

a sermon from I JOHN 5:4:

AGAINST THE IDOLATRY OF ADDICTIONS

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to consider the nature of idolatry in general and addictions as a form of idolatry in particular, a sin that all men struggle with. It was written in sermon form to be preached to adult Christian men and women struggling with various forms of idolatry in general and addictions in particular.

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ABSTRACT

Idolatry can take many forms in this modern fallen world. Any thing, possession, acclaim, escape, pleasure, passion or person that we allow to sit on the throne of our heart over the worship of GOD Almighty is idolatry. Only our Lord JESUS CHRIST can deliver us from all such sins as we confess and repent at The Cross. This sermon text is my humble effort in that regard.

DEDICATION

This sermon is dedicated to the next generation of our families. May they seek to love and serve The LORD all the days of their lives. O, LORD, that we all might have turned from all sins of idolatry earlier in our lives, that we and those whom we love might have been blessed with a closer walk with You!

EPIGRAPH

I JOHN 5:4 - For whatsoever is born of GOD overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!

I. AN OPENING PRAYER FOR RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

“Father, all-powerful and ever-living GOD, we do well always and everywhere to give You thanks and praise. You never cease to call us to a new and more abundant life. GOD of love and mercy, You are always ready to forgive; we are sinners, and You invite us to trust in Your mercy. Time and time again, we broke Your Covenant, but You did not abandon us. Instead, through Your Son, JESUS our Lord, You bound Yourself even more closely to the human family by a bond that can never be broken.

Now is the time for Your people to turn back to You [from all idolatries] and to be renewed in CHRIST Your Son, a time of grace and reconciliation. You invite us to serve the family of mankind by opening our hearts to the fullness of Your HOLY SPIRIT. In wonder and gratitude, we join our voices with the choirs of Heaven to proclaim the power of Your love and to sing of our salvation in CHRIST.”¹ In The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost! Amen.

II. A PROPOSITION

O LORD, deliver us from anything that displaces our affections for You first upon the throne of our hearts and in our lives, for this is the sin of idolatry!

III. A SCRIPTURE OF VICTORY IN CHIRST - I JOHN 5:4

For whatsoever is born of GOD overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith! [KJV]

IV. DEFINING THE PROBLEM – WHAT IS AN IDOLS AND IDOLATRY?

Dear brothers and sisters in CHRIST, I come before you, having first sought the inspiration of The HOLY SPIRIT, to preach against the sins of idolatry. But you may ask, "How can we be in danger of the sins of idolatry? We do not bow before statues of wood, stone and metal! We do not pray to the ancient pagan false gods of antiquity! We do not worship the foolish and absurd false deities of lost civilizations! How then can we be in danger of the sins of idolatry?"

¹ 1, Breaking Bread, “The Order of Mass, Eucharistic Prayer,” page 15, 3rd prayer.

What then is idolatry? Consider Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language. This godly Christian man defined the noun "idol" as: "An image, form or representation, usually of a man or other animal, consecrated as an object of worship; a pagan deity. Idols are usually statues or images, carved out of wood or stone, or formed of metals, particularly silver or gold. [Example:] the gods of the nations are idols... [PSLAMS 96:5a]."²

Webster gives these further definitions of an idol: "Any thing on which we set our affections; that to which we indulge an excessive and sinful attachment. [Example:] Little children, keep yourselves from idols... [1 JOHN 5:21]; [Example:] An idol is any thing which usurps the place of GOD in the hearts of his rational creatures..."³ Webster further defines "idolatry" as: "The worship of idols, images, or any thing made by hands, or which is not GOD. Idolatry is of two kinds; the worship of images, statues, pictures, etc made by hands; and the worship of the heavenly bodies, the sun, moon and stars, or of demons, angels, men and animals...; Excessive attachment or veneration for any thing, or that which borders on adoration."⁴

But let us return again to the sins of idolatry. Nelson's "Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible" observes idolatry the following: "While we may not make or bow down to a statue, we must be constantly on guard that we let nothing come between us and GOD. As soon as anything does, that thing is an idol. In addition to material objects such as houses, land, and cars, idols can be people, popular heroes, or even those whom we love. Objects of worship can even include things like fame, reputation, hobbies, pride and [even] deeds done in The Name of The Lord."⁵

² 2, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language, entry 1. for "idol," p "IDL - IDO - IDO." Pages are not numbered.

³ 2, Ibid., entry 4. for "idol."

⁴ 2, Noah Webster's 1828 Dictionary of the English Language, entries 1., 2. for "idolatry," p "IDL - IDO - IDO." Pages are not numbered.

⁵ 3, Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible., entry for "idolatry," p 501.

V. ADDICTIONS AS IDOLATRY

Edward Welch writes in a 2001 article in The Journal of Biblical Counseling, “Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free,” on overcoming addictions by The Power of JESUS CHRIST. He states, "In turning to idols, we are saying that we desire something in creation more than we desire The Creator... [Idolatry] includes anything on which we set our affections and indulge in as an excessive and sinful attachment... Idolatry includes anything we worship: the lust for pleasure, respect, love, power, control or freedom from pain..."⁶

Indeed is not all sin really a form of idolatry, in that the object of our attention consumes us with lust to such a degree that it displaces the worship of GOD from the throne of our hearts? Idols of this world falsely offer to fill the yearnings of our hearts that only GOD Almighty Who created us can fill. Yes, we no longer bow down and worship statues of wood, stone and metal, for we have become more sophisticated in our idolatry! In today's ungodly world, idols of the heart can be material things, worldly acclaims, relationships, other people and yes – addictions of all types!

VI. ADDICTIONS AS IDOLATROUS REBELLION AGAINST GOD AND HIS LAW

Idolatry is then rebellion against GOD in whatever form it may entice us to take. In doing so, we become sinful slaves to our idol masters, discarding the precious relationship of being saved servants to our loving Lord JESUS CHRIST! And the diabolical author of all idols is the devil himself, whose sole desire is to tear all men away from GOD, happily becoming the master of all who open their hearts to the sins of idolatry!

Where shall we start in The Scriptures to combat the sin of idolatry? Let us return to The Ten Commandments which GOD Himself gave to that Old Testament saint Moses on Mount Sinai in EXODUS 20:1-6: “And GOD spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy GOD, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of

⁶ 4, "Addictions: New Ways of Seeing, New Ways of Walking Free." Edward T. Welch. The Journal of Biblical Counseling, Volume 19, Number 3, Spring 2001, p 20.

bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me. Thou shalt not make unto 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 water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to 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.”⁷

GOD’s holy command to all men to worship Him and Him alone is repeated in the Hebrew “Shema” in DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our GOD is one LORD: And thou shalt love The LORD thy GOD with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”⁸

And our Lord JESUS CHRIST Himself repeats this command to love and worship GOD alone in our hearts! Recall the Pharisees - those superficially righteous leaders of Roman occupied Israel who worshipped The Old Testament Law rather than GOD Almighty Who inspired it! And when Our Lord was asked which is The Greatest Commandment of GOD, He reaffirmed that the throne of our hearts should belong only to our Father in Heaven in MATTHEW 22:37-40: “JESUS said unto him, Thou shalt love The LORD thy GOD with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all The Law and the prophets.”⁹

VII. MAN’S ONGOING TEMPTATION INTO IDOLATRY

The Holy Bible tells us that many ancient pagans and apostate Israelites worshipped and prayed to the idol of Baal. Baal was a pagan false god of war and fertility. This false god had a human-like appearance and its idols were often plated with gold. Indeed, the ancient worshipers of the false deity. Baal and its idols show the depths

⁷ 5, KJV, EXODUS 20:1-6.

⁸ 5, KJV, DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5.

⁹ 5, KJV, MATTHEW 22:37-40.

to which the human heart is willing to sink in its wicked search to worship just about anything instead of The LORD GOD Who created us all! ¹⁰

Recall the epic struggle of Elijah, that faithful prophet of GOD in apostate ancient Israel, as he faced off against hundreds of priests of the false god Baal before the rulers and people! This riveting event is recorded in 1 KINGS 18. Elijah called the people to choose either their false deity or GOD Almighty, reminding us that one can not serve both idols and GOD. Hear his stirring words that ring out even today to an apostate Church and a world lost in sin in I KINGS 18:21: “And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if The LORD be GOD, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.” ¹¹

Recall how Joshua at the end of his saintly life dedicated to GOD called the ancient Israelites to guard their hearts against the false gods and their idols of the heathens! Joshua reminds us that we can not serve both the false idols of this world and GOD in JOSHUA 24:14-15, “Now therefore fear The LORD, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye The LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve The LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve The LORD!” ¹²

And what did the people reply? They were pricked in their hearts and their consciences directed them to vow themselves again to serve and worship only The Almighty in JOSHUA 24:16,17,21: “And the people answered and said, GOD forbid that we should forsake The LORD, to serve other gods; For the LORD our GOD, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went,

¹⁰ 3, Nelson's Illustrated Dictionary of The Bible, entry for “idolatry,” p 501. A picture of a statue of the false god Baal - a female figure with weapons of war and what appear to be phallic objects.

¹¹ 5, KJV, I KINGS 18:21.

¹² 5, KJV, JOSHUA 24:14-15.

and among all the people through whom we passed... And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve The LORD!”¹³

Here Joshua then told the ancient Israelites to turn away from their idols and fulfill their vow to serve and worship GOD alone in JOSHUA 24:22-24, to which the people rededicated their lives unto The LORD, even though they had in times past fallen into the sin of idolatry: “And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves that ye have chosen you The LORD, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto The LORD GOD of Israel. And the people said unto Joshua, The LORD our GOD will we serve, and His voice will we obey!”¹⁴

Yes, my brothers and sisters in CHRIST JESUS, the gold plated idols of this fallen world are forever seeking to displace our worship of GOD Almighty from the throne of our hearts! , but The Almighty is ever ready to forgive and renew us when we repent and return to serve and worship Him alone!

VIII. WORSHIP THE LORD AND NOT THINGS OF THE WORLD

But let us not surrender to these damnable devil-inspired temptations from hell! Our Lord Himself warns us against storing up such idols in our lives in MATTHEW 6:19-24: “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: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also... 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!”¹⁵ We must choose to serve either our false idols of the world, the flesh and the devil, or to repent and serve only The LORD. We can not do both!

¹³ 5, KJV, JOSHUA 24:16,17,21.

¹⁴ 5, KJV, JOSHUA 24:14-23.

¹⁵ 5, KJV, MATTHEW 6:19-24.

Friends, do you not hear the voice of the psalmist calling to us from the pages of Holy Scripture to put away any and all idols in our lives that would tempt and enslave us to their earthly and eternal damnation? Consider these words in PSALM 96:4-13: “For The LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but The LORD made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before Him: strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give unto The LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto The LORD glory and strength. Give unto The LORD the glory due unto His Name: bring an offering, and come into His courts. O worship The LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth. Say among the heathen that The LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously!”¹⁶

IX. OVERCOMING OUR IDOLS IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST JESUS

Dear brethren, Saint John reminds us of how we may have victory over all the temptations of idolatry in this world! Who is it that may overcome this world, but he that believes upon our Lord JESUS CHRIST, Who alone offers us all the blessings of GOD The Father in this life and the next? Let us hear the Word of GOD to meet The Savior daily at The Cross, where alone we are offered deliverance from all the idols of this world in I JOHN 5:1-5: “Whosoever believeth that JESUS is The CHRIST is born of GOD: and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth Him also that is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of GOD, when we love GOD, and keep His Commandments. For this is the love of GOD, that we keep His Commandments: and His Commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of GOD overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that JESUS is The Son of GOD!”¹⁷

And we are further exhorted by Saint John to flee from all manner of idolatry in I JOHN 5:20-21: “And we know that the Son of GOD is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in

¹⁶ 5, KJV, PSALM 96:4-10.

¹⁷ 5, KJV, I JOHN 5:1-5.

His Son JESUS CHRIST. This is the true GOD, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen!”¹⁸

X. EXORTATION TO CONFESS AND REPENT AT THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Brethren, my feeble words fail me in drive home adequately the urgent and pressing need for all of us to keep our hearts from the idols of addictions of this world that would have us turn our backs on our Lord JESUS CHRIST! If our lives are dedicated to the worship of idols, we place ourselves and our loved ones outside of the blessings and providence of The Almighty! If we bow down to and follow the false gods of this world, we cut ourselves off from The Creator - blessed be His Name forever! If we choose darkness instead of light in this life, even our very eternal souls are in peril of everlasting and utter damnation for all time after we leave this fleeting world! Let us therefore turn to The LORD with truly repentant hearts at The Cross of our Redeemer!

XI. A HYMN OF THANKFUL DELIVERANCE - AMAZING GRACE

Friends, when I think of the wondrous and great deliverance from sin and death that GOD offers to lost sinners at The Cross - sinners like even me, sinners like even you, sinners like even all mankind - I sing in my heart with joy and praise to The LORD! Consider the hymn "Amazing Grace" by that infamous sinner turned righteous saint John Newman. Listen to the joy in this man's heart for the grace wherewith he, a wretched sinner who once bowed down to his false idols of blood money and wealth obtained through the abomination of the slave trade! He repented at The Cross and received pardon and renewal as a son of The Living GOD by the grace of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! See how GOD forgives the humble and penitent sinner, and what gladness it brings when we put away our false idols of the world, the flesh and the devil!

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
was blind, but now I see.

¹⁸ 5, KJV, I JOHN 5:20-21.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed.

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
His Word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
as long as life endures.

Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
a life of joy and peace.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing GOD's praise
than when we first begun.¹⁹

XII. A CLOSING PRAYER

Brothers and Sisters, let us pray: “Eternal GOD, You gave Your Son JESUS [CHRIST] to be light of the world. In His light, help us to face our darkness, to confess our sins, and, trusting Your mercy, to rest in peace..., so that with the coming of... [every] day we may wake in good faith to serve You...”²⁰ “Almighty GOD: You alone are good and holy. Purify our lives and make us brave disciples [of The Cross]. We do not ask You to keep us... [from all temptation], but to keep us loyal, so we may serve JESUS CHRIST, Who, tempted in every way as are we, was faithful to You.”²¹

¹⁹ 6, Amazing Grace, the hymn. Stanzas 1-5 by John Newton. Stanza 6 by anonymous author.

²⁰ 7, Cumberland Presbyterian Worship Book, Evening Prayer For Daily Use, p 59, “Eternal GOD...”

²¹ 7, Cumberland Presbyterian Worship Book, Litany of Confession, p 109, opening prayer.

Deliver us, merciful GOD, from anything that displaces our affections for You first upon the throne of our hearts and in our lives, for this is the sin of idolatry! Purge our hearts, renew our minds, sanctify our souls and mold our lives by Your HOLY SPIRIT according to Your will. For, as it is written in Your Holy Word, “For whatsoever is born of GOD overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith!”²² Give us the living and pure faith, O Divine Saviour, that overcomes the world and brings us victory over temptation! These things we humbly ask, O LORD, in The Name of GOD The Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

²² 5, KJV, I JOHN 5:4.

XIII. REFERENCES

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