

*“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21).*

Given the time of year, when the nation and so-called Christian world is at its height of false idol worship, I thought it appropriate to discuss idolatry and the Scriptural exhortations and commandments against it.

This sermon started out as a tearing down of the myth of Xmas and how the Catholic whore introduced this idolatrous notion, pretending it has something to do with the birth of Christ, as a money grab and a way to pacify the various systems of pagan religion that worship the sun and the cycles of the earth like Roman Saturnaliasts, the Druids, Celts, etc. I encourage all of you here in the seats, and those of you listening on the Internet, to do a diligent study of this crime the Popish whore committed here, in attaching what then was a week of sexual indulgence, murder, and absolute lewdness to anything having to do with Christ. It is an instructive, albeit vexing research project.

I started where I did because we are obviously caught up in the end of year idol-fest between the worship of the dead at Halloween and the great Satan fest of Xmas. When I was growing up, the whole year kind of built up to these last three months and the fervent idolatrous behavior associated with them, but if you look around us today, there isn't much difference between the hoopla surrounding Xmas and that of Valentine's, St. Patrick's, Veteran's, Earth or Election Day. It's around the clock, 100% idolatry, 100% of the time. Mankind universally asks "What can we find to extol the virtues of and worship, as long as it isn't the Living God?" And don't think this is just about so-called Christians. It is truly universal. Whether Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Atheist, or any other religion you want to name, with the exclusion of Christ's Church here, in this cesspool of Topeka, Kansas, the human race is consumed with idolatry every day.

As I wrote, it occurred to me that a larger discourse on the issue of idolatry and how dangerous it is even for us, who eschew these great, obvious trappings like Xmas, Halloween, and Thanksgiving Day might be useful. Yes, idolatry is a danger friends, even for those of us who work daily in this vineyard! It is a snare Men are easily seduced into by our Enemy. So, I scrapped that sermon and started over again.

I hope that at least one thing was clear to you all even before I started delivering this sermon – we swim in a sea of idolatry. Not just a nice calm, warm sea where you can float along and enjoy the water and the waves, but a whirling maelstrom, a tempestuous sea of idolatrous behavior that surrounds and buffets us on all sides at all times. We are adrift in a dangerous situation where this idolatry is ensnaring, it is at times hard to see for what it is, and it is a soul-damning thing. It is a thing we must be keenly aware of in order to avoid our drowning in it. It is a thing we must diligently watch for lest it invade this precious house, the only refuge from that buffeting we have!

To be clear, idolatry is a big deal to God. Look at the first two of His commandments:

*“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” (Exodus 20:3-5)*

Very plainly stated commandments – don’t worship anything other than God, and don’t create or bow down to any image of anything. No calling on Mother Nature, no prayers to Mary, no bowing down to crosses or paintings or stained glass windows. No molten or graven images of anything, including what you think God looks like or anything in the entirety of His creation including animals, angels, birds, fish, the earth itself, the seas, or the elements in the sky including the stars and planets. It’s a completely comprehensive list God has provided here. Nada, nothing, zilch is to be worshipped other than the God who created you, and you don’t need any accoutrements to aid you in that worship.

Why does God command things to be this way? He tells us

*“...for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments” (Exodus 20:5-6).*

There you have it. Our God is jealous and will not share adoration or worship time with anything or anyone else. He alone will be worshipped, because He is the Creator, and anyone or anything else you are worshipping is a creation of your own mind. He went to the effort to create the universe, not you, so He is entirely justified in His jealousy. He alone has the right to declare when, where, why and how He will be worshipped, and to set the boundaries of that worship for us. And in His mercy, He has. We aren’t left wondering if we ought to be sacrificing people in His name or burning incense or wearing strange symbols on our skin or putting trees in our houses and decorating them with silver and gold, or any other goofy so-called religious notion that mankind has come up with since the days of Adam. He lays it out plainly for us how to worship Him so that we don’t incur His wrath.

Those that won’t worship Him as He has stated He declares to be haters of Him. This is one of the primary reasons idolatry is such a critical sin to avoid. If you are an idolater, it is a declaration that you hate God, and He will visit iniquity upon you, ultimately ending in that eternal visitation of His wrath upon your body and soul in hell. Idolatry is a pernicious, sneaky weapon in the arsenal of Satan, and he has used it to ensnare many a soul in sin.

Do you reject the idea that God is jealous? That He would avenge the insult against His Deity by you worshipping someone or something else? Do you see God as a bully for having this clear-cut demand in place that you worship Him and Him alone or face the consequence of eternal damnation? Do you carry the idea in your head that this is an “Old Testament God thing”?

If you carry any of those ideas, my friend, you are in a bad spot, certainly engaged in some very deep, dark idolatry even as you think them. Your god is not the God of the Bible, which is the very definition of idolatry. That includes the billions on this planet who claim to worship God, just under some different label or form, whether that's Catholicism, Hinduism, Islam, Mormonism, whatever. One God created everything, and laid out the rules, and then showed extreme mercy in preserving these words for us so that we know PRECISELY what is expected! Everyone on the planet has access to these words, and can read them the same as us. You don't have to climb some treacherous mountain to get to an oracle to tell you the will of the gods. You don't have to smoke some special herb to hear his voice. You don't have to interpret some tea leaves and hope you get it right. All you have to do is read the words that He has preserved over centuries of attempted destruction to this very day, to know not to bow down to any image. Read them and know that there are to be no other gods drawing your attention other than the God who inhabits eternity.

If you think this is an "Old Testament thing" that Jesus did away with, think again. There are very few ideas, precepts or doctrines that you will find more frequently discussed or reviewed throughout the New Testament. Paul addresses it multiple times with the churches at Corinth, Galatia and Colosse; Peter addresses it in his Epistles, as does John. One cannot exercise the proper fear of God and worship of Him in any form if engaged in the worship of idols. John tells us to keep ourselves from them (1 John 5:21), and Paul tells us to flee idolatry and to mortify our members against "covetousness, which is idolatry" (Colossians 3:5). Paul focuses significant attention to whether you should even eat something that was sacrificed to an idol, and Christ speaks to the churches about this very matter in Revelation.

Idolatry can take many forms, which is why it should be a thing we think about and watch for not occasionally, not on a regular rotating basis, but every minute of every day.

There is what I call the obvious form of idolatry, prohibited expressly by the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment, where you give undue adoration and the focus of your worship to a visible object, giving the honor that is due to God to that object, even bowing down to it. You see it with pagan religions all the time – think statues of Shiva of the Hindus or Buddha. You see it in so-called Christianity. Look at all the "high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree" (1 Kings 14:23) in this nation calling themselves Christian churches. And when I say look at them, I'm not being figurative. Really look at them when you're standing in front of them. You are hard-pressed to find a so-called Christian house of worship anywhere in this world without an idol on its roof, over its door, behind the pulpit, on the walls, in the windows, on the floor, on its signage, adorning its stationary, its hymnals, its website, its T-shirts, Bible covers, beer koozies, custom water bottles, or communion accoutrements. Don't think there's a so-called Christian beer koozie? Google it.

These churches all adorn themselves with some sort of idol, whether it's a cross on the roof or something more ornate like what Catholics do with their stained-glass windows, crosses on every peak, over the door and in the house of worship itself. Occasionally you get an idol two-fer, like you get at Our Lady of Guadalupe here in town, where they not only have a giant painting of Mary behind their altar, but they also have the idols of the Aztecs painted on the outside of their building. Now, maybe we should give them some props for covering all their bases. Or not. While not all the people in these places may go to the lengths the Catholics do, of actually bowing down to the statues when they enter the building, look how many of them use the cross, wearing it around their neck, or looking to it when they pray. The commandment doesn't just say not to bow down to them, it also says not to serve these physical idols. Look at how they push these pagan holidays and all the symbols of them down our throats every day, demanding our adoration of the Xmas tree and good ol' St. Nick. There is definitely serving of those idols going on all around us, and we must be wary of it.

"We'd never put up an idol in this house" you say? I say to you "take heed lest ye fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). Remember that Christ spoke to the seven churches and two of them He specifically calls out for idolatry. Remember, these things didn't always exist in the churches. They crept in, and can creep inside our walls if we are not vigilant.

Which brings me to the second form of idolatry I see, that which is less obvious than some golden statue or other symbol, and therefore more devious. That idolatry is what is covered primarily by the first commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

This is sometimes harder to see, because it is not as blatant as that tree in your living room or that cross on your lapel that everyone sees and knows your adoration and worship of. This is, I think, a more personal thing. One that maybe is easily seen by others, but the depths of it are known only to you and your God, because it takes place in your own heart.

This form of idolatry takes that time which you are to dedicate to your Creator and dedicates worship and adoration to someone or something else.

I'm a technologist, a computer person, right, so I use this analogy. If it doesn't make sense, I'll apologize up front, all metaphors limp, but bear with me. Like a computer only has so many CPU cycles to use in a given time period, there are only so many cycles each of us has in a day to engage our minds, our hearts and our hands. For the sake of discussion, assume we are all single threaded – that is we can only do one single thing at a time (for some of us that may not be much of a stretch; that one thing can be a thought or an action, and each of these takes 1 second, 1 tick of our clock to accomplish. There are 24 hours in a day, or 86,400 seconds in which to do things. Due to the frailties of our frames, roughly 28,800 of those seconds, give or take, are spent sleeping, where we can do no conscious work for our God. So that leaves us 57,600 seconds in a day to focus on serving our God. 57,600 ticks of our CPU, as it were, to

process information and give to God His due praise, to lift up our voice, whether that is verbally or the voice of our heart, and sing His praises for all things He has done in the universe. Remember, it would not be an unreasonable thing to spend 57,600 seconds of every day praising Him. Were it possible, 100% of our energy, our thoughts, our CPU ticks, as it were, should be spent in that position of adoration and thankfulness, executing obedience to Him and performing those services which He seeks from us. And if we COULD spend those 57,600 seconds of every day in worship of Him, or somehow alleviate the need for those 28,800 seconds of sleep time, it **would still not be enough time** to adequately and properly show to Him our thankfulness for all His judgments and all His mercies.

So we have 57,600 ticks of our CPU in a day to use in worship of our God. I posit, for the sake of discussion, that it isn't possible, due to the weaknesses of the human heart and the natural depravity found therein, to dedicate all those cycles to Him. We have to dedicate some to our wives, our children, our loved ones, our jobs, our pets, ourselves. We must perform responsibilities to the ministry, to our technology needs, our transportation, maintenance of our 'things', etc. And for the sake of this argument, I am distinguishing our actions in our ministry from our worship of our God, just to keep the analogy a little simpler.

So the question to ask yourself is, out of those 57,600 ticks of your CPU, how many of them do you give to God? How many of them do you focus all of your energy on the Throne of Grace, saying "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13)?

Dig deeper. Where is the balance? If you had to execute a process list on your CPU, and list out everything you did across those 57,600 ticks, where would the preponderance of that time be spent? Compare it against the time spent on the worship of God. What is the ratio you spend doing other things, fleshly things, vs. worshipping God in your heart?

For you youngsters who might be sitting in the pews asking "what, does he want us to sit on these mildly comfortable pews all day every day?" I say worship isn't exclusively what we're doing here right now. Worship happens privately as well as publicly. For this discussion, I include both.

So now that you're reviewing where your cycles are spent, answer for yourself why you spend them on various things that are not focused in the meditation of Godly things, in the study of His word, and the worship of His holiness? Examine those things closely and I am certain you will find something, maybe many things, which are or are bordering on becoming, your personal idols. Things which you turn to for daily or even hourly comfort instead of resting on your God for all things

Do you dote on your children, spending undue amounts of time fawning on them, acquiring material things for them, pampering them, pandering to their comfort and their desires? Look around us, there is a generation of parents who spend almost their entire lives doing just that. Do you believe you are exempt from that snare of turning your

children into an idol? I tell you now that you are not! David clearly was not, and are better than he?

Do you seek worldly adoration and acceptance in your place of employment, going beyond what is necessary to please your masters to seek pleasant company with all men? Do you look to that place of work as an escape or more important than your service to God?

Do you seek worldly goods as the measure of your worth and the increase of them as a great pursuit? Remember, covetousness is spiritual idolatry! It places the love due to God on material possessions and worldly wealth, and the **obtaining** of things by your own hand, rather than the humble **receiving** of things from the hand of God which are profitable to us in our service to Him! Covetousness is the making of a god out of things!

Idols can be made of anyone or anything. We can make them out of our children, our parents, our friends, our family, our things, our talents and skills, our hobbies, our recreational activities, our homes, our jobs. Anything!

I contend we can make idols out of our very service to God! YES! Consider this, friends, that in focusing on the task itself too deeply, rather than remembering what we do is in service to our Master, we risk turning even our very service to God into an idol. We can turn our doctrines into idols, our singing, our worship services, etc.

Imagine if we were to turn our ordinance of the Lord's Supper into some laser focused worship of the bread or the wine as elements, rather than keeping the somber feast of remembrance, where we focus our attentions and meditations on the remembrance of Christ; in so doing we would have turned it into an idol the same as the Catholic sacrament of communion. If we turn our singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs into some unnecessary production aimed not at praising God with our hearts but at showcasing the wonderful melodiousness of our own voices, we risk turning that into an idol. If we elders seek to turn our sermons into oratorical masterpieces of unequaled exegetical and philosophical argument, full of sophisticated turns of phrases, with perfection of timbre and meter, rather than focusing on the simple messages of our Savior, we could easily turn this labor into an idol.

The width and depths of what we could turn into an idol are as deep and wide as our depravity, that is to say, they are infinite, and we must guard against it at all times!

We guard against this great sin by using those means which our Father has given. Are we not instructed to pray "lead us not into temptation" for this very reason? Are we not told to turn to our Father for all things, and not to the vain imaginations of our own hearts? There will come an end to this danger, it is not a thing we will have to wrestle with forever, but while we occupy this land, wrestle with it we must. We must be jealous of God's things as God is jealous. We must walk in Godly fear of Him "having

somewhat against” us for our idolatry and seek His aid in removing all aspects of idolatry from our hearts and lives.

Our God has promised that a day is coming in which this idolatry and the danger of idols will cease. “In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats” (Isaiah 2:20).

Let us hasten toward that day, keeping our lamps trimmed, our wedding garments at the ready, and our eyes focused to the sky where our Savior and Master will return to cause all idolatry to cease and full, true worship of Him to be the order of the day. And until that day let us walk in Godly fear, knowing that idolatry is not an abstract thing to view from afar, but to actively keep ourselves away from.

Amen.