

Matt Kruse  
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**“Death to Deception!”**  
Deuteronomy 13  
Series: *Loving God in Every Way*

**Congregational Prayer:**

**Introduction:** Take your Bible and join me in Deuteronomy 13. We have the great privilege this morning of coming back to our study of the book of Deuteronomy. I trust you were encouraged and strengthened in your faith in the Lord Jesus as we worked our way through the 4 servant songs of Isaiah in the month of December. I know that I was personally challenged with the great uniqueness of Christ who became a one-of-a-kind servant so that he could become a one-of-a-kind Savior.

As we come back into the book of Deuteronomy we enter back in through the doorway of a difficult passage. It is not difficult to understand, it is just difficult to read and to process. It is a passage about apostasy and the different ways that apostasy is spread and the drastic actions the people of God must take to deal with it in their midst. Apostasy is simply the turning of one's heart from loyal love to the Lord God alone. It is the denial of God's authority over all things and it always includes the pursuit of another god.

In the political or military realm, we think immediately of the most infamous traitor in our country's history, and that is Benedict Arnold. You probably can't recall much of his story, but you know that this name is anathema in American history. Arnold was promoted to the rank of major general in the continental army during the American Revolution. He was promoted to that post because of some great bravery and outstanding service he had shown in the battle of Saratoga. But after being given the charge of a fort he slowly dissipated in his commitment to the American cause and eventually he reached out to the English side to turn over the fort to them through espionage and betrayal. It is one of the most painful and unforgettable moments in our nation's history. It is so painful that after the Revolutionary War there were monuments placed in the battlefield in Saratoga, NY, and there was a monument raised to honor the sacrifice and service of Benedict Arnold, because we would not have won that battle without his efforts and leadership. But the memory of his betrayal was so sharp that a monument was designed which did not include his name, nor his face, not even his body. In fact, it is only a monument of his boot. And the description on the monument speaks of a soldier who fought valiantly and who was injured in his leg while advancing the fight for victory. That soldier was Benedict Arnold.

Someone turning from commitments and loyalties is always painful and difficult, no matter what realm it is in. But it is especially difficult when it happens within the people of God. And this apostasy – this turning from loving loyalty to the one true God – has been a plague among the people of God in all generations. It is a constant threat to God's people. And so, in Deuteronomy 13, Moses addresses the issue head on like a good pastor should do.

You'll remember that is exactly what Moses is in the book of Deuteronomy. He is a pastor who is preaching to his people to prepare them for their entrance into the Promised Land. He is rehearsing their history and the core of the covenant they have made with God on Mount Horeb. And now, in this second half of the book he is fleshing out the core of the Law, the 10 commandments, and how they work out in the everyday life in the Promised Land. And the first order of business in chapter 12 was to address their worship of God. And now that continues in chapter 13 with this expressed concern about their turning to worship any other god. In other words, Moses is taking the first two commandments and he is working that out in the context of real life under the direction of the Spirit of God.

Not only is this chapter a pastoral application of the 1<sup>st</sup> 2 commandments, but it is also an application of the Shema – the key truth at the heart of the Israelites relationship to the Lord their God. Remember that from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 – “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Because the Lord is one, they must have undivided and unreserved and unending love for their Lord. So, this is how they should act when someone in their midst turns from the Lord and goes after another god. Let's read Deuteronomy 13.

Did you notice as we read that the text basically breaks down into three main parts? In verses 1-5 Moses addresses how to handle apostasy that arises from a prophet, and then in verses 6-11 how to handle apostasy when it comes up in someone close to you, and then in verses 12-18 how to handle apostasy when it comes up in another community of faith. Each section has three parts – there is the detail about the betrayal or rebellion and where it is coming from. And this is followed by the strong command to drastic action to deal with the apostate. And this is capped off by the result of their obedience if they will deal with the apostate in this way. The obvious point of the text is to call for unremitting faithfulness and love for the Lord no matter who might fall away. It doesn't matter if it is your favorite preacher or some new-fangled prophet doing miraculous works. It doesn't matter if it is your closest relationship in life or if it is some other community of faith that slowly drifts away from faithful worship of the Lord. God does not change, and His Word is forever true. No matter who falls away we must remain faithful in our love for the Lord. Which is incredibly difficult to do when apostasy strikes in our own camp. In fact, it is impossible for us without God's help. So, let's study this chapter together with the goal of strengthening our resolve to faithfully love the Lord our God. I want to do that by looking at the spread of apostasy, the seduction of apostasy and the solution for apostasy.

## I. The Spread of Apostasy

- a. First let's look at the spread of apostasy. Apostasy is so dangerous because it arises from sources which make it appealing to the rest of us. The ultimate source of this apostasy is the depth of human depravity. Hearts which may for a time fake allegiance to the Lord and may for a time go through the motions of religious exercise, but who, when the rubber meets the road, are not really Christians at all. This is the nature of the apostate. They are a deceiver and a liar and ultimately, they are a rejector of God and His truth.
- b. *Religious Authority (vv. 1-5)*

- i. But they might still claim to be proclaiming the truth or to be representing the one true God. That is the issue at stake in this first source that spreads apostasy in verses 1-5. This prophet or this dreamer of dreams is a religious authority who claims to speak for God. They come performing signs and wonders which validate their authority and give them greater influence over the people of God.
- ii. These signs and wonders are real outcroppings of unusual power. These are the same Hebrew words that Moses has used to describe the signs and wonders that God did to rescue the people from slavery in Egypt. And you will remember in the book of Exodus that many of Moses and Aaron's supernatural works were aped by the magicians of Egypt. They couldn't do it all, but their black magic allowed them some access to supernatural power. And this display of unusual power can become a convincing lure to draw people away from the truth.
- iii. These false prophets were prolific during the time of Ahab & Jezebel, and you remember that in their showdown with Elijah, the true prophet – that they were not allowed to produce a supernatural sign. So, all of this is under the sovereign control of God and when this is allowed to happen it is for the purpose of testing the love that God's people have for God. Will they be true and steadfast to His Word even when there is a new and powerful experience which seeks to lure them away? That is the threat addressed here. And that threat has not changed. Theology is always to rule over experience, never the other way around. This is what so much of the modern day church has fallen into – an experience based religion that uses truth to feed its experience. But rather, God says, we are to love Him by remaining faithful to Him as we let His truth rule over all experiences. Every experience, no matter how real or authentic or powerful – if it leads us down the path of false worship of a false god – one of our own imagination rather than the One who has clearly revealed himself – then we must reject the experience and cling to God's revealed Word about Himself.

c. *Close Relationships (vv. 6-11)*

- i. The second potential source of apostasy is given in verses 6-11 and that is close relationships. This is one of the hardest sections of the chapter, perhaps of the whole book, to read and to think through. Maybe if you are not really thinking about it then you can read this text glibly and quickly with little impact. But if you really consider the potential source of apostasy as coming from someone who's close to you, then the pain and difficulty are beyond words. And yet, as difficult as that is to talk about, it is this category which is likely the most dangerous. I have seen the slow and steady decline of people's faith in the Lord through the years be impacted more by these close relationships than by any other. It is when your son or your brother or your daughter or the wife you love or your

best friend says to you things that are obviously not of the Lord that you have before you the most severe test of faith in the Christian journey.

- ii. The impact and influence they have over your soul, combined with your affection for them are powerful forces in pulling your heart to join them in apostasy. And every Christian will have this in some form or another. Moses himself was confronted with this by his own brother and sister. Thankfully they were won back to faithful obedience through severe discipline, but he knew this testing of his own trust in the Lord. Our Lord faced this test through Judas Iscariot and from his own brothers who disowned him and thought him to be a lunatic. If our Lord suffered in this way, certainly some of us will be asked to walk this road too. And it is a road of resolute faithfulness which is undeterred by the apostasy of those closest to us. It's a path of unmitigated sorrow and lifelong pain. It is a path of anguish and despair. It is a path of "what if's" and "why him" or "why her's." But it is a path which requires absolute allegiance to a love for God which far outweighs our love for the closest human relationships.

d. *Communities of Faith (vv. 12-18)*

- i. The third potential source for this apostasy is found in verses 12-18 and it is in other communities of faith. That is what these other towns in the Promised Land would be. They would be communities of faith which were local representations of the larger Kingdom of God on Earth. They were under the Theocratic Rule of God as king and they were covenanted together to him to be his people and he was to be their God. They were collectively, as a nation made up of all these towns and communities, they were to display holy obedience to the God who has loved them so very clearly by redeeming them from Egypt and giving them this Land he had promised to their forefathers.
- ii. So, if they were to hear of a city or town who had been infected by apostasy, then they were called to careful, serious, and righteous action. Notice that in this third potential source the first 2 sources of apostasy had been ignored on the local level. So, the city is turned from loyal love for the Lord by worthless fellows. They were either false prophets or someone's son or close friend. But the city didn't deal with them according to God's command and this leaven grew and eventually leavened the whole lump. And before too long the whole city had turned from loyal faithful obedience to the Lord and had gone after other gods. And if this is not dealt with then the whole of the nation might be turned away from God. So, they are to bear God's sword of righteous judgment and they are to go and deal with those who are apostatizing in idolatry before it infects the rest of the visible kingdom of God.
- iii. The carry over for us would be another assembly of the church. Like OT Israel we have local and visible expressions of the larger whole. And these communities of faith share a unique bond as followers of Jesus Christ. Obviously, the similarity does not get pressed into every detail, but the

general similarity is here. And this is a threat to the health of the church as a whole. When one local congregation starts playing fast and loose with doctrine and starts worshiping a god other than the God of the Scriptures, then there is a danger for the rest of the Body of Christ. And that danger is that we will be desensitized to false teaching because there are Christians we know and respect who are supporting it and promoting it. What Moses is saying here is that there is a loyalty to the Lord and His truth that must surpass even the most renowned and respected community of faith. Even if the town is Jerusalem that is found worshiping another god, then the responsibility of the nation is the same. The warning call is sounded – we must be on guard against apostasy spreading through religious authorities or close relationships or other communities of faith.

## II. The Seduction of Apostasy

- a. This spread of apostasy is accompanied by the seduction of apostasy, and by that I simply mean the temptation of apostasy. What is the lure here? Why is it attractive? Well, look at the repeated line of the apostate in all three sections. What do they say? Verse 2 – “Let us go after other gods and let us serve them.” And verse 6 – “Let us go and serve other gods.” And then again in verse 13 – “Let us go and serve other gods.” That is the lure of the apostate to seek to suck others away from the Lord. They offer a different god, or a different version of the god already being worshiped, which then makes it a different god altogether.
- b. But the bottom line is, that is their one line appeal – “come, let us go and serve other gods.” This is the absolute non-originality of Satan. This has been his line since the Garden of Eden. This has been the message of his deceptive ways in every generation. The bottom line is this – let us go and serve other gods. He is a one-joke comedian, a one-skill employee, a one-product salesman, a one-line deceiver. This is the best he has. And yet it has proven effective over and over and over again.
- c. The inherent message in the appeal is that there is another god who is better. There must be a better option. A god whose laws aren’t quite so strict, or a god who will provide for us better, or a god we can see. The most obvious example of this in Israel’s own history was the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai. Do you remember the demands of those worthless men in Exodus 32? When Moses didn’t come down from the mountain for a really long time, the people went to Aaron and said, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”
- d. And you remember what happens next? Aaron tells them to give him all the gold they have and he melts it together and fashions a golden calf and says to them, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” And then they celebrated and had a feast in the name of the Lord which was anything but a celebration of the one true God.

- e. What was the lure there? It was the perceived absence of God and of God's spokesman. They lost patience and their fickle hearts craved a god they could see and control. And to a depraved heart this is lure enough.
- f. Notice that in verse 5 the prophet is to be put to death because he is a teacher of rebellion against the Lord your God. This rebellion is the apostasy we have been talking about. It is the clear turning from loyal love of the one true God. And it is cultivated in the test tube of forgetfulness about God and His great love for us. The apostate forgets God and leaves God and calls others to join him.
- g. And we are suckers for something new, aren't we? We are suckers for something that seems to work for someone else. We are prone to forget God and all He has done to make us His own, and when we do, it is here that we are most ripe for the picking. It is here that we are in the most danger of apostasy ourselves. And when that arises from a religious authority or from within a close relationship or from another community of faith, then we are all the more tempted to leave the God we love and go after another god.

### III. The Solution for Apostasy

- a. So, what is the solution for this apostasy then? Well, it will never be completely eradicated from the people of God. There will always be goats mixed in with the sheep as Jesus said. There will always be weeds in with the wheat, and those will have to be separated out on Judgment Day. But what is our responsibility in the meantime? How are we to protect ourselves from apostasy, and how are we to deal with those who go out from us because they were never of us – as 1 John 2:19 says?
- b. *Love God*
  - i. Well, preeminently this is an issue of our love for the Lord. This is the core issue for all of God's people all of the time. This is why we've labeled our series in Deuteronomy as "Loving God in Every Way" because that is the issue. That is the core expression of our faith in God. The root of our faith is the grace of God at work in us, and the fruit of our faith is our love for God in response to this great grace.
  - ii. This is what we see right away in verse 3. The Lord God ordains this false prophet and his supernatural signs and wonders to test his people and their love for Him. Fidelity to something isn't really fidelity until it is tested and proven. A groom can say to his bride on his wedding day that he loves her and will until death parts them, but this isn't really seen until she gets sick with an incurable disease and life turns out to be something they never planned. A pastor can tell his people that he loves them when things are going well, but it's when the hurt relationships mount and the ministry challenges rise where that pastor's love is tested and shown to be what it really is. And this is true in our relationship with the Lord as well. It is easy to say we love God. But it is quite another thing to actually love God when others around us are departing from him and serving another god. This chapter is all about loving God more than anyone else. It is about loyally committing yourself to him no matter who might turn away.

- iii. And notice in verse 4 that this love for the Lord is quickly defined. Instead of following the false prophet they are to love God by staying on course. And instead of fearing the prophet whose miraculous sign they just saw, they are to fear God supremely. Instead of listening to the voice of the false prophet, they are to hear and obey God's voice. And instead of serving other gods, they are to be enslaved to the one true God who has lavished such kind mercy upon them. And instead of walking away they are to hold fast and cleave to the Lord alone. These are all things they were called to back in chapters 10 and 11, and now they are reminded that this is what love for the Lord looks like.
- iv. And then notice that this love for the Lord is not only defined here, but it is also given clear motivation. So, love the Lord by walking in his ways and listening to him and obeying him and holding fast to him and serving him alone in the face of the lure of apostasy. But why? Why should they love God supremely and singularly like this? Because he redeemed them and therefore, he is the Lord your God!
- v. The phrase "the Lord your God" is used 10 times in these 18 verses to remind them that this is the one true God who is their God. And He is their God because He has chosen to make them his people. That is what the false prophet is teaching them to rebel against in verse 5. He is calling them to forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery. This exact same idea is repeated in verse 10 in describing the severe punishment that is due to the apostate, even the one who is close to you. The severe punishment is warranted because they tried to draw you away from the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt.
- vi. So, the key motive to your love for the Lord is always to remember the work of redemption accomplished by the Lord to make you his own. This was true for the nation of Israel and this is true for the Christian today. The core issue in your living out your faith is your love for the Lord. And your key motivation is to look constantly upon the redemption that has been accomplished for you through the cross of Christ. This is so effective because the cost of redemption is always higher than the cost of your ongoing obedience. Your loyalty to the Lord is stoked into a great flame when your eye turns from self-pity over the cost of obedience and it looks upon the bleeding and dying Son of God hanging on the cross under the weight of your sin's condemnation. And here is an endless fountain flowing of red-hot lava to dump upon your heart to stoke it into a hot flame of zealous and loyal love for our Lord, no matter the cost. And that cost could be as small as the inconvenience of putting aside lesser charms and pursuing Christ with all you are and have, or that cost could be as large as losing someone close to you because they refuse to go on with you in the way of Christ. The core issue for you in that spectrum of potential cost is do you love God. In fact, that is the issue for you right now in all of

life. In every relationship where you are struggling and in every circumstance you would love to change and in every area of sanctification you need to work on – it all comes down to this issue – do you love God?

- vii. Isn't that exactly what Jesus questioned Peter about in John 21. After Peter had betrayed Jesus 3 times on the night of his arrest, what is the concern Jesus has in order to restore Peter to effective service? Simon, son of bar-Jonah, do you love me? Simon, do you love me? Simon, do you love me? Brother or sister – that is the most piercing and penetrating counseling question you could ever ask your own soul. In the midst of your current struggle or in the face of someone else's apostasy or in the midst of pressure to abandon faithfulness to the Lord, do you love Christ?
  - viii. Maybe you have heard the name Perpetua. One author said "it would be hard to find a more noble and heroic woman in all of church history than Vibia Perpetua of Carthage, who was arrested for her faith and thrown to the wild beasts in AD 203."<sup>1</sup> She journaled prolifically throughout the ordeal of her trial and martyrdom and so she became immensely influential in the suffering church for generations to come. As she awaited trial she writes this:
    - 1. "A few days later a rumor circulated that we would be granted a hearing. Then my father arrived from the city consumed with worry. He came to see me in order to shake my resolve. 'Have pity on my gray hairs, daughter,' he said. 'Have pity on your father – if I am worthy to be called your father! With my own hands I tended you like a blossoming flower. I favored you over both your brothers. So don't cast me aside now to be scorned by men! Think of your brothers . . . your mother . . . your aunt . . . your son! He won't be able to live without you. Don't be so stubborn, or you're going to destroy us all! We'll never be able to speak freely again if anything happens to you.'
    - 2. My father said these things like any loving father would. He kissed my hands and threw himself at my feet . . . I felt so sorry for my father's misfortune, because out of all my relatives he was the only one who wouldn't rejoice at my martyrdom.
    - 3. I attempted to comfort him. 'Everything that happens at my trial will be God's will,' I said. 'Rest assured that we are upheld not by our own strength in that moment but by God's.' And so he left me, grief-stricken."<sup>2</sup>
  - ix. Beloved – that is loyal love for the Lord in the face of apostasy!
- c. *Deal with the Apostate*
- i. This love for the Lord for the children of Israel will look like drastic justice brought upon the head of the apostate. That is the most difficult

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<sup>1</sup> Bryan M. Litfin, *Early Christian MARTYR STORIES*, pg. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 96-97.

and alarming part of this chapter to read. We don't live today in a theocratic kingdom where our nation is the chosen people of God and where God rules and reigns over us as King. In that theocratic system under the Mosaic Law, the nation was expected to wield the sword of justice. And nowhere was this more important than when the high treason of apostasy was swirling in the air.

- ii. That is different today in the Church age. The sword of justice for capital punishment is in the hands of human government now. But that does not mean that we have no mechanism within the church to deal with the apostasy that might arise in our midst. We are prone in our post-modern world to just shrug it off as no big deal if someone changes their mind and goes a different way. But the New Testament is not so ambivalent. Paul writes in Galatians 1 and says that if anyone – him, another preacher, or even an angel from heaven – if anyone preaches another gospel then they are anathema. That Greek word is representative of that phrase, devoted to destruction in verse 15. That is the curse of those who turn from God and his truth. They are devoted to destruction. In fact, at the end of the book of 1 Corinthians, a book in which Paul has called the church to rise up and address some serious sin issues in her midst, he says in 16:22 – “If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him!” Or quite literally – let him be anathematized.
- iii. You see how love for the Lord and fidelity to Him and His Word go hand in hand? And do you see how serious this is? It offends our sensibilities because our sensibilities are formed more by our ambivalence about our own sin than they are by the righteousness and holiness of God. But the testimony of Scripture is clear – this apostasy from the Lord is a big deal in any age. And the church must be on guard at all times. And when it arises in her midst, she must deal with it according to the Scriptural guidelines.

d. *Fear God*

- i. And when we do – the result will be what is promised here in chapter 13. God's people will fear the Lord more when we seriously deal with apostasy in our midst. We will each take a look at our own sinful hearts and we will each grow all the more eager to love God more faithfully. And God will strengthen us and will prosper us according to His will as we follow His ways.

**Conclusion:** So, beloved, no matter where the apostasy comes from or who promotes it, God has not changed. His truth has not changed. He is still the one and only true Lord and He is worthy of all our love! May God help us to love him more today. Let's pray.