

"Worshipping Idols"

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"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 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." (Ro 1:24-25)

This morning I am return to my theme of worship. It certainly should appear obvious to everyone that God is truly to be worshipped. This morning early, very early, I turned on the TV and all of the stations were carrying the inauguration of Pope Benedict XVI. I watched for a very few minutes as the new Pope sat there in his full regalia, with his Dagan hat, the hat of the fish god, the mitre hat of the impostor of St. Peter, for he no more represents the Apostle Peter than does Bill Clinton. The Apostle did not teach us about the immaculate conception, or Mary as Mediator, or transubstantiation, or prayers to saints, or prayers to Mary, or bowing to images, or any such thing. The Apostle Peter wrote in his first epistle:

"Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed."

So there was a great deal of pageantry, of ceremony, very rich and costly vestments, cups, etc. The questions arose in my mind, "Is this worship?" Is God served by men's hands? What is the worship of God in its essence? I want to know the essence of a thing to understand it. What is worship. Specifically, what is the worship of the true God. What is the essence of the food on my plate? Is it horse meat? cat? fish? dog? or prime beef? I want to know.

The first and second commandments are very explicit. The first forbids having any other gods. "Thou shalt have no other god before me"; the Hebrew for "before me" is face. Don't put a god in my face, is the first commandment. Do not offend the majesty and glory of God by sticking a god in His face. The second commandment forbids the imaging of anything to use in worship.

The reason is very clear in Scripture; God cannot be seen. He is invisible. As we read in Deuteronomy 4:

12 And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.

13 And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go over to possess it.

15 Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:

16 Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,

17 The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air,

18 The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth:

19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

We worship what we do not see. Even Jesus Christ we know no more after the flesh. We do not worship a man. My God is not a Jewish carpenter. It is true that He appeared for a little while as a true human and the Son of God is in heaven today, but we know him no more after the flesh, as Paul tells us. "It is expedient that I go away," He said, "so that the Holy Spirit will be sent to you." This shows us the nature of the knowledge we have of Christ—it is not of the flesh, not of the five senses; we do not see, taste, touch, hear, or smell him. He is known by the receiving of the doctrine of Scripture by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, or He is not known at all..

The Heidelberg Catechism is very explicit also on the interpretation of the First Commandment. The doctrine of the Scripture is expressed clearly in two questions: 94 and 95. There is both a negative and a positive aspect to it.

Question 94: I am to flee all idolatry, sorcery, enchantments, invocation of saints or other creatures. We are not to pray or trust in creatures. To pray to them. Prayers are to be made to God alone. But it is deeper than that. Prayers must arise from a right heart. Prayers are an abominations if they come from a wicked heart, Proverbs tells us.

We are to flee all idolatry: Question 95 tells us what idolatry is: to conceive or have something else on which to place our trust instead of, or besides the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word. Wow! What a wonderful biblical statement:

An idol is anything you trust in.

The most common idol that men have is themselves. They trust in themselves.

1. In their reason.
2. In their feelings.
3. In their strength. {I can figure it out}.

They trust in their church. [I belong to the right church] There is no church that can carry you to heaven.

I could go on and on, and usually I do, but I have other things to say right now.

Question 94:

1. We are to rightly acknowledge the only true God; Confess and bear His Name.

2. Trust in Him alone. For all things. For daily bread; and needs for the body; for human relationships [we don't live to be liked]; for safety in this world and in the next [we don't live in fear]; for happiness [we don't seek peace and contentment from the things of the world];

3. With all humility: if you trust in something else, you are proud-thinking you know better than God. Unbelief is arrogance and pride—the very work of the devil himself.

4. Patience: you trust that God will bring you through: you can walk as though you were blind for a while, because you see ahead by faith, and trust in God.

5. Expect all good from Him alone: He is the source of all good, and all good comes from Him, not anywhere else. No one, no thing, can do you good but God alone. "I don't know how I can get out of this mess...." Of course you don't. You never saw that you could get in the mess. Of course you don't see your way out.

6. Love: How can you not love such a God who is perfectly aware of all your needs and loves you more than you can imagine. Do you think He does not love you? Jesus died for you. The only reason you do not love God is because you don't really consider the Lord Jesus and His sacrifice for you, and you despise that sacrifice. If you did not discount the blood of Christ, you would love Him and His Father.

7. Fear and Honor: He deserves these things. We will honor Him by testifying to his greatness and His Name forever and ever. With my whole heart. True worship takes place only in the hearts of His people. The heart of the believer is the true altar of God, where the true sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving and honor and trust take place. If it does not take place in your heart, it will take place no where else in your life, and your ceremonies of worship will be sham and hypocrisy.

8. There is a sermon on the website under the first commandment, if you care to hear it again.

Finally, I would invite you to Psalm 62:5-7

5 My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defense; I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory: the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.

Note the following:

1. My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. We are to expect good things only from Him. This will remove all disillusionment and bitterness from you.

2. He is a rock and salvation and defense: you will not be moved: The soul will not be moved; the body might. Your soul becomes as a rock when you trust in the ROCK. "He that believes on Him shall not be ashamed." You will not be put to shame. Not in Him. In yourself you will be ashamed, so you might as well get used to it. But you will not be ashamed in God.

3. Salvation and Glory; strength; refuge. For the soul. The salvation of the soul. It is only in God. You might hide in a cave if you are chased by wild animals. You might flee to the courts if you are threatened by lawsuit and fraud. You might crawl into your basement if a tornado threatens. Even then, your safety depends upon God, and not on these things.

But where will you flee for the safety of your soul? What is the refuge of your soul, when guilt and fears and discouragement and worry afflict the soul? The answer is here: in God alone. In Jesus Christ His Son. In the promise and comfort of the Holy Spirit. This is the true refuge of the soul. The soul will never be at rest clothed in the armor of Saul. It must be secure in Christ alone. All other is idolatry, disillusionment and death.

Amen and Amen.

May God bless you.