

HIDDEN IDOLS

CMBC February 19, 2017

1 John 5:21; Isaiah 40:10 - 31

The last verse the Apostle John wrote in his letter jumps out at us, seemingly totally out of context. He writes: **Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.**

- The usual ending of a letter was some benediction to the readers.
- He hasn't said anything about idols in the letter. Not here, nor in his next two letters, nor in the Gospel he wrote.
- Or ... maybe he did and we missed it. Maybe he is pointing to hidden idols.

If this was the Old Testament and we were reading the story of Elijah, or the sermons of Isaiah, we would immediately know what he was talking about.

- The Children of Israel went back to idols again and again.
- In the New Testament we hear about idols, but idolatry is primarily "out there", like Paul on Mars Hill, or a new believer having been delivered from that lifestyle.
- And for us, the typical stone or wooden image in our houses that we would be tempted to bow down to isn't really an issue here
- John doesn't deal with idolatry as something that is out there, but a warning of something more sinister – hidden idols.

John's purpose for writing this letter is that the church has been infiltrated with those that have come into the church teaching that believing Jesus was God come in the flesh was naïve and miss representing God.

- They said:
- Flesh was evil and sinful, and God would never take on flesh.
- Being fully human and fully divine was impossible.
- The only way to God was to know about God in our mind and spirit, and so connect with God.
- It wasn't about a personal, intimate relationship with God - God in us and we in Him.
- Jesus' death proved that the flesh was evil, and that he wasn't divine. What's more, since the flesh was evil, was doomed to die and decay.
- The flesh wasn't from God, so what you did with the flesh, in the flesh, didn't matter.
- So enjoy what pleasures you could with the flesh.
- Our salvation came from knowing more and more about God.

John wrote:

- "We have seen him.
- We have heard him.
- We touched him.
- He is the Word of life.
- It is by his blood that we are purified from our sin.
- When we believe and confess, he enters into our lives and brings us eternal life.
- The cross has changed the way we live.
- His love has changed the way we love.
- **5:22 And we are in him who is true – even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.**
- Anything else than that is a false god.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

What a great way to end his letter.

But idolatry is rampant. How do we slip into idolatry?

1. MAKING GODS THAT SUIT US

The Children of Israel were primarily agricultural people.

Let's trace the example of a farmer.

- a. Aware of a power beyond us
 - i. You can't control the weather, the pests,
 - ii. **ILL** Rancher's hay crop out in the field
 - iii. **ILL** Deciding on what to do with the snow on our parking lot.
 - iv. There is a power we beyond us

- b. Creating my image of that power
 - i. What is that power and we begin to imagine
 1. Carve it into something I can see.
 2. It is my imagination
 3. I make one that expresses my fear
 4. I make one that gives me licence eg. Goddess Diana
 - ii. Sometimes people think that the power is within them
 - iii. Second commandment tells us not to make an image of God
 1. We will never get it right
 2. Maybe not a sculptured image, but an image in my mind.

- c. Manipulating those powers
 - i. How do we appease this god, this power
 - ii. Make a sacrifice
 1. People sacrificed their children to Molech
 2. Today we sacrifice our children to the god of me – abortion

- d. Disappointed in their lack of fulfillment
 - i. When I don't get what I want, I have fear
 - ii. Get angry at the god or blame someone else
 - iii. Change gods

2. THE "CHRISTIAN" RESHAPING OF GOD

The people the Apostle John warned about were people in the church, claiming to be Christians

That is the sinister part of hidden idols. They come proclaiming that they have it right.

What kinds of idols?

- a. The Jesus-plus idol
 - i. The Galatians church had those.
 1. They believed that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, but you also needed to keep the Jews laws
 2. Salvation is by works
 3. **III.** I am going to heaven because I am good enough

b. The legalist idol

- i. This is similar to the Jesus-plus
- ii. It is a set of rules that we have which we expect everyone to follow
- iii. Paul talked about that in writing to the church at Corinth
 1. Food which had been offered to idols
 2. Days that should be or should not be observed
 3. Today it is about music and how you dress in church
 4. Paul says to the Corinthians, "If it is wrong to you then don't do it. But be gracious with the person that does. Or even be willing to change if what you do causes a weak brother to stumble."
- iv. John and James had that problem when they told Jesus, "We saw someone, who was not part of our group, casting out demons in your name and we told him to stop."
Jesus said, "Don't stop him. Whoever is not against you is for you."
Luke 9:50
- v. The opposite is also true, "God forgives, so I can do whatever I want."

c. The religious performance idol

- i. It is the idol where we try to impress God with our spirituality
- ii. The Pharisees had this problem when they fervently prayed pompous prayers in public to impress the people and God with how spiritual they were.
- iii. They even reminded God how spiritual they were.
- iv. They even did this with their Bible reading. Jesus said: [39] You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, [40] yet you refuse to come to me to have life. John 5:30
- v. Jesus wasn't saying that we shouldn't be diligent in our study of the Word, but for the right reasons.
- vi. They were reading the Scriptures to prove their point rather than to hear what God was saying.
- vii. It is having your devotions or reading through the Bible without hearing what God is saying to you through that Scripture.
- viii. Doing church in our own skills.
- ix. All of these are helpful, but easily become our idols.

d. The rational idol

- i. This is a very popular idol today, and it was the idol John was warning about in this letter.
- ii. It is when we try to make logical sense of God.
 1. We can't.
 2. No more than my computer can logically understand me.
 3. Someone asked me "What is artificial intelligence?" It is intelligence that man has designed by what we put into it, but never can understand anything more.
- iii. This is the idol worship that asks,
 1. "How can God be everywhere, while at the same time be here on this earth in the man Jesus?"

2. "Why would God let such a terrible thing happen?"
 3. Or it asks, "How could God the Holy Spirit inspire John and Paul and David to write words that become God's Word, God's truth, while at the same time they used their own words?"
 - iv. This idea that we need to logically prove everything really took off only a in our modern history, and produced the theory of evolution.
 1. To be fair that kind of thinking has benefited us in many ways.
 2. But it's huge failing is that it tries to prove God using minds that are totally inferior to God. But if we cannot prove God, we deny that he exists.
 - v. These are good questions to ask, but we will never while on this earth fully be able to understand. We have to accept them by faith.
 1. Job asked God for a logical explanation for what was going on in his life.
 2. God never gave him that answer. He simply said, "I am way beyond your ability to understand. Just trust me for who I am."
 3. Job had it right when he said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh. Blessed be the name of the Lord."
 - vi. God is a spirit, Jesus said, and even then we have a difficult time understanding "spirit".
 1. How can God live in us we are in God, as John said?
 2. How can we become children of God, with new life?
 3. How can the Holy Spirit fill us, and teach us.
 - vii. We only know this because God has revealed it to us, and we accept this by faith.
- e. Idols are Satan's counterfeit god's to confuse mankind, to destroy mankind.
- i. They are invisible like God
 - ii. There is a power associated with them – his evil power
 - iii. The Egyptian priests were able to duplicate some of Moses' miracles
 - iv. Don't let him steal the mystery of God.

ILL. The land in Banzone, Burkina Faso, where no one lived because it was evil. Believers moved in and turned it into very productive fields.

John says in the last verses of his letter...

3. JESUS, WHO IS THE TRUE GOD

- a. He is beyond our comprehension
 - i. If He is God our Creator, then we will never understand all that there is about Him
 - ii. How can Jesus be fully human and fully divine?
 1. How can God be sovereign and yet give us the right to choose to follow him?
 2. How does God know us before he even created the world, and how does He know now who will love Him and who will not?
 3. How can a God of love be angry with those who reject Him?
 4. How can God live in us?
- b. What you need to know you have heard

- i. We can only know what God reveals to us about Himself
- ii. And all we need to know He has made know to us.
- iii. **Romans 1:19** What may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. [20] For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

c. It is He who initiated love toward you

- i. Idol worshippers attempt to find out who this power is, this god is, that they fear, and try to keep this God to leave them alone.
- ii. The true God reaches out to us, to make peace with us, to save us from our own damnation.
- iii. He is a God who willingly sacrifices Himself to bring us salvation and peace with Him.

d. Follow Him with complete trust

- i. What He asks of us is to trust him.
- ii. What He tells us is that He alone is God
- iii. He alone tells us why we are here and His wonderful plans for us for all of eternity
- iv. And He has done all that is needed to bring that to us, and asks us simply to trust Him, to love Him, to let Him change our live.
- v. Have faith in God.
- vi. Every other God is an idol, a counterfeit, a hokes, a lie
- vii. **Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.**