

Tuesday's Touch #64

...from Pastor Ed ...April 13, 2010

Christian Idols

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them... Exodus 20:3-4

...we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.. Eph 2:1-10

What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 1 Corinth 10:19-20

...covetousness, ...is idolatry: Colos 3:5

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 John 5:21

Man, created in the image of God, exists to bear that image to the exaltation and glory of God in His creation. God, alone, is to be the center and pervading purpose of every human life, and the sole object of all worship. So it is not surprising that idolatry is strictly forbidden under the old covenant and the new alike. Any Christian who is at all orthodox would agree that there is only one true God, and to worship any other being or object is terribly wrong. Paul makes it clear that those who worship idols are actually in communion with, and are under the influence of demons.

The New Testament highlights the fact that any form of covetousness that dominates one's heart and actually directs his life, is idolatry. This form of idolatry is rampant among western Christians. It has been enshrined in the 'American dream' and sanctified in the 'prosperity gospel.' There is near complete disregard in many Christian circles for the copious warnings in scripture regarding covetousness and materialistic ensnarement. However, as prevalent and destructive as the idolatry of covetousness is, there is another form of idolatry that is more insidious, and is often practiced by the most sincere of Christians and churches.

This is the idolatry of bestowing spiritual efficacy or power upon 'holy' objects and unsanctioned rites, and incorporating them into the worship of God. Even under the old covenant, with its divinely prescribed objects and rites (its cultic), to incorporate any *other* objects or ceremonies into the worship of the one true Yahweh was strictly forbidden and harshly judged. Most adherents to the reformed tradition have understood the second commandment as referring to this type of idolatry. Throughout the narrative of the Old Testament this is certainly the case. When Aaron created the golden calf at the foot of Sinai, he built an altar before it and actually proclaimed a feast *to* the LORD (Yahweh!). Though he could say that the calf was simply an object of focus through which they worshipped the LORD, the wrath of God fell upon them (Exodus 32). In the temple worship, to use 'strange' incense was an abomination before the Lord (Ex 30:9; Lev 10:1-2). The Israelites were warned against adopting the idols and ways of the pagan nations *into* their worship of God: *And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things (Deut 12:3-4).*

From the beginning of the New Covenant church, Christians have been plagued by the incessant desire to attach their faith to outward, corporeal objects and rites. I again emphasize, to attach any spiritual efficacy or power (good or evil) to inanimate objects, or religious ceremonies is idolatry. Even the elements of the old covenant worship, which covenant is done away in Christ, must not be brought over into the church, making Christians subject to the "weak and beggarly elements

(spiritual powers) of the world (Gal 4:9; Colos 2:16-17; Heb 13:10). We must remember with caution that there is often a fine line between the use of symbolic forms and images to *communicate* truth, and the turning of these objects into idols. For example, the cross has been a perennial (and appropriate) symbol of Christianity from the earliest days. But a cross becomes an idol the moment we esteem it (even “in the name of Jesus”) to have some sort of power to ward off evil, or as a charm, or as an object of worship. Likewise, when a house of worship, with its altars, pews, stained glass, and steeples, becomes “*the House of God*” which embodies some holy nature in and of itself, it becomes an idol. While we have a great latitude of liberty in New Covenant worship, ‘holy’ vestments and paraphernalia, *obligatory* orders of worship (liturgy), rites and ceremonies not ordained by Christ, all become idolatrous worship when they become spiritual necessities. While, in Christ, God is very patient and gracious to individuals according to the disposition of their hearts, and the degree of their understanding, those responsible for directing worship and teaching truth are accountable to flee idolatry, and to warn the sheep concerning it.

Perhaps the most disheartening form of idolatry is the perverting of the beautiful and simple ordinances that Jesus has given to His church – Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These ceremonies (the only ones given to the church) were to keep Christ and the gospel as the focus His people and at the heart of their worship. Their sole ‘spiritual’ nature is in the *truth* they convey, and the Holy Spirit’s witness to that truth. But how quickly even these ordinances were endowed by segments of the church with a salvific power - an efficacy of their own to convert sinners and to distribute Christ Himself to communicants. To utilize the ordinances in this way is idolatry.

Finally, in our individual lives, let us beware of idolatrous superstitions, vesting supposed powers upon inanimate objects. Good luck charms, rabbits feet, lucky pennies, crystals, etc., are all idols if we believe them to have some sort of influence on our behalf. It is the same with occult objects, potions, etc. If we *believe* they have power, then we *give* Satan power to use them. Material items do not carry a spiritual power in themselves. Urns, figurines, lamps, pictures, trunks, Ouija boards, graveyards, houses, etc., cannot be possessed or haunted by evil. But be sure, if we *deem* them to be such, Satan will delight to promote such belief, and capitalize on our fears. We may well then be forced to deal with real demonic influences and manifestations.

They who worship God must worship Him in Spirit and in truth (John 4:24) through Christ alone. He, alone, is to direct our lives. To Him alone belongs the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Eternal Lord of Glory,

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created.

Amen

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