

1 John Chapter 5F

Over the past week, a few people have come to me with a puzzled look on their face and asked me why I neglected verse 21 in what appeared to be my final sermon in the book of 1 John.

- I suppose they thought I was being negligent in my duty to cover every verse of every chapter of every book in the Bible.
- Still others offered a measure of grace for my apparent omission; after all, it is kind of hard to see how verse 21 fits into the larger context of the chapter. For some people it was ok that I neglected the verse.

Well, I didn't neglect it, I actually thought that verse 21 needed more attention than I could give it last week.

You see, the problem of idolatry is so pervasive and the topic so important that I felt verse 21 needed at least one full week its own.

- When you read chapter 5 you realize, John could actually have ended the letter with that great crescendo of confidence in verse 20.

1 John 5: 20 **And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.**

- John could have put down his pen, sealed the letter and sent it on its way and no one would have questioned him.
- OR he could have ended the letter the way he ended 2nd and 3rd John in essence saying:

Listen, there is a whole lot more I want to write to you, But I hope to see you soon and then we can talk face to face. That too would have been just fine.

- BUT here at the end of the letter, John offers one final seemingly abrupt command.

1 John 5:21 **Little children, keep yourselves from idols.**

It seems only natural to ask, what does this puzzling command have to do with anything that John has written in this letter? Frankly, that's a good question.

- We could look back at vs 20 and say, Since Jesus is the True God I suppose that John just wanted to make sure that we stay away from all the other false gods.
- While that makes sense, I tend to believe there is more to it.

When you consider the larger context of the letter and the specific issues that John is addressing His final statement actually fits quite well.

Remember in this letter, John exposed a group of False Teachers whom he boldly calls, “**Antichrists**.” These heretics were promoting a corrupt, idolatrous image of the Lord Jesus Christ. They denied that He came to us in real human flesh. They corrupted the Biblical doctrine of atonement, and rejected Jesus’ teachings on love and obedience.

- By presenting Jesus as a mere man, on whom the Spirit of Christ descended in Baptism and departed before the crucifixion these “**Antichrists**” created and promoted an idol, a false image of God.
- Oh, their twisted false Christ may have carried the name of Jesus BUT he was certainly NOT the eternal Son of God who humbled himself and put on human flesh in Mary’s womb.
- They rejected the atonement in which the God-Man bore the full fury of divine wrath on behalf of those who were chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world.

In many ways, they were like that first generation of Israel whom God delivered out of Egypt. When Moses lingered longer on Mt Sinai, the rabble came to Arron and said: “**Up, (Get moving Aaron) make us (some) gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.**” Exodus 32:1b

- Sadly, Aaron obliged and gathered a pile of jewelry from the people, melted it down and formed their necklaces and rings into an idol in the shape of a calf.

Exodus 32: 4 **And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"** 5 **When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."**

- I read all of this just to point out that Aaron actually used the covenant name for God, “YHWH” when he said: “**Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.**”

Like the Jews at Mt Sinai, these False Teachers created their own God BUT they kept the name of Jesus in order to deceive God’s people.

- And like the previous generation of Israel in the wilderness the false teachers in John’s day sought to lead the people of God astray into immoral practices.
- In the 1800’s, the founder of Mormonism created an idol, a different Jesus, supposedly the spirit brother of Lucifer and set out to deceive multitudes

As you can see from these two examples, Idolatry is a major issue, a sinful practice that is prevalent in both the Old and New Testaments. As a matter of fact since man rebelled against God in the Garden, He has been prone to Idolatry.

R. C. Sproul “*The most basic sin found in the world is idolatry.*”

Joshua reminded the people of Israel that God Called their Father Abram out of a land of idolatry. Joshua 24: 2 **And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the LORD, the God**

of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.

In Genesis 31 when Jacob gathered his family to run away from his Father In-Law, his wife Rachel went into her Father’s house and stole her father’s “Household Gods.”

Genesis 31: 19 Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father’s household gods.

- To you and I this may seem like a strange thing to do. BUT in some way Rachel felt that she simply had to take them with her.
- It’s likely that she was raised in the superstition that these household Gods could somehow assist her in her journey, provide security, blessing and prosperity in a strange new land.
- Although these manmade statues were powerless to provide the desired blessing something within Rachel just would not allow her to leave home without them.

In our sinful flesh, we long for something tangible, something that will give us an Edge in this Uncertain World, something we can trust in, something that will assure our success and provide us with prosperity. Did you know:

- Michael Jordan wore his North Carolina University shorts underneath of his Chicago Bulls uniform because he thought they were the key to his success.
- Babe Ruth had to touch second base every time he came off the field because he thought that was the key to successful batting.
- Superstitions tend to feed man’s ravenous appetite for idols.
- Rachel trusted in her father’s gods to meet her needs as she made her way to Jacob’s homeland. Then whenever she was tempted to fear she could reach down and touch her family idols and she would feel better.

Before we close this book of 1 John for the final time I would like to elaborate on verse 21: **Little children, keep yourselves from idols.**

- We could spend years studying everything that the Bible has to say about Idolatry, but this morning I would like to show you that the worship of Idols goes against common sense, it breaks the Command of God and it arises out of the sinful corruption of our flesh.

How about if we make those things our three points for today:

1. Common Sense
2. Command of God
3. Corruption of Man

Turn with me if you will to the Book of Isaiah Ch 44 and we will consider how Idolatry is completely contrary to Common Sense.

The prophet Isaiah confronted the nation of Israel at a time when they were worshipping the idols of the other nations around them. Baal and Ashertoth

- In Chapter 44 Isaiah boldly declares the divine attributes of the one true God and then he moves on to show how utterly foolish it is to worship idols.

Isaiah 44: 6 Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.

- Here God identifies himself as Lord – YHWH, the self-existent God, The King of Israel – Rightful ruler over his chosen people, Their Redeemer, the one who delivered them from slavery in Egypt.
- Lord of Hosts, Sovereign ruler over all that is seen and unseen. Apart from him, there simply is no other God.

Then Isaiah describes the sheer foolishness that is involved in worshipping an idol that you make with your own two hands.

13 The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. 14 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it.

- Isaiah provides a detailed description of the work of man caring for the trees, cutting the wood, planing and shaping that wood into the image of a man so that he can worship the work of his own hands.

15 Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!"

17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

18 They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.

- Friends, it is just plain foolish to think that from the same piece of wood that you use to heat your house and cook your food you could make a god and bow before it in worship.
- When the day is done this foolish man cries out to a piece of wood that cannot hear, he listens for direction from an idol who cannot speak and he seeks deliverance from a god who cannot move. Isaiah highlights the folly of this practice saying:

19 No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?"

- Well friends, there aren't many people in my neighborhood who are cutting down trees and craving out their own images for worship.
- BUT when I go on Facebook I find a growing number of Millennials, Young people ages 18-35, who seem to be remaking Jesus in their own image.
- Like them He is socially active and culturally relevant.
- Although many of them were raised in the church, they have rejected orthodox Christian Doctrine.
- They focus on the idea that "God is Love," (1 John 4) and from those words they create an idol who is sentimentally tolerant and welcoming to all people,
- They have developed a false Christ who sets aside all moral standards in order to assist the outcast and embrace the disenfranchised.
- IN an effort to make the world a better place they lose sight of the Kingdom and trade away the eternal for the temporal.

Well, as you can see the worship of Idols is completely contrary to common sense. Now I would like you to see that Idolatry is also an act of rebellion against the Command of God.

2. The Command of God.

Exodus 20:1 **And God spoke all these words, saying,** 2 **"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.** 3 **"You shall have no other gods before me.**

- For 400 years, the people of Israel were plunged into Pagan Society in Egypt, where they were surrounded by idolatry, exposed to false religious rituals.
- When you think about it, it is a miracle that they retained their national identity after being immersed in a foreign culture for 13 generations.
- Did they really understand? Were they able to see the strong arm of the Lord as He brought his judgment against the idols of Egypt?

Think about it, With every plague that HE visited upon the Egyptians, God displayed his almighty power over the false Gods and idolatrous worship of Egypt.

- The Egyptians worshiped HAPI the god of the Nile and the True and Living God brought his judgment upon the Idol turning the Nile into blood.
- They worshipped HEGET the Goddess of birth and fertility who was depicted as a woman with the head of a frog and in judgment God sent a plague of frogs on the land.

And then, God sent a plague of flies in judgment of KHEPRI the Egyptian god of creation, who was represented by a man with the head of a fly. It was said that KHEPRI was the one who pushed the sun into the sky every morning.

Now I want you to think carefully; WHO was it that really benefitted from the plagues that God sent on the Idols of Egypt. WHOSE attention was God seeking to capture

through His miraculous intervention? Pharaoh? (No God Hardened Pharaoh's heart) The Citizens of Egypt? (Maybe?)

In my personal opinion, God was liberating his people, not only from the physical slavery that they endured in Egypt BUT also from any inordinate affection they might have developed to the Idols of the land.

- I believe that the circumstances surrounding the plagues were a part of God's plan to liberate his people from the culture in which they were immersed.
- The hardship and testing that they endured unified them as a nation and caused them to trust in to rely upon the only true and living God.

You see, before removing His chosen people from Egypt God needed to remove Egypt from his chosen people.

- When the time came for them to leave, None of the False God's of Egypt could take credit for Israel's great deliverance because YHWH had judged them all revealing the folly of idolatrous worship.
- While they were in the wilderness God revealed his holy law saying:

Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

- "No other gods before me," does Not speak of prominence. He was not saying that he simply must be the most important God... The word actually speaks of presence; you shall have no other Gods in my presence.

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

Because God is pure spirit, it is impossible to create a material likeness of his image.

There was a period of time when God sovereignly removed the idols from my life. Everything that I valued, all that I trusted in was destroyed. Relationships were broken, vocational success was ruined, finances were lost. AS he did in Egypt, God judged all of my Idols. While I would never want to live through those days again, they played a valuable role in my salvation. God delivered me from the bondage of sin, healed my broken heart and brought me into his family.

As we observed from the life of Rachel in Genesis 31 the hearts of men and women tend to cling to idols of our own imagination. Those idols can be anything that we trust in, anything that we rely on for comfort, relief or pleasure outside of God.

For example:

- Some people feel the need to plunge themselves headlong into mindless entertainment at the end of a tough week.

- Others run to alcohol to find comfort after a hard day at the office.
- We escape a troubled relationship at home in the pages of a romance novel, and we end up looking for love OR pleasure in all the wrong places.

The sinful corruption of our flesh searches for meaning, for pleasure and fulfillment in the things of this world rather than looking to God our Creator.

John Calvin wrote, “The human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.” Many quote him as saying, “The heart is a veritable factory of idols.”

- Like the children of Israel, we need something tangible, we need a god that we can see and touch when it seems that the true God is distant or silent.

Elyse Fitzpatrick in her book, “Idols of the Heart” writes, “To my sadness I’ve frequently heard Christian women say, “I know that Jesus is here with me.... But I need something more. I need a god with skin that I can feel.

As the Apostle Paul reflected on the history of Israel he understood that in our flesh, we all have a propensity to turn away from the Lord. Writing to the Church at Corinth Paul held Israel up as an example.

1 Corinthians 10:1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

- Despite the miraculous saving work of God, His deliverance and His faithful provision, the vast majority of those who came out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of idolatry.

1 Corinthians 10: 6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

The words of Paul challenge us to learn from the example of Israel, He calls us to examine their failures, to carefully weigh the high cost of their foolishness so that we don’t end up repeating their mistakes.

- We need to keep in mind the tendency of our flesh to worship the creature rather than the creator who is blessed forever.

Arthur Pink wrote: “Men must have an object to worship, and when he turns from the true God, he at once craves a false one”

Friends as we come to a close I want you to know that God has not only revealed WHO we should worship BUT He has also revealed HOW He is to be worshipped.

IN the Old Testament God gave very precise instructions to the people of Israel as to how He was to be worshipped.

- With great detail, he described the Sabbaths, the feasts, the instruments of worship and the garments of the Priests.
- Every sacrifice and offering was clearly laid out and they were required to follow his instructions with precision.

This was because every offering, every sacrifice, every act of worship was specifically designed to point the people to the Lord Jesus who was to come.

- Their worship pointed forward to the coming one, BUT our worship points BACK to the one who has come. To the Lord Jesus Christ.

Meeting on the First Day of the week - Resurrection Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2

1 Timothy 4:13 Centered on the Word of God **Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.**

Col 3:16 Songs and Hymns ALL originating in the Word of God. **Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

Baptism - Matthew 28:18-20 Making disciples, Baptizing, Teaching,

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Lord's Supper - 1 Corinthians 11:23-26