

“Hold Fast to the Lord”
Deuteronomy 13
November 19, 2023
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

We return this morning to the book of Deuteronomy, as Moses instructs the people of Israel, while they stand on the verge of the promised land. This morning we come to chapter 13.

So please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

Moses said to the people:

^{13:1} “If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For Yahweh your God is testing you, to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ You shall walk after Yahweh your God and fear him and keep his commandments and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and hold fast to him. ⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught rebellion against Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you out of the house of slavery, to make you leave the way in which Yahweh your God commanded you to walk. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

⁶ “If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife you embrace or your friend who is as your own soul entices you secretly, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which neither you nor your fathers have known, ⁷ some of the gods of the peoples who are around you, whether near you or far off from you, from the one end of the earth to the other, ⁸ you shall not yield to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him, nor shall you conceal him. ⁹ But you shall kill him. Your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. ¹⁰ You shall stone him to death with stones, because he sought to draw you away from Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹¹ And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you.

¹² “If you hear in one of your cities, which Yahweh your God is giving you to dwell there, ¹³ that certain worthless fellows have gone out among you and have drawn away the inhabitants of their city, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods,’ which you have not known, ¹⁴ then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently. And behold, if it be true and certain that such an abomination has been done among you, ¹⁵ you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction, all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword. ¹⁶ You shall gather all its spoil into the midst of its open square and burn the city and all its spoil with fire, as a whole burnt offering to Yahweh your God. It shall be a heap forever. It shall not be built again. ¹⁷ None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand, that Yahweh may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you mercy and have compassion on you and multiply you, as he swore to your fathers, ¹⁸ if you obey the voice of Yahweh your God, keeping all his commandments that I am commanding you today, and doing what is right in the sight of Yahweh your God.”

This is the Word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

Prayer of Illumination

Lord, we plead before you this morning,
to give us understanding according to your word.
Let our prayer come before you now,
and deliver us according to your promises.
Our lips this morning have poured out your praise,
because you teach us your statutes.
Our tongues have sung of your word,
because we know that all your commandments are right.
And so, as we attend now to your word,
grant us understanding and be at work in our hearts,
for Jesus's sake. Amen
[Based on Psalm 119:169-172]

Introduction

Our text this morning raises a number of questions for us. And to get at those questions, we'll consider four things this morning. We're going to consider:

- The people the Moses warns us about,
- the penalty described, and it's meaning for us today,
- the principle underlying the chapter,
- and then the practical applications for us.

So: the people, the penalty, the principle, and the practical applications.

The People

The first thing for us to consider is the people: Who is this text focused on?

And when we read the text carefully, what we see is that this text is not about believers who are struggling in their faith. It's not about believers who have sinned and then repented. It's also not about how to deal with non-believers in general.

Rather, this text is very specific: It's about an Israelite who is actively trying to entice God's people away from the Lord. This is someone who claims to be a brother or sister in Israel, but who is actively trying to lure faithful Israelites into betraying the Lord in a fundamental, core way.

So for us, this text is not about how we deal with Christians who are struggling with doubts, or who are immature in their faith, or who disagree with us on secondary or tertiary theological issues or ethical questions. It's not about how we relate to people who are openly non-Christian. Rather, this text is about someone who claims a place among God's people, but who is actively and intentionally trying to draw faithful Christians away from the Lord in fundamental, core ways.

And Moses's message is that we need to be on guard against such people – those who present themselves as our friends, our allies ... but who are also calling us to turn from the Lord who saved us.

Moses then describes three kinds of relationships where we might encounter someone like this and be especially tempted to listen to them.

The first setting where we might find this enticement away from the Lord especially tempting, is when it comes from people we find impressive.

We see this in verses one through five, where Moses speaks of someone who accomplishes a great work or exhibits unusual knowledge or displays great power.

We may find ourselves impressed by someone for a variety of reasons. Maybe because they explain the world in a way that makes sense to us. Maybe because they seem to be able to win cultural or political battles that others can't. Maybe because they seem so knowledgeable. Maybe because they have such great abilities. That's one category Moses mentions.

Another category of false believers who might more persuasively entice us away from the Lord are people who are intimately close to us.

This is Moses's focus in verses six through eleven. Here Moses warns us against when those who are dearest to us try to draw us away from the Lord: a beloved spouse, a close family member, a friend we deeply care about.

The third category of false believers who might entice us away from the Lord, are influential communities in our lives.

This is what Moses addresses in verses twelve through eighteen. Certain communities ... maybe groups with noteworthy wealth or influence which we hope to gain from (as verses sixteen and seventeen may imply) may turn from the Lord themselves ... but we may find ourselves still hoping to gain something from them ... whether wealth, or recognition, or social advancement.

And in each case – whether it's someone who impresses us, someone who is close to us, or someone we hope to gain something from – in each case Moses says that we can be tempted first to tell ourselves that that person or that group is part of God's people, even when there's obvious evidence that they're not. Second, we may be tempted to listen to them in ways we shouldn't, giving their words – especially their words on spiritual matters – more weight than they deserve. And then third, we can be tempted to follow them even when they call us away from the Lord in obvious ways – calling us to break his commandments or deny his truth. This is how we can be tempted by non-Christians who impress us, who are close to us, or who we hope to gain something from.

But whatever their relationship to us may be, Moses here calls us to be on guard against those who claim (on some level) to be allies of the Kingdom of God, but who in reality are trying to entice us away from the Lord in fundamental ways.

That's the sort of people this text is speaking about.

The Penalty

Second, we need to consider the meaning of the penalties imposed here, and how they apply to us today.

Now (spoiler alert), I'll just say up front that we are not called on today to apply this text by executing or killing people.

But the reason our application of this text today is different is not because we are called on to adjust the Bible to modern sensibilities. Rather, it's because the Bible itself tells us how we are to conjugate and apply this text to our period of redemptive history.

In First Corinthians 5:13, the Apostle Paul quotes from our passage, and as he does, he instructs the church in Corinth about how to apply the concepts in this chapter to their period of redemptive history, as the Church. And the way he tells them to apply it is not to stone or execute the offender in their midst, but rather to excommunicate them: to formally remove them from the membership of the Church and to publicly declare that the Church no longer considers that person to be a Christian. The Apostle Paul makes it clear that what execution accomplished in ancient Israel, excommunication now accomplishes in the life of the Church. And the heart of both actions is the same: We are to regard the unrepentant offender as a non-believer in our midst.

And the same idea also underlies verses twelve through eighteen. What Moses is calling the people to do here, when an Israelite city forsakes the Lord and entices others to do the same, is to approach that city in the same way they were called on to approach a pagan Canaanite city in the promised land during the conquest. [For more on the ethics of the conquest, see my sermon "The Conquest Begins": <https://www.faithtacoma.org/deuteronomy-nicoletti/the-conquest-begins-deuteronomy-217-and-224-311>]

That is the underlying meaning of the punishments here: they were ways, at that particular time in redemptive history, that Israel declared that a person or a people had rejected the Lord and was no longer considered a part of Israel – a part of God's covenant community.

That's the meaning of the punishments.

The Principle

Third then, we need to ask: What is the principle that underlies this text?

And the principle underlying this passage is the antithesis, the fundamental opposition, between those who are faithful to Yahweh and those who are not.

The Bible calls us to hold on to two significant truths in how we think about non-believers.

The first is the common grace that the Lord has shown to all human beings. All human beings bear God's image. All human beings have some knowledge of God's truth. All human beings do good things that reflect God's goodness. All human beings are given gifts by God that they might use in good ways in this world. These are things that God, in his goodness, gives to all people – Christians and non-Christians. And the Bible calls us to acknowledge this in a variety of ways – praising what is good from the unbelieving world, and acknowledging the dignity of all people, as those who bear the image of God. That's one truth the Bible tells us to hold onto.

The other truth the Bible tells us to hold onto is that there is a fundamental antithesis – a fundamental opposition – between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. And every human being is a member of one of those two kingdoms. The Bible sets up this antithesis – this fundamental opposition – in Genesis 3 when it speaks of the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and it reinforces this fundamental human division again and again [e.g.: Romans 5]. There is no spiritually neutral ground in this world.

So the Bible gives us these two lenses to rightly view unbelievers: common grace and antithesis. And it calls us to use both lenses with all non-Christians – one lens on each eye, in a sense – viewing them through the doctrine of common grace and the doctrine of antithesis at the same time. [Eglinton, et al.]

The problem is that where the Bible gives us glasses, most of us prefer a monocle. Most of us prefer to use only one lens at a time. And often we prefer to use only the lens of antitheses when it comes to non-Christians we don't like, and only the lens of common grace when it comes to non-Christians we do like.

So for those non-Christians we don't like, we tend to see only the bad. But for those non-Christians we do like, we tend to downplay the spiritual antithesis between them and us, and focus only on the good.

And that's what Moses is warning us about here in Deuteronomy 13. When it comes to non-Christians we like, we tend to let down our spiritual guard. And when we do, they may very well entice us away from the Lord.

Can you identify someone in your life ... whether someone in the culture who you are impressed by, or someone close to you, or some broader community ... where you're tempted to set the biblical lens of antithesis aside ... and let your spiritual guard down with someone who, if you're honest, does not appear to be a follower of Christ?

Now, again, this is not a call to retreat from the world [1 Corinthians 5:9-10]. Rather, it's a call to be honest about the spiritual state of the people around us, and to be on guard accordingly. That's the principle of antithesis that underlies this text.

So, we see the people Moses is speaking about. We understand the message of the punishments described here. And we see the principle that underlies it all.

That brings us to the fourth major thing for us to consider: its practical applications for us.

Practical Application

What does this text call us to do?

Avenues of Action

And we might start by observing that the avenues of action in view here are both personal and institutional ... but they are not the action of a mob.

Take a look at verse fourteen. Moses specifies that when charges are brought about a community, the first step is that they “shall inquire and make search and ask diligently.” And action should only be taken if the charges turn out to be “true and certain.” In Deuteronomy 19 it’s spelled out more specifically that when an accusation of “any crime” or “any offense” is made against anyone, then there must be sufficient evidence, and if there’s a dispute about that, then a formal procedure should be followed with the priests and the judges, who are called on to “inquire diligently” into the matter. [19:15-18]

Deuteronomy rejects mob or vigilante justice ... and we are called to reject it as well, in the Church.

We are not to act on rumor or inuendo. If we have not ourselves witnessed the offense, then we are not to draw conclusions without a sufficient investigation that leads to a level of certainty that the charges are true. We are not to act as self-appointed vigilantes, declaring to others on our own authority who is or who isn’t a Christian. Neither are we to stir up a mob to declare those conclusions on our behalf.

Rather than acting as a vigilante or a mob, Deuteronomy 13 calls for action that is personal and institutional.

First, it’s institutional, in that it calls for a formal process from the institutional church.

That point is made in Deuteronomy 13:14 and also Deuteronomy 19.

The church, as an institution, is called on to exercise church discipline. When someone is conducting themselves in a way that reflects open and clear rebellion against the Lord – especially as here, when they’re actively calling others away from the Lord – then the church must begin a formal process that could lead to the excommunication of the offender: the formal declaration of the Church, that from what we can see, a particular person is not living as a Christian. The goal of such a process, as the Apostle Paul highlights in First Corinthians 5, is to win the offender back to Christ: to bring them to repentance and renewed faith. But we cannot control whether they will respond that way or not. Our calling instead is to declare what we can see after a careful investigation.

And that process is supposed to be intentional, diligent, and just.

That’s why, in our own denomination, we have specific procedures we’re required to follow in such cases – just as Moses suggests in Deuteronomy 19.

So, one way this text was to be applied, is formally and institutionally, in the Church.

Another is that we are often called to take personal action.

Individual believers, when they know that someone has sought to entice them or others away from the Lord – either when they’ve witnessed it themselves, or it’s been made clear from a diligent inquiry – then they are called on to take certain personal actions.

First, they’re called on to guard themselves against the influence of such enticers, as verses three and eleven highlight.

Second, they may be called on to speak truthfully in any formal proceeding against that person by the Church, as verse eight indicates.

Third, if pitted between the unrepentant offender and the Lord, they need to declare their final allegiance as being with Christ, as verse nine suggests.

Each of those things might be painful. But each is important. And as the Apostle Paul reminds us, we do these things not to destroy the offender, but with the hope that they will repent. [1 Corinthians 5:5]

Taken together, while Deuteronomy calls us to reject mob or vigilante actions, it does call us to make personal judgments when we see evidence that someone is actively drawing others away from the Lord, and it also calls on the Church to take formal public action when someone claims to be a brother or sister in Christ, but is actively trying to entice people away from the Lord.

Those are the avenues of action: both personal and institutional.

But let’s get more specific. How does this text apply to different types of people? Let’s consider a few.

The Ordinary, Sincere Believer

First, (and most obviously), how does all this apply to the ordinary, sincere believer?

Now, in many ways, that’s what we’ve focused on so far. And we’ve said that we are called on to beware of those who might draw us away from the Lord. But central to Moses’s warning here is that this temptation may come from those we think of as our allies in the world – those we would tend to let our guard down around. And so Moses here warns us to be honest about the spiritual state of our earthly allies, and the potential for this kind of temptation from them.

We can and should have good and loving relationships with non-Christians. But we also must keep in mind the Bible’s teaching of antithesis, and the temptation of non-Christians close to us who may seek to draw us away from the Lord.

This is something for us to consider with non-Christian family members, and it’s one of the reasons the Bible calls on Christians only to marry other believers. It can also be true in the workplace, among our friends, or in our other social groups.

And another place this threat has become more and more pronounced in our culture is in our politics. In a world that often raises political allegiance to a level of highest importance, we can be tempted to let down our guard spiritually with our secular political allies. But they too can draw us away from the Lord.

In a recent study of those who have left the church in recently years, one startling finding was that when evangelicals today were considered across a political spectrum, evangelicals on the political right are currently leaving the Church at almost twice the pace that evangelicals on the political left are leaving. And for many, it's their political relationships that have replaced their church community. In other words, in 2023, statistically speaking, it appears that the secular right is drawing evangelicals out of the Church at almost twice the rate that the secular left is. And I mean out of the church completely – not from one congregation to another. [<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/misconceptions-dechurching/>]

That statistic surprises many evangelicals today. And that's probably part of why it's happening. We don't expect it. We've let our guard down. We know to be guarded with the secular left. But we haven't been guarded with the secular right. Often, we haven't even thought much about the ways secular conservatism can lure people away from the Church. We're more likely to treat secular conservatives as if they're almost Christian ... rather than acknowledging the reality of the spiritual antithesis between us. And so we make exactly the kind of mistake that Moses warns us against here.

But the reality is that while we can and should work with non-Christian allies on various cultural and political issues, from a spiritual perspective, the Church in 2023 is fighting a spiritual battle against secularism on at least two fronts. [<https://theopolisinstitute.com/building-new-watchtowers/>] And right now, the secular right is luring evangelicals out of the Church at almost twice the rate that the secular left is.

And so whether we think of our political allegiances, our family ties, our workplace relationships, or our deep friendships, our text this morning calls us to be on guard against the temptations we face from others, who might seek to draw us away from the Lord.

That's what ordinary, sincere believers are called on to consider here.

The Apathetic Church Member

What about others who may be here though? What about more apathetic church members? What does this text have to say to you?

Maybe you're here this morning ... and you're just kind of going with the flow. You're here for one reason or another, but the truth is that faith in Christ is not really a major factor in your life.

Well for you, this text is a warning. Because it's unlikely that you'll be able to just go with the flow forever. And so you need to decide where your ultimate loyalties will lie, and act accordingly.

Verse three tells us that when these tempting voices enter our lives, it's really the Lord who is testing us.

Now ... this is not the sort of testing that tries to trip us up or make us fail. Rather, this is the kind of testing that is meant to reveal – both to us, to others, and before the Lord – what’s really in our hearts. [Roberts, *Theopolis*, 25:00ff]

And if such testing has not yet come to you, it probably will at some point. And you should be preparing for it now by taking your faith seriously.

If what we proclaim here is true (and it is), then there’s nothing more important than being in a right relationship with your Maker. Everything else should pale in comparison. And so you should prioritize that relationship above everything else. Because only in a right relationship with God can we have true life.

And when such testing comes to you, going with the flow will not be enough in that moment. You will need to take a stand. And so you should strengthen the legs of your faith even now, by actively engaging with the Lord, and seeking him with an earnest and sincere faith.

That’s what this text has to say to apathetic church members.

The Heretic Hunter

A third group of people we should consider this morning is the kind of person who gets really excited about texts like Deuteronomy 13. This is the person I’m going to call “the heretic hunter.” This is Christian who sees themselves as especially called on to identify and call out other Christians they think might be compromised in their doctrine or ethical opinions.

In conversation, and often online, this kind of person is always looking for spiritual threats, and is quick to tell others that someone they least expected is actually a major threat to the Church.

Now, such people tend to like texts like the one we have this morning. However, they can often fail to read these texts in their full biblical context.

As I said earlier, Deuteronomy 13 is meant to be applied with Deuteronomy 19. And that is something that this kind of person often fails to do.

Because if Deuteronomy 13 emphasizes the grave offense that it is to try to draw a believer away from the Lord ... Deuteronomy 19 emphasizes what a grave offense it is to falsely accuse a Christian of drawing others away from the Lord when they’re not.

Deuteronomy 19 speaks about a person who accuses someone of a serious crime more out of ill-will than out of solid facts. Moses refers to this person as a “malicious witness.” And he says that “If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, [...] the judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you.” [19:16-20]

To maliciously and falsely accuse someone of an offense they are not guilty of is viewed by the Bible as a very serious sin, and is to be treated as being as serious a crime the offense they falsely accused someone of.

That means that if you falsely or maliciously accuse someone of enticing people away from the Lord, when that's not what they've done, then you stand under serious judgment from the Lord, and you should receive serious consequences from God's people.

It means that if you take a theological or ethical disagreement about an issues that's really of only secondary or tertiary importance, but you present it to others as being of primary importance, and as if that person has rejected Christ and is causing others to do the same ... then for that false and malicious slander, you should be treated in the way that you had urged others to treat the person you accused. You should be regarded as a wolf in sheep's clothing instead of them. That's the implication when we read our passage in light of Deuteronomy 19.

And so, it's worth asking yourself if you've been guilty of, or complicit in, this kind of malicious false testimony over this very serious issue.

Have you brought such accusations against others, digging up dirt on them, putting an uncharitable spin on their words, and then trying, maybe, to rally others against them over an issue that's not actually as important or foundational as you're pretending it to be? If that's you, then Deuteronomy 19 tells you that you must repent. And if you don't, then you should be treated as a wolf in sheep's clothing, rather than the person you've accused.

Maybe you don't initiate such things, but you tend to pass them on and spread them. You share links or summaries of accusations with others. And when pressed, you say that you're not necessarily endorsing the accusations ... just passing them on for others to consider. But passing on malicious accusations is not morally neutral – something you'd certainly agree with if someone else passed on malicious accusations about you. And so Deuteronomy 19 calls you to repent. And if you don't, it tells us that you are the one we should consider a danger to the Church – rather than the people you've spread malicious testimony about.

Maybe you don't initiate or pass on such unsubstantiated claims about fellow Christians ... but you present yourself as a ready audience to hear them. Maybe you follow people on social media who make such claims, or you frequent websites that do that, or you participate in email lists or group texts or side conversations in which such accusations are common.

Deuteronomy 19 tells you that if a person maliciously accuses someone of being a false teacher when they're not, then you should treat the accuser the same way you would treat a false teacher. And Deuteronomy 13:3 says that the first thing you should do is not listen to them.

Because even listening to such slander can do harm. Proverbs 26:20 tells us that our participation in such communication adds fuel to it, and Proverbs 18:8 warns us that hearing such slander affects our hearts more than we often realize.

Saint Augustine, when he was Bishop of Hippo, had a verse of poetry written onto his dining room table, which strictly forbid gossip and slander to be spoken by those who dined with him.

On at least one occasion, when very close friends of his, who were also bishops, began to repeat gossip at his table – questionable words that were critical of someone else – Augustine “upbraided them so sternly that he lost his temper, and said that either they should rub these verses off the table, or that he would get up and go to his room in the middle of the meal.” [Brown, 195]

We should take a page from Augustine. Because we are often far too willing to be listening ears to slander spoken against other Christians – whether public figures, or those we know personally.

Where do you need to listen less to such things? What conversations do you need to start walking away from? What accounts do you need to stop following on social media? What email lists or group chats do you need to exit? What websites do you need to stop visiting?

We learn in Deuteronomy 13 that God takes the threat of those who would entice others away from him very seriously. But for that very reason, we are reminded in Deuteronomy 19 that God also takes careless or false accusations of this sin very seriously. And we should as well. Such slander is not a sin we should tolerate.

The Unbelieving Enticer

The fourth kind of person we should consider this morning ... is the kind of person our text is most focused on: the unbeliever who is hoping to entice someone away from the Lord.

Maybe you’re here this morning ... and that’s you.

Maybe you’re here because of someone else ... and you’re going along with the church thing for now ... but your real hope is that rather than you getting roped further into this Christianity thing ... you can, in the long-run, pull them further out of it. You hope, in some way, to entice them away from the Lord – away from taking their faith so seriously.

If that’s the case ... then what are you supposed to do in light of this passage of Scripture?

Well one thing you should not do is feel comfortable. It’s true that in our period of redemptive history, we are not going to execute you. So ... that’s good, you might say. But that’s not because the New Testament takes this sin less seriously.

Far from it, actually.

In Matthew 18, Jesus says: “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,” – in other words, whoever successfully entices someone who believes in the Lord away from the Lord – Jesus says: “it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” [18:6]

Now ... notice what Jesus is saying there. He’s saying that enticer themselves would be better off in the long run, if they died in the sea, with a millstone around their necks – than if they were given the opportunity to successfully draw someone away from the Lord.

The reason Jesus says that is because one day, every single person, will stand before him. And he will judge them. Those who have trusted in him will enter into everlasting life. Those who have rejected him will go into everlasting judgment. But not all judgments will be the same.

And in Matthew 18:6, Jesus says that the judgment you will face in the next life, if you draw a single Christian away from him, will be so terrible, that you will wish you'd been drowned in the sea long before you ever had the chance to do what you did.

Jesus loves his people. And if you draw someone away from him ... his wrath will make the anger of a mother bear separated from her cub look mild in comparison. And his wrath will be combined with the unfathomable power of God. It's a terrifying thought.

But Jesus offers more than just threats. He also offers hope – even for one who has committed such a sin.

Because unlike a mother bear, Jesus is willing to forgive you, if you truly repent and come to him in faith.

He's done it many times before. The Apostle Paul was a persecutor of the Church, working hard to drive people away from the Lord. But then the Lord confronted him, not only with the magnitude of his sin ... but also with an offer of astounding grace. And when Paul turned from his sin, and embraced the Lord, the Lord forgave him, cleansed him, and made him his own.

And the Lord offers you that same gift this morning if you would repent and turn to him in faith. I urge you, this morning, to do so.

Conclusion

Our text this morning is a brutal one. In harsh terms it warns us of the spiritual threats we face and the consequences of sin.

But the brutality of the text should also point us to the magnitude of the grace offered to us in Christ. Because whatever we have done – whether we have enticed others, or slandered others, whether we have wandered from the faith or failed to acknowledge the spiritual state of those around us – whatever our sin, in the gospel, the brutal judgment that we deserved has fallen on Christ instead of on us. He suffered so that we might be spared.

That's the love he's shown us. And in light of that, how can we forsake him now? How can we turn from him now? How could we not continue to walk with him?

Our text, above all, calls us to cling to Christ by faith.

Because there's no greater good that we could ever possess than knowing the One who made us, and gave himself for us, that we might be saved.

And so, brothers and sisters, let us hold fast to him.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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Note: In my preaching I often cite and draw from a range of sources, which includes material from Christians within my theological tradition, Christians outside my theological tradition (in keeping with our church’s core value of “Reformed Catholicity”), and also (following the Apostle Paul’s example in Acts 17) non-Christians who are well outside of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. And so, when I cite an author or a source, that citation should not be understood or construed as me necessarily agreeing with, endorsing, or recommending to others anything else from that author or source, except for what I explicitly say I agree with, endorse, or recommend. When engaging with different materials and thinkers, all Christians must exercise wisdom and discernment to determine what is helpful, appropriate, and edifying for each person, taking into account their current needs, wisdom, and spiritual maturity.