

So That You May Know

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

Chapter 31- Guard Yourself From Idols

290 Keep Guard From Idols Part 2

WAOY Thursday 12/11/08

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 as I told you on the last broadcast- John was right to warn us about the horror of idolatry and how that the Bible links idolatry with another wicked sin called, covetousness.

And because covetousness and idolatry are such evil sins in God's Eyes- it would behoove us to know what this sin is- so we will not sin against God. So just what is idolatry? And why did John go out of his way to warn us to keep ourselves pure from this sin?

According to the Holy Scriptures- Idolatry is present anytime we value anything or any person more than we value the one true living God. An idol is anything or any person that takes center stage in our affections; our loves; and our desires.

Now what will help us to sort all of this out is to remember in what setting John wrote this letter. The Apostle John wrote this Epistle sometime between AD 96 and AD 98. And John was the last living Apostle on earth. Paul and Peter had both been beheaded and the Church was under very severe and very consistent persecution by a pagan Roman Government that was hostile toward Christianity and by Jews who considered Christianity to be blasphemy. So the average believer of that day was under enormous pressure that at any moment- he could be taken away and imprisoned and his family would never see him again.

And this was the normal way of life for believers of that day. It was not uncommon for a group of believers to gather together and right

in the middle of the Church Service- armed soldiers would storm into the building and ask who the Pastor was. And when he would raise his hand and they would take him out in the front yard and kill him. And then they would go back in and ask who the Elders were. And the Elders would raise their hands and they would be taken out and killed. And then the soldiers would storm back in and ask who the Deacons were.

And the amazing part of this is that the Elders and Pastors and Deacons would all willingly reveal who they were. Nobody was ashamed; nobody was concerned about their own lives; nobody tried to hide or run away. This was the great boldness that the early Church had. And when you read about this and then compare our generation to them- it makes you want to cry. Truly we love this present world and we love ourselves much more than we love Jesus in our day and we need to repent of this, dear friends.

But even though that was hard- the external persecution against the Church by unbelievers was not the worst thing that the Church fought. No, the leaders of the early Church remembered that Jesus had promised them that they would be persecuted. And although today preaching about the straight and narrow path and expecting believers to actually walk with God is considered to be mean spirited and legalistic- the early Church did not view persecution- even to the point of death- to be anything other than the normal response that the lost world would have to all those who name the Name of Jesus.

But as bad as the external persecution was- surprisingly that did not hinder the growth of the Church. No, some of the greatest numbers of converts to Christianity occurred at the point of the hardest persecution. That is because external persecution does not hinder souls from being saved. Preaching the straight and narrow path does not hinder souls from being saved. Teaching people that after Salvation that Jesus expects them to deny themselves; pick up their Cross and follow Him daily does not hinder souls from being saved.

No, what hinders lost people from coming to Jesus is people in the Church who make the claim that they are saved yet they do not serve Christ and the lost world looks at these hypocrites and they are offended at people who say but don't do and people who lay claim to believing the Bible and yet they do not obey it themselves- that is what hinders lost people from being saved.

But what was worse than the external persecution was the fight that was going on *inside* the Church over Divine Truth. You see, dear friends, the people of the early Church were very sweet and innocent and naïve people who were so glad to be saved and so glad that Jesus had rescued them from the Wrath of God and they gathered together and they heard God's Word preached and they sang about God's Love and Mercy through Jesus Christ and they were so happy to be a part of the Church. They never dreamed that evil men would creep into the Church to try to distort the Truth; they never in a million years thought that anybody would want to try to tear up the Church.

But evil men did creep in and evil men began to teach false Doctrine and evil men began to insert heresy and wicked teachings to usurp Divine Revelation and to deceive God's people. And so the leaders of the Church had to rise up and confront these evil men and they had to expose their false teaching and they had to earnestly contend for the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints because if they didn't- Biblical Christianity would be lost forever.

And we can all thank God today that the leaders of the early Church like Irenaeus and Tertullian and Athanasius and others did their jobs and they took their roles as shepherds seriously and they stood against these false teachers and they stood against these men and they rejected their lies and they renounced their heresies and they rescued the Church from evil wicked deceivers.

Now I want to make myself perfectly clear about what I am saying here. There is a mindset today in many areas that all battles over Doctrine are inherently wrong and that we really don't need Doctrine at all- because all we really need to do is to love Jesus. I don't believe that. I believe that anything that is valuable is worth fighting for. And Truth is worth fighting for. The reason that this nation is in a war against terror is because we value our way of life. And if our way of life is worth the struggle- then it really doesn't matter how long it takes; it doesn't matter how much money it costs; and it doesn't matter how many lives are lost because to stop fighting is to guarantee that we lose. So we will continue to fight as long as we value what we are fighting for.

And that's the way it is with Divine Truth. God has spoken. And anytime someone wants to change what God said or to twist what God said and to warp what God said- they need to be confronted and they

need to be exposed and if they refuse to repent- they need to be shown the door. And that is because what God said- is valuable.

The true Church of Jesus Christ does not allow false doctrine to be taught. The true Church of Jesus does not allow men to come in to deceive the sheep. Part of the responsibility of leaders in the House of God is to guard the souls of the sheep and to make sure that all men hear the one true Gospel so they may repent and be saved.

And the Gospel has already been established. It has been exhaled by the Mouth of God and it has been articulated and set down in writing by holy men who were moved along by God the Holy Spirit. The Gospel has already been defined and it is what it is. And nobody has the right or the authority to monkey around with the only tool that God has provided to save lost souls- the everlasting Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But in spite of this- periodically- some wayward souls will attempt to bring in false teaching. And for the first 1900 years of the Church- those new teachings would be analyzed and held accountable to Scripture. And if they matched up with what God said in the Bible- then, Praise God- they were added to what the Church taught. But if in any way that new teaching contradicted what Scriptures said- then that teaching was rejected and condemned and was not allowed to be taught inside the Christian Church- regardless of how popular that teaching might have been.

But sadly, that is no longer the case. Today many in the modern Church accept whatever the dog drags in through the front door. And many accept new teachings for no other reason other than they are new. And this happens because far too many people consider Biblical Christianity to be stale and old and dry and boring and in desperate need of improvement.

These so called Church growth gurus write their books which say that nobody wants to hear serious, adult, line upon line and precept upon preaching any more today. These pied pipers say that people today are sophisticated and technically advanced and so they have no desire to sit and be taught about serious eternal issues. No, they want to be entertained with lots of upbeat music; and comedy acts and skits that make no demands on their lives.

We are constantly told by people who say they know that people today can't sit and listen to a deep penetrating sermon that actually exposit the Word of God- no, they want some short sermonette which

gives them tips on better living and how they can have their best life now. Some religious groups have abandoned preaching and teaching altogether and no longer call people to flee from the Wrath that is coming and to turn from their wicked ways to serve the living God.

Prayer meetings where God's people can grab the horns of the altar and weep between the porch and the altar and where they can cry out to God for strength not to love money and to be set free from idolatry and covetousness and where they can gain the power to rejoice in suffering and to forgive those who have wronged them are growing less and less prevalent in our day. And more and more Churches are dark and the doors are locked because everybody's home watching TV.

Bible Studies which confront our own hypocrisy and our own lukewarmness and our own shallowness are quickly going out of style as we seek "life coaches" and tips on how to make more money and how we can think and grow rich.

Now I am compelled by the Gospel to tell you that these things are not signs of revival, dear friends- they are signs of a great falling away; they are signs that we love this present evil world more than we love God. And they are signs that we really believe that God is more interested that we prosper here on this earth than He is that we become holy and prepared for the next life.

So I say to you that now, more than ever before- we need to know what we believe and why we believe it. And we need to examine what we are being taught to see if God actually said it in scripture. We need to examine and see if what we believe and do glorifies God and not simply makes us feel better. And we need to find out if what we are being taught is really nothing more than an ancient heresy designed to glorify Man.

Now if you realize that part of the responsibility of Elders and Pastors is to preserve the Faith that was once and for all delivered to the saints- then you will then see that all debates about Doctrine are not necessarily bad. Some are necessary to clearly weed out the false from the good so that the people of the Church are hearing what came out of God's Mouth and not what came out of Man's.

And as John began to write this letter- the Christian Church had already been rocked with two major heresies and a third was gaining ground. Back in **The Acts 15**- the first major heresy called legalism attacked the Church through the false teaching of the Judaizers which

said that in order for a Gentile convert to become a good Christian- he first had to become a good Jew by keeping the Sabbath and by keeping the dietary and ceremonial laws of Moses that were never supposed to be eternal but were only for the Jews for a certain period of time.

You can read how the Church stood against that false teaching which ignored Grace by looking at **The Acts 15** and by reading how carefully Paul taught against legalism in the **Epistle to the Galatians**.

The second major heresy to attack the Church was the false teaching of the Antinomians who taught that because we are saved by Grace we have no further requirement to actually serve God after Salvation. This is called lawlessness and it abuses Grace. Paul taught against this heresy in **Romans 6** and James taught against Antinomianism in his Epistle.

But the third heresy was even more sinister than the other two. This was the heresy of Gnostic mysticism. And we find pieces of Gnosticism today in Jehovah's Witness and Mormon Doctrines and what is called "New Age philosophy". And the Apostle John wrote this very **Epistle of 1John** to expose Gnosticism.

Now some Gnostic mystics were saying, "Jesus isn't the Christ" and John addressed that in **1John 2:22** while others taught that "Jesus didn't really come in the flesh" and John addressed that in **1John 4:2**. So this entire Epistle is a very powerful defense of Christianity and what it means to be really saved from all the confusion that false teaching brought to the Church then and has brought to the modern Church in our day.

And so now here in this last verse of this magnificent Epistle- John is warning us of the great danger of the paganistic philosophy of the lost world creeping into the Church to make us worldly and so this faithful preacher tells us to keep ourselves from idols.

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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