

Concerning Worship: Deuteronomy 12
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The Fellowship of Ailbe
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Introduction to Deuteronomy 12

The primary calling of the people of God is to glorify and enjoy Him forever. Worship is the context where we experience this most intensely, and worship as a community prepares us for a life of worship – of enjoying and glorifying God in all we do.

Moses spoke to the people of Israel about the ways to worship – God’s ways, not theirs, and not the ways of their pagan neighbors. God knows best how we should worship Him, both that He might gain the honor which is His due, and that we might realize the joy He intends for us.

Susie and I hope you will find this study challenging and enriching for your walk with and work for the Lord.

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T. M. and Susie Moore

1 No Pagan Worship

Opening Prayer: Psalm 122.1-4

I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go into the house of the LORD.”
Our feet have been standing
Within your gates, O Jerusalem!
Jerusalem is built
As a city that is compact together,
Where the tribes go up,
The tribes of the LORD,
To the Testimony of Israel,
To give thanks to the name of the LORD.

Psalm 122.1-4

(Nettleton: *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*)

I was glad when they said to me, “To the Lord’s house let us go!”
Holy City, let our feet be firmly planted in your soil.
Jesus builds His Church forever, where His people sing His praise!
As Your Word decrees forever, we will thank You all our days.

Today’s Text: Deuteronomy 12.1-4

Preparation

1. What does God forbid in worship?
2. How should the people of God avoid this practice?

Meditation

Deuteronomy 12 is meant to encapsulate and include the “statutes and judgments” of God concerning worship – all those various religious ceremonies and protocols given in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. In this chapter, Moses concentrates only on the most important and most foundational aspects of the worship of God.

The writer of Hebrews explains (chapters 7-9) that all the *particular practices* related to the work of priests have been fulfilled and eclipsed by our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. Yet, as Paul shows in 1 Corinthians 9 and elsewhere, valid *principles* still exist in these “religious” or “ceremonial” laws which can help us in knowing how to worship the Lord as His holy people.

So in the first place, Moses declared, no pagan components, practices, themes, or protocols were to be included in the worship of the one true God. Pagan worship was sensual, self-serving, and frequently violent. It included illicit sexual relations, the slaughter of children, cutting the body, and working oneself up into a mindless frenzy, all for the purpose of placating or enlisting gruesome false deities in human projects.

All the multitudinous sites where the pagan peoples of Canaan worshiped their false gods were to be sought out and destroyed (v. 2). All the components they employed in their worship – altars, sacred pillars, wooden images, and more – were to be completely destroyed and burned. No trace of pagan practice was to be introduced into the worship of God. Moses was emphatic: “You shall not worship the LORD your God *with* such *things*” (v. 4).

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Notice the emphasis on the perpetuity of these instructions: “all the days that you live on the earth” (v. 1). We worship God truly, in Spirit and in truth (Jn. 4.24), by looking to every word He has spoken on this subject, seeking a *pattern* for the *practice* of worship that fits the *prescriptions* God gives us in His Word. Moses will elaborate more fully on this throughout the rest of this chapter. For now, we must begin to reflect on our own practice of worship. How confident are you that your worship is completely in line with what God has revealed as the pattern of sound worship?

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

This, not that. Here, not there. Then, not now. These, not those. Decisions made about commands given can have eternal consequences. God clearly states, “These” (Deut. 5.6-21; Ex. 20.1-17), not those. And those God wanted them to destroy utterly – break, burn, and cut down. Not much to wonder about there! He has not left us on earth without guidance. He has told us exactly what He wants to see happen. All of these commandments are important. Jesus says to us, “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled” (Matt. 5.17, 18). No pagan worship for the Israelites, nor for us! Definitely “these” and not those.

Reflection

1. What would be some examples of pagan practices that might find their way into our worship of God?
2. Should we expect the Bible to be a sufficient guide for us in how to worship God (2 Tim. 3.16, 17)?
3. What can you do to better hide the commandments of God in your heart and mind?

The Israelites are charged not to bring the rites and usages of idolaters into the worship of God; not under color of making it better. We cannot serve God and mammon; nor worship the true God and idols; nor depend upon Christ Jesus and upon superstitious or self-righteous confidences. Matthew Henry (1622-1714) Commentary on Deuteronomy 12.1-4

Thank You, Lord, for showing us how we must worship You. Help me to worship You truly today as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 122.5-9

Pray for unity in your church and among the churches in your community. Pray that God’s peace will prevail among His people over all the earth.

Psalm 122.5-9

(Nettleton: [*Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*](#))

On the throne of David, Jesus sits to judge the nations all.

As our holy peace increases, we are safe who on You call.

Grant us peace, Lord, by Your favor; for Your people’s sake we pray.

For the Church’s sake, O Savior, we will seek Your good today.

2 Worship God's Way

Opening Prayer: Psalm 132.13-18

For the LORD has chosen Zion;
He has desired *it* for His dwelling place:
“This *is* My resting place forever;
Here I will dwell, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless her provision;
I will satisfy her poor with bread.
I will also clothe her priests with salvation,
And her saints shall shout aloud for joy.
There I will make the horn of David grow;
I will prepare a lamp for My Anointed.
His enemies I will clothe with shame,
But upon Himself His crown shall flourish.”

Psalm 132.13-18

(Finlandia: [*Be Still My Soul*](#))

God dwells among us, and He will forever,
to meet our needs and clothe us with His grace.
He has to us sent Jesus Christ, our Savior,
and made us His eternal resting-place.
His foes are banished from His Presence ever,
but we shall reign with Him before His face.

Today's Text: Deuteronomy 12.5-7

Preparation

1. Where were God's people to worship Him?
2. What was their worship to include?

Mediation

The important point in these verses is that God sets the standards and protocols for worship. Three purposes for worship are outlined in these verses.

First, God intends to *host His people in His dwelling place* (v. 5). In worship, we come before God, as invited guests in His abode. We are in His Presence, and all our orientation and conduct must be determined by that fact. We are there on His terms, for His purposes, and according to His desires. Worship, in short, is about God.

Second, the people of God come into His dwelling place for the purpose of *honoring Him* with offerings, tithes, sacrifices, and gifts (v. 6). Worship is about giving honor to God. In ancient Israel, the people did this with various kinds of sacrifices. Detailed explanations of these are provided in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. Those offerings have now ceased, since Jesus fulfilled all they pointed to (Heb. 7-9). Nevertheless, when we come before God in worship, the *principle* established in sacrifices and offerings remains. We come to God to honor Him with gifts of singing, prayer, testimony, tithes, and, indeed, our whole lives (Rom. 12.1, 2).

Third, in worship the people of God *hold communion* with Him. When sacrifices were made, the people ate them, together with the priests and Levites, there in the Lord's dwelling place together (v. 7). In worship we

have fellowship with God by His Word and Spirit, and especially by the Lord's Supper. God, having received our offerings and gifts, feeds and renews us by the ministry of the Word and sacrament. Worship is meant to be a time of rejoicing together in the Lord, honoring Him for His greatness and blessings, and being fed by Him according to our needs (v. 7).

Scripture has much more to say about worshiping God, but this is the bare outline. Our worship as a community must follow His will and seek His glory, or we do not worship Him at all.

And we worship God at His dwelling place.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162.

We are to "seek the place where the LORD your God chooses...and there you shall go" (vs. 5). Here is a house-hunting adventure with the Master Realtor. He chooses the place; we just need to find it and go there. We bring all our housewarming gifts of singing, prayer, tithes, communion, and hearts full of love, and then we hear it: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3.20). And there we are in the perfect property: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms..." (Deut. 33.27).

Reflection

1. Why does it make sense that God should prescribe the pattern of worship we are to follow?
2. Paul says we are the temple of the Lord (1 Cor. 6.19, 20). What does this suggest about meeting with God for worship?
3. What will you bring to honor God in worship today?

Although, then, there is a special promise here concerning Zion, still there is no doubt but that God in the meantime confines the Jews to His sanctuary, lest any one should erect a private altar for himself, or build for himself other cities and other temples. The phrase is worthy of observation, "to put his name there;" and again, "his habitation." John Calvin (1509-1564), Commentary on Deuteronomy 12.5

Lord, thank You for dwelling in me by Your Spirit. Make my life a living sacrifice to You as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 132.1-12

Pray that God would make you a living sacrifice for His service and glory in all you do today (Rom. 12.1, 2). Cling to His Presence and call upon Him throughout the day to receive your prayers and labors and to bless you in all things.

Psalm 132.1-12

(Finlandia: [*Be Still My Soul*](#))

Remember, Lord, we pray, in David's favor,
the hardships he endured, the oath he swore,
the vow he made to Jacob's mighty Savior:
"I shall not enter through my palace door;
I shall not sleep, nor slumber my eyes favor,
until I make a dwelling for the Lord!"

The word throughout the chosen nation spread,
to Ephrata, and in the fields of Jaar:
"Now let us go," the faithful people said,
"and worship where our Savior's dwellings are!
Around His footstool let our worship spread;

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come, gather to Him, all from near and far!”

Arise, O Lord, come to Your resting place;
Your holy Presence meet with us in might.
Clothe us with righteousness in Jesus’ grace,
and we will shout to Your divine delight!
For David’s sake, turn not away Your face,
but look upon us in Your holy light.

Remember, Lord, the oath You swore to David;
do not turn back, do not deny Your Word:
“One of your sons, with your throne I will favor,
and He shall keep My cov’nant evermore,
and walk within My testimonies ever,
thus He shall ever rule as Israel’s Lord.”

3 Elements of Worship

Opening Prayer: Psalm 115.1-3

Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory,
Because of Your mercy,
Because of Your truth.
Why should the Gentiles say,
“So where *is* their God?”
But our God *is* in heaven;
He does whatever He pleases.

Psalm 115.1-3

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

Not to us, O God, not us, but unto Your Name give glory!
For Your love and faithfulness, ever to Your Name be glory!
Why should the nations cry, “Where is their God on high?”
You rule us, Lord, on high: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Today’s Text: Deuteronomy 12.8-14

Preparation

1. What must we *not* do in worship?
2. How would you describe the relationship between blessing, rest, and worship as you see it here?

Meditation

That phrase, “every man doing whatever *is* right in his own eyes” – is ominous, especially as we remember its usage in the book of Judges. I’ll come back to this.

A considerable amount of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers are given to describing the various sacrifices and offerings Israel should bring before the Lord. Why did God command so many of these?

Because worshiping God consists of various *elements*, which may be expressed in a variety of *forms*. These derive from “the rest and the inheritance” (v. 9) God provided for His people by delivering them from bondage in Egypt and settling them in the land of Canaan (v. 10). In the promises of God, Israel would be safe and enjoy all the blessings He graciously promised, as long as they obeyed His commandments.

That includes the commandments concerning worship. Worship allowed the people to declare their gratitude to God, to praise and rejoice in Him together, to be renewed in repentance, and to dedicate themselves in specific ways to more faithful obedience and service. In the various religious or ceremonial laws, God explained the *elements* that are appropriate for worship. The various offerings and sacrifices – the *forms* of worship – expressed the heart of Israel in thanksgiving and praise; confession of sin; dedication of their lives to Him; and vows they intended to fulfill, especially in response to His Word (“All that the LORD has spoken, we will do”, Ex. 19.8). They also helped to provide for the needs of priests and Levites, who administered the offerings locally and at the tabernacle. While the people could worship God in their own communities, it was important that, from time to time – especially during the national feasts, and for certain kinds of offerings (v. 14) – that the people should come to the tabernacle and bring their offerings there (vv. 11, 14).

The tone of worship was to be rejoicing (v. 12). And why not? In worship the people were renewing and

strengthening their relationship with God, and delighting in His Presence.

We no longer keep the particular *forms* of worship God commanded His people through Moses. But the prescribed *elements* of worship remain, as we draw on the principles embedded in the ceremonial laws to maintain covenant continuity with the people of God in every age and place (cf. 1 Cor. 9.11-14). So in worship, we're not free to do "whatever seems right" to us. That kind of "freedom" leads only to enslavement to whim and self. God has shown us what to do in worship. Let's make sure we do what He commands, not what we invent.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

We all look forward to events such as Christmas and Easter, an exciting move, a new home, or a new job. God likes us to look forward to things; He created us this way. He explained some new events and future plans to the Israelites: For as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which I am giving you. Keep going. Keep expecting. Another place, another opportunity to rejoice in Me, further along. Jesus shares His ultimate plans with us. Just across eternal Jordan are the best ones yet: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know" (Jn. 14.2-4). Look forward, rejoice, and worship in hope.

Reflection

1. Why should we look forward to worshiping God? How can we prepare for joyful worship?
2. What's the difference between *elements* of worship and *forms* of worship? Which are more important? Why?
3. Why is it not a good idea to just do whatever we want in worshiping God?

... "you ... and the Levite" includes all Israelites—women and men, slaves and free, Levites and tribes with land. The Hebrew word for rejoice describes a deep enjoyment by the entire community of God's good gifts. God gave the Law to the people for their good—even for their enjoyment. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Deuteronomy 12.12

Let my life today be one of worshiping You in everything I do, Lord, especially as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 115.9-18

Rejoice in the salvation which is ours through Jesus. Rejoice in the rest and blessings of the Lord. Devote yourself to increasing in Jesus today, as you obey Him in all your ways.

Psalm 115.9-18

(Plainfield: [*Nothing but the Blood of Jesus*](#))

All who trust in Jesus yield – ever to His Name be glory! –
find in Him their help and shield – ever to Your Name be glory!
O Israel, trust the Lord! He helps us evermore!
Fear Him obey His Word: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Blessings from our gracious Lord – ever to Your Name be glory –
will attend us evermore – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless all who fear You, Lord, all who obey Your Word,
all who Your Name adore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

Grant us, Savior, great increase – ever to Your Name be glory!
Bless us with eternal peace – ever to Your Name be glory!
Heaven and earth are Yours; let every soul adore
and bless You evermore: Ever to Your Name be glory!

4 Tithes and Offerings

Opening Prayer: Psalm 118.26-29

Blessed *is* he who comes in the name of the LORD!
We have blessed you from the house of the LORD.
God *is* the LORD,
And He has given us light;
Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.
You *are* my God, and I will praise You;
You *are* my God, I will exalt You.
Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for *He is* good!
For His mercy *endures* forever.

Psalm 118.26-29

(St. George's Windsor: [*Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*](#))
Blessed are they who in His Name come and Jesus' grace proclaim.
God His light upon us shines in the Savior's sacrifice.
Praise and thanks to You, O Lord; we extol Your holy Word!
Thanks to You for You are good! Thanks to our great loving God!

Today's Text: Deuteronomy 12.15-19

Preparation

1. What were the people supposed to do with their tithe?
2. How did the Levite factor into the tithe?

Meditation

First, a word of clarification: The people of Israel were free to kill and eat all kinds of clean meats in their homes (v. 15). Eating meat was pretty much an everyday occurrence in Israel. They just had to be careful not to eat the blood, but to drain it out on the ground (v. 16).

That being said, the meat that was set aside as a tithe to be offered to God was not to be eaten locally (v. 17). Not only the meat, but the grain, wine, and oil set aside for the Lord was to be taken to the place where the Lord had established His dwelling (vv. 17, 18). There the sacrifices and offerings could be given to the Lord and made by the priests before they were eaten by those who brought them, some of each offering being left over for the Levites (vv. 18, 19).

Three principles concerning worship can be discerned here. First, God expects His people to give tithes and offerings with gratitude, faith, and rejoicing. Second, those tithes and offerings are to be brought to the Lord's house and given publicly as an act of worship. Third, a portion of those tithes and offerings are to go to the care of those who serve in the Lord's house, while the rest is devoted to the ministry of the church, including the benefits that come to those who make offerings.

All our tithes and offerings, however, are tokens of the fact that we give our entire lives, every day, as living sacrifices to our Lord (Rom. 12.1, 2). We are not our own; we have been bought with a price. God has called us by His Name, and we are His.

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Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

- Where did God say to bring the tithes?

“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this,” says the LORD” (Mal. 3.10).

- Who would benefit besides the tither?

“And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake” (1 Thess. 5.12, 13).

- What should be the overall attitude of the tither?

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5.16-18).

- Will you be blessed in your obedience?

“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (Jn. 13.17).

Reflection

1. What’s the best way to make sure that you are giving your tithes to the Lord as you should?

2. Why are tithes and offerings such an important part of our worship of God?

3. The blessings of God are clearly tied to obedience in tithes and offerings. Why is that?

*Aspects of God’s worship that were designed for community celebration were not to be done in the privacy of the home. Instead, God would designate the place where He would be worshiped. In a similar way, the NT places a strong emphasis on the community of believers. **rejoice:** God’s prohibitions were designed for the mutual pleasure of God and the people. Earl Radmacher (1931-2014), NKJV Study Bible Note on Deuteronomy 12.17, 18*

Lord, make me a living sacrifice today, and use me to...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 118.14-24

Praise God for the salvation we have in Jesus. Call on Him to give you strength to live for Christ throughout this day.

Psalm 118.14-24

(St. George’s Windsor: [*Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*](#))

In the Savior we are strong! He is all our strength and song!

To His grace now raise your voice; in His righteousness rejoice!

For the Lord does valiantly; we shall live eternally.

Praise His works with all your breath, you whom He redeems from death.

All who know Christ’s righteousness His great Name now thank and bless!

Though His gate full righteous is, He our saving mercy is.

Cast aside and left alone, Christ is now our Cornerstone!

God has made His Son and Word our salvation: Praise the Lord!

5 Meat and Blood

Opening Prayer: Psalm 85.1-3

LORD, You have been favorable to Your land;
You have brought back the captivity of Jacob.
You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people;
You have covered all their sin.

Selah

You have taken away all Your wrath;
You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger.

Psalm 85.1-3

(Lyons: [O Worship the King](#))

O Lord, You Your favor showed to Your land;
Your people You saved by Your mighty hand.
Their sins You forgave, all Your wrath You withdrew;
You turned back the anger which to them was due.

Today's Text: Read Deuteronomy 12.20-28

Preparation

1. Why were the Israelites forbidden from eating blood?
2. Which offerings were the people required to take to God's dwelling place?

Meditation

God permitted His people to eat meat – as much as they wanted. They didn't have to come to the central dwelling place of the Lord to be able to enjoy meat. They were free to enjoy meat as part of their regular diet, with some restrictions relative to clean and unclean meats (v. 20, Deut. 14.3ff.).

Only the “holy things” and “vowed offerings” – like the firstborn, the Paschal lamb, and other offerings made to seal vows – were to be sacrificed and eaten there (v. 26). Israel had one God, not many; only one place would serve to make offerings to Him.

It seems to me from verse 21 that people may have associated eating *any* meat with eating it before the Lord, perhaps for the joy of it, or to make sure they were meeting the needs of the Levites. That was fine with the Lord, but not required, especially if “the place where the LORD your God chooses to put His name is too far from you...” Otherwise, the people should feel free to eat meat in their own homes.

I'm sure there are many practical reasons for not eating the blood of meat, but here God emphasized that blood was a symbol of life (vv. 23, 24). Eating “life” would send a wrong signal to the people who ate it, that somehow they were being reinvigorated by the life of animals when they ate their blood. Perhaps the pagan peoples of Canaan practiced this sort of ritual. We can't be sure. What we *do* know is that God forbade it.

Again, Moses promised the blessings of God to the people and their children for attending carefully even to these rules about eating meat and offering sacrifices (v. 28).

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul” (Lev. 17.11). Our salvation is covered in the

blood of Christ. So beginning with the Israelites, God was teaching them about this. They didn't need to understand all the ramifications; they just needed to obey. Now we are allowed to understand what God was talking about – His incredible love shown through the life blood and death of His dear Son. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom. 5.8, 9). And Jesus says to us, “For this is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26.28). Now we can see the truth of God's words: “Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do *what is* good and right in the sight of the LORD your God” (Deut. 12.28). For just a little obedience, we receive the eternal gift of life.

Reflection

1. God warned His people against eating blood. How did He explain this proscription?
2. What is the significance of God telling His people that life is in the blood? How was this evident in their sacrifices?
3. How does the blood of Jesus cover our sins and provide us the gift of salvation?

Moses emphasized the potential greatness of God's blessings on the people. The land might become so large that for many people frequent journeys to the central sanctuary would be impossible. In this case, provisions were made for the enjoyment of meat at home. Earl Radmacher (1931-201), NKJV Study Notes for Deuteronomy 12.20

Lord, You are so gracious and generous in providing for our needs. Thank You! Help me to live out my gratitude by...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 85.4-13

Thank the Lord for all the ways He provides for you each day. Rejoice in your daily bread, and offer yourself to the Lord for this day as a living sacrifice unto Him.

Psalm 85.4-13

(Lyons: [O Worship the King](#))

Restore us, O God, renew us in peace,
and cause all Your wrath against us to cease.
Will You evermore all Your wrath to us show?
Revive us that we may Your joy again know.

Lord, show us Your love; restore us, we pray!
And help us to hear the words that You say.
Speak peace to Your people; in truth let us stand.
We fear You; let glory and grace fill our land.

In Jesus God's grace and truth are combined;
both goodness and peace in Him do we find.
Truth springs from the earth as He walks in our midst,
and righteousness flows from the heav'ns as a gift.

The Lord by His grace will give what is good;
our land will produce abundance of food.
And righteousness will go before the Lord's face,
and make of His footsteps a way in this place.

6 Whatever God Commands

Opening Prayer: Psalm 19.12-14

Who can understand *his* errors?

Cleanse me from secret *faults*.

Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*;

Let them not have dominion over me.

Then I shall be blameless,

And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

Be acceptable in Your sight,

O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Psalm 19.12-14

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

Who, Lord, can know his errors? O keep sin far from me!

Let evil rule not in my soul that I may blameless be.

O let my thoughts, let all my words, before Your glorious sight

be pleasing to You, gracious Lord, acceptable and right!

Today's Text: Deuteronomy 12.29-32

Preparation

1. What must Israel be careful about?

2. How should they do that?

Meditation

Idolatry is simply looking to anything or anyone for that which God has promised, and ascribing to anything other than God the honor and reverence He alone deserves. In a materialistic age like ours, we are constantly tempted to think that our happiness depends on things, our daily bread is the fruit of our work, and our overall sense of wellbeing is the product of agreeable circumstances. All these things and more, people who do not believe in God look to and strive after for meaning and happiness. Instead of worshiping and serving God, they are devoted to fleeting temporal ends as their greatest good. God's people must be careful not to allow the good things God provides for us to usurp His place as the ultimate focus of our devotion and love.

The people of Israel were constantly faced with the temptation to worship idols. God warned them against doing so (vv. 29, 30). But perhaps they would not worship the idols outright, but only incorporate into the worship of God certain pagan rituals or protocols. Like burning your children as sacrifices (v. 31).

God hates all pagan elements and forms of worship (v. 31). He has told us what the elements of worship should be – thanksgiving, praise, giving, hearing His Word, committing ourselves to Him (oaths and vows). And He has outlined the forms we may use to engage those elements – in Israel's case, offerings and sacrifices, singing and prayer, and obeying the Law. Anything beyond what He prescribed is an abomination to God (v. 31).

We just need to do what God has revealed in His Word – nothing more, and nothing less (v. 32).

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

Why bother to dispossess, displace, and then dwell in a land God gave you, if you were just going to recreate

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the same abominations? Indeed, why? God warned His people of this impending travesty, and He described the slippery slope they would confront: “Hmmm, how did these nations serve their gods? Well look here, I also will do likewise...” But then He said to them, “You shall NOT worship...in that way.” God knows these Israelites were not the only ones to be confronted with this temptation. He warned the people of the New Testament, and us too, of the same bad behavior. Jesus scolded the religious of His day saying, “...*in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*’...All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition...making the Word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do” (Mk. 7.7, 9, 13). As we work to dispossess and displace the sins in our lives, and dwell in worship with God, we must do whatever He commands.

Reflection

1. Why are we so easily drawn away from God’s Word to do things other than what He commands?
2. How can we check this tendency to drift from the Lord and to prefer our own ways rather than His?
3. What does the work of dispossessing and displacing the sin in your life require?

In this brief clause he teaches that no other service of God is lawful, except that of which He has testified His approval in His word, and that obedience is as it were the mother of piety; as if he had said that all modes of devotion are absurd and infected with superstition, which are not directed by this rule. John Calvin (1509-1564), *Commentary on Deuteronomy 12.32*

Let Your Word guide my every step today, Lord, as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 19.7-11

Thank God for His Law and for all His Word. Pray that He will embed His Word throughout your soul, so that you abide and walk in it always.

Psalm 19.7-11

(St. Christopher: *Beneath the Cross of Jesus*)

The Law of God is perfect, His testimony sure;
the simple man God’s wisdom learns, the soul receives its cure.
God’s Word is right, and His command is pure, and truth imparts;
He makes our eyes to understand; with joy He fills our hearts.

The fear of God is cleansing, forever shall it last.
His judgments all are true and just, by righteousness held fast.
O seek them more than gold most fine, than honey find them sweet;
be warned by every word and line; be blessed with joy complete.

7 Worship Yeas and Nays

Opening Prayer: Psalm 51.10-13

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me *by Your* generous Spirit.
Then I will teach transgressors Your ways,
And sinners shall be converted to You.

Psalm 51.10-13

(Passion Chorale: [*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*](#))

Create in me a clean heart, renew me from within!
Take not Your Spirit from me because of all my sin.
Salvation's joy restore, Lord, and keep me in Your hand;
thus shall I tell Your strong Word to sinners in the land.

Review Deuteronomy 12; meditate on Deuteronomy 12.12, 32

Preparation

1. What are the most important points about worship in this chapter?
2. What must the people guard against in the worship of God?

Meditation

Clearly, worship as God outlined it is not a spectator sport. Worship requires focus, attention, diligence, and effort. Worship brings us into the Presence of God, where we share or participate in Him with greater intensity than normal. The things we do in worship enable us to enjoy the Lord's Presence, so that the enjoyment of Him will go with us into the times in between worship, to sustain and guide us.

God set clear parameters for the worship His people would bring to Him. Certain elements were to be engaged – thanks, praise, giving (including confession of sin), attending to God's Word, making commitments – and certain forms were to be used in expressing these elements – sacrifices, offerings, prayers, singing, vows. God knows the elements and forms that are most appropriate for us in coming before Him in worship. We are not free to do whatever we like, just because we like it or find it pleasing in some way (v. 8). We rest in the promises of God in worship (v. 9); and our worship grows out of those promises, as we have experienced them, and toward those promises, as we yet hope to experience them. Since all the promises of God are in Him and His Word (cf. 2 Cor. 1.20), worship will lead us to greater rest and blessing in the promises and Presence of God when we worship as He directs.

We must especially be on guard against incorporating into the worship of God elements or forms deriving from pagan worship. The pagan peoples of Canaan had long before rejected the worship of the one, true God. But because they were made in His image – as all people are – they could not *not* worship. So they made up gods to suit their fancy, then sought to connect with those gods through forms of worship according to their own best ideas. Turns out, some of these weren't such good ideas after all, especially if you were a young girl or guy whose parents had surrendered you to temple prostitution. Or if you were a child selected to be burned alive. Or if some grim priest, perhaps angry at your paltry offering, directed you to cut yourself to

please the god you had offended.

God described all such elements and forms as abominations (v. 31). Pagan forms of worship – that is, any worship that departs from or adds to the elements and forms God prescribes (v. 32) – is abominable today as well.

Worship works for us, to bring us into the joy and rejoicing of the Lord (v. 12) when we work at it according to God’s Word. Sitting by and waiting for worship to “do something for you” is not the way to worship God. See Him, love and fear and serve Him, then come before Him according to His Word. He will give Himself in communion to you.

Treasure Old and New: Matthew 13.52; Psalm 119.162

“...so that the enjoyment of Him will go with us into the times in between worship, to sustain and guide us.” Look at the care God expresses in Deuteronomy 12.12. While He is guiding the people in the rules for correct worship, He is also teaching them about His kindness and care for others. “And you shall rejoice before the LORD...” and be sure to care for the Levite, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. “For His merciful kindness is great toward us, and the truth of the LORD endures forever” (Ps. 117.2). In truth, God cares about all of us, and He wants us to care about others as part of our participation in worship. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5.22, 23). All legal. All doable in the power of the Holy Spirit. All ways we can please God. “Clearly, worship as God outlined it is not a spectator sport.” So let’s get busy and actively worship God!

Reflection

1. In what ways should we expect to be *active* in worship?
2. Why are pagan elements and forms of worship abominable to God?
3. How would you counsel new believers to be always working to improve their worship of God?

The Word of God is not subject to whim, taste, or passing fancy. Earl Radmacher (1831-2014), *NKJV Study Notes for Deuteronomy 12.32*

Help me to live in worship before You today, Lord, following Your Word and praising You as I...

Closing Prayer: Psalm 51.1-9

In worship, we are in the Presence of God. He wants us to rejoice, even when worship leads us to recognize sin in our lives. As you worship the Lord today, keep focused on Him. Listen as His Spirit searches you. Rejoice in His forgiveness and grace, and call on Him to revive and renew you.

Psalm 51.1-9

(Passion Chorale: [*O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*](#))

Be gracious to me, Savior, according to Your love!
According to Your mercy, my sins, my sins remove!
O wash me, precious Savior, and cleanse me from all sin;
look on me with Your favor, and cause my grief to end.

Against You only, Savior, have I become unclean;
thus just the condemnation which You pronounce on me.
Lord, I was born to sinning, while You seek truth within;
to wisdom my heart winning, release me from my sin!

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In Jesus' blood and mercy, Lord, cleanse my evil heart!
Let me washed, cleansed, renewed be and pure in whole and part.
Bring joy again and gladness; look not upon my sin.
Deliver me from sadness; renew me yet again!

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. Worship is the most important work we do as God's people. Explain.
2. Why does it make sense that God knows best what we should do in worship?
3. Why is it important to keep out of our worship anything that God has not prescribed?
4. How can you know more joy in worshiping God? How can you help others know more of the joy of worshiping Him?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from Deuteronomy 12? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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