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News of His

Vol. 47: No. 10 May 21, 2008

Abbeyville Road Christian Church
551 Abbeyville Road Lancaster, PA 17603-6399
717-393-8821 FAX 717-393-8660
email: office@abbeyvilleroad.com
web site: www.abbeyvilleroad.com



Guided by His Word,
Serving in His Love

Making Idols

"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth below. You shall not bow down to them and worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." - Exodus 20:4-6

In the sense that we typically think of idolatry, it usually involves giving an inordinate degree of adoration to something that we well know is not god such as money, recreation or material trinkets. Still, this misplaced adoration occurs to the detriment of our devotion to God, so we dub it "idolatry". We muddy the concepts materialism and idolatry because, after all, we consider ourselves well past the dark superstitions of the ancients who might craft little statues and bow before them as gods.

In that more classical sense of idolatry, bowing to handmade images, idolatry was a sin typical to backwards and superstitious cultures. This second of the *Ten Commandments* was intended to guard the distinctiveness of God's chosen nation of Israel. While the wicked nations of Canaan were worshipping modified sticks and stones, the Israelites dared not to bow before anything that obscured the glory of *JEHOVAH*.

Nevertheless, one of the darkest episodes in the early history of the young nation revolved around this issue. During the wilderness wanderings, Moses had gone up into the mountain to receive God's Law. Under the leadership of Aaron the priest, an image of a calf was fashioned from gold, and the people worshipped it as god. As idols go, and in the context of ancient cultures, the calf was as flattering an image of a god as was available. A bull-calf was a symbol of strength, and some among the people surely rationalized that this image represented a quite impressive god. Still, no image could ever do justice to the glory of the Creator, which is precisely one reason why idols were forbidden.

Aren't you glad that we live in these modern and sophisticated times? The silliness of idols is obvious to us. Perhaps, this second commandment is obsolete to us today. Primitive peoples in remote and

underdeveloped countries might benefit from this injunction, but we need not be bothered with it any longer. Our priorities in regard to our things might get out of whack from time to time, but we would never bow in true worship to something we ourselves created.

Not so fast! Before any little statue was ever fashioned and bowed before, a notion of a god was fabricated in someone's imagination. When we worship the one true God, but, only as we imagine Him to be, in some way contrary to how He has revealed Himself to be, it doesn't matter whether we jot our idea down on paper, chisel it in stone or carve it out of a bar of soap. We have become idolaters. Everything we know of God is what He has revealed of Himself. But, a man may not appreciate God's holiness and how that particular attribute cramps his own style. So, of his own authority, he declares things like: "I don't believe God cares if I do this," or, "I cannot envision that a loving God would be so inflexible about that."

The most dangerous idols we face today are the idols that are manufactured in the silver-shops of the imagination. This is where we fashion God into whatever image we would like for Him to be. Like the Israelites of old, many modern idolaters probably rationalize that they are flattering God when they celebrate His love and grace. Yet, they mock Him when they minimize His holiness, His jealousy and His hatred of sin. In truth, they do not understand His grace at all. There can be no real understanding of the grace of God without a healthy recognition of His holiness, which has been offended by our sinfulness.

The road to Hell is paved with people who mock God in this matter, so-called "believers" who trade on God's grace, but dismiss the demands of His other attributes as well as His expectation that we walk in His light and likeness. They are worshipping an idol of the imagination. They are failing to revere the one true God of revelation.



Karl's Korner