

WALKING IN THE LIGHT- First John and the Path to Living Deeply in Christ - Part twenty-nine

Sunday, September 19th, 2021 - 10:00 a.m. - Teaching #2127

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KEEP YOURSELVES FROM IDOLS (continued)

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:20-21 - “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. [21] Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

I said last Sunday there were two controlling ideas in this great text. The grace of God through Christ brings first of all a *new understanding* - “...we know that the Son of God has come and has given us a new understanding....” We never knew our deepest need apart from this gracious enlightening.

Secondly, we begin to grow in an ever deepening love for God that is rooted in an *exclusive* devotion to Him. That’s the point of study in today’s teaching.

- 2) **WHEN CHRIST ENTERS THE LIFE HE GRADUALLY DEVELOPS A NEW LOVE FOR GOD THAT MASTERS AND CONTROLS ALL THE IMPULSES AND INCLINATIONS OF SELF**

IPAD TEXT - 1 John 5:21 - “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Just to re-cap, John says first, the ***mind*** is transformed by seeing the greatness and glory of Christ Jesus. John says Jesus brings a “***true***” understanding to the heart (**20**). And now, second, John says the ***affections*** are purged from any desire that would compete with love for God in the heart.

If the greatest ***command*** is to ***love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength,***” then the greatest ***sin*** is to allow anything to ***dilute*** that love in any way, for any amount of time. That's what idolatry is. It's competition, a diluting of my supreme and exclusive love for God.

There are two things to remember about idolatry:

- a) ***It's not a sin that relates to any one specific outward act.*** It will manifest itself in many ways, ***but the sin itself is committed in the heart.*** This final sin that John warns about isn't an outward act like ***stealing, lying, committing sexual sin, or gossip.*** It's an ***interior sin.*** It's committed in the ***mind*** and ***heart.***

Usually, only you and God know about it. And it's sometimes hard to diagnose it in a church like ours. Unless we very carefully appeal that pricks at our cherished patterns of idolatry can explain away as ***unreasonable religious legalism.***

- b) ***Secondly, idolatry is the one sin we are all inclined to by our own nature.*** In fact, all the other forms of perversion and wickedness marring life in this world are ***caused*** by idolatry. The Bible says this is so:

IPAD TEXT - Romans 1:21-25 - “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. [24] Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, [25] because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

The text then goes on to describe the ***results*** of this sin of idolatry:

IPAD TEXT - Romans 1:26-32 - “For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; [27] and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” [28] “And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. [29] They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, [30] slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, [31] foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. [32] Though they know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

Where do all of those sins come from? What causes them to grow in people's hearts? How can things get so bad?

The soil from which those sins grow is the attitude that ***puts the creature before the Creator***. Paul says people ***"suppress the truth"*** (Romans 1:18) even though they ***know they are wrong and deserve judgement*** (Romans 1:32). And they do all of this because they've already decided in their heart to ***live for themselves rather than the Creator***.

That's the passion behind John's plea against idolatry. That's why this dying apostle would rather close with a ***warning*** than a ***benediction***. Idolatry isn't just ***a sin***. Idolatry is where sin ***comes from***.

3) THE ESSENCE OF CONVERSION IS THE TURNING *FROM* IDOLS TO GOD

IPAD TEXT - 1 Thessalonians 1:8-9 - "For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. [9] For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you *turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God...*"

This might be the best definition of conversion in the whole New Testament. There are always **two** sides to it, not just **one**. We tell people to “**come** to Jesus,” or to “**accept** Jesus.” The New Testament tells them to “**turn from idols to serve the living God.**” No one has turned **to** God until he's turned **from** all idols.

People in Macedonia and Achaia knew about the wonderful work of God that had taken place in Thessalonica. The reputation of the Thessalonian revival traveled faster than Paul. ***What did people notice about the work of God among the Thessalonians?*** They were a people without idols. They used to have idols. But they turned away from them when they were confronted by the gospel.

Now John reminds his readers in his last words that ***their greatest threat hasn't changed.*** They must guard their hearts. The greatest danger isn't first of all that they will **do** something bad. The greatest danger is that they will go astray ***in their hearts*** - in their ***affections.*** As I said at the beginning of this teaching, John's worry isn't that these people will cease loving God. They don't have to **deny** God to end in ruin. John's worry is God will become **one** of the things they love, not **the** object of their love.

Hear these closing words of John after about half a year and 18 hours of study. Most of the time you don't fight the devil **directly**. Most of the time you deal with him in a **second-hand fashion**. He **distracts our attention, divides our loyalties**, and **weakens our attachment to Jesus** long before he **trips us up in some outward act of sin**.

You will stand before God soon enough. Keep all the idols out of your heart. It's like dusting under the bed. You never do it for the last time. You must **keep** your heart clear and clean. John says you and I will keep our spiritual understanding sharp as we keep the idols out. We will hold temptation at bay as we keep the idols out.

And, perhaps most importantly of all, people will see the difference Jesus makes as we keep the idols out. He is so precious we will never be "bought off" by anything less precious. They will come to treasure, not what we **proclaim**, but what we **treasure**.