

KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS

The opening lines of the Ten Commandments are: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...”* (Exodus 20: 3-5a). These words are repeated in the Ten Commandments as given in Deuteronomy 5:7-9. The first three verses of the Decalogue have to do with idolatry. By law of first mention we see the importance that God places on not committing idolatry. He dedicates the first two commandments to make the case even stronger.

The beloved disciple John pled with the early Christians, *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen”* (I John 5:21). As John was fast approaching the end of his ministry and earthly influence before becoming exiled on the Isle of Patmos, he sternly warned the people to stay away from idols. To understand what John was talking about, let us examine the previous verse: *“And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life”* (I John 5:20). This verse is saying that Christ, the Son of God has come and placed us in Himself. He is true; furthermore is the one and only Eternal Living God! In I John 5:21, the Word of God demands that we keep ourselves from idols. The meaning is obvious -- anything or anyone competing with Jesus is an attempt to substitute the true God, Jesus Christ for idols. A secular definition of idolatry is: a pejorative term for the worship of an idol or a physical object such as a cult image as a god, or practices believed to verge on worship, such as giving honour and regard to created forms. Dr. Tim Keller says, “making an idol out of something means giving it the love you should be giving your Creator and Sustainer. An idol is anything in your life that is so central to your life that you cannot have a meaningful life if you lose it.”

While Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy at Athens, he was astounded at how the citizens of one of the most famous cities of the ancient world worshipped. The Bible says, *“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry”* (Acts 17:16). No civilization, even those claiming to be atheistic is bereft of worship. We all worship something or someone. The phrase “wholly given” means to cleave steadfastly, to conform completely.

We can better evangelize the world we live in if we know what and who the gods of our culture are. To whom or what are people cleaving steadfastly? Pagans have gods for everything, because everything can become a god. The Bible says, *“For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,)”* (I Corinthians 8:5). There are work gods, sex gods, nature gods, everything and

nearly anything can become an idol. Think how really nothing has changed in this world. When Paul was on Mars Hill he confronted people who worshipped Athena, the goddess of wisdom or philosophy, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, just warfare, strength, strategy, the arts, crafts, and skill and human reason. Are people today not worshipping their own wisdom, civil actions, military might and human reason? Aphrodite was the goddess of love, beauty and sexual rapture. Do not people worship the physical beauty of the human body and sexuality? Artemis was the goddess of the wilderness, the hunt, wild animals and fertility that brings the successful harvest which accrues monetary blessings. Do people not worship success, especially financial success? The answer to all of these questions is a definite yes!

I would like to break down three forms of idolatry prevalent in our culture today.

1. Idols of Self

In the late 1960's people began to talk about going to the desert or other distant location to "find themselves." This was the segue of the hippy movement. I guess it was the natural route after they blew their minds on drugs. This became the recovery system. It was modern psychology's answer to the quest for wholeness after life became a fraction for so many baby boomers. Sometimes a bland diet full of health foods and meditation was the preparatory work for "finding yourself." I remember a humorous warning, "Be careful as you go out to find yourself; you may not like what you find." As a rule, the humanisticly driven person was egotistical enough to not only like what they found but to worship what they found. Hear what the Bible says about the person who makes a god of themselves: "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man...Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 1: 22,23a, 25). Let us keep ourselves from the idol of self!

2. Idols of Others

Is there any wonder when we have a leading hit show on primetime called, "American Idol," that our society is constantly on the hunt for someone to worship?

It is good to find love, provided it is God's ordained love. Even loving a person can become idolatrous if loving them has become the goal of your life. If you lose relationship with someone, it is only right to be sad. If, on the other hand, you want to commit suicide because of losing that relationship, you are revealing that this certain person has become your god. I warn all unmarried people, please keep your perspective and balance right when you court. Jesus must always stay number one!

Speaking of the Pharisees, the Bible says, "*For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God*" (John 12:43). "*The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso*

putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25). There is no safety in man, only in God!

3. Idols of Things

The Egyptian pharaohs had themselves buried with their worldly riches to accompany them into the afterlife. Now Conde Chiquinho Scarpaso, a Brazilian man is planning a similar scheme with his beloved Bentley Continental Flying Spur. He is so infatuated with his British luxury car he has revealed plans to bury it, so he can be with it in the hereafter. This car is sold for approximately five hundred thousand dollars. Whether this is a stunt or reality, people today worship things they have or wish they had. Jesus made it plain when He said, *"...Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"* (Luke 12:15).

What we value on earth is not valued in Heaven. People worship gold here, while God uses gold as asphalt in Heaven. We value pearls here, while God uses pearls for doors or gates in Heaven. The Bible says, *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Colossians 3:2).

God has given man a nature and a heart to worship. We shall worship and adore someone or something. Therefore, if your heart has been turned away from Christ, the only power to overthrow the god you have set up in His place is to fall in love with the Lord Jesus. Thomas Chalmers said it best when he talked of the "expulsive power of a new affection." Loving Jesus will drive out all competing idols.

-Pastor Pope-