

## TODAY'S IDOLS

Donald Townsley

Idolatry has always been the thing that brought the downfall of God's people. The first commandment God impressed upon His people under the law of Moses was, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" (Ex. 20:3). He also said, ". . . *for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, . . .*" (Ex. 20:5). Failure came to the Israelites over and over because of their violation of this law. Moses warned Israel that their downfall would come if they turned to idols that the nations before them had served (Deut. 12: 29 - 31). When the kingdom divided, Jeroboam introduced calf-worship in Israel ( I Kings 12:28 - 30). This idolatry finally brought the downfall of the northern kingdom.

We, today, say that we are Christians and that we have learned better than to be idolaters; but I ask, HAVE WE? I believe a close examination will show that the people of God today are filled with all kinds of idols! And, these idols are destroying God's people today just as they did in the Old Testament!

The New Testament warns Christians about becoming idolaters. Jesus warned, "*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" (Matt. 6:24). Paul said that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). The word covetousness here means "the desire to have more"; "It has been described as ruthless self-seeking; the desire for that which a man has no right to desire." (Barclay). Barclay defines this same word that is translated "greediness" in the King James Version in Ephesians 4:19 this way: "It has been defined as the spirit in which a man is always ready to sacrifice his neighbor to his own desires." ( Barclay, Galatians and Ephesians, pg. 181, 182).

One can see from these definitions that the idolatrous spirit tramples on other people to get its own way! This spirit does not care who is hurt, or what method is used -- so long as one gets what he desires! The idolatrous person does not care whose life is injured or whose innocence is destroyed just as long as he gets what he desires. The idolatrous spirit is destroying homes and dividing congregations all over this nation! Let us look now at some idols that people are "bowing down to" today.

### THE IDOL OF ONE'S OWN PASSIONS AND DESIRES

Many in today's society, and in the church, have made their passions and desires their idols (Eph. 4:19). When their passions and desire conflict with what God demands of them, they serve their "IDOL OF PASSION" instead of God! Think about these hypothetical examples to illustrate the "idol of passion":

A man who has been married for twenty-five years and claims to be a Christian, but he allows his passions to violate his marriage bed. He hurts his innocent wife by his total disregard for her feelings and for the covenant that God has witnessed between them (Mal. 2:14) in order to have his passions and desires satisfied. This man worships his passions! He puts them before God, before his wife, and before the Lord and His church! He is an idolater! He worships at the shrine of his own passions!!!

A woman who divorces her husband of twenty years and marries an old "teenage flame" that she never got out of her system. She hurts her husband and her children with her total disregard for their feelings, and violates the will of God. She does this to satisfy her own passions and desires. This woman worships her passions! She puts them before God, before her husband and children, and before the Lord and His church! She is an idolater!

Yes brethren, we have too many in the church today who worship the idol of PASSION-- both in the pulpit and in the pew!!!

#### THE IDOL OF TRYING TO RECONCILE RELIGION AND WORLDLINESS

There are those who want to be religious and worldly at the same time. They want a religion that they can reconcile with worldliness! They do not like the restraints of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ, so they set up their own idol of trying to reconcile religion and worldliness by perverting the gospel!

These people want an easy doctrine on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Some want to hold to the doctrine that says that God's law does not apply to people outside of the church. They say that one can marry and divorce many times before he becomes a Christian, and then he can live with the companion he has at the time he obeys the gospel. Paul said that some of the Corinthians were fornicators and adulterers before they obeyed the gospel ( I Cor. 6: 9 - 11), so brother Paul, by inspiration of God, kills that false doctrine!

Some want to hold to the doctrine that two people can divorce for any reason; then the first to remarry commits adultery; and that adultery gives the other person a scriptural right to remarry. This the old "waiting game" doctrine. Jesus teaches that both parties to a divorce that is without the cause of fornication who marry again commit adultery (Matt. 19:9; Mark 10: 11-12; Luke 16: 18; Matt. 5: 32)!! The scriptures set forth but one reason for divorce and remarriage on the part of the innocent party-- that reason is fornication (Matt. 19:9).

The doctrine of Christ is too strict for worldlings who want to reconcile religion and worldliness. Brethren, this idol is destroying God's people in many places! Beware! It is a growing idol among us!!!

#### THE IDOL OF "MAMMON"

Jesus warns about the idol of "mammon" (riches, wealth) becoming man's master in Matthew 6:24. The man who sets his heart on "mammon" (Matt. 6:21) will find that it will have a powerful control over his life -- a control that will come very subtly! People who allow this idol to become their master want to deny it is so! We hear them say, "I am the same person that I have always been", but it becomes evident that this is not true! Mammon has such a grip and power that it has mastered his feelings and affections; he has become a lover of money ( I Tim. 6: 9 - 10) and a server of wealth! The kingdom of heaven is no longer first in his life (Matt. 6: 33), and he no longer has the proper feelings for his fellowman! His own wife and family must take second place. He has become a "mammon

server"! His idol is "MAMMON" - and he continues to deny it! The church today is filled with "mammon servers"!

### THE IDOL OF SELF

Many people today are lovers of self - completely self-centered! (2 Tim. 3:2). These people think only of SELF. They exclude God from the central place to which He is entitled in their lives. They also exclude others from the place of interest to which they are entitled. They make SELF the beginning and the ending of all their thoughts and actions! They are selfish and greedy. They see every relationship from the standpoint of how it affects them personally. The self-centered are self-indulgent, giving free course to their passions, desires, and inclinations. They are also self-willed and are set on having their own way about everything!

The husband and wife relationship is being destroyed by the idol of SELF-WORSHIP. And, local churches are suffering in many places because of the idol of SELF!

After reading this article, I believe you can see that one of the greatest threats to churches of Christ in America today is IDOLATRY! Brethren, we must destroy these idols among us before they destroy us!