

Stop Worshiping Idols

In our last sermon we saw that the history of ancient Israel is important for us today.

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

This is because while times have changed, human nature has not changed and God's nature has not changed. Ancient Israel was given a task of inviting the world to prepare for Christ's first coming to this world. Since Israel rejected the Messiah, the duty of inviting the world to prepare for the second coming of Christ has fallen to the believers in Jesus Christ. The New Testament refers to this group as spiritual Israel. Spiritual Israel is not a political movement therefore it has no political ties to modern Israel formed nearly 2000 years later.

Last time we learned that when God took ancient Israel out of Egypt, He brought them to the desert. When the Israelites saw the desert they began to be afraid. They could not see how they and their animals could be sustained in that barren place. Their food had not run out and yet they worried for the future. They quickly forgot that God had worked many miracles to save and protect the Israelites in Egypt. Because certainly the God who could divide the Red Sea and drown all of Pharaoh's army in it could provide food for the people and animals.

Human nature is the same and we find that we also worry about a situation that has not happened yet. We worry that if we take a job that pays less in order to keep God's Sabbath holy that we won't have enough to survive. We quickly think that the solution is to break God's Sabbath. In essence we desire to return to Egypt like the Israelites. We think that the world is a better safeguard against poverty or difficulty than God is.

Don't be deceived. God will allow a situation to occur that will demonstrate whether you really trust Him or not. He will allow the challenge of your faith to come. Will you be like the mixed multitude in the desert and abandon your faith in God to go back to a worldly way of living? Or do you really believe that God will supply your needs?

Too often we act as though our desires and our needs are one and the same thing. Sometimes we think that if we don't have the comforts and luxuries of life that God is not taking care of us. Perhaps you need to re-evaluate what you really need and what things you simply want. When we abandon God's principles for the things we want but that we really don't need, then we have made our desires an idol.

Most people think that they would never worship an idol. But the vast majority of people do whether they know it or not. You think I am talking about the veneration of idols and icons in the Greek and Catholic churches. I am not talking about those alone. You think I am talking about India with their myriads of gods. I am not talking only about that.

Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

The Bible says that covetousness is idolatry. Let's learn what covetousness is. One dictionary gave the following definition:

Excessively eager to possess, especially money.

Why does the Bible consider this idolatry?

It is not necessary to bow down to a carved piece of wood or stone to serve idols. Anything besides the Holy Spirit of God that controls your heart, commanding its service, is really an idol. See {18MR 129.2} .

Is there something evil about money? No. Money can be a power for good or evil. It is the love of money that is the root of evil.

1 Timothy 6:”10 For the love of money is a root of all *kinds of evil*, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

It is the love of money that is focused on self-gratification that is idolatry. Pride associated with money is idolatry. All of our money belongs to God and has not been given to us to please self.

Are you holding back money that belongs to God? He has required from you 1/10 of your income. But instead of returning 1/10 of your income to God do you spend it on unnecessary things like fashion and entertainment? Do you pay your dues to a club but give nothing or next to nothing to God? Do you spend your money on even harmful things like cigarettes and coffee and tea but you have nothing to give to God when you come before Him? If the answer is yes are you not really coveting God's money? The Bible says that covetousness is idolatry.

Some people will do anything to be honored by others. They may seek education or a position in society or even the church to be seen as superior. This is also idolatry. People worship themselves and it is seen in their own egos.

With this in mind we go to the warning that Paul gives to spiritual Israel in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 10:7 And do not become idolaters as *were* some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."

The verb tense in the Greek implies that some of the Corinthians had already become idolaters in the literal sense of participating in heathen worship. ABOUT CORINTH?

Paul refers to the time when the Israelites worshiped a golden calf. God had already spoken the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. Moses and Joshua had climbed the mountain to receive further instruction from God. Moses and Joshua were on the mountain 40 days. Instead of using the time to reflect on their own lives and the law of God, the people began to fear and worry and show distrust in God.

Exodus 32:1-6 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *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." ² And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." ³ "So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. ⁴ And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵ So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD." ⁶ Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

The Israelites had cowered with the mighty display of power that God showed when He spoke the Ten Commandments. There was fire and smoke and earthquakes associated with the event. But now the people have so distrusted God that they worship a calf made out of the gold that was made out of their earrings! God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt but the Israelites said it was Moses who brought them out of Egypt. When people forget God and look to human leadership to make their decisions for them, they soon fall into sin.

Notice that the people ate and drank and rose up to play. Many people today mix the sacred religion of God with entertainment. In many Christian churches there is loud boisterous music and wild behavior. And this is called worship. This is just what the people desire: entertainment under the guise of religion. It soothes their carnal souls. Instead of self-denial and the putting away of sin, people prefer some excitement and something to make them laugh. This is not true worship but idolatry. People are worshiping in a way not directed by God but in a way invented by themselves.

Aaron was in a leadership position and he failed to be strong and stop the evil. Instead he permitted it and even participated in it. He feared the people more than God.

We are living in the days right before Christ's second coming. Let us understand what constitutes true worship and not stray into idolatry. Jesus said,

John 4:24 "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Let us put away the idols from our lives and worship God in spirit and in truth.