

## Caution: Counterfeits Abound

<sup>21</sup>Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. – 1 John 5:21

This is always good advice for God's people in any era, but this verse appears very abruptly as the final words of the epistle of 1 John. At first glance they seem like a disconnected and undeveloped afterthought, standing independently of anything that John has addressed thus far in his letter.

If such is the case, John's words still make good sense. John was in Ephesus, a great pagan center of false religion. One of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis was there. The city was also renowned for sorcery, astrology, and every other kind of magic. The temple became a center for the sale of "Ephesian letters" which were charms that were supposed to make wishes come true. William Barclay writes: "To have anything to do with the Temple of Ephesus was to be brought into contact with commercialized superstition and the black arts." In Acts 19, the preaching of Paul and Silas impacted many in Ephesus to renounce their involvement in sorcery. One repentant group publicly burned scrolls worth about fifty thousand drachmas, enough to pay the daily wage of fifty thousand common laborers.

But, it is in no way far-fetched to suppose that John's closing words sprang from one of the major themes of his letter, and that is his defense of the Person of Jesus Christ. John, the last surviving Apostle, wrote to respond to a heresy that challenged the status of Jesus as truly God and truly man. Christianity has everything to do with Who Jesus is. These false teachers minimized Jesus' unique role in bringing people to God. They taught that knowing God was a matter of spiritual discovery based on one's own inquiry. They did not believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, thereby undermining the power of His death to secure atonement for sinners. The false teachers were not all that disturbed by their own sinfulness, believing that God, Who is spirit, was much more interested in their spiritual pursuits. In spite of these aberrations from the apostolic teaching, the false teachers still called themselves, "Christian."

Much goes on today under the moniker of "Christianity" that would just as quickly cause John to spring to his feet. To protect ourselves from the abundance of idols falsely called "Christian" today, there remains no substitute for biblical orthodoxy.

Under the auspices of science, a purely atheistic religion has emerged. By the most colossal leap of faith, a man is asked to embrace the notion that everything that exists spontaneously came into being and evolved from there. Unfortunately, this anti-God belief system has so inundated the culture that many Christians feel obliged to somehow harmonize evolution with biblical creation. Why? There is neither compelling logical rationale nor scientific evidence for taking such a posture. Christian, it is preferable to just keep oneself from idols.

The god of *Tolerance* is a new idol that intimidates many who profess to be Christian right out of being salt in a decaying world. In the name of *Tolerance*, we are told that every point of view and every lifestyle choice is to be accepted and affirmed. In worship of *Tolerance*, more human infants are sacrificed today than were ever slaughtered at the altars of Molech or Baal. In reverence of *Tolerance*, many Christians bow, for there is a warm satisfaction that comes from offending no one and condemning nothing. In the truthful scheme of things, *Tolerance* is loveless posture when it is silent regarding those things that will ultimately pit a man against God. For a Christian, the gap between tolerance and cowardice might be very small. It is better by far for believers to simply guard themselves against idols.

Finally, many Christians today struggle with the tendency to embrace God, not as He has revealed Himself to be, but as they imagine or even desire Him to be. You don't like a judgmental God? ... a jealous God? ... a God of wrath? Just take it upon yourself to strip Him of any such nuisance attributes. When the God Who revealed Himself is refashioned in a person's own imagination (even the imagination of one who professes Christ), according to what makes that person comfortable, whether or not he manufactures a physical image of his imagined God, he is bowing to an idol.

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