

When in Rome Don't Do as the Romans Do

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[0:00] Right. Deuteronomy 12.13. Already. Nearly halfway. Okay. I'm not sure if you heard this phrase. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

! So what does it mean to you? Come to New Zealand. Speak as the Kiwis speak. Sweet ass. Keora. Don't speak like your old Hong Kong phrases, right?

Be a Kiwi. In a sense, yes. When you come to New Zealand, live as the Kiwis do. But there are things that we should not imitate. Some of the things that Kiwis, not as pleasing to God.

All right. Now, for this phrase, surely, I mean, Rome. There was a lot of good things. Ancient Rome actually were very, very reputed.

Like, all roads lead to Rome. That means all the buildings, the engineering was really, really great at that time. Right? But Rome was also famous for their assassinations.

[1:14] You know? You want to be the Caesar? You just kill the present Caesar. And you can be the next one. Immorality. You know? You know?

Immorality. Immorality. We all know about these ancient Romans. These people really was bad and with sex and debauchy.

And, you know, we should not follow what the Romans did. And brutality. The gladiators were fighting until somebody died.

Right? So, when you're in Rome, don't do as the Romans do. This is exactly what the passage was saying today.

When the people of Israel went into the promised land, to the land of Canaan, don't do what the Canaanites do.

[2:11] Because the practices, the idolatry, the immorality that they had. Israelites, you are to remain pure to God.

So, the passage Denise has read to us. It's 12, 13. We didn't have time to read the full two chapters. But those were the texts that we really need to pay attention to.

Israel was to be steadfast. To live and worship according to God's order. When they start anew in the promised land.

Now, they were on the eastern side of River Jordan. They were about to cross over to the western side. Okay? There was two and a half tribes on the eastern side.

But there was nine and a half tribes going across the Jordan. But the whole 12 tribes were going to start anew to the land that God has promised to them.

[3:21] But they had to follow God's order. They were not supposed to live according to their own ways. And I think that for us as Christians, we have been set free by Christ.

We are no longer sinners. We are no longer bonded to sin and death. Right? But we are not free to do whatever we want to. We are to set apart ourselves from the world but submit to God's will.

And two, be steadfast to God's word. And I think a lot of times the Israelites, I think, why they were moaning and groaning in the wilderness, in the desert.

Because they came out from Egypt. And I thought, I think they thought, yeah, we are free. And let's go and do whatever we want.

That's why we were so frustrated. And that's why we were so never satisfied. Because their sort of freedom was not God's intended freedom.

[4:31] God's intended freedom was to follow His word and then to lead them into promised land. If they were to obey God's word at the first time, they would have gone into the promised land and enjoyed all the good things God has had for them in the first place.

But they did not. That's why they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Right? So I think that freedom, that joy is not according to me, my desires.

It's in God's condition. So today, in the first verse in chapter 12, these are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow.

All right? Stated very clearly. In the land the Lord, your God, of your ancestors have given you to possess. This new promised land, God is going to give it to you.

But you have to live according to the decrees and the laws that God has given to you, Israelites. There were three things.

[5 : 47] It was in the two chapters. It was in the two chapters. It was in the two chapters about separation, submission, and steadfastness. To the Israelites at a time.

And I think for us Christians, same principle. When God has set us free from sin and brought us to this promised land on this journey until Jesus returns.

These are the three things we need to uphold. Young and old. New Christians or even have believed in Jesus for the many decades.

Pastors, pastors, leaders, and just brothers and sisters, all alike. So, firstly, separation.

Verse 2 to verse 3. Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains, on the hills, and every spreading trees. And with nations, you are dispossessing, worshipping the God.

[6 : 53] Now, God was driving out all these enemies through the Israelites. When the enemies were driven out, their idols, their altars, their worship venues were still there.

And Moses said, look, be careful. When the people were driven out, you are to destroy all these worship places, all these stones, all these poles.

Let nothing of these things tempt you to worship these foreign gods. Those are just some of the foreign gods that were in the land.

Some are very, very evil. This Moloch, right? You see, these people was offering babies to burn their life to the idols.

Moloch. And all these different words, even deities, different gods and goddesses. God said, had nothing to do with them.

[8 : 06] Like the song you sung just before, break down those idols, right? Yeah. Are there any idols? It may not be like these. It may not be like an object.

But it can be something that steals the place, the primary place of God in our lives. That could be idol.

Are there any in our lives? I'm sure there are many. I think it's a fine line. God gives us a lot of these things for us to enjoy.

Our possessions. Our families. Our health. Yeah, Uncle Tommy said. Our health. Right? Our fame. Right?

Our career. These are all given by God for us to enjoy. Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. But if we kind of allow these things to be equal or even higher than the places of God in our lives, those would be idols.

[9 : 15] And somehow, in God's goodness, if we keep worshipping them, God knows we're going to be drifted away.

And sometimes in His goodness, He could just maybe take some of these things away from us to help us to learn. I hope we don't need to learn that way. But beware of the idols.

And there was, in verse 4, even this verse, You must not worship the Lord your God in their way. Now, don't worship idols.

That's clear. Never had nothing to do with their images or altars. Destroy them completely. Yeah. But not even worship the way that these Gentiles did.

Did. Now, what would be some of the ways? Maybe. Now, the golden calf was a good example. Because they were not supposed.

[10 : 23] They really did not want to worship idols. But they really wanted to build a calf to help them to worship Yahweh, God. Right?

But they said, I couldn't see God. Let's do something so that we can see. God, you know, helped us. And God said, I am invisible.

I have no images. Nothing can represent me. So, do not make any objects of idols to worship me. So, anything that is not in the way that God is pleased, but in the ways of the foreign objects of the Gentiles, when they worship their idols in that way, even that can be risky.

And today, maybe something, I think for us, I think in our attitude, if we come to worship God, be careful.

[11:33] We treat it like a concert. Or you must have this or that. Right? I'm sure, I mean, God accepts all kinds of worship.

I have nothing against praise and worship. I have nothing against contempt, worship songs. Right? But it's in our mentality. If we must have the lights, if we must have the smokes, if we must have the this and that, we may be just worshipping these instead of God himself.

Right? It's not just contempt worship. Even in classical worship, I've experienced in our seminary days, you must have the pipe organs.

You must have that. You must have those. I just want to do, are we actually worshipping these things instead of worshipping God himself? And sometimes, there's a big temptation for speakers, for preachers, you know.

People treat us like you talk show. And you make people laugh. And people, you have great audience. And it seems like you're popular.

[12:48] No, we should not, should not be tempted. Even there is two or three. So I really enjoy camera. I expected many of you dozed off, right?

But you did not. It was really great. And I really enjoyed it. And every life, every soul was precious. And that should be the preachers of God.

And that should be when you hear the speakers of God. Do not treat them as, as, you know, people giving talk shows. No. We are giving the will of God.

I'm not here to make you laugh. I'm not to make you to feel inspired. I make you, perhaps if the will of God convicts you, that should be it. And as, as a church, we are, we are not just an organization. We're not just looking at datas or numbers. Right? Yes, they are, they show something, but we should not let church to degrade it to an organization.

[14:00] We are an organism. Body of Christ. Love. Relationship. Encouragement. Will of God.

It's more important than numbers or datas. So, we must not worship, Lord, as the, as the world do. We have to work, to worship and serve according to the Bible teaches us.

Do not conform to this world, but let God transform us. Right? This, if we, if we do not allow God to transform us, we will indeed continually be conformed to this world.

And we will never know the good, perfect will of God. Romans 12, 2. 2. Next, submission.

Submission. Submission. So, there was three specified, specifications for submissions.

[15:12] One is, they must be, must worship in a specified place. And secondly, they must take care of a specified people.

And thirdly, there are special conditions for eating. And these Israelites, when they go into the promised land, they must be careful to observe.

Firstly, specified place of worship. in the wilderness, it was the tabernacle. Right? The tabernacle was, was setting up and taken down whenever they go, wherever they go.

And the 12 tribes were, was camping around the tabernacle. Okay? Everybody, when they go to, offer sacrifices, they would just go in the middle.

That was the way, how it worked, how it worked in the, in the wilderness. But, when they, enter into the promised land, there's no longer tabernacle.

[16:26] But there will be a specified place for worship. All right? And, in Samuel time, it was Shiloh. And, down, at the time when David, and Solomon, where?

Jerusalem. Right? You may ask, why? Why, a specified, place of worship? Why cannot they worship in their own, places?

Why? Isn't God everywhere? Why? Why? Why? You must have to go to, one specified, specified place to worship. Because, when they, went, went into the promised land, they all disperse, dispersed, to different places.

They all, they have the lands, to, you know, to, habit, to inhabit. Right? And, and, and God's intention was to, the people of God, to come, and worship him, as one people, at the appointed time.

The Pentecost, right? The, the, the tabernacle feast, and, the, the Passover, right?

[17:50] Three festivals. And, ordinary Israel, Israel man was to come, to this specified place, of worship, so that, they can come, as one, people of God, to worship him.

I think this, this, yeah, even, even Jesus told, the Samaritan woman, look, today, you don't just worship, in Jerusalem, or in that, in that mountain, you worship, in your heart, and your spirit, and your truth.

True. But, God still, is pleased, for us to come, to worship together. And, that's why, Hebrew says, do not stop, gathering together.

Like those, who, who get so used to, not, worshiping together. So, God is pleased, for us, to worship with her.

It's on a Saturday, we have different choices, for different people, right? So, we have Saturday service, we have Sunday morning service, we will have Sunday noon service, for ES.

[18:59] There are enough choices, for us together. Even, with these, intense times, of, World Cup. You still have choices, right?

There's no excuses, not, you're not coming to church, to worship. God, delights, his people, to come, and worship, as one people, to bring our offerings, and sacrifices, to him.

And secondly, there was this, specified people, Levites. It mentioned twice here, do not forget them. It mentioned further, in chapter 14, all right?

Do not, neglect, the Levites, because, these are the, chosen, people, to, to take care, of the, worship, and the, sacrificial, um, uh, chores, the, the duties, in, in the, in the, in the, in the, worship places.

They were, they did that, in the tabernacle, but in the new, when they crossed over, to the promised land, they were, do just, they were chosen, to do just the same. So, they could not, own lands, right?

[20:15] No properties. That's why, the rest of the, tribes, the people of God, were to, take care, of their, needs. Because, God has, chosen them, to do, those specific tasks.

And I think today, for us, those Levites, maybe, maybe, um, full-time workers, like pastors, missionaries, or, or, some, by faith, who offer their lives to God, to work, to serve, in some, Christian organization, organizations.

And, and, they, when we, when we respond to God, we, literally, say to God, God, we, we, give up, this, this, dream, of, making, money, or, or, living a wealthy life.

All right? We, literally, we say that, I did that. All right? And, it's the, it's the duty, responsibility, of the church, to take care, of people, like us.

So, it's, it's, both, uh, kind of a jewel, kind of a, responsibilities, we, we need to respond to God.

Levites, that's the calling, they, they need to respond to God, faithfully, and the rest of the tribes, of the people, they also need to respond to God, so that, God's purpose, may be, fulfilled.

[21:55] And thirdly, I like this picture, and, and I saw, this, um, elderly lunch, it was, it was just like that picture, you know? When, we eat, with joy, in the house of the Lord.

Right? It, it mentioned, in verse 7, verse 12, and verse 18, such a joyful occasion. You know, Deuteronomy is not about, obeying this, obeying that, if you do not, God will smite you.

No, it's, God is so, willing, to bless us. In Him, there's so, abundant, goodness. But the condition is, we need to, fulfill, and do it in His way, not my way.

Right? I cannot just grab the food, and then go out, and eat. I, have to follow, His, condition, and stay, in the house of the Lord, to eat, and enjoy. That's what it was mentioned.

Now, the food law, alright? It mentioned a few things here. Firstly, um, when they offer, the, the tithes, and, uh, and, uh, and the offerings, and they could eat the meats, alright?

[23:12] But they must do that, in the designated, in the specified place. You can't do it at home. You can eat meat, yes, yes, but not sacrificial meats. And, and then they talk about, you can, there's certain food, and you can eat, or you cannot.

Now, I'll leave that to Pastor Barry, as such a, complicated, study, study, and I'm sure, he'll do a good job, alright? I only do, I only mention, blood, today, alright?

Do not, eat, blood. How many people, eat, blood here? You do! Alright? Pig's blood? Yeah?

Okay. Now, Chinese are actually, they have a tradition, like eating pig's blood, but not, not drinking it, alright? But I heard that the Scots, they actually drink it.

How, how, how can you drink blood? Alright? But, they were prohibited, to drink blood. Because what?

[24:26] Because, it had a lot to do, with the heathen worship, at the time. that was, you see, there was somebody, was holding a baby up there.

Yeah? And, and, and when they, after they're doing, doing these sacrifices, they will drink certain, blood, to, in their superstitions, they will believe, they drink the certain, bloods, from different, from certain animals, they will gain, that, that, like for example, they drink, the cow's blood, or the bull's

blood, they will be, as strong, as bull.

If they drink, if they drink, the blood of the horse, they will be, as fast, as the horse. Alright? And for Chinese, if we eat, the blood of the pig, what is it like?

It will be, as lazy, as pig. No, no, I think, I think, there are different ways, of looking at it, alright?

It's not just a legalistic, not eating blood, God knows, for, for the Jews, they did, they should not, eat blood, it's, it's a few, things for them, to, to, to, to, comprehend, I think, firstly, because, they had to do, with the hidden worship, so they, God prohibited, to do that, and today, it may not, we may not, have these, sort of, um, hidden worship, practices, but I think, there are other principles, in the Bible, can teach us, if there are things, that, we do, that, has, something to do, with, for, with the, Gentile worship, superstitions, we do not do it, right, but, even, if there are, there are, things, when, when we do, if, if, for example, if, drinking blood, or eating blood, can cause, others, to stumble, then, for others, conscience, sake, we do not do it, for example,

[26:41] I heard, um, that, missionaries, when you, when you, work among the, Islam people, Islamic people, all right, you don't eat pork, if they found out, you eat pork, all the works, all the years, of the, of, of the gospel works, among them, will be destroyed, right, it's for their conscience, sake, it's not for my, surely, I get, I'm free to do anything, I'm free to drink blood, I eat blood, but I don't do it, because, I feel, I, I, I believe that, as, as Paul said, it's not, it's no benefit, if you're not eating it, right, and I've heard, from doctors, is that, it's actually, it's not, it, yeah, it's, it's, it's, it's, quite a lot of germs, in the blood, even cooked, so, why eat blood, right, well, let God convict you, right, and, and, you may ask, then, what about the, that, ribeye, or the sirloin steak, what about,

I, I enjoy my rare, you know, rare, rare cook, how, is it okay, is it, rare to medium rare, we're kind of, sinning, now, I don't need to take picture, don't need to take, we're not legalistic, right, you know, next time, you don't need to, ask the waiter, burn it, I don't want to sin, right, I don't think so, all right, but really, too rare, of the meats, still has, has a lot of worms, right, I think it's better, to have it, cooked, properly, right, and you don't want to eat, pork, medium rare, you, you go straight, in the hospital, right, so, I think, I think, yeah, it's, it's about, how do we respond, I, I remember, an old, pastor, used to say to me, it's not, you cannot, it's, that,

I, have the freedom, can choose, not to, in Chinese, in Cantonese, it translate better, I find it hard, to get, the meaning across, if you understand Cantonese, all right, it, it says, ■ hay, ■ hay, ■ hay, ■ hay, ■ hay, bt hò yi, okay, hay, hò yi bt, you, you, you understand that, it's not that, we cannot, but, we can have the freedom, choose, not to, in the freedom, that God has given to me, right, yeah, um, you have to deal with the, eels, or the, shellfish, and the pig, next time, okay, I'll look forward to hear that, so that's my bit, I don't want to cross this territory, and thirdly, steadfastness, now three examples again, okay, one, a false prophet, false prophet, must be an, it got to be a, a popular one, otherwise,

Moses wouldn't want them, right, this guy, if he could speak, wow, I've just had a great dream, oh, he could do, miracles, and he speaks, with, with confidence, convictions, but the end, hey, let's, let us go follow other gods, Moses said, don't do it, even, how, even though how popular, how, how famous he is, don't do it, the next group, the next group of people, closer to home, right, your brother, your son, your daughter, your wife, even your closest friends, these have great, great influence to you, love you dearly, and you love them dearly, but if they said, hey, let's go worship other gods, Moses said, God is greater than him, don't do it, and thirdly, now this is mass, there's everybody, in the city, that you live in, right, if everyone, in the city, was, um, started right, by these troublemakers, but then, the whole town, agreed, and, you don't follow them, now that's hard, right, that's, that's not easy, that's why we need to be steadfast, and, and Moses told him, to, to be drastic in their actions, to eradicate, now we can't kill those people, at home, okay, don't do it, please, don't go home, don't go to your friends, if they don't believe, they ask you to go to other, other, other temples, and God, don't kill them, you'll, you'll end up in jail, right, but, they could, at that time, because, it was theocratic, at the time, we are not, in this same situation, but,

I think in our hearts, we need to, stay, steadfast, there are lots, and lots of temptations, lots, and lots, lots of trials, in our Christian growth, for those who committed Christ, to your life, to Christ, and during your camp, yep, get ready, all right, you need, you need, all the support you have, you need to grow in Christ, because, there will be, tribulations, Christ has warned us, right, there will be, tribulations in the world, but take heart, I've overcome the world, steadfastness, we, you, we don't, we don't necessarily, enjoy, these, these trials, and, and, it's not easy, to stay steadfast, and we can't, even see, any results, that's why, we need faith, there is a, people's tribe, called,

[33:25] Garo, Garo tribe, now, this is India, that's, northeast of India, I think Bhutan, Sri Lanka, is about there, so this, on the eastern side, northeastern side, of, India, now, most, the majority, 90 something percent, of India, Hinduism, all right, but you see, this, blue, color, Christianity, if you can't read it, I'll read it to you, Christianity, Protestant, Protestantism, that's the, evangelical Christians, like you and me, and that, Garo tribe, when they call it tribes, it's quite a big tribe, they got a million people, so 90 percent, of this, million, one million people, are Christians, that's, that's big percentage, that's, 900,000, right, people, in this,

Garo tribe, were Christians, how, how, how, how did they, become Christians, they were, in the mystic, they were pantheistic, that means, they worship, all, trees, sun, moon, just like any, any tribe, tribal people, okay, but it was about, 160 years ago, there were these, American Baptist, missionaries, they went, they went to this, these people, they worked very hard, and finally, they have converted, one family, and they, and they, and they, clearly, very, clearly, believed in Jesus, and their heart, was very steadfast, but that, enraged, the tribal people, and especially, the chief, of the tribe, at the time, so they, had the family, arrested, set them, before, him, and the rest, of the people, surrounded by, thousands, of these people, was watching them, because they were, the one, only one family, they, they believe in, who,

Jesus, who is that, we do not, allow this, in our tribe, so the chief, told the, told the, the man, of the, of the family, told the dad, I'll give you, I'll give you a chance, to renounce Jesus, or, I will shoot, your children, and your wife, how did the man, respond, I have decided, to follow Jesus, the children, shot, I'll give you, another chance, if you renounce Jesus, I'll spare your wife, and you, if no one, joins me, still, I will follow, his wife, shot, last chance, the cross, before me, the world, behind me, the whole family, died, so when we sing, this song, please, do not sing it, too lightly, lightly, it's a song, of the martyrs, but the miracle, was, after the family, has martyred, the chief, felt, who on earth, would believe, somebody, that's so far away, and 2000 years ago, no one knew about, and why would this family, would put their lives, on the line, and willing to be, to be, to be martyred, to die,

I want to know, a little bit more, about this, God, and eventually, he became, the next, Christian, and because of his, conversion, and you see, the 90% of the, of the people, become Christians, in the next, 150 years, you know, steadfastness, steadfastness, may not be fun, but that's the, that's the only way to go, if, if, if, that family, has given up, there's no, garold Christians, young people, it might be, your parents, or your grandparents, have really, been steadfast, so that they, pass the batons, onto you, to you, and that you can, you can come to church, there are many, maybe, they, they, they have, persevered much,

I couldn't say, sufferings, but, but we have, persevered much, for Christ, so that we, we, we pass on, the goodness of Christ, to you guys, and you, have the responsibilities, to carry on, passing on, to the, to the children, and your children, that God will give to you, otherwise, the gospel light, would just stop there, right, so let's be steadfast, parents, grandparents, let's carry on, be steadfast, we may not see it, in our, in our life, but God knows, and he could use it, Hudson Taylor, used to say, Christ, is either the Lord of all, or, he's not the Lord, at all, he's not, just a little bit, of flavor, in my life, we're not, we're not adding,

[39:52] Jesus as salt, or, pepper, on the steak, to make it taste, a bit better, no, Christ, is, the Lord of all, the Lord of our lives, let's, be steadfast, shall we pray, and then we're going to sing that song, okay, Father God, just want to thank you, thank you for your word, thank you for the Israelites, they had to learn, those lessons, and we, have to learn too, but we trust, you, God, you are the God, of, yeah, you're a good God, you are a gracious God, you are a merciful God, but you are also, a just, and mighty, and holy God, Lord, help us to follow you, wholeheartedly, not, according to my way, but according to your way, Lord, help us, when we sing this song, I have decided, Lord, enable us,

Holy Spirit, enable us, to, to have the courage, to let go of everything, and to willing, to be willing to, to follow you, every step of the way, in Jesus name, we pray, Amen.
Amen.