

So That You May Know

An Expository Study of the Epistle of **1 John 5:18-20**

Chapter 31- Keep Yourselves From Idols

291 Keep Yourselves From Idols Part 3

WAOY Friday-Monday 12/12-15/08

Welcome again, my beloved in Jesus Christ. We're continuing our verse by verse "journey" through the Epistle of **1 John**, and today we're going to *continue* to look at the very last verse of **1John** as the Apostle John warns us about the great danger of idolatry. So, let's read **1John 5:21** again together:

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Now we saw last time how that John ends this wonderful Epistle with this warning against idols because this issue of idols and covetousness is a very serious subject that we need to guard against even in our day. And we saw how that the Bible itself makes the connection between covetousness and idolatry in **Ephesians 5:5** when Paul said:

For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

So because covetousness and idolatry are such evil sins in God's Eyes- it would behoove us to know just what idolatry is- wouldn't it? So just what is idolatry? Idolatry exists anytime we value anything or any person more than we value the one true living God. And an idol is anything or any person that takes center stage in our affections, loves, and desires. So you can see that practically anything has the potential of becoming an idol and you can also see that what makes something to be an idol is in how we place value on it- so idolatry is in the heart of Man.

And in a culture like 21st Century America- in which possessions

are more easily acquired- than ever before- the danger that we all face in crossing over the line that separates God meeting our needs and us becoming covetous is blurred and confused.

Now many times people will come up to me to tell me that I am being way too serious about this subject. That everybody needs money in order to live and that things have changed since the Bible was written and that having money and making money is not wrong. And when you combine that laid back attitude toward the sin of worldliness and covetousness and idolatry with the notion that many Churches today actually teach that covetousness is a virtue and not a sin at all- I see this issue as being even more important now than it was when John first wrote it.

And here's why. God is a jealous God. And God is correct to be jealous because there is no thing or no one in all the Universe more worthy of our love and more worthy of our devotion and more worthy of our affections and our loyalty and our obedience than God is. And for us to steal the love that should only rightfully go to God and to place that love on something that is part of Creation or something that is passing away is to rob God of our affections and loves and to give those affections and loves to something less lovely and less worthy and less glorious than God is- and that is a horrible offence to God.

That is why, dear friends, that I spend so much time teaching you that Biblical Christianity is not about God making you feel better about yourself; it is not about God giving you more earthly possessions; and it is not about God making much of you because Christianity is not about you- Christianity is about Jesus; it is about God and it is about us having the honor and the privilege of Jesus washing our sins away so that we may give to God the worship and love and respect that He is entitled to; it is about us giving to God what He deserves; and it is about us making much of God- so that God is glorified and so that our joy will be full.

Christianity is about the fact that through the horrible death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus Christ- the just Wrath of God that was bearing down on us like a freight train at 300 miles an hour has been averted; it has been stopped and we have been rescued from God's Wrath by the horrendous Act of Love that Jesus gave to us.

And the result of that Act is that now we have been bought and paid for by Jesus and we are no longer our own and we no longer belong

to ourselves but we are now bondslaves of the Lord Jesus Christ and we owe Him our allegiance and we owe Him our devotion and we owe Him our worship and our love and the only way that we prove our love for Jesus is by obeying what He said and by living in accordance to what He said so that we may live our lives to the Glory of God alone.

You see, there is no such thing as anyone loving Jesus and then living in abject rebellion to what He says. The Apostle says in **1John 2:4** that anyone who thinks or says that being saved has nothing to do with how we live our lives is self-deceived.

So us graciously and humbly and gladly submitting to all of Christ's Authority over our lives is what serving Jesus is all about. And that service is called, "Worship". You see, beloved, worship is not what we do during the Song Service at Church on Sunday Morning. No, worship involves how we live our lives and how we spend our money and how we raise our children and what we love and what and who we obey.

And so while many today are mostly concerned with their own agenda and with their own dreams and with their own plans and with what offends them and they seek to include God in their lives only to the extent that God will make their dreams come true- God is not at all concerned about those things. No, God is very concerned about His Agenda; and His Dreams; and His Plans and His Will being done in the earth to the same extent and with the same urgency as His Will is done in Heaven. And the believer is never told to pray, "*gimme, gimme, gimme*", but the genuine believer is counseled to pray, "*Not my will- but Thine be done*".

So anything that might not normally be a blatant sin in and of itself and yet if it robs God of the affections, loves, and desires that only rightfully belong to Him- then that thing at that point is an idol and if we insist on pledging our desires to it- then we are in fact idolaters.

And it could be anything- a spouse; a child; a humanitarian project; pornography; drugs; power over the poor; or even religion. We humans have an enormous capacity to turn otherwise noble things into idols by the way in which we attach our affections to it.

So, an idol then is a God-substitute; a God replacement; something that takes the place of God in our lives. And this could be something small that would be easy to be rid of like statue of Buddha on a shelf or something that is so huge that it would take a miracle to

deliver us like looking to the Government for provision in your monthly check instead of praising God from Whom all blessings flow.

So the reason that John issues this final warning here is precisely because idols are not always so easily identified; and they are not so easily discerned and we slip into idolatry with surprising ease.

Here is a very simple check list to see if we are keeping ourselves from idols or if idols are keeping us from God:

How long has it been since you were troubled by covetousness in your life? Now that lack of concern may be due to the fact that you are free from idolatry. But the more obvious cause of our lack of concern is because idols have already blinded us to the point where we don't see them- which of course means that they have already done their work and we are in fact self-deceived into thinking that blatant sin is a blessing from God.

Now I get phone calls about this issue and the most common remark that I get is that people believe that the only recourse that they have to not being covetous is to live in poverty. And I would like to respond to that.

First of all- I am not advocating poverty as an answer to anything. And to think that poverty removes our own human proclivity to covet is silly because if anything poverty causes more covetousness. So I am not a proponent of poverty as a solution to any sin.

But while that is true- it is equally true that if we viewed covetousness to be the terrible sin that God said that it is- then it shouldn't matter to us what it takes for us to be free from it- including poverty. In other words, if Jesus said that we should cut our hand or foot off or we should pluck out our eyes if we cannot cease from sinning with them- then what difference does it make what we have to do to escape the tyranny of idolatry?

And the fact that we are not willing to do anything to escape the sin of idolatry only proves that we really don't think that this is such a big deal after all.

So that is the test- not a list of what is or is not an idol but a test that allows us to prove to ourselves how willing we are to be rid of this terrible sin.

Now listen to me- it is absolutely true that "in theory" a believer can possess great riches and still be godly. That is true- but only if it is true. And what I mean by that is that while it is possible in theory for a

believer to be fabulously wealthy and still be godly- it is also true that Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it was for a rich man to enter into Heaven. And when you take that statement all the way back to the original Greek- Jesus actually said that it was easier for a real live animal called a camel to go through the eye of a sewing needle than it was for a rich man to enter into Heaven. Which is the same thing as saying that it is almost impossible.

And the reason that it is almost impossible is because as human beings- we are very attracted to both wealth and power. And that ungodly attraction changes us. You see, we want wealth because of what wealth makes us feel like when we have it and we want power because power makes us that much more like God in our own minds and hearts.

And the reason that this is a real big issue friends- is because even though our souls were gloriously saved by the Lord Jesus Christ- our flesh was not saved and our flesh is still sinful and it is still influenced by ungodly influences and it still wants the very same sins and the very same attention that we gave it before we were saved.

And our sinful flesh is still of that nature of Adam that willingly rebelled against God in the Garden and- in fact- wanted to be God. And because that is true for every single human being- we are cautioned in Scripture to handle money very carefully; with great fear and with great caution because it is very easy for even the best of us to cross over into covetousness and idolatry.

And it is also a fact that the more money that touches our hands and the more power that we come into – the harder it is to resist the temptation that we are great and that we deserve it and that we are special and as so as that temptation begins to take over in our lives- covetousness and idolatry are not far behind.

And there are not very many people who are strong enough to resist that kind of temptation that wealth and power brings into our lives which is why there are so many warnings in Scripture about this issue. For example-

Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place *these* over them *as* leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.

Psalms 119:36

Incline my heart to Your testimonies And not to *dishonest* gain.

Mark 7:20-23

20 And he said, *That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.*

21 *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders,*

22 *Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:*

23 *All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.*

Luke 12:15

And he said unto them, *Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

Ephesians 5:3

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;

Hebrews 13:5

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

1 Timothy 6:6-12

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.

7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Well, I have to stop right here, but please join me on the next broadcast as we continue our journey through the Epistle of **1John**. May God help us all.

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