

No Idols – 1 John 5:21

INTRO • Read Vs. 18-21

The NEXT v 21 is the focus of our attention this morning, but before we read it, let's pray. [Pray]

1. Did you catch the abrupt change of subject between vs. 20 & 21?
2. As John wraps up the ltr in ch5, he deals w/some goofy ideas that had begun to circulate in some of the churches there at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> C.
  - a. False teachers had infiltrated the Church & were drawing away the unwary.
  - b. So John confronts the core of their error head on.
  - c. We'll take a closer look at what it was in our last MW study when we cover both chs 4 & 5.
3. For now, it's enough to say they had a goofy idea of who Jesus was.
4. So in vs 18-20, John wraps up his thoughts & says at the end of v 20 – This is the true God and eternal life.
5. So how cults today can say Jesus isn't God, I just don't get!
6. But it's what John says next that ought to blow our minds.
7. Let me explain it this way . . .
  - a. After service today, you head into the FH for a donut.
  - b. You see a friend and start up a conversation as you're chewing & sipping.
    - 1) You talk for a bit about the message.
    - 2) You catch up on how each other are doing at work & home.
    - 3) You suggest getting together soon for lunch or a round of golf.
  - c. Then as you part and your friends walks toward the exit, he stops, turns back around toward you and loudly calls out, "Hey – [your name.]"
  - d. Several people stop what they're doing to listen.
  - e. He says, "No more shop-lifting, Okay?"  
Or, "No more drug-dealing / car-jacking / Identity theft."
  - f. You'd be like "What?!?!?!?"

V. 21

1. THAT! Is what John does here when he writes,  
Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.
2. Remember that the vs #s weren't in the original; added hundreds of years later.
3. So let me paraphrase vs20-21 . . .  
The Son of God came so we could recognize and understand the Truth which is perfectly embodied in Him. We're now living in that Truth; in God's Son, Jesus Christ. He is both the True God and Real Life. My dear children, watch out for idols. Bye!
4. At first glance, v21 seems totally disconnected from what comes before.
5. In fact, John closes this ltr unlike the other ltrs of the NT.
  - a. They usually end w/personal comments to individuals in the churches their addressed to.
  - b. Then conclude by commending their readers to the grace of God.
6. John **seems** like he's going to end that way,
  - a. He starts v21 w/the warm words "Little children."
  - b. But then he drops a bomb; "Stay away from idols!"
7. To which they'd scratch their heads & reply, "Idols? Did John just warn us about idolatry?"
  - a. Why would he do that? We gave up idols long time ago.
  - b. That's like Step 1 in becoming a Christian.
8. Remember that the JEWS who became Christians **abhorred idols**.
  - a. Coming to faith in Jesus didn't require **they** repent of idolatry.
  - b. They had to repent of self-righteousness & trusting they could **work** their way into God's favor.
9. But most of the **Gentiles** who came to faith in Jesus **had been** idol-worshiping pagans.
  - a. Their repentance was a turn away from false gods.
  - b. They quickly came to see the futility of idols.
10. So when John wrote, "Keep yourself from idols," their first reaction was probably, "Well duh!"

11. But they knew John wouldn't have written it unless it was something they needed to hear & heed.
12. As they pondered his words, they began to see **why** it was such an important warning.
13. We must do the same That is, realize **this is as much for us** as it was for them.
  - a. Because we can make the same quick assumption they did.
  - b. We read this & say, "We don't need to worry about idols because we're not Hindus.
  - c. We're not some Stone Age tribe running around in the bush worshiping trees & rocks.
  - d. We're sophisticated, moderns unburdened by the silly superstitions that once gripped the pre-scientific world.
  - e. We've narrowed it down to 2 options: 1 God or none.
  - f. And those who believe in that 1 God don't make images of Him out of wood or stone."
14. Listen: John knew his readers had forsaken their prior paganism.
  - a. He knew they didn't go to the old shrines & temples any more.
  - b. Yet still, he warned them to stay clear of idols.
  - c. Because he knew the problem of idolatry goes on.
  - d. Long after people have stopped bowing before a statue,
  - e. They may still have an idol **in their heart**.

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment

1. In Exo 20:3, the very 1<sup>st</sup> of the *10 Commandments*, God says  
"You shall have no other gods before Me."
2. We understand why God said this 3500 years ago.
  - a. The ancients believed in many gods.
  - b. The Jews had just come out of Egypt which worshipped a plethora of idols.
  - c. So God tells them as Rule 1 – they're to regard only He as God.
3. We assume what was necessary then isn't now because the age of believing in many gods is over; at least in the Modern West.
  4. Nothing could be further from the truth.
5. This command is as relevant today as it was when given on Mt. Sinai.
6. There are **more** idols today, not less!
  - a. There're more because there're more **people**.
  - b. The gods prohibited by the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment aren't just carved from wood or stone; images people bow to in some religious shrine.
  - c. An idol is **anything** we give our devotion to that belongs to God.
    - 1) An idol is what brings meaning & purpose to our lives.
    - 2) It determines what's valuable; it sets our priorities.
    - 3) Another way to think about what an idol is, is what we ultimately trust in.
  - d. And a good way to help figure that out is to consider what we **look to, run to, go after**,  
 When we're **in trouble**,  
 When we're **stressed, distressed**,  
**hurting, lonely**.
7. Some of the most common things people trust in & run to when they're in need are
  - Savings
  - Sports
  - Friends
  - Sex
  - Shopping
  - Food
  - A hobby
  - Entertainment: Movie – Music
  - Gambling
  - Or the classic meds of Alcohol, Weed, Meth, Rx drugs
8. Idols require sacrifice. They're hungry & never satisfied.
  - a. So people who trust in all these things to help & comfort them when they're in need, end up **living** for them.

- b. They draw their **identity** from it.
- 9. John reminds his readers to be on guard against idols because he knows they live in a world packed to overflowing with idolatry.
  - a. The idols that present a danger to Christians aren't statues.
  - b. They're wayward thoughts, hidden loves, & evil desires.

#### An Issue of the Heart

- 1. Idolatry is far more an **issue of the heart** than a **pagan ritual**.
- 2. The famous early church theologian Augustine said – "Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be *used*, or *using* anything that is meant to be worshiped."
- 3. Martin Luther said, "Idolatry is not only the adoration of images but also trust in one's own righteousness, works & merits; it's confidence in riches and power."
- 4. 1 of my favorite authors is AW Tozer. He wrote, "The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of him."
  - a. Tozer puts his finger squarely on what John was getting at here.
  - b. His readers had forsaken paganism & idols.
  - c. But the **problem of idolatry** lingered on in goofy ideas about God.
  - d. As I said, false teachers were spreading lies about who & what Jesus was.
  - e. All ch5 is **setting the record straight** about Jesus.
- 5. Really V21 **flows out of** v20.

We could read it this way

Jesus is both the True God and the Real Life. Dear children, beware of imposters!

- 6. The **specific error** John dealt w/is not of much concern to us today.
- 7. But John's warning is still relevant. Because many are the voices that want to make Jesus into something else.
  - a. He's the means to perfect health & unending wealth.
  - b. He's a bearded hipster who digs jazz & a cold one.
  - c. He's Uncle Sam's Uncle & votes for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - d. He's a Therapist Who listens patiently then dispenses pithy sayings that make everything better.
  - e. He's here to make my skin clearer, my smile brighter, my hair fuller, & my TV sharper.
- 8. I'm sorry if that's the msg you heard & think that's what being a Christian is about.
- 9. Jesus did NOT come to make OUR lives better!
  - a. Our lives are **precisely the problem**.
  - b. Jesus came so we could die, get out of the way, & He could live **in & thru** us.
- 10. Jesus is God. All others are imposters, pretenders Including the ones our hearts manufacture.
- 11. The heart of man is an **idol-factory**.
  - a. Michel Montaigne wrote, "O senseless man who cannot make a worm, yet makes gods by the dozens."
  - b. God made us in His image, & it seems we've returned the favor, making Him into ours.
- 12. We must constantly check to ensure that an idol, some more convenient & accommodating deity hasn't usurped the place that belongs to Jesus alone.

#### Competition

- 1. "Little children," the Spirit thru John says, "keep yourselves from idols."
- 2. This doesn't mean we can't enjoy many of the things I mentioned before.
  - a. Friends & Food can be a blessing
  - b. There's nothing wrong with Sports & Hobbies; they can be wonderfully rewarding.
  - c. There's nothing inherently sinful in shopping or going to a movie.
  - d. And sex is God's gift to enrich the intimacy of marriage.
- 3. They become idols when we **sacrifice** for them;  
When we look to them to comfort us rather than God.  
When we draw our identity from them.
- 4. They're idols when we don't engage in them **as an expression** of our love for & devotion to Jesus.
- 5. Let me use an illustration I hope most of you can relate to.
  - a. Remember the movie *Chariots of Fire*?

- b. It's main characters were Olympic track stars **Eric Liddell** & Harold Abrahams.
- c. Liddell was a Christian headed to the mission field.
  - 1) He said he knew God had made him fast & felt God's pleasure when he ran.
- c. Abrahams was an unbeliever whose driving passion was to win at running.
- d. On board the ship taking them to the Olympics, Liddell learned his qualifying heat for the 100 meters was on a Sunday.
  - 1) He'd made a commitment not to run on the Lord's Day.
  - 2) Though the heir to the English throne, the Prince of Wales, put pressure to him to set aside his religious convictions, Liddell refused to budge.
  - 3) At the time of his heat, he was in a local church giving the message to the congregation gathered there.
  - 4) It seemed Liddell's Olympics were over.
  - 5) But one of his British teammates, who'd already won a medal in the hurdles, offered Liddell his place in the 400 meter race.
- e. As Liddell moved toward the starting blocks, 1 of the American team members slipped him a note.
  - 1) Liddell's story had gone round the world.
  - 2) Christians lauded his commitment while unbelievers mocked him.
  - 3) Liddell opened the note & read, "1 Sam 2:30 – He who honors Me, I will Honor."
- f. Liddell drew the outside lane, the **worst**, in a race **much longer** than his usual distance.
- g. But he crossed the tape first, breaking both the Olympic & World records.
- h. Abrahams won the 100 meter race, but came in 6<sup>th</sup> in the 200.
  - 1) Though an Olympic gold medal winner, he was more **upset** by his **loss** in the 200 than **buoyed** by his **victory** in the 100.
  - 2) Because he took his identity from running, he couldn't decide if he was a winner or loser.
- i. Liddell was never plagued by such thoughts.
  - 1) He was a child of God; a follower of Jesus – a really, really **fast** Follower.
  - 2) He used his speed to glorify God.

## CONCLUSION

1.