

Message #74 of *Scripture Beneath The Surface*
“Idolatry In Christianity”

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Hello! Thanks for being with us. Today I'd like to draw your attention to the verses in Isaiah 44:9-20 which talk about how men could cut down a tree, use some of it to make a fire with which to warm themselves and to roast meat for their meal, and then use the rest of it to make a carved or melted image which they could then bow down to, as if this image they had fashioned themselves would be able to help them. Let me read all of these verses, and then we'll look at some of the interesting points. Starting in verse 9, it says, “They that make an engraved image, all of them are vanity; and their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they do not see, nor know; that they may be ashamed. 10 Who has formed a god, or cast a molten engraved image that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his acquaintances shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. 12 The smith with the tongs both works in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms: yes, he is hungry, and his strength fails: he drinks no water, and is faint. 13 The carpenter stretches out his rule; he marks it out with a line; he fits it with planes, and he marks it out with the compass, and makes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. 14 He hews down cedars, and takes the cypress and the oak, which he strengthens for himself among the trees of the forest: he plants an ash, and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it shall be for a man to burn: for he will take some of it, and warm himself; yes, he kindles it, and bakes bread; yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down. 16 He burns part of it in the fire; with part of it he eats flesh; he roasts that which he roasts, and is satisfied: yes, he warms himself, and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire:

17 And the residue of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image: he falls down to it, and worships it, and prays to it, and says, Deliver me; for you are my god. 18 They have not known nor understood: for he has shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. 19 And no one considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yes, also I have baked bread upon the coals of it; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue of it an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? 20 He feeds on ashes: a deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

Well, it's an interesting portion of scripture. This has always been an amazing concept that the people of Old Testament times would actually worship an idol which was made out of wood, or made of stone or metal. I suppose in a limited sense, there are still people today who worship idols made out of lifeless material. But, if someone were to come up to you in this current day and age and suggest to you that you should come over to their house and worship their idol, you would be shocked. It would seem to you as if it was the dumbest thing in the world. We cannot conceive of a man being so ignorant as to actually bow down to a hunk of wood, metal or stone. But the people who lived in the days before Jesus Christ would do something like that, and in fact, it was a very common thing. Worshiping an idol in those days was as common as watching television today. And, of course, we should be careful not to miss the similarity between these two things.

I guess what I find the most bewildering is that these people who worshiped idols were not the lunatic fringe of society, but were the average person. They weren't mental nut cases, but were your everyday ma and pa, grandpa and grandma, young man and young woman. They were the people next door. They could be the poor of the community or they could be the king and queen. The fact that people would worship a carved idol was not altogether unusual, nor was it considered to be sinful, except by those who actually knew and worshiped the true God of heaven. It was only those people who truly worshiped God in Spirit and in Truth that knew for certain that it was complete foolishness to worship the trunk of a tree.

But, for the sake of today's subject, consider for a moment what went on in the minds of those people who did worship idols. For a minute, place yourself in that society and imagine yourself going through the rites and rituals of idol worship. Yes, I know this seems silly, but play along with me for a couple of minutes. Imagine a hypothetical situation and you, yourself, rising up in the morning and realizing it was the weekend. Time to dress up a little after breakfast and then walk down to the center of town to where the temple of the idol was. Let's just imagine that this particular idol was the town idol, rather than your personal idol which you worshiped in your own home. Let's just imagine that this particular idol was popular with enough of the town people so that the town had gotten together to build a special house for this idol. So, dressed in your weekend temple going finery you saunter downtown to the temple square where a few hundred other people have gathered. Everybody greets everybody and talks small talk until the temple ceremonies are to begin. From somewhere comes the sounds of trumpets and the clang of symbols, and a few men come together at the entrance of the temple. They are dressed in funny

looking costumes which indicate that they are the priests. One man is dressed in exceptionally colorful robes, and you recognize him as the high priest. He's the one that will lead the temple ceremonies this morning. There's a lot of fanfare, and the temple singers make a lot of noise. Male and female prostitutes start dancing in the temple square, and the gates of the temple swing open wide.

There, in the very center of the temple is a statue. It's about 15 feet high, including the raised pedestal it sits on. It's made of wood, but is covered with gold, and draped with colorful cloth wrappings. It has jewels for eyes, and gold rings in its ears. It has maybe about a dozen horns sticking out of its head, and four arms instead of two. Its mouth is open, and its tongue hangs out several inches, and some of the children ask their parents why the god is sticking out his tongue at them. But the parents tell the children to shush, and the ceremony continues. By now the people are beginning to sway to the sound of the music, and they begin a slow ritualistic dance, moving in small semi-circles back and forth in front of their man-made idol, trying to get into the overall feeling of the moment. Eventually, the little children are silent as the adults begin to dance more wildly, and the children begin to join into the dancing, but being careful not to laugh. You feel yourself caught up in the motions of the crowd, and soon the perspiration begins to roll from your forehead and the heat of all the bodies dancing together increases, until the sound of a large metal gong resonates throughout the crowd. The people stop dancing and begin to crowd toward the idol, craning their necks to see what they can of the ritualistic administrations of the priests.

Suddenly there is a gasp of air by a large majority of the people as they react to the visual sight of the high priest advancing toward the platform. In his hands is a small child, perhaps only six or eight months old, and the baby is half crying, half cooing, in response to being the center of attraction. As the high priest reaches a large metal dish which sits in front of the idol, he raises the child up high, shouting out a ritualistic chant in a sing-song voice, which is a rehearsed prayer to the god in front of him. It is clear that the child in his hands is meant as an offering to the unseeing god, and a hush further deepens on the crowd as the child is laid in the metal dish. At that precise moment one of the priests opens a vent on a large underground furnace which has been prepared in advance for this special occasion. From the large metal dish comes instant screams as flames billow up from below and begin to engulf the child. The screams are not all from the child, but also from many of the people in the crowd, who react to the extreme emotional pressure. However, the priests show no emotions whatsoever, but present expressionless faces toward their metal covered wooden god, their arms upraised in adoration for an idol which cannot see and which cannot speak, and which could not appreciate an offering so precious as one tiny child. As the sacrifice is consumed, the people move once again into a measured dance which eventually leads to a frenzy of total abandonment.

And the rest of it, I'll leave to your imagination. But, now I want to ask you something. My question is, "How could you do this? How could you possibly participate in something so horribly sinful and devilish as to consent to the sacrifice of a tiny human being to a god which is not alive, and could not bless you or provide for you, and could not possibly appreciate your

sacrifice?” Of course, your answer would be that you couldn't, for that would be the most foolish thing anyone could do. You would answer me that no one in their right mind could possibly be so ignorant as to believe that a piece of wood carved into a god-like statue would be able to benefit anyone. And of course, you're absolutely right. I agree with you. It is the most ignorant thing I can imagine. But, that's exactly what Isaiah 44:18-19 implies, is that the people who do this are blind, that they have eyes that cannot see, and a heart that cannot understand. Yet, this is exactly what hordes of people did for centuries. No, the hypothetical situation of idol worship I described to you was not how it was always done, but it did contain many of the concepts of idol worship.

An interesting thought, though, is the Bible story of Elijah on Mt. Carmel, where there was a showdown between the God of heaven and Baal, the idol which was worshiped by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, as well as most of the people of Israel at that time. The people had gone so far from the Lord God of heaven that they no longer recognized the difference between an idol of wood or metal and the living God of heaven. Of course, you are familiar with the story, but the part I want you to zero in on is that this was a contest which was intended to reveal to the people where the real power was. Of course, we know that the real power is God. But the people of Israel at that time did not know that. In fact, it is interesting to note that after they witnessed the power of God by the fire coming down from heaven and consuming the sacrifice, the stones of the altar, and the water which surrounded it, the people with one voice sang out, “The Lord, he is God. The Lord, he is God.”

Just think about this. A people who had been especially chosen by God to be his people had become so ignorant of truth that they had actually worshiped a dumb idol and had really believed it was a real god. When they saw the fire come down from heaven, which was the final result of the contest between the priests of Baal and Elijah, the prophet of God, they were wonder struck in the sense that they realized they had been deceived. It wasn't as if they were trying to be rebellious. True, their parents had been rebellious, and they had picked up the remnant of that social environment and had accepted Baal as their god, but yet, they were completely ignorant of the truth. The showdown on Mt. Carmel was God's way of taking away the deception by revealing his power to the people.

So, how would you like to be one of those people who had been worshiping a dumb idol and was suddenly shown your ignorance and saw that it was the God of heaven that truly was the power of men? Actually, no one wants to be deceived, and no one wants to have their deception pointed out to them. However, it certainly is a good thing to be brought out of deception and into the truth when it is the truth which will set you free from your bondage. No one wants to be in bondage. No one wants to be in prison. Everyone wants to be set free, and that's why we as Christians worship God and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. We want to be set free. It is Satan who wants us in bondage. It is the devil that wants to imprison us. If he can, he will deceive us until we are so overwhelmed with his lies that we begin to worship something that really isn't a true God.

And this is the message I really want you to hear. Much of the Christian church of today is deceived to a great extent and is in bondage to Satan. Much of what is called Christianity today is not actually the worship of the true God of heaven, but worshipping a false god, a god of wood and stone which has been covered with metal and decorated with jewels. It is a false god which cannot see, which cannot understand, and which cannot deliver anyone from the clutches of Satan.

Listen for a moment to a scripture. It is found in Colossians 3:5. It says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil lustful desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Do you hear this? The Bible is telling us that these things, the fornication, uncleanness, improper or perverted affection, evil unbridled desires and especially, covetousness, is idolatry. Certainly the Christian church recognizes that fornication, perverted affection, and unbridled lusts are evil. But what about that last part, the covetousness? Covetousness is idolatry. When people begin to covet, they enter into worship of a false god. When people become covetous, they will be deceived into thinking it is a real power that will satisfy their desires, but will find out that the only real power this false god has is the power to destroy them.

Look at the definition of covetousness. Covetousness, in the sense of Colossians 3:5, means to be overcome with greed for things which satisfy the lusts of the flesh. When people begin to be covetous, and want more and more of those things of the world, when these unhealthy desires are unbridled, and when they cause us to seek after the stimulations of the flesh, we are actually in the act of worshipping a false god. For the evil desires will not gain you eternal life, but will gain you eternal damnation.

Now, do you suppose that Satan is unaware of this? Do you suppose he is ignorant of the fact that covetousness is idolatry? The devil is not unaware of any of this. He knows that if you will go after things of this world for your personal fulfillment, you will eventually lose sight of the God of heaven and will begin to trust in the riches of this world.

In each and every situation of spiritual imprisonment, Satan has managed to convince the people of earth that the stimulations of the flesh, those desires for things of this world, are the true gods. Multitudes worship the gods of the flesh. Even multitudes of Christians are worshipping these false gods. And the greatest tool in Satan's arsenal for these end times is the silver screen the TV screen, and the computer screen. Through these three mediums he portrays an Image of the Beast, an image of the animal nature which cries out in worship of the gods of this world. Even Christians have succumbed to this deception, and have been pulled into the idolatry of covetousness. Almost every commercial, and almost every program emphasizes the importance of the human body, and emphasizes the importance of pride. Television and movies are the greatest platform of doctrinal instruction that Satan has. Through these mediums he has convinced the people that they can still worship the God of heaven while they also worship the idol of covetousness. And most Christians have no clue as to what has happened to them. They

are like the children of Israel on top of Mt. Carmel who were awestruck when they actually saw the God of heaven reveal his power.

Covetousness reigns in the church as well as in the world. Just because you call yourself a Christian by not smoking, drinking, and running around, does not mean you are not caught up in idolatry. If you have continual desire for something new to play with, something new to look at, something new which will make you look better than you really are, then you are caught up in covetousness, and are an idolater. And when God finally reveals himself from heaven, you are going to be so surprised to realize that all this time you have been worshipping a god that was blind, deaf, and dumb. You have been worshipping the gods of flesh, rather than worshipping the God of heaven, who is a living breathing Holy Spirit of fire.

Come on, Christians. Let's get out of the social spider web that Satan has spun. Come on. Let's cast off the evil influence of TV and movies. Let's get them out of our homes. Let's stop lusting after things of the flesh, and things that appeal to the eyes, and for the pride of life. Come on. It's not about how much we can get. It isn't about who dies with the most toys. It isn't about sports and hobbies, houses and lands, automobiles and jewelry, or name brand clothes. It's about being a sojourner for God. It's about being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. True Christianity doesn't try to worship both God and idols. True Christianity worships only the God of heaven, the living, breathing, Almighty God of the universe. True Christians come out from among the people of Earth and are separate. True Christians are willing to cast off the shackles that Satan has put on them. Come on. If you're a real Christian, take the plunge. Start acting like one. Come on. You're not alone. The rest of us are with you. We can do it. Together, we can do it. God is on our side. No, it won't be easy to cast off that which has become so familiar. We have been so brainwashed by the media that we no longer can recognize the difference between God and a dumb idol.

What? You say you don't worship a dumb idol? Then what is that thing in your house that stares at you with its big eye, and which you give your life to for such great extended periods of time? You don't think you're imprisoned? You don't think you are affected by the indoctrination of man's animal nature? Then tell me, "How much time do you allocate to God, and how much time do you allocate to the idol in your living room?" Well? How much? Tell me, "Which is most important? God, who you spend so little time with, or the TV, which you give yourself to so much?" You can say what you want to say, but imagine what your spouse would say if you spent so little time with them, and most of your time with someone else. Come on. Take the plunge. It's time for real Christians to stand up and be counted. Believe me, contrary to popular opinion, you can do it. It is being done by others, and you can do it too. You just have to come to the conclusion as to which God you truly want to serve.