

Sermon Title: Deuteronomy: Faithfulness and Fellowship, Part XX 11.5.2023

Themes: Biblical faithfulness and being careful about who leads you. Video devotionals are at christforlife.life. trinitycg.org has live-streaming and sermon notes.

Question of the week: Who and what are leading you?

Sermon Points:

1. Be careful *what* leads you. Biblical faithfulness is essential. What leads you is important. Do your sinful desires lead you or do God's ways lead you? **Deuteronomy 16:21-22.** As writer's note, throughout the Old Testament, we read accounts of idol worship among the Israelites, especially the worship of Baal and Asherah [Ashtoreth]. The paganism that surrounded God's people gained a foothold, and led to great misery. It was a constant struggle to stay true to the Lord. Can you relate to that? If so, we're in good company! God commanded Israel not to worship idols (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7)—they were to avoid even mentioning a false god's name (Exodus 23:13). To prevent compromise, they were warned not to intermarry with pagans. Israel was the nation chosen to give rise to the Savior of the world. Yet, Israel was continually drawn into worship of Baal and Asherah. Baal was the supreme god in ancient Canaan and Phoenicia. His consort, Asherah, was the chief female deity and was represented by a carved pole or limbless tree trunk planted in the ground. Baal and Asherah are often mentioned together in Scripture. Sometimes Baal is mentioned with the goddess Ashtoreth who, in Canaanite mythology, was closely related to Asherah and may have been for a time considered the same goddess. All of them were fertility gods, and their worship rites involved sexual perversion. Because of Israel's incomplete conquest of the land of Canaan, Asherah-worship plagued Israel, starting as soon as Joshua died (Judges 2:13). Because of the association with carved trees, the places of Asherah worship were commonly called "groves," and one of King Manasseh's evil deeds was that he took the carved Asherah pole he had made and put it in the temple. Some scholars say that *Ashtoreth* is the proper name for the goddess, while *Asherah* is the name of her images (the tree trunk or pole). So, when King Josiah cut down "the Asherim" (2 Kings 23:14, ESV), he was destroying the groves Solomon built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians (verse 13, ESV). Worship of Asherah was noted for its sensuality and involved ritual prostitution. The priests and priestesses of Asherah also practiced divination and fortune-telling. The Lord forbade the worship of Asherah. Despite God's clear instructions, Asherah-worship was a perennial problem in Israel. The wicked Queen Jezebel, a Phoenician, promoted Asherah-worship. At times, Israel experienced revival, and notable crusades against Asherah-worship were led by Gideon (Judges 6:25 –30), King Asa (1 Kings 15:13), and King Josiah (2 Kings 23:1 –7).

2. Be careful *who* leads you. Character matters. Here we see a warning against allowing the godless to rule the godly. Hint: It never works out for the people of God. **Deuteronomy 17:14-20.** God gets angry when we knowingly and willingly engage in wicked practices. Want to hear the words of an angry God? **Jeremiah 32:30–35.** In sum, be very careful about allowing nonbelievers from the world to rule over the people of the Lord.

3. Be careful *how* you are lead. Occult practices versus prophetic revelation. **Deuteronomy 18:9-22** and **Romans 13:1–7.** How do we square the New Testament with the Old Testament and with our current situation? It's easy: If you move to a country you must submit to its rules. If the country you live in gives you no say over your leadership, then submit to their rules. If the country you live in allows you to choose your leaders, don't choose evil leaders! The above has one simple caveat: As a follower of Christ you are not permitted to transgress the commands of God. The government told me I could do it, should do it, or must do it is no excuse before our holy God. One way we overcome a worldly heart condition is through discipleship. We must model right attitudes and behavior for others to follow. That means staying close to God and clean in Christ, even in our "harmless" comments about others. They take note even when they don't say anything. They notice even our "harmless" but petty jokes and words. Be careful how you are lead so that you're not lead astray.

Invitation: Lord, help me to discern between godliness and unrighteousness, beginning in my heart and extending to those I lead and by whom I am lead.