

Keep Yourselves from Idols

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Date: 15 March 2026

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[0 : 00] Little children, keep yourselves from idols. It's possible for even good things to become idols.

! And just to explain, I'm just going to do my last point in my sermon. Because I believe the author of this letter is the same guy who was with Jesus from the beginning. That's a phrase that comes in our reading, those few verses at the start. And there's a much older man, this guy who was with Jesus from the beginning, writes a letter to his little children, to those in the church. And so on this Mother Church Day, I wanted to bring, I hope, a message of encouragement to you as God's people here at Hearn Hill.

[1 : 09] So moving swiftly to point four. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

What's an idol? An idol is something that has our ultimate allegiance. Well, I'm not into worshipping false gods, I say immediately. Yeah, okay. Certainly not the bales. But how about BMW? I'm not into idols. What about my pension? And for a Baptist minister, that's a very important question.

I'm not into idols. No, what about my image? I'm not into idols.

[2 : 11] What about the politician I most admire? It's possible even for church to become an idol.

Hear me carefully. Church isn't perfect. I keep resigning as master of the universe, because if only my home church asked me, I would tell them how to do things better.

As you search for a pastor, have you an ideal pastor in your mind? I remember being a candidate at one church, and they had a social in the evening before I was to preach, and somebody was a bit too honest.

I said, how are you getting honest? He said, we're really desperate. We'll have anyone. I said, well, even me. He said, well, I didn't. Here's a job description for a pastor, which you might find helpful. He preaches exactly 20 minutes and then sits down. He condemns sin, but never offends anybody. He or she works from 8 in the morning till 10 at night, and they're not only preparing sermons, but they're locking up the church when necessary, sweeping and Hoovering if needed.

[3 : 52] They make about 400 pounds a week, but they tithe, and they give an additional 100 pounds to World Mission. They do drive rather a modest car, but they're still able to buy lots of books, wear nice clothes, and have a very nice family, the children of which are always perfectly well behaved.

He or she contributes to every other good cause too, and anybody who's homeless, who drops by the church on their way, they give generously. They're 36 years old, and have been preaching for over 40 years.

They're tall on the short side, heavy set in a thin sort of way, and very good looking. Their eyes are either blue or brown to fit the occasion. Their hair is parted in the middle, and occasionally dark and straight, right side brown and wavy.

They have a burning desire to work with the youth, but spends all their time visiting the senior citizens. He smiles or she smiles all the time, but they're serious.

They have a keen sense of humor, but are always dedicated. They make 15 calls a day on church members, but spend all their time evangelizing non-members, and always found in their study if needed.

[5 : 18] Unfortunately, this pastor burnt themselves out and died at the age of 33. It may be that your ideal pastor isn't going to be one of the names on a list.

Just ask God, who are you calling? That they're not... It's not anybody you want. You want somebody with a BA, born again.

You want them working on their MA, being marvelously altered. And they might even have a doctorate, a DR.

They may be working on a deeper relationship with Jesus. Somebody said, the church is being emptied by degrees.

I disagree. I believe in a trained and accountable leadership. But, maybe God may ask you to think outside the box.

[6 : 26] Little children, dear children, keep yourselves from idols. The person that you may have in mind might be a pastor from your past.

And their expository preaching filled the balcony, and we put balcony full notices outside. And that they were such a caring person all the time, and they visited everybody, and they worked with the youth, and they had a young family, and yet they instinctively knew how to respond to those with early onset dementia.

We need somebody like that. Yeah, well, in your dreams. But God does have Hearn Hill Baptist Church on his heart.

You're known in heaven, but little children, just keep yourself from even a little eye idle. Because the person God may ultimately call here as you share that calling might be different from the pastor you have in mind.

Spring harvest is great and encouragement. I once thought I was going to be a famous Christian, not as famous as Steve Jorg, but I once thought, because they invited me to spring harvest, and I never made it to main stage.

[7 : 56] My daughter goes straight to main stage. What's that about? So maybe the person in your mind is somebody who would be on new wine main stage or spring harvest.

They've written several books, or maybe God's got somebody who's born again, marvelously altered, and seeking a deeper relationship, and is a servant leader.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. So what about the perfect church?

I said as we gathered around communion, Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. But is it just possible that the way we do things here, even unconsciously, might become a little idol?

I'm told that a Baptist was once marooned on a little island in the sea, and a boat came, and there was rescue ahead.

[9 : 16] And the captain of the ship came ashore and said to the Baptist, we're here, we're here to rescue you. But before we rescue you, I'm puzzled. You're the only person on the island?

Yep. There are three buildings on the island. What are they? And he said, oh, that's easy.

That's my house. That's the church. Yeah, but what's the other building? Oh, that's the church I used to attend. Well, somebody said, if you find the perfect church, you know, don't join it, you'll spoil it.

So I know that we have adherence to the biblical record, so I'm not saying anything goes. I'm not saying, oh, let's become Mormons, you know, because he's a nice person.

I'm saying that Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. But how we do things, could that become, from my perspective, 70 plus, a bit set in my ways?

[10 : 32] Little children, keep yourself from an idol. Even church, I'm told a vicar was at the door of the church in a village and he was shaking hands and somebody in the pub opposite had too much to drink, called out, hey, vicar, I know all these people, they're my neighbors.

They're all hypocrites. And the vicar said, oh, well, why don't you come and join us next week? One more won't make any difference. So, keep yourself from an idol, Peter, that you've got an idea of church.

Do you remember Hearn Hill as it used to be? Because I do. And, I'm not sure I or others as leaders handled everything right at a time when it was very heady and life was bubbling over in unpredictable ways.

But this is not the past. This is now. We are as we are. But I tell you three things that don't change. God, His Word, Jesus.

Because Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And the answer is to keep the main thing the main thing. And the answer is Jesus. You can't pour from an empty cup.

[11 : 57] And unless Jesus is filling and refilling and filling our hearts, we're just playing at a social club with nice people. and expect church to be done in a different way.

I remember communion service with somebody who wasn't used to going to church. And I was in an Anglican church and I said, you know, the body of Christ broken for you. He said, oh, cheers, mate. Thanks a lot. Now, that's not liturgy, is it? But he, and then in a Baptist church this time, obviously one of the young people had brought their boyfriend to church. It seemed to me they'd come straight from the nightclub, okay? Sitting at the front, little glass there. He takes one look at this. It's a shot to him.

He goes, like that. It's messy. Church is messy. I don't just mean the movement messy church. [12:56] I mean, church is untidy. keep the main thing, the main thing.

Your pastor-to-be is praying right now, he or she, that God would guide them to the right place. little children, keep yourself from an idol. If it ain't Billy Graham, we're not interested.

Do you know what? When Billy Graham was preaching, people thought if they copied what Dr. Graham did, it would bring the same results as Dr. Graham. And they noticed at the end of his sermon, Billy Graham took a step back, went like that, bowed his head in prayer.

And I've seen this happen at Crystal Palace. People streamed forward. So you had a whole generation of preachers that say, you know, Amen. Amen. Keep yourself from idols.

[14:23] And as a church, now, I wish it was more like the church I came from. Do you remember when? But the Holy Spirit is here.

Now, even those memories, blessed though they may be, with a little I can become an idol. So keep the main thing, the main thing.

We're called to be faithful, not successful. We're known in heaven, loved by God. Little children, keep yourself from idols.

Amen. Amen.