**The One Place of Worship**

I’ll let you in on a bankers’ secret, we are reluctant to make church loans. It’s not that bankers oppose religion, in fact most bankers I know are good church going, God fearing folks. They are also fearful of having to foreclose on a church. Can you imagine the public relations nightmare resulting from such an action? Although rare, foreclosures on churches do happen occasionally, sometimes brought on by a split in the church which has a negative impact on giving. Sometimes churches are just too ambitious with a building program and take on more debt than they can afford. Another problem with church foreclosures is the risk of a substantial loss when the collateral is sold. Churches are considered single purpose buildings that are difficult to convert to another use so there are few buyers unless another church wants the building. In recent years, there has been a trend of churches acquiring closed businesses such as grocery stores and converting them to churches. Second Baptist in Aiken recently moved into an old Food Lion building. In our study of Deuteronomy chapter 12, we see that Moses warned the Israelites about taking over places of worship they would find when they went into Canaan.

The chapter begins with a familiar theme, Moses telling the people that they must be careful to follow the laws and decrees God required of them. He told them to destroy completely all the places where the Canaanites worshipped their idols and false gods. They were not to simply avoid them, they were to seek them out and destroy their altars, sacred stones, Asherah poles and idols. They were told not to worship in the manner of the Canaanites. They were told to seek out the place God would choose as their house of worship. At the designated place they would: 1. bring their offerings, sacrifices and tithes, 2. eat meals in the presence of the Lord and 3. Rejoice in everything they put their hands to. Moses contrasted that with how they had worshipped in the desert where there were no organized ceremonies. Each family worshipped in their own way or not at all. Apparently they had previously offered sacrifices at places they chose without the participation of the Levites. Moses made a distinction between animals that were slaughtered for normal meals and those that were to be sacrificed. They were to eat any offerings at the place of worship God would designate as well as new wine, oil and the first born of their flocks and herds.

The chapter ends with the admonition similar to “when in Rome, don’t do as the Romans do”. Moses was rightly concerned that the Israelites would adopt the practices of the people they would encounter in Canaan where worship had devolved to burning children as sacrifices to their false gods.

David Guzik wrote that a common practice at that time was to take over temples used by other religions and use it to worship a different god. Buildings were scarce and a ready made church was probably very appealing. God would not tolerate the Israelites taking a building formerly used to worship a god such as Molech and use it to worship Him. He considered such buildings as defiled and wanted them totally destroyed. The tabernacle and later the temple would serve as God’s dwelling place.

Matthew Henry wrote “Now, under the gospel, we have no temple that sanctifies the gold, no altar that sanctifies the gift, but Christ only; and, as to the places of worship, the prophets foretold that in every place the spiritual incense should be offered and our Savior has declared that those are accepted as true worshippers who worship God in sincerity and truth, without regard either to this mountain or Jerusalem.” Still, places of corporate worship provide havens for us to do as God commanded; bring our offerings, have fellowship with other believers and rejoice in His presence. Those who choose to have a service outside the confines of a church are not getting the blessings a traditional church service offers. Further, they risk the very thing Moses warned about, each doing as he sees fit without the spiritual guidance offered in a structured environment. Certainly the internet provides a valuable service by linking home bound Christians to a church. We should approach our worship services as a time to meet with God just as the Israelites did.