

ALL FEELINGS ASIDE

Deuteronomy 13:1-11¹

1 If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder,

2 And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them;

3 Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

4 Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him.

5 And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee.

6 If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;

7 Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;

8 Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:

9 But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.

10 And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

11 And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you.

¹ Romans 15:4: "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

I. THE PROOF OF OUR DEVOTION **(Why God Tests Us)**

The issue presented by these passages is neither obscure nor incidental. Rather, the controlling question is whether God occupies the place of absolute supremacy in the affections of his people. To be sure, the chapter addresses idolatry; howbeit idolatry itself is but the outward manifestation of a deeper jurisdictional issue, namely, whether any competing loyalty or authority may lawfully displace the Lord from the throne of your heart. The question, therefore, is not merely whether one professes to love God. The issue is whether that profession survives scriptural scrutiny when obedience becomes personally expensive.

Observe that the Bible immediately directs our attention to circumstances in which the claims of God appear to collide with the expectations of those whom we most dearly love. Such occasions are not accidental. They function as proving grounds. It is comparatively easy to render obedience when obedience exacts little cost. It is altogether another matter when fidelity to divine revelation threatens domestic harmony, cherished friendships, financial security, personal reputation, or emotional comfort. At precisely that juncture, the true hierarchy of the heart is manifested.

The opening verses of Deuteronomy 13 remind us that not every spiritual influence originates with God. Moses speaks of prophets and dreamers of dreams who may perform signs or wonders and whose predictions may even come to pass; therefore, the Bible teaches that the occurrence of a miracle is not, in and of itself, ipso facto proof of the Lord's approval. Outward success, extraordinary experiences, popularity, sincerity, persuasive speech, intellectual brilliance, or supernatural manifestations never establish the truth. Throughout history, multitudes have been led astray because they judged what they conceived as the truth BY APPEARANCES RATHER THAN BY THE WRITTEN WORDS OF GOD. The determining question has always been, "What saith the scripture?" If a person's teaching contradicts God's Book, then no amount of sincerity, charisma, influence, learning, or apparent success can make his message true. The Holy Bible remains the final authority. Every experience must submit to the holy scriptures; scripture never submits to experience.

The Lord explains why he permits such influences to arise. "For the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Dt 13:3). This statement does not imply that God lacks knowledge concerning His people. He is omniscient. He perfectly knows your heart before the trial ever begins. Rather, the proving reveals to us what already exists within us. Throughout the Bible, God repeatedly proves or tests His people. He proved Israel in the wilderness to reveal what was in their hearts (Ex 16:4; Dt 8:2, 16). He proved Israel at Sinai (Ex 20:20). He withdrew his restraining hand from Hezekiah for a season to reveal everything that was in his heart

(2 Chr 32:31). David prayed, “Examine me, O LORD, and prove me” (Ps 26:2), while elsewhere confessing, “Thou hast proved mine heart” (Ps 17:3). The Psalmist acknowledged, “For thou, O God, hast proved us” (Ps 66:10). Solomon declared that “the LORD trieth the hearts” (Prv 17:3). Our Lord Jesus Christ tested Philip before the feeding of the five thousand, not because Christ required information, but because Philip needed instruction concerning the weakness of his own faith (Jn 6:6). James teaches that “the trying of your faith worketh patience” (Jas 1:3). At the same time, Peter reminds believers that “the trial of your faith” is more precious than gold refined in the fire (1 Pt 1:7). Every one of these passages teaches the same enduring principle. God proves His people to expose, refine, strengthen, and manifest genuine devotion.

Observe carefully what God is proving. The test is not whether we possess affection toward him. The test is whether he occupies the highest and loftiest place in our affections. God often permits competing loyalties and authorities because only such competition reveals supreme loyalty or final authority. So long as obedience costs nothing, our profession remains largely untested. But when obedience requires sacrifice, when biblical conviction collides with human affection, when fidelity to Christ threatens the approval of those nearest to us, then the true condition of your heart is laid bare. God asks, in effect, “Whose voice carries the greatest authority in your life? Whose approval matters most? Who ultimately governs your decisions?” Every trial presses those questions upon the conscience.

II. THE PULL OF OUR DEAREST RELATIONSHIPS **(Why the Test is Difficult)**

Thus, it is significant that Moses immediately shifts from false prophets generally to those relationships that are nearest the human heart. “If thy brother...or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul...” (Dt 13:6). The Lord deliberately names the deepest earthly relationships known to mankind. These are not adversaries. These are not strangers. These are the people whose opinions matter most, whose happiness we cherish, whose grief becomes our grief, and whose counsel naturally carries tremendous influence. David and Jonathan illustrate such affection, for “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sm 18:1). Yet even relationships of that depth must remain subordinate to absolute obedience to God. No human relationship, regardless of its intimacy or preciousness, possesses authority to alter, diminish, suspend, reinterpret, or overrule the commandments of Almighty God.

Affection naturally creates influence. We instinctively trust those whom we love. We tend to assign greater credibility to their opinions than to those of strangers. Their approval encourages us. Their disappointment wounds us. Consequently, the greatest spiritual dangers often arise, not from open enemies, but from those whose place in our hearts

renders their influence especially powerful. Satan has frequently accomplished through affection what persecution itself could never achieve. When the person urging compromise occupies a cherished place in our lives, the temptation becomes far more difficult because the issue no longer appears merely doctrinal. It becomes intensely personal. We begin asking how our obedience will affect the relationship, how our decision will be received, whether peace can somehow be preserved, or whether an exception might be justified. Yet none of those questions addresses the only question that really matters: “What has God said?” Every other consideration must yield before the words of God. God must remain first, regardless of the cost, albeit emotional, financial, professional, etc.

Moses then introduces a phrase that deserves our careful attention: “If...thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly” (Dt 13:6). The temptation does not begin in the public square. It begins in private conversation. It begins behind closed doors. It begins through whispered suggestions, emotional appeals, personal conversations, and subtle reasoning. The phrase “entice thee secretly” reminds us that spiritual compromise ordinarily begins in the heart long before it manifests itself in outward conduct. Apostasy seldom begins with a public denial of biblical truth. It usually begins with a private willingness to entertain reasoning that God has already settled in his Book.

This is precisely the strategy employed by Satan in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:1–6). The serpent did not begin by openly urging Eve to rebel against God. Rather, he introduced doubt by questioning God's words. “Yea, hath God said...?” Once divine revelation became a subject for human debate, the foundation for disobedience had already been laid. Satan has never abandoned that method. Error frequently disguises itself as compassion, practicality, moderation, fairness, common sense, family loyalty, or emotional sensitivity. It rarely announces itself as rebellion. Instead, it asks questions such as, “What is the harm?” “Surely God understands your circumstances.” “Everyone else does it.” “Perhaps you are taking the Bible too seriously.” “Can't you make an exception this one time?” “Do you really think God meant that?” One of my personal “favorites” is, “But I love him/her. How can love be wrong?” Ask Samson (Jgs 16:4). Listen, don't you sit there and tell me you can't love the wrong person! The temptation is not presented as hostility toward God but as a reasonable adjustment to accommodate human relationships or difficult circumstances.

That is precisely why undue influence is so spiritually dangerous. The issue is not merely that someone disagrees with you. The issue is that affection may be employed to persuade you to violate convictions already established by the word of God. Emotional pressure easily becomes spiritual accommodation. A parent may unintentionally encourage compromise for the sake of family peace. A spouse may appeal to affection to justify conduct contrary to scripture. A child may ask us to overlook what God condemns because we do not wish to injure the relationship. A close friend may appeal to years of loyalty in an attempt to silence biblical conviction. In each instance, the temptation is fundamentally

the same. Will human affection override the word and will of the Lord? Will personal loyalty become greater than sacrifice and obedience to God? You know the answer concerning yourself. You know the answer right this minute. Are you willing to be honest about it? Are you going to do something about it?

III. THE PERIL OF MISPLACED AFFECTION **(What Happens When Affection Becomes Idolatry)**

The immediate context concerns idolatry. “Let us go and serve other gods” (Dt 13:6). Yet the principle extends far beyond the worship of false gods. The Apostle Paul identifies covetousness itself as idolatry (Col 3:5). An idol is anything that competes with God for first place in the heart. That’s right! You turn on the television daily, weekly, or whenever, and you’re guilty of idolatry because you covet what you see on it! Your eye affects your heart (Lam 3:51). Consequently, a relationship may become an idol. A career may become an idol. Personal ambitions may become idols. Reputation may become an idol. The approval of others may become an idol. Even the ministry itself can become an idol if it displaces simple devotion to Jesus Christ. Whatever occupies the place that belongs exclusively to God has become a rival to his rightful supremacy. God will not tolerate rivals. He alone is worthy of absolute allegiance and preeminence.

IV. THE PRIORITY OF ABSOLUTE OBEDIENCE **(How Believers Must Respond)**

The commands that follow are among the strongest in the entire chapter. “Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him” (Dt 13:8). Each expression exposes a different way in which natural affection tempts us away from obedience.

A. REFUSE AGREEMENT

First, God says, “Thou shalt not consent unto him.” Love does not require agreement with sin. Genuine love never assists another person in disobeying God. Modern culture frequently equates love with unconditional affirmation, but biblical love is inseparable from the truth. This is what the LGBTQ crowd fails to realize (and I don’t know how many letters they keep adding; every time someone doesn’t like what goes on in life, a new letter is added, it seems)! To encourage someone in conduct that God condemns is not compassion; it is participation in spiritual harm. No relationship, regardless of its intimacy, grants permission to violate the commandments of God. Period. You say, “I don’t like that. I don’t like what you’re saying.” Well, that is exactly what your problem is. You have an authority problem!

B. REFUSE ATTENTION

Second, God says, “Nor hearken unto him.” There are matters upon which debate is unnecessary because God has already spoken...like sexual matters. Eve's downfall began when she entertained conversation about a matter the Lord had conclusively settled (Gn 3:1–6). Human reasoning never possesses the authority to overturn what God has said. Whenever the scriptures speak plainly, our responsibility is not to renegotiate God's words but to submit to them. Faith does not sit in judgment upon the Book; faith bows humbly before it.

C. REFUSE SENTIMENT

Third, God commands, “Neither shall thine eye pity him.” Misplaced compassion has become one of Satan's most effective instruments. Scripture certainly commands mercy toward those overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1), patience toward the weak (1 Thes 5:14), and forgiveness toward those who seek reconciliation (Eph 4:32). Yet there is also a counterfeit compassion that excuses rebellion, minimizes sin, and substitutes sentimentality for holiness. Saul imagined he was acting mercifully when he spared Agag and preserved the best of the Amalekite livestock (1 Sm 15:1–23). God, however, regarded Saul's misplaced pity as direct disobedience. Mercy never possesses the authority to contradict righteousness and what God said!

D. REFUSE ACCOMMODATION

Fourth, Moses says, “Neither shalt thou spare.” Fallen human nature instinctively seeks to avoid painful confrontations. You would rather preserve relationships than address sin, wouldn't you? We often convince ourselves that silence promotes peace, when in reality, silence frequently serves as a cloak for disobedience. Love for God sometimes requires conversations that are emotionally painful. It sometimes requires saying “no” when every natural affection urges you to say “yes.” Genuine discipleship demands courage because faithfulness is often costly. It is time for some Christians to stand up and have some guts to do what's right!

E. REFUSE CONCEALMENT

Finally, God says, “Neither shalt thou conceal him.” The natural inclination is to protect those whom we love from the consequences of their choices. We are tempted to cover wrongdoing, preserve family reputation, excuse sinful conduct, or remain silent to avoid embarrassment. Yet concealment makes us the abettors of iniquity! Under Israel's civil administration, the witness who knew the facts was required to stand openly for the truth (Dt 13:9). While the civil penalties given to Israel do not govern the church, the underlying principle remains unchanged. God's people must never become the accessories of sin. Truth must always take precedence over personal devotion. The one who knows must act. The

one most tempted to remain silent is often the very one whom God calls to speak up the loudest. That's what courage is, you know. Courage is doing something you ought to do even when you're afraid to do it, and it may cost you dearly.

These commands reveal that the central issue is not cruelty but priority. God is not teaching his people to despise their families. Indeed, the Bible repeatedly commands husbands to love their wives (Eph 5:25), wives to submit to their husbands (Eph 5:22), children to honor their parents (Eph 6:2), parents to nurture their children (Eph 6:4), and for people to care for members of their own household (1Tm 5:8). Deuteronomy 13 addresses an entirely different question. What happens when obedience to God and devotion to another person collide? At that moment, God must prevail. Every earthly relationship is a gift from God, but no earthly relationship may assume God's throne. Every affection must remain beneath the Lord's authority. Every loyalty must remain subordinate to God's will. Every human utterance must yield to the voice of God.

V. THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST (Why Christ Deserves First Place)

The latter portion of Deuteronomy 13 turns our attention away from the outward act of temptation and directs it toward the inward condition of the heart. The Bible repeatedly reminds us that God is not merely concerned with what we do; he is equally concerned with why we do it. Men observe conduct, but God examines motives. "The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sm 16:7). He is "the LORD searcheth all hearts" (1 Chr 28:9). He "knoweth the hearts of all men" (Acts 1:24). "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked...I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins" (Jer 17:9–10). Our Lord likewise declared, "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts" (Rv 2:23). Consequently, every trial, every temptation, every competing loyalty becomes an occasion in which God exposes what truly governs your heart and your affections.

This truth ought to humble every believer. We are often skilled at defending our decisions by appealing to our intentions, our emotions, our experiences, or our circumstances. Yet God looks beyond every outward justification and asks penetrating (and that Book sure penetrates! See Heb 4:12) questions that cannot be evaded. Why did you make that decision? Whose influence governed your thinking? Whose approval were you seeking? What occupied first place in your affections? What controlled your reasoning? What relationship were you unwilling to surrender? Those questions reach beneath external conduct and expose the true object of our devotion. David understood this when he prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts" (Ps 139:23–24). He desired God to expose whatever rival affection might secretly occupy the throne of his heart before it matured into open disobedience.

That reality brings us to the principal lesson of the entire chapter. Feelings are real, but feelings are not our authority. Emotions are gifts from God, but they are never intended to govern the believer's life. Our feelings fluctuate. They are influenced by circumstances, fatigue, disappointments, relationships, fears, and innumerable external factors. God's word, however, remains forever settled in heaven (Ps 119:89). Truth does not change because our emotions change. Biblical principles remain true irrespective of our feelings, affections, experiences, logic, preferences, reasoning, or personal justifications. Hence, you shouldn't ask, "How do I feel?" before determining what is right. You ask, "What does God say?" The answer to that question settles the matter.

This principle reaches its fullest expression in the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord did not diminish the demands of Deuteronomy 13; he intensified them. "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:26). Christ was not commanding sinful hatred. Scripture repeatedly commands believers to love their families (See above Eph 5:25; 6:1-2; Titus 2:4). Rather, he was speaking comparatively. Our love for him must be so supreme that every other earthly love appears secondary by comparison. In plainer words, "hate" here means to love less or to place second. Father, mother, husband, wife, children, brothers, sisters, friends, and even our own lives must occupy a subordinate place beneath our devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. If any earthly relationship possesses greater authority over our decisions than the Lord Jesus Christ himself, that relationship has assumed a place that belongs to God alone. That earthly relationship has to go.

Our Lord immediately continued, "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Lk 14:27). Much confusion surrounds the meaning of cross-bearing. The cross is not merely the ordinary inconveniences of life. It is not simply sickness, disappointment, financial hardship, or difficult circumstances. In its biblical context, the cross represents willing submission to God when obedience is personally costly. It signifies dying to self to obey and follow Christ. Sometimes that cross involves losing the approval of family. Sometimes it involves the misunderstanding of close friends. Sometimes it requires standing alone when everyone nearest to us urges compromise. Sometimes it costs advancement, popularity, comfort, possessions, or reputation. The cross reminds us that genuine discipleship always requires sacrifice because the Lord Jesus himself walked the path of sacrifice before us and for us.

The Lord then illustrated this truth by speaking of a man intending to build a tower (Lk 14:28-30). Before construction begins, the wise builder sits down and counts the cost. He determines beforehand whether he is willing to finish what he has begun. Christ's point is unmistakable. No one should profess discipleship lightly. Following Christ is not an emotional impulse made in a moment of excitement. It is a settled determination that God will remain first regardless of the personal consequences. You must resolve beforehand

that no relationship, no ambition, no possession, no opportunity, and no earthly attachment will ever be permitted to displace Jesus Christ from first place. Unless that matter is settled before the trial arrives, the temptation to compromise and sin will often prevail when the cost becomes great for you.

The Lord reinforced the lesson with the illustration of a king contemplating war (Lk 14:31–32). Before engaging the battle, he carefully considers the strength of the opposition. Likewise, every believer should understand that following Jesus Christ inevitably places him in conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. There will be opposition. There will be pressure. There will be competing loyalties and authorities. There will be moments when obedience appears and/or is costly. The Lord never concealed those realities. He called men to discipleship with complete honesty, requiring them to understand that allegiance to him demands absolutely everything.

The Lord concluded with words that leave no room for divided allegiance: “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:33). Christ is not teaching that salvation is earned through renouncing possessions. Rather, he is teaching the absolute discipleship. Everything we possess already belongs to him. Every relationship belongs to him. Every ambition belongs to him. Every affection belongs to him. Every plan belongs to him. Every talent belongs to him. Every moment of our lives belongs to him. Nothing may compete with his rightful place as the Lord. We own nothing independently of him. We merely steward what he has entrusted to us until he comes.

VI. THE PRACTICE OF COSTLY DISCIPLESHIP **(Biblical Examples of Obedience)**

This is precisely the principle Moses taught centuries earlier. The New Testament church does not administer the civil penalties prescribed under the Mosaic Law. Nevertheless, the spiritual principle remains entirely unchanged. The apostles declared before the Jewish council, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). That statement applies irrespective of who “men” may be. It remains true when those men are government officials. It remains true when they are respected teachers. It remains true when they are employers. It remains true when they are lifelong friends. It remains true when they are beloved family members. No human authority, however dear or influential, possesses the right to require what God forbids or forbid what God commands. Whenever such a conflict arises, your duty has already been settled by the authority of God's Book. God comes first—always, immediately, completely, and without exception.

Therefore, the great question of Deuteronomy 13 is not whether we love our families. God assumes that we do. Nor is the question whether we value friendships, appreciate spouses, cherish children, or honor parents. Scripture advocates all of those things. The searching

question is this: Who has first place in your heart? Whose voice carries the greatest authority over your decisions? Whose approval matters most? What relationship would be most difficult for you to place beneath the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ? What possession would you be unwilling to surrender? What ambition would you refuse to abandon? What affection would you permit to override the Bible? Until those questions are answered honestly before God, we have not yet fully understood the message of Deuteronomy 13.

May our answer forever remain that of Moses: “Ye shall walk after the LORD your God, and fear him, and keep his commandments, and obey his voice, and ye shall serve him, and cleave unto him” (Dt 13:4). May our hearts be settled before the trial ever comes. May every competing loyalty already have been surrendered. May every earthly affection remain beneath the feet of Christ. And should the day arrive when obedience to God costs us the approval of those dearest to us, may we still be able to say with unwavering conviction in our obedience to God. God first. God above all. God before every relationship. God before every affection. God before every ambition. God before every earthly attachment. Whatever the cost, however painful the sacrifice, and irrespective of every feeling to the contrary, he alone is worthy of absolute, unquestioning, and supreme devotion. That is the true test of love. That is the true test of loyalty. That is the true cost of discipleship. And that is the enduring message of Deuteronomy 13: all feelings aside, God must always be first.

It is important that we appreciate just how radical the Lord's demand truly is. We have become accustomed to speaking about putting God first, but very often we mean that God occupies first place among many competing priorities. That is not the only biblical picture. God is not merely first on a list; he is the foundation upon which every other relationship rests. He does not simply rank above family, career, possessions, ambitions, or personal desires. Rather, every one of those things derives its legitimacy only as it remains in submission to him. If God is truly first, then every other relationship must be loved through him, governed by him, and surrendered to him. The moment any person or affection begins directing our decisions contrary to that Book, that person or affection has become an idol, regardless of how innocent it may appear.

This explains why the Lord so frequently places his servants in circumstances where obedience is expensive. Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac upon Mount Moriah (Gn 22:1–18). Isaac was not merely Abraham's beloved son; he was the son of promise through whom God had pledged to fulfill his covenant. Yet even that miraculous gift could not become more important than the Giver. Before Abraham could become the father of many nations, God required him to demonstrate that Isaac occupied the altar while God occupied the throne. The lesson remains unchanged. Every Isaac in our lives must remain beneath God's authority. The Lord may never require us to surrender that blessing permanently, but

he will often require us to surrender it unconditionally. Nothing that God has given us may become more precious than God himself.

The same principle appears throughout the Bible. Moses chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:24–26). Ruth left her homeland and her family because the God of Israel had become more precious to her than everything she left behind (Ruth 1:16–17). Daniel continued praying when the decree of the king prohibited it, because God's authority outweighed governmental authority (Dn 6:10). Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar's image, choosing the fiery furnace rather than compromise their allegiance to God (Dn 3:16–18). Peter and John continued preaching Christ despite official commands to remain silent because they recognized that God's authority supersedes every other authority. In every generation, faithful men and women have faced the same essential question: Is God truly worth whatever obedience costs?

The answer of the holy scriptures is an unequivocal yes. The Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of every sacrifice because he first sacrificed everything for us. He did not merely ask us to bear a cross; he bore his own cross first (Jn 19:17–18). He did not merely command us to deny ourselves; he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Phil 2:7–8). He did not merely tell us to surrender our lives; he “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). The call to costly discipleship is grounded in the infinitely greater sacrifice of our Savior. Whatever he requires of us is never greater than what he has already done for us.

Perhaps that is why Paul could say with such confidence, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8). Paul had surrendered reputation, religious standing, influence, security, possessions, and ultimately his own life. Despite that, he never regarded himself as the loser. Compared with knowing Christ, everything else had become comparatively insignificant. That is precisely the perspective our Lord Jesus teaches in Luke 14. Discipleship is not fundamentally about what we give up; it is about whom we gain. The believer who treasures Christ above all earthly relationships has not impoverished himself. He has discovered the Pearl of Great Price for which every lesser possession may gladly be relinquished (Mt 13:45–46).

Accordingly, let every one of us examine our own hearts before God. It is easy to condemn Israel's idolatry while overlooking the subtler idols that quietly occupy our own affections. What decision would you make differently if the approval of others were removed from the equation? Is there someone whose opinion carries greater weight than the Bible? Is there a relationship you fear losing more than you fear grieving the Holy Spirit? Is there an ambition you would refuse to abandon if obedience to Christ required it? Is there a possession that would be too costly to surrender? Is there a personal desire that repeatedly pressures you to reinterpret what God has plainly said? Those questions are not theoretical.

They are precisely the kind of questions that God uses to expose whether he truly occupies first place in our hearts.

The believer who settles those matters before the trial arrives will stand when the trial comes. Daniel had purposed in his heart before Babylon ever offered him the king's meat (Dn 1:8). The three Hebrew children had already determined whom they would worship before the golden image was erected (Dn 3:16–18). Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” before Israel made its choice (Josh. 24:15). Likewise, every Christian must settle beforehand that no matter who speaks, no matter how persuasive the argument, no matter how deep the affection, no matter how painful the consequences, and no matter how great the personal loss, God's word is the final authority.

Remember this: Convictions established after temptation arrives are usually convictions established too late.

My prayer is that when God proves (and He will), we shall not be found clinging to earthly attachments more tightly than we cling to our Lord Jesus Christ. May he find hearts that have already yielded every affection, every ambition, every possession, every relationship, every dream, every fear, every hope, and every desire to his sovereign authority. May he find disciples who have counted the cost, taken up the cross, forsaken all, and determined that obedience is never too expensive because Christ is infinitely worthy.

VII. THE PROMISE FOR FAITHFUL BELIEVERS **(The Final Call To Put God First)**

When all feelings have been laid aside; when every argument has been exhausted; when every earthly relationship has been weighed; when every emotional appeal has been silenced; when every competing loyalty has been exposed; and when every idol has been brought to the foot of the cross, may there remain only one settled conviction in our hearts: the Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of absolute supremacy and preeminence. He was first before we were born. He deserves to be first while we live. He will be first throughout eternity. Therefore, let Him be first in our homes, first in our marriages, first in our families, first in our decisions, first in our affections, first in our ambitions, first in our worship, first in our obedience, and first in every corner of our hearts. For he alone is "King of kings, and Lord of lords" (Rv 19:16), and he alone is worthy of our highest love, our deepest loyalty, and our unquestioning obedience. All feelings aside, God first—always, only, and whatever the cost.

One observation deserves our careful consideration. Deuteronomy 13 is frequently misunderstood because readers become preoccupied with Israel's civil penalties and consequently overlook the abiding spiritual principle that underlies the passage. Under the Mosaic Law, Israel functioned as a covenant nation whose civil government was directly administered by God's Law. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ does not execute the civil

judgments prescribed for national Israel. The New Testament nowhere authorizes churches to administer those penalties. Yet while the administration has changed, the principle has not. God's claim upon the absolute loyalty of his people remains every bit as binding today as it was when Moses first delivered these words upon the plains of Moab.

For that reason, the Christian's response to compromise is not physical judgment but uncompromising fidelity to God's truth (Jn 17:17). We expose error by proclaiming the truth (Eph 5:11). We restore the penitent in a spirit of meekness (Gal 6:1). Local churches administer discipline when necessary for its purity (Mt 18:15–17; 1 Cor 5:1–13). We pray for those who oppose themselves (2 Tm 2:24–26). Yet in every circumstance, the believer's allegiance remains unwavering. Love never requires compromise. Compassion never authorizes disobedience. Mercy never nullifies holiness. Grace never abolishes truth. Every biblical expression of love operates within the boundaries established by the words of God.

Perhaps the greatest danger confronting believers today is not outright persecution but misplaced priorities. Many Christians would readily affirm that Jesus Christ is the Lord, yet practical decisions often reveal that family expectations, professional advancement, financial security, social acceptance, personal happiness, or cultural approval exercise greater influence than the Bible itself. Such compromises seldom appear dramatic. They occur gradually, one concession at a time, until the voice of God becomes increasingly faint beneath the louder voices of human affection and worldly reasoning. Deuteronomy 13 confronts us before that process reaches its conclusion. God lovingly interrupts us and asks, “Who is really directing your life?”

The answer to that question is discovered less by our professions than by our decisions. We reveal what we value most every time obedience demands sacrifice. When the scriptures contradict popular opinion, whom do we follow? When the Lord's commands conflict with family expectations, whom do we obey? When biblical conviction threatens career advancement, what do we choose? When the truth of God costs friendships, reputation, comfort, or opportunity, where does our loyalty remain? These moments become God's examination room. They expose whether Christ is truly the Lord in practice and not merely in profession.

History repeatedly demonstrates that God's greatest servants have often walked LONELY paths. Noah stood against an unbelieving world (Gn 6–7). Elijah stood virtually alone upon Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:20–39). Jeremiah faithfully proclaimed God's words despite continual rejection (Jer 20:7–9). Paul testified that “at my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me” (2 Tm 4:16), yet immediately added, “Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me” (2 Tm 4:17). Earthly companions may fail us. Family members may misunderstand us. Friends may disappoint us. Human approval may disappear. But the believer who remains faithful to Christ never stands alone, for the Lord himself has promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5).

That promise transforms the cost of discipleship. Whatever we surrender for Christ's sake can never compare with what we receive in Christ Himself. The believer never ultimately sacrifices more than he gains. As I previously remarked, Moses esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" (Heb 11:26). Again, Paul counted every earthly advantage as loss "for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). The apostles departed from persecution "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name" (Acts 5:41). Their joy was not rooted in suffering itself but in the incomparable worthiness of the Lord for whom they suffered. Jesus Christ is worthy of every sacrifice because there is no treasure greater than Christ himself.

Let us resolve today that this matter shall already be settled before the next trial arrives. Let us determine now that the Bible will always be treasured as the final authority. Let us determine now that no relationship will ever become an idol, no affection will ever supersede obedience, no emotion will ever overrule divine revelation, and no earthly cost will ever persuade us to depart from the clear teaching of God's Book.

Remember this: Convictions settled in the calm are the convictions that sustain us in the storm.

As we leave Deuteronomy 13, the Holy Spirit leaves each of us with searching questions that only an honest conscience can answer before God. If your closest friend urged you to compromise biblical truth, would you remain faithful to Christ? If your family opposed your obedience to the scriptures, whom would you follow? If discipleship cost you promotion, possessions, popularity, or personal comfort, would Christ still be enough? If following him required you to bear a cross that no one else understood, would you still follow him and bear that cross? If obedience left you standing alone before the world, could it honestly be said that God still occupied first place in your heart?

May our answer never depend upon changing emotions or favorable circumstances. May it instead rest upon an unalterable conviction that Jesus Christ is worthy of our absolute allegiance. May we love our families deeply, our friends sincerely, our neighbors compassionately (and love them as ourselves, just like that Book says to do), and our enemies graciously. But may we love our Lord supremely. For when every relationship has been properly ordered beneath God's authority, we will finally love others as we ought. The first commandment governs every other commandment.

So let this be the settled testimony of every heart: God first when obedience is easy. God first when obedience is painful. God first when obedience costs relationships. God first when obedience costs reputation. God first when obedience costs possessions. God first when obedience costs opportunity. God first when obedience costs everything. For the God who purchased us with His own blood (Acts 20:28), who loved us and gave himself for us

(Gal 2:20), and who is coming again in power and great glory (Titus 2:13), is worthy of nothing less than complete, unconditional, lifelong devotion.

God first. God above all. God before all. All feelings aside.

Someday, every one of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10). On that day, careers will not matter, reputation will not matter, and popularity will not matter. The approval of friends will not matter. The opinions of family members will not matter. Every earthly attachment will have passed away. There will remain only one question: Was Jesus Christ first? Did we love him with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength? Did we obey him when obedience was costly? Did we remain faithful when compromise seemed easier? May God grant that when our lives are weighed in his presence, they will testify that above every affection, above every ambition, above every relationship, above every earthly treasure, Jesus Christ occupied the throne of our hearts. For he alone is worthy. He is worthy of our obedience. He is worthy of our sacrifice. He is worthy of our devotion. He is worthy of our lives. Therefore, when every feeling has been set aside, when every competing voice has been silenced, and when every earthly loyalty has been brought into subjection to the word of God, may this be the settled testimony of every believer: “Ye shall walk after the LORD your God...and obey his voice...and cleave unto him” (Dt 10:12). God first. God above all. God, whatever the cost.