive Devotion

Joshua Kruger Jr.

7/23/2023

**Outline:** Deuteronomy 12:29-13:18

1. Spiritual Authorities
2. Close Personal Relationships
3. Corporate Implications

In 1758 the American colonies and the English Parliament were at each other's throats, and Benjamin Franklin included a proverb or poem in an Almanac that he entitled "A little neglect may breed great mischief". The poem does predate Benjamin Franklin, but here is his version. It read as follows:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost.  
For want of a shoe, the horse was lost.  
For want of a horse, the rider was lost.  
For want of a rider, the battle was lost.  
For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost.  
And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Indeed it does seem that for the kingdom all was lost due to the lack of a single horseshoe nail. Sounds like a bit of a fairytale right? Perhaps you prefer a more modern illustration.

On 31 January 2009 google engineers accidentally added a single forward slash to the list of harmful websites that google was aware of. Since every single webpage includes a forward slash, the entire internet was deemed dangerous and harmful to your computer. For nearly an hour the entire internet was blacklisted to all users across the globe. In millions and even billions of pages of code, a single, out of place forward slash broke the internet.

Whether the lack of a nail or the inclusion of a simple forward slash, in these illustrations they both quickly escalated to catastrophic consequences that may or may not have been predictable.

God's Word however tells us that unchecked temptations to sin have much more predictable consequences than what **could** happen if we were missing a single, hypothetical horseshoe nail. Throughout the Bible we are told that "Temptation unchecked" will ultimately bring forth death...every time. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is death!

And the reason I say "Temptation unchecked" is because sin usually does not go around yelling, "Here I am...I am sin!". It can so often come at us deceptively and seemingly innocent at first glance. But the deceptiveness of sin is no excuse, because we know that our hearts are prone to wander. Wander towards things that are shiny and attractive...things that bring us joy, fulfillment, or "Purpose". This could include things that we need, think we need, or just want because maybe someone said you can't have it.

Our hearts can also be prone to wander away from things we dislike, don't find useful, or that we find difficult. Sometimes we find something else that has captured our hearts more, and so we wander away from it.

Last week Matthew spoke to us from Deuteronomy 12 about our hearts' inclination to wander. The main point was that God calls us to only worship him in the way He requires and makes possible. When we do not, we have reduced our "Worship" to syncretism which is the combining or mixing of different religions or practices. We do this by adding or taking away from what God has commanded us in His Word.

So as a bridge from last week to this week let's consider our first few verses right at the end of Deuteronomy 12.

Moses reminds Israel that God is going before them, that He will cut off the nations before them, but Moses warns them in verse 30 *"Take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? - that I also may do the same.'"*

Now up to this point it is clear that the Israelites would be ensnared if they went after serving *other* gods. But then, as if Moses you can hear them saying, "Yeah yeah, we know, serve Yahweh, not other gods" he continues. *"You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods,"* and then Moses gives an example of just one of their worst practices: *"...for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods."*

Not only are you not to worship other gods or even inquire about how these nations worship their gods, you shall not worship Yahweh in the way that these nations have served their gods. That is the very definition of syncretism. And as if to summarize, Moses says in verse 32 *"Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it."*

Inquiring how the Canaanites worshiped their gods in an attempt to worship Yahweh in the same way, was to remove the proverbial "Missing horseshoe nail" or add the "Forward slash". The consequences for Israel would be infinitely worse. They would very quickly be drawn away from Yahweh altogether. The very predictable end result of syncretism is complete apostasy, abandonment and renunciation of Yahweh.

You see brothers and sisters, the sin of taking from or adding to all we have been commanded is as old as the serpent saying to Eve: *"Did God actually say...?"*. This is an example of taking from what God has said. Again the serpent, *"You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes shall be opened, and you will be like God..."*. This adds to what God has said. So let us not be quick to excuse ourselves as if we are somehow immune to serving other gods and falling away from the Lord our God. Adding to and taking away from God's commands is as old as original sin.

And we will also see momentarily, Moses has gone from addressing worship and what it should look like as a response to idolatry around us. That was last week's message. Now Moses turns the eyes of Israel to see how they are to respond to the idolatry among them.

This morning we will consider three different scenarios that Moses gave to Israel. Three different, hypothetical but all too real situations that inevitably lead down the same road. Complete apostasy, abandonment, and renunciation of the Great I AM. And so I believe the command to us this morning, just as it was to Israel is to:

**Ruthlessly reject every voice that would lead you away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer.**

1. Spiritual authorities that reject exclusive devotion to God

So Moses gives us a first scenario or example of how we could be led astray. By entertaining voices of spiritual authorities that would **lead us away from exclusive devotion to God's Word**. Because as we said before, sin is no small matter. We will see just how serious God takes sin and those who lead others away from Him in a moment.

In the first scenario we see a "So called prophet" or "Dreamer of dreams" arise from among their own ranks. He actually gives Israel a sign or wonder that comes to pass. One author said, "This is NOT smoke and mirrors". They didn't trick us. What they dreamt has come true or what they did was what we could only describe as supernatural. And after wooing us with this supernatural sign or dream, then look at the second part of verse 2 "... [the prophet] says, 'Let us go after other gods,' which you have not known, 'and let us serve them,'

Dilemma right? I mean we would want to assume this prophet or "Dreamer of dreams" is a man of God...what he said came true!

But here is the question we need to ask: Is that how God has commanded us to obey Him? Is the coming true of dreams or the display of a supernatural sign the signature of God. The sign that this is indeed a spiritual authority who is to be obeyed and submitted to? No.

*3 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.*

We have one ultimate authority by which we measure any and all spiritual authorities or voices...

*4 "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."*

We are to order our lives under and obey the word of God. Walk after the Lord your God. Fear Him. Keep His commandments. Obey His voice. Serve Him. Hold Fast to Him. This includes any voice that has our ear whether an author of books, a podcaster, spiritual leader,

healer, deliverer, prophet, or worship leader. Whether it's a prophetic word or a new worship song...we measure if they are pleasing to God by discerning whether they align with God's Word.

You see, just because a famous musician wrote a song once that really got you emotional, doesn't mean we submit to every product of their intellect here and forevermore. Just because a friend sent you a "Helpful quote" from a book about "Self forgiveness" does not mean the author's work should be accepted as authoritative. Just because a pastor or parent had great advice (or what we determined to be good advice by how it made us feel) doesn't mean that we accept it as the authority of God in our lives.

Friend, this week will be inundated with book recommendations, so called worship songs on the radio, self help quotes or memes on Facebook. There will be sermon excerpts plastered all over social media by "Spiritual authorities" that want to speak into our lives. If what they proclaim does not align with the Word of God, then you and I are to reject them. We are to give them no opportunity and lend them no ear in our lives. When any truth, song or quote is not grounded in Biblical truth to begin with, it will soon show itself to be unable to bring about the lasting change God's Word has promised itself to be.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot trust our hearts to determine whether an author or musician or parent or pastor is authoritative. 2 Timothy 3:16 says that *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness"*. That is how we discern truth and it is infinitely more reliable than our hearts because it is the very infallible Word of God. The Word informs us, authoritatively, how we are to respond to and live by **rejecting every voice that would lead us astray from exclusive devotion to the Word of God.**

Hear verse 4 again, *"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."* And anything that fails that test is to be rejected and dealt with ruthlessly. Because the smallest temptation that draws us away from exclusive devotion to the Word of God in our midst, not ruthlessly rejected, will soon lead us away from God to complete rejection of Him...guaranteed.

But that is not the only way we are told to deal with voices that would lead us away from God. Now we get to veres 5, which I am sure you all have been waiting with eagerness for me to talk about. What we are to do with those who draw us away from exclusive devotion to God?

*5 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.*

God says through Moses...because I have brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, you are required to walk in all my ways that I have commanded you. The one who has tempted you to sin and lured you away from

exclusive devotion to the word of God, you are commanded to put him to death. Sin is ruthlessly dealt with by God. And what should this look like for us today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

And here we have to do a bit of critical thinking to understand what is being communicated to us, the context thereof, and what our application is for today.

And so we have to consider that in this context. Moses was speaking to the nation state of Israel, that is, those who are ethnic Jews under the Old or Mosaic Covenant. We however are under the new covenant. Israel was marked by their ethnicity and lineage. We are marked spiritually by faith in Christ as the Bride of Christ. Acts 1:8 says: *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”* If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit in you.

John Piper said it this way: *The New Covenant is different from the Old. We do not execute false teachers or their apostates, do not “Purge the evil from [our] midst” ...by throwing stones. The closest thing we do — something just as serious — is church discipline and excommunication.*

So although the intention of the scripture has stayed the same (because God hasn't changed)...the following statement was true for Israel and it remains true for us. **Ruthlessly reject every voice that would lead you away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer.** The major change is that we engage with this command differently...because we are under a new covenant. The application of this scripture will look different.

And this is the truth not because Matthew or I or some scholars have decided that it is, but because Christ Himself told us that He has fulfilled the Old Covenant.

Matthew 5:17 says: *“17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”*

The Old Covenant was designed to show the people of God that they were hopelessly lost without a Saviour. They could not keep God's law. It pointed them, as it does for us, to the fact that we need someone to keep the Law for us and then apply the blessings of keeping of the Law to us That someone is Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says: *“21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* Jesus takes our punishment, and we get His righteousness.

So, there is continuity because of God's purposes, and there is discontinuity because God has furthered our understanding and application of the Old Covenant through Jesus Christ who fulfilled it.

And so we can continue to apply and teach the Law of the Old Covenant, even though we ourselves are no longer covenantally bound to it. Rather we continue to be bound by and apply the Law as it has been fulfilled in Christ.

Hear how Jason Meyer says it:

Christians are under the binding authority of the law of Christ, not the law of Moses. The law of Christ is “The demand of God that is binding on Christians since the coming of Christ.” The law of Christ includes the demands and teachings of Christ and his apostles. Parts of the law of Moses carry over but only because they now are part of the law of Christ...love for neighbor is the primary lens through which the Christian views the law of Moses...The most direct guide for loving one another is the law of Christ, not the law of Moses, because the new standard for love is Christ’s cross.

So then, what does application look like for us today when spiritual authorities attempt to lead us from exclusive devotion to the Word of God? Israel was told to reject such authority by putting them to death, we turn to passages such as 2 Timothy 4:2-4

*2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

One of the ways we **reject voices that would lead us away from exclusive devotion to the Word of God** is by being ready in and out of season to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching and when necessary excommunication. Preach the word of God – Gospel message

So, when we are confronted by spiritual authority that tries to **lead us away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer**. May we respond by: ruthlessly rejecting those voices, keeping watch over our souls by being careful to obey all God has commanded us. At the same time loving others through acts like teaching, reproof, rebuking, and exhorting those wayward voices from the Word of God.

## 2. Close personal relationships that reject exclusive devotion to God

Moses has gone from last week’s scripture where he spoke about how to respond to idolatry around us (as in the Canaanites). He tightened the circle to spiritual leaders in our own midst, and he tightens it now for us even more to close personal relationships.

In the first scenario Moses says a spiritual authority that tries to lead you astray is to be put to death. Here in the second scenario, Moses has gone to great lengths to paint a significantly more vivid picture.

If your brother, son, daughter, “The wife you embrace” or your friend who is “As your own soul”. I mean Moses isn’t talking about some distant relative. The “Wife you embrace” or your friend who is “As your own soul” could not be closer or more loved. And then Moses takes the vivid picture one step further. If these very beloved and close people “*Entice you secretly*” meaning in the comfort of your own home. You may be the only person that knows of their secret enticing you **away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer**,

Verse 8 *“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.”*

What should they do?

Verses 9-10 *“But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of the people. You shall stone him to death with stones...”*

Now again, as a people marked by our spiritual union with Christ, under a New Covenant, we remember that there is continuity because of God’s purposes. There is also a discontinuity because God has furthered our understanding and application of the Old Covenant through Jesus Christ who fulfilled it.

But I think an opportunity would be missed if we did not quickly consider those of us that would think...the God of the old testament just seems bloodthirsty and vindictive.

*Hear the words of Christopher Wright: “...if we no longer feel comfortable with the cursing psalms, for example, it is not because of our greater, “Christian” sensitivity, but because of our appalling moral apathy. We no longer feel the passion of the psalmist that God should deal with evil and evildoers and vindicate God’s own moral order in the world. We respond to idolatrous, blasphemous evil not with a curse, but a shrug, and then have the gall to claim morally higher ground than ancient Israel. Similarly, if we can no longer identify with the scale of priorities and values that undergird Deuteronomy 13, it is manifestly not because we have acquired a greater appreciation of the value of human life, but because we have lost any sense of the awful majesty of God’s reality.*

Even though our application of this text looks different because of our being under a new Covenant. We should still respond with the same disgust, aversion, loathing to every sin and **every voice that would lead us away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer.**

Whether your brother invites you to a party where you know things are going down that will not be glorifying to God. Whether your children give in to common peer pressures and ask you for your approval. Whether the friend who is as your own soul or the person you laid next to in bed last night gossips or slanders and tries to draw you into doing the same. We **MUST** ruthlessly reject those voices.

Galatians 6:1 teaches us: *“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”* Restore them...in a spirit of gentleness...but keep watch...keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted.

And we are reminded why in verse 10b: because of *“...the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”* We have been bought at a price. 1

Peter 2:24 says: *“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”*

Because of Christ’s obedience and His sinless life. Because He kept the Law we could not keep. Because He died our death in our place and was raised again victorious over the grave breaking the power of sin for us. Because He then applied all the blessings of perfect obedience to us. We can now, by His resurrection power, trust Him and obey Him to the Glory of God even when the very person who has attempted to draw us away from Him is as close as the wife you embrace or the close friend who is as your own soul.

verse 11 reminds us that when we reject every voice **that would lead us away from exclusive devotion**, it has corporate implications...not merely individual implications.

Verse 11 *“And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.”*

I read some time ago where an author said that if we desire to have stronger, healthier churches, the fastest way to make that happen is to be stronger, healthier members. Your church will benefit from it instantly.

By being careful to do everything that God has commanded us. By **rejecting every voice that would lead us from exclusive devotion to God**, there will be a corporate warning and a corporate blessing.

And that brings us to the final point.

### 3. Responding to corporate rejection of exclusive devotion to God

Points one and two were warning us to **ruthlessly reject every voice that would lead you away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer**. The third point tells us what to do when people have not been ruthless with every temptation to sin and you find that corporate falling away from exclusive devotion to God has come to pass. The promises of corporate blessing when we are careful to do all God’s Word commands us, that Moses spoke of in verse 11, have fallen away. Now there is corporate disobedience in action.

In this portion of our passage this morning, we see Moses’ longest and most in depth description of punishment in the whole chapter. It is reserved for the corporate falling away from exclusive devotion to the Word of God. He commands them, once you have heard of such sin, and confirmed it to be true and accurate:

15 you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword.16 You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again. 17 None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand...



Eugene Merrill says: *“The seriousness of the punishment fits the seriousness of the crime...”* They have not only inquired about other gods, they have failed to keep what Moses commanded in the first two scenarios. They have not **ruthlessly rejected every voice that would lead them away from exclusive devotion to the Word of God**. Now the lingering, persisting voices of spiritual authorities, of brothers, sons, daughters, the wife that you embrace or the friend that is as your own soul has caused apostasy and outright rejection of God.

Rejection of the same God who promised back in Deuteronomy 12:29: that he will cut off before them the nations whom they go in to dispossess. It is (Deuteronomy 13:5-10), rejection of the same God who brought them out of slavery, out of the house of Egypt.

And so, God commanded them to treat that city exactly how he commanded them to treat every other Canaanite city upon entering the land. This is because they had essentially defected by worshiping the gods of the Canaanites. In Joshua 8:28 it says: *“So Joshua burned Ai and made it forever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day.”*

The seriousness of the punishment did indeed fit the seriousness of the crime.

So what does this look like for us, under the New Covenant, the Law of Christ? Well it could look like:

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

*9 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.*

So Paul had written to them a previous time...we do not have this letter available to us today, but he apparently told the Corinthians not to associate with the sexually immoral people and the Corinthians misunderstood him. That is why He says: *“Not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world”* rather verse 11 *“But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”*

When Paul says not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother our minds should immediately go to the corporate setting of the church. Bearing the name of brother is intended to point us to a fellow church member, numbered among us and if *“He is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.”*

Not even to eat with such a one is referring us to communion. One of the many blessings of communion is that it is a visible expression of our unity. An affirmation of our spiritual condition. And so Paul commands the removing of this affirmation which is essentially excommunication which is the corporate dealing with sin.

God is as committed to His holiness and glory today as He was back in Deuteronomy 13 nearly 3500 years ago. We know this to be true because He knew that we could not keep His commands, and instead He gave us His Son, Jesus Christ. As a High Priest, He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because He has been tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin. And He became for us a perfect sacrifice in our place, so that we would not be put to shame.

Brothers and sisters, apart from the work of Christ on the Cross, to appease God's wrath against us, we would have had to keep the Mosaic law to gain right standing with God, which is impossible.

I said earlier that while Israel was marked by their ethnicity, we are marked spiritually. And so we, by the power of the Spirit alone, can trust Him to lead us, empower us, equip and embolden us. So that we may guard our souls and that by the power of the Spirit we may **ruthlessly reject every voice that would lead us away from exclusive devotion to the Word of our Redeemer.**

Brothers and Sisters, if everything you have heard this morning sounds difficult and you don't know where to start, please know that we have the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. He is with us and wants to help us to be able to discern His voice from among all the voices that fight for our attention and devotion. All we need to do is go to Him in prayer and ask for His help.

Or maybe you already, even as you listened to me this morning, have become aware of voices in your life that have allowed you to lead you away from exclusive devotion to God. If that's the case then please know that there is forgiveness available to you in Jesus right now. 1 John 1:9 says – *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

And this is only true, and our only hope, because of the hope we have in Jesus Christ and all He did on the cross to conquer sin and death. He came to accomplish all of this for us because He knew that we are unable to be careful to do all He has commanded us apart from His saving work on the cross on our behalf.