

Keep yourselves from idols

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[0:00] And let's go to the Word of God, if you've got the Bible there, 1 John 5. 1 John chapter 5, and the last verse of the book. 1 John 5, 21.

Let all children keep yourselves from idols. Amen. Keep yourselves from idols.

The Bible warns us much against idolatry. Some have said that idolatry is actually one of the central themes of the Bible. Some Jewish scholar apparently said this in the Old Testament, but you could say, really it's the whole Bible.

There's this conflict between the true God and the false challenges, the idols. We see this battle going on, this spiritual battle right through, where we have king after king who follows the true God, and then one follows the false gods, the idols.

And there's this chewing and frowning between those who worship the true God, and then they fall into idolatry and apostasy.

[1:20] And then they revive and repent, and then the cycle begins again. When we think of idolatry, we sometimes just imagine of countries elsewhere, other places, of places and peoples who worship images of stone or metal.

But idolatry is alive and well in Australia, in this nation, in our community. Like some preacher put it, an idol doesn't have to be a bad thing, it can be a good thing.

And he goes on to say, some people park their idols in their garage. Some people park their idol at the marina. Some people put their idols in the deposit box, the safe deposit box or in their wallets or whatever it be.

Archaeologists tell us that in every culture throughout history, there's been idols. People have statues, little gods or goddesses, little manufactured items that they revere and honour and bow down to.

Man has this desire for some reason to turn objects or people or things into objects of worship. And we know that our Lord does not want that.

[2:33] He does not like that. Point is, we cannot have fellowship with idols and the Lord at the same time. We see that for example, 1 Corinthians 10.

1 Corinthians 10 verse 14. Paul says, Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. And the context is, having the table of devils and the table of the Lord.

Now, can light mix with darkness? What communion has it? What fellowship has it? It should be very much one or the other. Make your stand.

Take your stand. One or the other. You cannot have idols and the true God must decide who you are going to follow.

As Joshua said, Choose you this day whom you will serve. What is an idol? An idol, someone has defined it like this. An idol is anything or anyone that begins to capture our hearts and minds and affections more than God.

[3:36] It's something else other than God. That we love, that we adore, that we dwell on, that we have an affection for, other than God. Anything that draws our heart from Him.

That takes His rightful place. It's a substitute for God. An old time evangelist said, You don't have to go to heathen lands today to find false gods.

America is for them. Whatever you love more than God is your idol. Another preacher said, As long as you want anything very much, especially more than you want God, it is an idol.

Anything that you want more than God is an idol. An idol takes our affections, our attention. An idol worship is still a problem in modern day Australia.

In our nation. Aussies worship other gods, don't they? You even got to show Australian idol. There's that sense that there's a worship of other.

[4:40] Of something other than God. That replacing of God. Something that is above all replacing God. Replacing our relationship with God. That's idolatry. And our idols can be the things that are central to our lives.

And we can all do well to take a stock take. Do a bit of an inventory and a self-assessment. What is it that's in my life that sometimes displaces my Lord and His rightful place?

The world's idols can have a certain attraction, can't they? The world and its ways and the attractive things that the world can put across our path, can divert us.

And idols are false gods. We're a small g, not real gods. They're false. There is no other gods. There's only one. Amen. The one true God. And idols make him jealous.

Our God gets jealous. He is a jealous God. We read. And we can grow accustomed to the world and its culture and absorb it. And just become just like the world around us.

[5:44] It's good to ask ourselves, do I have an idol? Ask yourself this. And to answer that we could ask other questions like, what is the focus of my affections?

What is it that I focus my affection on? What is it that I tend to worry about, keep on worrying about or thinking about? What is it that I love or hate most of all?

Sometimes it's things that are a diversion, aren't they? A distraction to our spiritual life. And the first commandment prohibits idolatry.

We see the very first commandment in the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. In verse 5 it says, Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. You know, don't make a graven image. Don't bow down. Don't serve them. And idols are things that we bow down to, we submit to, and we serve. In Bible times, it's been said there are three primary idols in Bible times.

[6:54] Three main major idols of that time. There was Baal, or the female counterpart Ashtoreah, who was the god of sex.

There was Mammon, who was the god of money. And then there was Moloch, the god of violence. And so we see, sex, money, violence.

What does this sound like today? Sounds like Hollywood movies, doesn't it? Sounds like what's the latest movie that they're airing. You know? This violence, this immorality, this materialism, this culture of our world.

It's idolatrous, people. Isn't it? Idolatrous. Not to say everything on telly is wrong, but we do well to discern. We do well to discern such things.

And our shrines today, they're not made of wood, stone, clay, or metal. Today we have mental images. Mental. Not metal images. Mental images.

[7:55] Such that these things that Hollywood bombards us with, they become mental images in our minds. And they can become idolatrous to us.

There's many things that you could reckon can be idols. Some of them fairly harmless and actually useful things and needful things. But when it gets such that we shift our focus to them, then they can become like idols in our lives.

For example, clothes. You know, I had my jacket tailor-made just so that it would look just right on Sundays.

But that was thanks to someone who was very bothered by my ill-fitting clothes. Clothes can become a bit of an idol. Where, oh, I've got to go and get a new set of clothes, like all the time, and such things.

And it just becomes... We get preoccupied with such things. Or money. Making money. Or even our children. When they become such that we elevate them to...

[9:00] In a harmful way. Our friends. Relationships. They can actually become like an idol for us. When they detour us and distract us from God's way.

Sports. There's nothing wrong with sport. But when it becomes an idol, it can just dominate our life. And some people, it's like they're just so dominated by it.

That it seems that they almost worship their team and their players and such. A job. That can become like an idol.

Nothing wrong with it, but it can become such that it obsesses us. Our physical appearance. You know, when you get to my age, you don't need to worry about what's in the mirror.

But some of you younger folk, you might be more caring for that physical appearance. Such that it just dominates their thinking. And they've always got to be pampering themselves and such.

[10:03] The entertainment can become like an idol. Where we've got to find the latest movie. The latest and greatest hit. We've just got to pursue that and keep up with that.

Popularity. Our home. Our home. We can get so house proud that our home becomes like an idol. Or religion. You know, people get very religious.

And that becomes an idol to them. Our car. Now, I've just got a new car lately. An old new car. But you know, some people with their cars, such that they become so dominated by that.

And that's a be all and end all. Material things. Comfort. Itself can be an idol. Where we've got to look after our own comfort. To the exclusion of, what does God want for my life?

You know, does God want me to actually do something that's stepping outside of my comfort zone? And that can be an idol. And that can be an idol. An idol. So we can become so passionate about something that it becomes like an idol for us.

[11:10] It becomes like our identity. Again, like when people glorify sports teams. And look, I'm not anti-sport.

But it's just one example of many that we could cite as one example. We see that reflected in Psalm 115, where the psalmist is speaking about idols.

And Psalm 115 from verse 3. The psalmist writes, But our God is in the heavens. He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not. Eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not.

Noses have they, but they smell not. They have hands, but they handle not. Feet have they, but they walk not. Neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them.

[12:08] So is everyone that trusteth in them. Now you see people bowing down to idols, to icons, to statues, to images. Even well-meaning Christians can.

Fulllessly revere such a thing. But the Bible speaks very much against such. Notice verse 8 of Psalm 115.

It says, They that make them, the people who manufacture these idols, are like unto them. So is everyone that trusteth in them.

Notice it says, verse 8, They trust in their idols. And their idols dominate them. Now I know a well-meaning Buddhist woman, who told me that she prayed to Buddha, and she prayed to the statue, and she got what she wanted.

You know, they trust in their idols. People trust in a lump of concrete sprayed with gold paint. In these Buddhist temples.

[13:09] Or whatever it's manufactured from. It's an idol. It's just a lump of solid material. That is an idol that can't see, can't speak, can't hear, can't walk, can't talk.

These are idols. Yet people trust in them. And it says, verse 8, They that make them, those who manufacture these idols, are like unto them. Their idols dominate them.

Again, just to use the analogy of the sport picture there. They become like them. You see these sports fans? It's the big game.

And you ride on the train. And they're singing their hymns. Very religious people. And they're wearing their colours, their scarves, their beaming. Their shirts, their socks.

You name it. It dominates them. And some people get so obsessed, they become so identified with that.

[14:12] You know, the glorious crows. Or poor power. Whatever it be. You name it. Whatever team. Whatever sport. Harmless, isn't it?

But it's when they get so identified with it. That that becomes just, oh, everything's about that.

Everything is about that. They're dominated by that. And then become like what they value most.

Notice at first that that man shapes his idol. Then the idol shapes him.

Now they chip away and make that statue, that image, that sign, that picture, that shape.

They shape their idol. And then the idol shapes them. It's like that with whatever it be of all those things I mentioned earlier. So man is not only deformed but conformed to his chosen idol.

[15:12] And idols will dominate and deform and ultimately destroy you. In Revelation 21.8 it tells how idolaters will have their part in the lake of fire.

Now I'm not saying if you're a fanatic Crows fan that you're going to have your part in the lake of fire necessarily. But I'm just saying that when we get so obsessed with something that it replaces God. That's a problem, isn't it? When you hear of some, oh, I couldn't get to church, you know, I can't get to church for the next season because I'm in the soccer club. And, you know, you think, well, is that a good reason, really?

Is it? Idols. There may be something God has given us that is good. But we can cross that line where we give that all of our attention, our labor.

It controls us. We get obsessed. People would think of nothing of flying to the game over in Melbourne.

[16:20] They'll give their last dime to be there. To get a good seat. To pay the price.

Because of their love. And it controls some people. You hear of some people, their houses, their rooms are decked out with all the merchandise.

Again, sport is just one example. And don't think I'm bagging sport entirely. It's just one example of many. People worship all kinds of things.

All kinds of things. Like I gave in that list earlier. And really, the supreme idol is self. It's the self. It's the supreme idol. And as an old time preacher, he's well regarded largely across the world has said, years ago, he said, First, keep yourselves from worshipping yourselves.

Keep yourselves from worshipping yourselves. Reserve your love and worship for him. And what is it that we esteem and place our affections on? Some have reckoned there's some four things that mark idolatry.

[17:30] Some point us to idolatry, you could say. Number one, the flesh. The works of the flesh. The lust of the flesh. This consuming desire for false gods.

It's a fleshly pursuit. It's like, oh, that really appeals to me. That's what I really want. And they pursue that. That passion. That pleasure.

And it becomes like an idol to them. That love of self rather than a love of God. That corruption of the flesh. A second one is stubbornness.

Where we see that occasion where Saul did not destroy the Amalekites property and cattle and such.

And Samuel challenged him and he said, Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

[18:31] That's 1 Samuel 15, 22. Another sign of idolatry is stubbornness of heart. In that occasion we see that a clear word was given to the king and he rejected that word of God.

He was not willing to obey. He rationalized it. He kind of flakily addressed it by saying, Oh, I'm using these things to worship God.

You know, he's kind of justifying, pragmatic kind of way of thinking that he tried to excuse his disobedience to God. And idolatry is like that.

When we're stubborn of heart, it's like idolatry. It says there, 1 Samuel 15, 22, 23. When our will is more important than God's will. When we try to excuse ourselves, there's a stubbornness of heart. There's that rebellious nature, that rebellion of heart. Like the sin of witchcraft. Another sign of this idolatry is covetousness.

[19:39] Colossians 3, verse 5, it says covetousness, which is idolatry. Covetousness. It talks about that greedy desire to have more. More, more, more.

It's that insatiable desire to get more and more and more. And some people are like that, where they're just obsessed with gathering and gaining that desire to have more and more.

That greedy, grasping, covetousness, which is idolatry. Then we see another one is enslavement or bondage. Galatians 4 talks about how it's like a bondage that ensnares people.

And we can get that sense of being bound up by those things that dominate our lives. Fleshly lusts, that selfish heart of pridefulness, that obsessing and wanting of more, of possessions, of prestige, of money.

So just to recap, those four things were the flesh, stubbornness of heart, covetousness, and enslavement. These are the markers of idolatry.

[20:54] And we see that in our world today, don't we? The people who don't know the Lord are just so in bondage and enslaved by this idolatrous thinking.

And idolatry for some people can be an addiction. Something that dominates them. Something that we've got an addiction to. It's like, it's got a control over us that is dangerous.

It becomes almost a god. And something becomes almost a god to someone that's idolatry. And it's a good question for us to ask, what is getting in the way of my loving and worshipping God?

What is hindering that? What is distracting? What is it that I'm pursuing to such a degree that it takes over and it displaces God? An idol.

We can think, oh, that's just in these countries where they're animistic, where they worship nature or statues and such. But no, it can happen right here.

[21:58] Right in our heart. In our lives. An idol. It's when we have, when something, anything other than the Lord Jesus, we give our worship to.

And we can question that. What is it that is like that in my life? How can I separate from that? How can I leave that and say, no, I won't partake of that?

And as I say, self can be the biggest idol. Pride. We can get proud. You know, we preachers can get proud, oh, I've got my doctrine just right.

And anyone who differs from me, God will sort them out at the rapture. You know, you can get proud and prideful such that even when you believe earnestly and truthfully and genuinely that you've got everything down pat, we can get prideful.

And that's wrong, isn't it? For us to be prideful even when we are right. And as one preacher put it, lovers of themselves or lovers of self, you see it everywhere and it starts early in life.

[23:04] And this is a bit tongue in cheek now. But you can see it in toddlers. You can see it in little ones. You know, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Of course, even a little saintly young David there, he might have some of these characteristics, even just as a little tack over it. Even just as a one year old, you can see it in them, you know. The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. And here's how someone can put it, like I say, tongue in cheek somewhat. But the toddler property laws. If I like it, it's mine. If it's in my hand, it's mine.

If I can take it from you, it's mine. If I had it a little while ago, it's mine. If it's mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way. If I'm doing or building something, all the pieces are mine.

If it looks just like mine, it's mine. If I think it's mine, it's mine. If it's yours and I steal it, it's mine. That kind of way of thinking, isn't it?

[24:04] The me, me, me generation of the world we live in. Where it's not just a problem for toddlers, but for adults too. We're living in the it's all about me generation. You know, the selfie generation.

Where we see people with slogans like, be yourself. Or believe in yourself. Take care of yourself. Watch out for number one. You can do courses to help you increase your self-love.

And your self-confidence and such. Me, me, me. When you boil it all down. It's a worship of self. It's a worship of your own self.

And that is idolatry. When you boil it all down to it. That when we put our self on a throne in a heart, it's not right.

And idolatry is a heart issue. We read of idols in the heart. In Ezekiel 14 verse 3, it says in part that these men have set up their idols in their heart.

[25:04] So idolatry, when you boil it down, is like a heart issue. And what is the antidote? In Proverbs 4 verse 23, it tells us, Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

Keep your heart. Guard your heart. Idols are deeply embedded in hearts. Like the psalmist cried in Psalm 139, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

Try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. Have you an idol worship problem?

Have I an idol worship problem? Someone has set this test for idolatry. And things that we can ask to help explore this honestly before God.

As we say, Lord search my heart. Search my heart. Does that matter, that substitute for God have first place in my life?

[26:13] Does it, in other words, does it put God, does it put our Lord as second? That could be things such as self. Men shall be lovers of themselves.

More than lovers of God. It's one of the characteristics of these latter days. And we're being bombarded with that all the time, aren't we? There's a constant bombardment. Because men shall be lovers of themselves.

More than lovers of God. The people that are programming the large part of the content that comes through the media. The media is programmed, it's designed by people with that philosophy.

Self. What about another person? Is there another person that in my life, I want to please him or her before and instead of pleasing God?

It can be an idol for us. You know, you get to another saved friend. And sometimes that can be a real trap.

[27:19] Another aspect in considering this question about a test for idolatry. Time. How much time is involved? Is it consuming such time that it's not wise?

You know, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Ephesians 5.16. What about money? How much of your resources does it consume? The love of money is the root of all evil.

Not money of itself, but the love of money. Is it consuming my money, my resources? That which, you see, the amount of money people spend on buying the latest gear with all the insignia over it, whether it be the crows or whatever it be, and such.

They just think nothing of throwing money out of it. Conversation. Conversation. Do you talk about it all the time? It's another question, isn't it? What is it that you go on and on about?

What about, is it such that you set the goals for your future, you choose the decisions of life revolving around that?

[28:32] That it becomes the centre of your life. It's so important. It becomes almost a matter of life and death. People get so consumed by this. That can be an idol for us.

And so it's a good question to consider. Little children keep yourselves from idols. So what are we to do? What are we to do if we may identify such a thing that is that replacement for God in our life? What are we to do? It's a heart issue. Get your heart right. It's not for a preacher to condemn you or to badger you or others to.

But it's about you and the Lord and getting your heart right. What is not a faith is sin. We can all maybe have things on our list.

Those things that I talked about earlier. It's when they are elevated to a point when we're almost giving them control over our lives.

[29:40] Because God doesn't want to be your top God. He wants to be your only God. And that should be that that sets our thinking straight.

Because he says he doesn't want us to have any other gods. No other gods. No other gods. So John is saying here keep yourselves from idols. So what are we to do in this sense of keeping?

It means a guarding of yourself. Garrison yourself. Diligently guard yourself from them. In other words keep alert. Be like the sentry at the entry. Recognize the idols for what they are.

Those things that, yeah, actually come to think of it. That is a bit like an idol in my life. When you come to think of it. And you can say, yeah, I'm going to set my house in order.

I'm going to do something about that. Now back in the Old Testament days when a righteous king came along. We see, for example, Josiah in 2 Kings 23.

[30:41] Josiah cleansed the land. What did he do? He smashed the idols. He tore them down. He ground them to dust. 2 Kings 23 verse 14.

And he broke in pieces the images. You know. And he cut down the groves. And he filled their places with the bones of men. To defile them with bones. And made them unfit to use as a place of worship. And moreover the altar that was at Bethel in the high place. The high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin had made. Both that altar and the high place. He broke down and burnt the high place. And stamped it small to powder and burnt the grove. He made sure it was gone. He broke down the altar. It's like, I believe it was Elijah. He broke down the altar of Baal. And he rebuilt the altar to worship the true God.

[31:44] And we can't have both altars. We've got to destroy the altar of Baal. The idol worship. Because idolatry is futile and vain.

It's destructive. We should destroy the idols before they destroy us. And I know some have made the point of actually... Having a fresh look at even the house that they live in.

Because I know there's some that have been really convicted of this. Such that if they have, for example, a Book of Mormon in their home.

Or if they have... Maybe someone might have given them a little ornament that came from some eastern country. And it was... But it's actually an idol.

There can be such that there can... People might innocently have just a little Buddha. Like a little good luck charm sitting on the mantelpiece and think nothing of it. But when you actually consider that is something that is abhorrent.

[32:50] And absolutely abominable. It's an abomination. We should not have any such things. And we could consider many such things as that.

Now some might have a bit of a leaning to looking at horoscopes or such. Or... Can you give me some examples? People might think of particular things.

Garden nose. Garden nose. Yeah. Can be. Anything that's like a statue, an image. People might innocently have like an icon or a picture of Jesus.

You know, with this... Look so innocent. With his long hair. And it's totally wrong. Or you see someone with a picture of the light of the world with this long-haired Jesus standing there.

As if he's kind of just waiting at the beck and call of the one behind the door. And such things. It's totally unbiblical and wrong. The Bible says not to have a graven image.

[33:51] And so we could consider, look, your conviction might be different from mine. But for me, there's none of that that I want. Mind you, I do have a Book of Mormon. But just for research purposes.

But you know, you could say there's certain things that... Well, I'm not going to partake of that. I'm not going to allow that in my home because it is of the enemy. And I'm not going to allow that or excuse that.

Even ornaments or things. I know, as a young man, I had particular things that came from Hong Kong. And afterwards I thought, no, that is doubtful.

Keep away from them. Idolatry can become like a stronghold. Of course, we know these are just pieces of metal or material and there's nothing in them.

What they represent. That we need to say, no, because that represents that which is false and wrong, I'm going to remove it. Destroy it.

[34:54] Like in the old, in Acts times, they had magic books. They didn't kind of keep them on their bookshelf. They put them in a pile and they burned them up. Because they knew that was wrong.

And it wasn't right for them to hold on to such things anymore. And I know in some places, people have destroyed their rock music and such things. And some people, they get convicted about particular things.

That they know, that's doubtful. I'm going to remove it from my life. I'm going to do it. Absolutely. So make sure, brother, sister, your relationship with God is what you cultivate most of all.

That becomes your focus. That becomes your... ..your aim. That becomes your purpose for life.

And that relationship with the Lord is what matters first and foremost and most importantly of all.

And really, He is to be your only God.

[35:54] If you've got some gods that are maybe, oh, it's just a little god in my life. He doesn't want you to have any little gods. He wants to be the only God. The only God. So let's worship the one true God.

Make Him our passionate pursuit. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that your word tells us we can take heart today in your truth. And Lord, that as the people of God of old took action, so can we. Lord, help us to identify those things that can take your place. Let us, Lord, have our eyes clearly open to see such things that we need to deal with. Lord, point them out by your Holy Spirit's convicting power. That we can be a people that are earnestly endeavouring after righteousness and truth. Help us, Lord. Help us, Lord. We pray if there's any in the hearing of this that do not know you. That they'll tear down the idols in their heart. Lord, they'll not bow down to anything other than to you. [37:02] Our Lord, our only Lord, our only God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray that each one might know what it means to honour and revere and steadfastly worship the one and only true God. Lord, help us to that, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.