

# Idolatry: Not just an ancient problem

With Bishop Ronald K. Powell

# 1 John 5:21 King James Version (KJV)

■ <sup>21</sup> Little children, keep yourselves from idols.
Amen.

### 1 John 5:21 Living Bible (TLB)

- <sup>21</sup> Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts. Amen.
- Sincerely, John

### Jonah 2:8 Living Bible (TLB)

\* (Those who worship false gods have turned their backs on all the mercies waiting for them from the Lord!)

#### Isaiah 30:9 ESV

These people are like children who refuse to obey. They lie and refuse to listen to the LORD's teachings.

# Jeremiah 44:8 KJV

...7So now, this is what the LORD God of Hosts, the God of Israel, says: Why are you doing such great harm to yourselves? You are cutting off from Judah man and woman, child and infant, leaving yourselves without a remnant, <a href="mailto:8provoking Me">8provoking Me</a> to anger by the work of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to reside. <a href="mailto:As a result, you will be cut off and become an object of cursing and reproach among all the nations of the earth."</a>

#### Nothing New Under the Sun

- ► Well, believe it or not, the most common warning about sin in Scripture does not deal with lying, gossip, adultery, stealing, or murder.
- The most common sin in all of Scripture that we're told to avoid, reject, and move away from is idolatry.
- And that's not just <u>Asherah poles</u> or <u>Apis</u> in the Old Testament.

# 1 John 5:21

- In the New Testament, 1 John 5:21 says, "Little children, guard yourselves from idols."
- So apparently idolatry is still trying to work its way into our lives and distract us from worshipping and obeying God.

# John Calvin

- It was John Calvin who said our heart is an idol factory.
- In a fallen world, people constantly seek things they can worship, even though the Creator is before us in plain view.
- We are all looking for something to worship and serve. Idols come easy, but go hard.
- There is a consistent theme about idolatry throughout the Scriptures—and in our lives as well.

#### 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

- In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10, the Bible describes our new life, our new birth in Christ in this way: "You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."
- Of course, in comparison to a dead and false idol, serving a living God seems like a no-brainer.

#### Idols Know No Boundaries

- Does becoming a worshiper of the one true God mean we no longer have to contend with the issue of idolatry? I wish it were that simple.
- Everything that is not of God raises itself up against God, even in the life of a Christian.
- So we constantly have idol pop-ups in our lives. We have to cast them down, but they will be there as long as we live here on earth.

# Modern day idolatry

- God doesn't leave any room for confusion in the commandment: "You shall have no other gods before Me." Exodus 20:3.
- It took only forty days from when Moses went to talk with God on Mount Sinai for the Israelites to fall into idolatry. Even after witnessing the miracles that freed them out of Egypt, they demanded that Aaron make a new god for them to worship. (Exodus 32)

# Question: "What are some modern forms of idolatry?"

Answer: All the various forms of modern idolatry have one thing at their core: self. We no longer bow down to idols and images. Instead we worship at the altar of the god of self. This brand of modern idolatry takes various forms.

- First, we worship at the altar of materialism which feeds our need to build our egos through the acquisition of more "stuff."
- Our homes are filled with all manner of possessions. We build bigger and bigger houses with more closets and storage space in order to house all the things we buy, much of which we haven't even paid for yet.
- Most of our stuff has "planned obsolescence" built into it, making it useless in no time, and so we consign it to the garage or other storage space. Then we rush out to buy the newest item, garment or gadget and the whole process starts over.

- This insatiable desire for more, better, and newer stuff is nothing more than covetousness.
- The tenth commandment tells us not to fall victim to coveting: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17).
- God doesn't just want to rain on our buying sprees. He knows we will never be happy indulging our materialistic desires because it is *Satan's trap* to keep our focus on ourselves and not on Him.

# Second, we worship at the altar of our own pride and ego.

- This often takes the form of obsession with careers and jobs. Millions of men—and increasingly more women—spend 60-80 hours a week working.
- Even on the weekends and during vacations, our laptops are humming and our minds are whirling with thoughts of how to make our businesses more successful, how to get that promotion, how to get the next raise, how to close the next deal. In the meantime, our children are starving for attention and love.

- ► We fool ourselves into thinking we are doing it for them, to give them a better life.
- But the truth is we are doing it for ourselves, to increase our self-esteem by appearing more successful in the eyes of the world. This is folly.
- All our labors and accomplishments will be of no use to us after we die, nor will the admiration of the world, because these things have no eternal value.

### As King Solomon put it:

"For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless" (Ecclesiastes 2:21-23).

# Third, we idolize mankind through naturalism and the power of science.

- We cling to the illusion that we are lords of our world and build our self-esteem to godlike proportions.
- We reject God's Word and His description of how He created the heavens and the earth, and we accept the nonsense of atheistic evolution and naturalism.
- We embrace the goddess of environmentalism and fool ourselves into thinking we can preserve the earth indefinitely when God has declared that this current age will have an end:

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:10-13).

### (2 Peter 3:10-13)

- As this passage states, our focus should not be on worshiping the environment <u>but on living holy</u> <u>lives as we wait eagerly for the return of our Lord</u> <u>and Savior.</u>
- He alone deserves worship.

► Finally, and perhaps most destructively, we worship at the altar of self-aggrandizement or the fulfillment of the self to the exclusion of all others and their needs and desires.

# This manifests itself in self-indulgence through alcohol, drugs, and food.

- Those in affluent countries have unlimited access to alcohol, drugs (prescription drug use is at an all-time high, even among children), and food.
- Obesity rates in the U.S. have skyrocketed, and childhood diabetes brought on by overeating is epidemic.
- The self-control we so desperately need is spurned in our insatiable desire to eat, drink, and medicate more and more. We resist any effort to get us to curb our appetites, and we are determined to make ourselves the god of our lives

# Self-aggrandizement

- This has its origin in the Garden of Eden where Satan tempted Eve to eat of the tree with the words "you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5).
- This has been man's desire ever since—to be god and, as we have seen, the worship of self is the basis of all modern idolatry.

#### Three Lust

- → All idolatry of self has at its core the three lusts found in 1 John 2:16: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."
- If we are to escape modern idolatry, we have to admit that it is rampant and reject it in all its forms.
- It is not of God, but of Satan, and in it we will never find fulfillment.

- This is the great lie and the same one Satan has been telling since he first lied to Adam and Eve. Sadly, we are still falling for it. Even more sadly, many churches are propagating it in the preaching of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel built on the idol of self-esteem.
- But we will never find happiness focusing on ourselves. Our hearts and minds must be centered on God and on others. This is why when asked what is the greatest commandment, Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).
- When we love the Lord and others with everything that is in us, there will be no room in our hearts for idolatry.