



Holy Worship

Deuteronomy 12-14

Main point: God's ultimate holiness calls us to live distinctly before Him

Overview

Expounds on the first three commandments

No other gods: worship God in His place/way (ch. 12)

No graven images: purge all idolaters from midst (ch. 13)

Don't take God's name lightly: eat correctly before Him (ch. 14)

Observations

God's holiness calls us to distinct worship (ch. 12)

In the OT, this was certain rules in one place

In the NT, this is through Jesus Christ

God's holiness calls us to cut off all idols and idolaters (ch. 13)

This includes cutting off those who aren't committed to Him

God's holiness requires a distinct lifestyle (ch. 14)

Not everything will make sense

Application

Worship is about God, not us *1Co 10:31*

This means we ask what God likes, not what we like

Idolatry is serious and requires a serious approach *Eph 5:5; 1Jo 5:21*

God's holiness calls us to unique actions

Some appear arbitrary but keep us humble *Rom 14:5*

Some are extravagant and turn our hearts to God *John 12:2-8*

Response

Seek God only through Jesus Christ

Ask God to expose idolatry in your own life

Embrace spiritual disciplines

Both exclusive and inclusive

Thoughts on Idolatry

C. S. Lewis once said that 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. The western church, more than it cares to admit, has imbibed the dichotomized, privatized, cultural worldview in which God is no longer the ultimate governing reality and Lord of all human life and community, private and public, domestic and political, local and global. And having for all practical purposes accepted the box into which the surrounding culture has confined God, it is not surprising that we have difficulty with the concept of idolatry. For if the living God is little more than an idol, where do other idols fit? We lack the categories to define them and the tools to discern them. And thus, in reality, their power over us is infinitely enhanced because we don't even recognize them. We can't begin to work on the relevance of a chapter like Deuteronomy 13 when we don't know what it is talking about. We have long since failed the test of verse 3. For only those who know and love the living God "with all their heart (understanding, mind, intellect) and soul (personal commitment)" know what idols are. One of the most critical missiological tasks facing the church today is to recover, rethink, and reapply a fully biblical understanding of idolatry, with a sober and painful evaluation of the extent of its penetration, not only to the roots of western culture, but into the very bloodstream of the church. We will not find ourselves reviving the legislation of Deuteronomy 13, but we may become more impressed by the sharpness of its delineation between truth and falsehood, between the saving God and lifeless substitutes, and ultimately, between life and death.

– Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series, Baker: Grand Rapids, MI, 1996. 177-78.