

I John - Keep Yourselfes From Idols

by Mariano Di Gangi

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing and following God, and warns against the dangers of idols and false gods.

Duration: 21:57

Scripture: Matthew 11:27, 1 John 5:18-21

Topics: "Idols"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher uses the analogy of a dog dropping its bone to reach for a bigger one to caution against abandoning the true and living God. He emphasizes the importance of not abandoning the God who came down to earth in the person of Jesus, who showed His love through His scars and defeated death through His resurrection. The preacher highlights that through Jesus, we can have a clear understanding of God's character and His intentions towards us. The sermon concludes with the admonition to keep ourselves from idols, reminding us of the certainty we can have in knowing God and His truth.

Transcript

Over the past several Sundays, we've been reading through the first letter of John and taking a text from each of the various chapters. And today we come to chapter 5 and we focus particularly on the concluding words of the fifth chapter. 1st John chapter 5 beginning at verse 18.

We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. The one who was born of God keeps him safe and the evil one does not touch him. We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. The text begins with a series of ringing affirmations. It underlies certain certainties.

It's not always possible to have certainty. I heard the story of a professor who was lecturing to his students and since it was right after lunchtime, a soporific spirit was pervading the student body. And he thought

that he would rouse them awake and he leaned over to one student and he says, what do you think? The student answered, you're the professor, what do you think? And the professor said, I don't think, I know.

The student said, I don't think I know either. There are many things that we don't know. There are many things about the past that we cannot accurately recall.

There are many things about the present that leave us with question marks rather than exclamation points. And who can accurately predict the future? We lack certainty about so many things and yet we can be absolutely sure concerning the things that are mentioned here by the apostle. Three times in just a few verses, he used that verb to know.

We know that anyone born of God doesn't continue to sin. We know that we are children of God and that the world lies under the grip of the evil one. We know that the son of God has come and given us understanding.

There are some things that we can know. There are some things that we must know. There are certainties and affirmations that we should be able to make as men and women in Christ.

Let's consider these various certainties and affirmations mentioned by the apostle John as he winds up this letter. First, concerning our rebirth, we know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin. For the one born of God keeps him safe and the evil one does not touch him.

The Bible doesn't teach reincarnation but it does teach rebirth. Our Lord explained this to Nicodemus who was rich and respectable among the Jews but still had not tumbled to the fact that in order to enter the kingdom of God, you need not so much new laws but new people. And that except the person be born a second time or born from above, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

He cannot even see it. He doesn't understand what it's all about. And we are told in scripture that when we receive the word of God and the fertilizing power of the Holy Spirit works together with the word that we have received, we are born again not of corruptible seed but of incorruptible by the word of God which lives and abides forever.

Now the apostle says we know this much about our rebirth that if we are born of God, if we are born again, we receive a new life and those who are born of God do not continue to sin. He doesn't say that they become absolutely sinless. He knows better than that.

Earlier in this epistle he has told us that we need to be on guard against a superficial kind of righteousness, against the false sort of perfectionism where we deny that we have committed acts of sin, where we deny that the elements of a sinful nature still cling to us. And then he tells us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. So he's under no illusion about the state of Christians even after they are born again.

We do not immediately pass into a state of confirmed and absolute sinlessness. But we know this about our rebirth. We can be sure of this, that if we are born of God, we will not willingly and gladly and persistently continue in a state of sin.

It would be abnormal to our new existence. It'll be utterly incongruous with our new existence. And by way of habit and by way of trend and direction, we will be moving in the opposite to sin.

Rather, we will pursue holiness in the fear of God. Now the intent of the evil one is to touch, to taint, to destroy. Every now and then, some madman breaks into a rich treasury of art and will deface a painting that is a masterpiece like Rembrandt's Night Watch, or will go to the place where Michelangelo's statue of the dead Christ and the arms of his young mother is found and strike a hammer blow to smash that magnificent sculpture, the Pietà.

That is the intent of Satan, to deface the masterpiece that comes from the brush of the Holy Spirit, to shatter the sculpture that comes from the work of Almighty God, for we are his workmanship. And we know that if we are truly born of God, we will not habitually sin, but we will hate sin and grieve for it as an abnormality that should have no place in our life. And we not only will be kept by the power of God, but we ourselves will use the means which God has provided to stay the course, to persevere, and to finish successfully at the last.

We know that if we are born of God, the direction of our life is not downward in the way of disobedience, but upward by obedience to him in whom we have believed. And that if we continue in that way, God will preserve us as we persevere. We know that, says the Apostle.

It's an affirmation we can confidently make. Second, we not only know something about our rebirth, but something about our relationships. And we know that there is a definite difference between those who are children of God and those who are part of the world that is under the control of the evil one.

We know that we are children of God, and that in contrast to us, there is a world that is under the control of the evil one. There should be a difference, a noticeable difference, a difference that we can know between belonging to the family of God and being related to God, and being part of the sinful system that is soiled and dominated by the devil, called in scripture, the world. There are those who are related to God, having been given a new nature that comes from God, and there are those who remain in the grip of the evil one.

And the word that is used by the Apostle John is a very descriptive term. It's the term that can be applied, for example, to a ship that is pitched onto a reef, can't get off it, and remains at the merciless battering of the waves. It's the kind of expression that is used for a sheep that falls into a crevasse and cannot extricate itself.

It's a word that very easily might describe the plight of Samson, who with false security goes to sleep on the lap of Delilah, who will do him in and turn him over to his enemies. The world is in the grip of the evil one, like a ship floundering upon a reef, like a sheep that is caught in a crack, like a strong man who in his carnal security becomes utterly weak and totally beguiled and captivated. Those who are born again are related to the Heavenly Father.

Those who are still unregenerate are in the grip of the evil one. But someone might say, isn't that a very harsh judgment to pass on the rest of people? Let me ask this question in turn. What is it that keeps you from beholding the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in face of Christ Jesus? What is it that keeps you from putting your faith in him as your Savior and submitting to him as your Lord? Is it not the power of the evil one who holds you in its grip? It's not only the fiend who complicates rape with murder who is to be considered as being in the grip of the evil one, but anyone who is kept from putting trust in Jesus, who is kept from repenting for sin, shows by that very unbelief and disobedience that he or she is indeed held in the grip of the evil one and needs to be liberated by a mighty act of God to be transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son, which is resplendent with healing light.

We know that if you're born of God you don't habitually sin and think nothing of it. We know that if you are born of God you have a relationship to him and you're no longer enmeshed in the world. You are in it but not of it.

Your standards and motivations come from God. Third, we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding that we may know him who is true. We know not only about rebirth and about the matter of relationships, but we know concerning the fact of recognition.

We know that the Son of God has come, stripped of all its sentimental and commercial trappings. This is the central theme of Christmas and it's good for us to think of it in the waning weeks of summer and on the very edge of autumn so that we are not distracted by the time of tinsel. Christmas is nothing more and nothing less than the stupendous beneficent invasion of this sin-cursed planet by the Son of God who has come.

We know that the Son of God has come and he has come so that you and I need no longer guess about the character of God, grope about the intention of God. He came so that we might have a clear conception of the character of God. He that has seen me, says Jesus, has seen the Father.

No man knows the Father but the Son of God and the person to whom the Son of God is willing to reveal him. That's what Jesus tells us in Matthew 11 27. We know that the Son of God has come.

We know that he has left the ivory palaces of heaven and come into a world of woe and we know that he has come so that he might reveal the character of God and we need no longer grope and guess. We can have a very clear idea of what God is like and what his intention toward us is. When we look at Jesus and listen to him and when we know him whom Jesus came to reveal, we experience new life and we enjoy fellowship with the Father and with the Son.

And so John brings his letter to a close with three great affirmations but he concludes with one challenging admonition. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. You might wonder what kind of postscript is that? He's been speaking about faith that overcomes the world.

He's been speaking about love that is absolutely indispensable to verify our status as born-again Christians and now he seems to descend from these lofty themes of faith and love to speak about keeping ourselves from idols. It was a mighty torrent and now he seems to dribble to a conclusion. Not so.

Notice what he says in this closing sentence. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. Now we believe that the author of this letter was none other than the Apostle John, venerable for age, venerable as the disciple whom Jesus particularly loved, venerable as one filled with apostolic authority.

But he tempers his apostolic authority with a genuine pastoral concern and affection. And so he doesn't address himself to dear subjects but to dear children. And it makes no difference if it's in political affairs of the state or the politics of the local church where authority is exercised over people without the pastoral love and concern that cares for people, it can degenerate into becoming mere authoritarianism that can cause a church or state to chafe and rebel.

Authority must be tempered with affection. And so you have a venerable apostle who addresses his people as dear children. And so he expresses a loving pastoral concern for men and women.

And he indicates a contrast between the God who is true, mentioned in verse 20, and the idols that are mentioned in verse 21. See, this is no afterthought, this is no mere postscript, this is the logical conclusion of what he has been saying. If there is only one true God and he has revealed himself to us in Jesus Christ so that his face is the face of Jesus and his voice is the voice of Christ, then all other gods are idols, fictions manufactured by the fertile imaginations of men, substitutes for the true and living God, meant to displace him from the unique centrality that belongs to him at the heart of the life of a congregation or a family or an individual.

If we know the true and living God, then we must turn our back on all idols that would rival him and displace him. And so he not only expresses a loving pastoral concern in speaking to dear children, but he indicates a sharp contrast between the true God revealed in Jesus Christ and all other gods under the heading of worthless, empty idols. And he gives a command, keep yourselves from idols.

We've all heard that homely parable of a dog that has a bone in its mouth, clammers up a bridge, pokes its head through the slats, looks down at the water, and in the reflection of the moving water, sees a dog with a bone that appears to be much larger than his own. And so he drops the bone that he has to reach out for one that he can never get. The apostle John says, don't be like that.

Don't abandon the true and living God who came down to earth in the person of Jesus. Don't abandon the God who has scars in hands and feet and side to show how much he loved you. Don't abandon your love in a God who can defeat death through the mighty resurrection.

Don't abandon a God who loves you and intercedes for you and cares for you and go instead after that which is a mere illusion and delusion. What have we to do with idols who have accompanied with hymns as the hymn writer? And a truer word was never spoken. God forbid that we should give up the God who is real in favor of gods that are merely manufactured by the likes of you and me.

The apostle has spoken, but it's the apostle's Lord who adds the concluding word You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve. Let us pray. Lord forbid that we should put our own ideals and ideologies in the place that should be reserved exclusively for you.

Enter our hearts. Reign over our lives. Subdue with your generous grace all that would rebel against your sovereignty or ignore the claims of your majesty.

Help us to worship you and to serve you as we ought and in that worship to find satisfaction and in that service perfect freedom through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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