

JESUS AND IDOLS?

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

It's not likely that we modern-day Christians in the western world would be tempted to worship an idol of wood or stone the way they did back in Old Testament days, or still do in certain societies. We like to assure ourselves we are not that primitive. Even so, idolatry is a serious problem among many Christians.

Here from the New Testament are two verses revealing areas of idolatry that are very common.

“Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them, as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play” (1 Cor. 10.7).

In other words, when we view life as something that is our own to enjoy unto ourselves, this is idolatry—the idolatry of self. It is perhaps the greatest form of idolatry in the world. People who would not be caught dead worshipping a wooden idol bow down with ready abandon to the worship of themselves. It is they themselves who sit on the throne of their lives ordering all things. They believe their lives are their own to do with as they see fit. If they are sitting down they are eating and drinking. When they rise up it is to play. The idol temples of eating and drinking and play are filled day and night—particularly in our secular western world.

Here is another one.

“...Covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3.5).

“...No covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph. 5.5).

How is covetousness idolatry? Covetousness is idolatry because the heart is filled with a lust for something other than God. It is a heart issue—the idols of the heart. Do we not trust God to give us whatever is necessary to glorify Him in our lives—whether material or spiritual? (Yes, it's also idolatry to covet our brother's spiritual blessing for ourselves.)

These two areas of idolatry are rampant out there in “the world.” But because we Christians live in the world we are vulnerable. Perhaps we are not abandoning Christ wholesale and turning to the idols of the world, although that does happen, I know. The more serious problem is that we want Christ and our idols. We want Christ and what the world has to offer as well—its pursuits and joys and toys. So we have this phenomenon so common in our day. I am fixated on prosperity—so I make a Christian doctrine out of it. If I was a biker, now I become a Christian biker. If I was into the rock scene, now I become a Christian rocker. If I am into football in a serious way, now I become a Christian football player. I love the glory of entertaining. Now I will give Christian concerts. I will be a Christian movie star. We want to pursue the best the world has to offer, and be a Christian too, so we don't miss out on God. Of course we want God—but just to bless us in the pursuit of our own endeavours.

Jesus' words still stand. On one occasion when He saw the multitudes following Him He turned and said to them, “...And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple” (Lk. 14.25-27). (How's that for an evangelistic technique, by the way—telling the multitudes to go home unless they are prepared to take up their cross?)

We Christians are to walk a holy walk—in the world yet not of the world. Nevertheless, it is not a stiff legalistic holiness that will draw the idolaters of the world into the worship of the true God. It's seeing the holiness of love—the love of the holy Jesus burning in the heart—that turns the idolaters to Him. Jesus, who though He was “separate from sinners,” loved them deeply. And they knew it.

Here's a poem I've loved for a long time. I've seen it quoted in part, but I found it in full one day. It's based on a passage in Hosea who back in his day decried with broken heart this chronic problem of God's people wanting their idols along with their God. It's such a beautiful book—Hosea. You touch over and over God's love for His people—it's He who is broken hearted—even as He pronounces judgments upon them for their waywardness. And in the final analysis what is it that turns them back to Him? (I confess I am far short of this myself—but am pursuing.)

“Ephraim shall say, what have I to do any more with idols? I have heard Him, and (beheld) Him...” (Hos. 14.8). That's what does it! Hearing Him! Seeing the unmatched Jesus!

Hast thou heard Him, seen Him, known Him?
Is not thine a captured heart?
Chief among ten thousand, own Him?
Joyful choose the better part?

Idols, once they won thee, charmed thee,
Lovely things of time and sense;
Gilded, thus does sin disarm thee,
Honeyed, lest thou turn thee thence.

What has stripped the seeming beauty
From the idols of the earth?
Not a sense of right or duty
But the sight of peerless worth.

Not the crushing of those idols
With its bitter pain and smart,
But the beaming of His beauty,
The unveiling of His heart.

Who extinguishes their taper
Till they hail the rising sun?
Who discards the garb of winter
Till the summer has begun?

’Tis the look that melted Peter,
’Tis the face that Stephen saw,
’Tis the heart that wept with Mary
Can alone from idols draw:

Draw and win and fill completely
Till the cup o’erflow the brim;
What have we to do with idols
Who have companied with Him?

Miss Ora Rowan
(1834-1879)