

Modern Idols: Wrong Friendships

Read 1 John 5:21

John's last verse leaves us with that most basic question which God continually poses to the human heart. Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken supreme place in our heart's trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?

It is a question that effects the immediate motivation of our behavior, thoughts, and feelings.

John Calvin writes, "Every one of us is, even from his mother's womb, a master craftsman of idols. Man's mind is like a store of idolatry and superstition; so much so that if a man believes his own mind it is certain that he will forsake God and forge some idol in his own brain. How idols boil up from within us."

It could equally be said that they boil up around us. There is always some object at hand for us to put our faith in. Money, Possessions, People, Comfort, Sports, Food, Health etc.

According to John Bunyan in his book *Pilgrim's Progress*, the world is a "Vanity Fair." Bunyan's entire book, and the Vanity Fair section in particular, can be seen as portraying the interaction of powerful, enticing, and intimidating social shapers of behavior with the self-determining tendencies of Christian's own heart.

Will Christian serve the Living God or any of a fluid multitude of idols crafted by his wife, neighbors, acquaintances, enemies, fellow members of idolatrous human society...and, ultimately, his own heart?

In the Old Testament Elijah directly confronts the idols of Baal worship.

In the New Testament Jesus faces the rich, young ruler with his mammon worship. The parable of the sower faces people with their unbelief, their social conformity, their preoccupying riches, pleasure, and cares (all of which can be rephrased as expressions of idolatry).

When the Apostle Paul visited Mars Hill in Greece he saw a city given over to idolatry.

We read in Acts 17:16-23, “ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Paul’s spirit was stirred in him because he saw the gross sin of idolatry. His mind was greatly excited.

The word used here denotes any excitement or agitation of mind. It here means that the mind of Paul was greatly concerned doubtless with pity and distress, at their folly and danger.

The same kind of concern is expressed by the Apostle John in I John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

Amidst the temptations of idolatry, and the allurements of sin, nothing were allowed to estrange the hearts of God’s people from Christ.

The Apostle John appeals to the second commandment in I John 5:21. What is the second commandment?, “Thou shalt not make thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the waters beneath the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.”

John’s great objective in this letter had been to lead his readers to the knowledge and love of God.

The word rendered idols in I John 5 means, properly, an image--as of the dead. It would represent anything, particularly anything invisible, and therefore anything designed to represent God.

Anything that would be set up with a view to be acknowledged as representing God, or to bring God, or His perfections, more vividly before the mind.

The word is applicable to idol-gods--heathen deities, but it would, also, be applicable to any image designed to represent the true God, and through or by which the true God was to be adored.

You may be thinking to yourself, “we are not in danger today of bowing down to idol statues made of silver and gold in this church, or of engaging in the grossest forms of idol-worship.”

But we may be in no less danger of substituting other things in our affections in the place of the true God, and of devoting to them the time and the affection which are due to Him.

Today we live in a world infested with idols. It is possible to love with such an attachment as shall effectually exclude the true God from the heart.

The world --its wealth, and pleasures, and honors-- we may love with a degree of attachment such as even an idolater would hardly show to his idol-gods.

There is practical idolatry all over the world, in families that acknowledge no God but wealth and fashion, in the hearts of multitudes of individuals who would scorn the thought of worshipping at a pagan altar, and it is even to be found in the heart of many who professes to be acquainted with the true God.

There is a question asked in Hosea 14:8, "...What have I to do any more with idols?"

These words express the heart felt desire of believers against any form of idolatry.

Christ alone must have the supreme place in our affections.

The love of everything else should be held in strict subordination to the love of Christ.

The Lord Jesus should reign in our hearts, be worshiped in our families, and church; be submitted to at all times as having a right to command and control us; be obeyed in all the expressions of his will, by his word, by his providence, and by his Spirit; be so loved that we shall be willing to part without a murmur with the dearest object of affection when he takes it from us.

Elisabeth Elliot writes, "If my life is surrendered to Christ, all is well. Let me not grab it back, as though it were in peril in His hand but would be safer in mine!"

Tonight, I would like to begin a series on *Modern Idols in the Heart*. Idols are not merely stones and statues made by hands but can be inordinate desires in the heart that replace God.

A Christian author writes, “The Bible describes our hearts as being deceptive. Perhaps there is no greater form of deception than idolatry.

Satan is the master deceiver. We tend to conform to the atmospheric deceptions of our society. Our idols are so plausible and instinctive that a person can even describe them, without really seeing them as the crucial problem in his or her life.”

Let us consider tonight the modern idol of wrong friendships.

There is no book in the Bible that says more about the subject of friendships than Proverbs.

We read in Proverbs 18:24, “A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” (Messianic)

Proverbs 27:6, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”

Proverbs 27:9, “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel.”

These verses are just a small sampling of references in the book of Proverbs that teaches us the importance of friendships.

The question we have to ask ourselves is “Who should be our friends?”

It can take only one foolish friend to take you and I away from the Lord, and destroy our life.

Proverbs 13:20, “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.”

The Bible warns us against wrong friends.

We read in Proverbs 22:24, “Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go.”

We read in Romans 16:17, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

The Bible tells us to stay away from people who are considered to be “dogs,” and to beware of people who are “evil workers.”

This does not mean that we cannot work with the lost, the downtrodden, and sinners who need to find Christ and His message of eternal salvation.

When Jesus came to earth in the flesh, He always went after the sinners and the outcasts. But when Jesus went after sinners, it was always for the express purpose of saving their souls and making them holy.

Therefore, we must choose our friends wisely and prayerfully. If we are not careful, we can choose the wrong kind of friends. There are important questions we must ask ourselves when choosing friends.

1. Are my friends committed to Christ?

Beware of friends that are fickle. These friends are likely to change, especially due to instability. They are not constant or loyal in their affections for Christ.

Like the crowd in John 12:13 one minute they cried, “Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

And then only a few days later shouted, “Crucify Him. Crucify Him. Release to us the murderer Barabbas and put to death the Christ.”

Beware of friends like Demas in 2 Timothy 4:10, “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica.”

Demas is honorably mentioned in Colossians 4:14.

But nothing more is known of him than what can be gathered from that place and this--that he was at first a friend and fellow-laborer of Paul, but that, under the influence of a desire to live, he afterwards forsook him, even in circumstances where he greatly needed the presence of a friend.

Ahithophel was a friend of David and was known for his wisdom in matters of government.

We read in 2 Samuel 16:23 “And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.”

But Ahithophel betrayed David and sided with the rebel Absalom.

Ahithophel led Absalom to engage in sin.

He told Absalom to be with David's concubines. (II Samuel 16:21)

In choosing friends, we should avoid those who would lead us astray from Christ.

We read in II Peter 2:18, "For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error."

2 Corinthians 6:14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?"

Our friends must be committed to Jesus Christ.

"As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend." (Proverbs 27:17)

A true “Godly-friend” can help keep you sharp in the Spirit, let you know when you are getting too far off track, help you get through and make sense of some of the downswings that can occur in your walk. You each serve to help keep each other walk in the Lord so that you both can continue to stay on the straight and narrow path that God has now set for you.

Ruth was a loyal friend to Naomi.

Jonathan was a faithful friend to David. When David killed the Philistine giant Goliath, perhaps Jonathan said in his heart, “I want David to be my friend!”

While Christ was dying on the Cross he turned to his Apostle John and said, “behold your mother.”

John was the friend of Christ and therefore he could be trusted with taking care of Mary when Jesus died.

Are your friends committed to Jesus Christ? Are you committed to Jesus Christ? If we are not careful, friends can become idols in our life.

2. Are my friends consecrated to holiness?

We read in Leviticus 19:2, “Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.”

1 Peter 1:16, “Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

Beware of base friends. Friends who are perverse immoral, and idle in their lives.

2 Samuel 13:3, “But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very *subtil* man.”

Jonadab devised a wicked plan for Amnon to rape Tamar and Amnon followed his friend's diabolical advice.

Do you think Amnon had any regrets later in his life that he followed the counsel of Jonadab?

How many people today regret the foolish and wicked things they did with their friends in the past?

The friends we choose must be consecrated in their walk with Christ.

The prodigal son had friends as long as he had money. But once his money was gone his friends were gone. Was the prodigal son consecrated to holiness? Were his friends consecrated to holiness? NO.

Proverbs 14:20 warns us, "...the rich hath many friends."

Proverbs 19:4, "Wealth maketh many friends..."

3. Are my friends concerned about eternity?

Beware of temporal friends who live for the here and now, and give little thought and concern for the life to come. Their conversations revolve always around the things of this world

We read in Luke 12:19 about the rich man who built bigger barns and then said, "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."

Ecclesiastes 8:15, "...a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry."

"What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?"

Do your friends want to gain the world? Take the world but give me Jesus!

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Matthew 6:19-20, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal."

Abraham is called the Friend of God who had his eyes not fastened on this world but on the world to come. We read in James 2:23, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God."

We read in Hebrews 11:8-10, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Are my friends living in view of eternity with their eyes on Jesus?

In closing, the Apostle John commands the church to “keep yourselves from idols.” An idol can be any inordinate affection in the heart that takes the place of God. Wrong friends can be idols and can lead to sin and sorrow. We need to ask ourselves some important questions. Who are my friends? Are my friends committed to Christ? Are my friends consecrated to holiness? Are my friends concerned about eternity? May the Lord help us to choose our friends wisely so we will have a closer walk with the Lord. Let us pray.