
KEEP YOURSELF FROM IDOLS

by David Alsobrook

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Foreword

The Holy Spirit has dealt with me about modern day idols. Many of them are couched in contemporary Christianity. They not only exist, but flourish in almost every group of believers.

Back in the days of the Patriarchs there existed a subtle form of idolatry known in Hebrew as *teraphim*. The *teraphim* were initially innocent, useful proofs of ownership long before the days of titles and deeds. They were small figurines of the busts of departed fathers, grandfathers, and greatgrandfathers.

This is how it worked: a father who was soon to die gave a favored son his primary inheritance. To verify this transaction a bust of his likeness was bestowed. The son kept the bust of his departed father in a special place, more out of protection than out of reverence, to use as his "title deed".

Over the succeeding years, during the long supper meals, the family entertained themselves by stories of departed loved ones. Admirable qualities of the deceased patriarchs took on a legendary tone around the family campfire. After two or three generations the figurines were held in such awe and reverence that songs were sung to them and even prayers offered to them. Thus the once innocent images became "gods" and so were called the *teraphim*. The most often translation of *teraphim* is "strange gods" followed by "images" and "household gods".

The above information helps us understand why Laban made such a fuss with Jacob over the "images" Rachel had stolen from her own father and why she lied to him about them (see Genesis 31:19-42).

Has the church repeated the same mistake, at least to a small degree? Have we taken the fathers of the faith and lifted them up to an esteemed position they never knew in their own era? Think of Wesley, Finney, and Wigglesworth. Would those humble men of God be appalled at all the fuss being made over them today? Would not "the apostle Paul" of the New Testament be vexed at hearing

preachers today quote him as "the *great* apostle Paul"? The adage is a far cry from the one who called himself merely "*a servant by whom you believed*" (1 Corinthians 3:5).

Jacob later discovered Rachel's trickery and "*said unto his household...put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean ...and let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God*" (Genesis 35:2-3).

Let us today heed this admonition and put away all the "strange gods" from our hearts and minds "*looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith*" (Hebrews 12:2).

"O LORD our God, other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us: but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy name "

Isaiah 26:13.

Chapter One

The First Commandment

God verbally spoke the ten commandments from Mount Sinai to the children of Israel (see Exodus 20:1; 18-19). The first two commandments dealt expressly with idolatry. When considered in the fullest sense, these two commandments encompass idolatry in all its forms, modern as well as ancient, and are enjoined repeatedly in the New Testament.

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 showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments

Exodus 20:3-5

As if to buttress His total prohibition of idolatry, God immediately reiterated this thought to Moses after He gave Israel the ten commandments: *"Ye shall not make with Me gods of silver neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold" (v. 23).*

Why did God hate idolatry with such vehemence? Why did He refer to Himself as "a jealous God"?

This is the only sin He promised to visit upon the children, the grandchildren, the great-grandchildren, and even the great, great-grandchildren! Why?

Before we even attempt to answer these astounding questions we must first define idolatry. What is idolatry? Beyond the obvious, of course, (worshiping an idol), we would be wiser to ask, what is an idol? This is not always as easy to answer!

Since the proper and full definition is vital for a correct understanding, let us study the original Hebrew and Greek words. This is the only way we can properly define "idol."

Hebrew and Greek Meanings

There are a number of English words in our Bibles which refer to idolatry. They are: idol(s), image(s), grove(s), god(s), devils, and lords.

1. idol(s)—The Hebrew word *elyl* (Strong's number: 1544) means "to be weak or deficient" and is used in Zachariah 11:17 of religious leaders. In Isaiah 2:8 this word refers to vain objects of worship. Another Hebrew word *atsab* (6091) means "to fashion, form or shape." It refers, of course, to the false images of gold, silver, wood, and clay which were made as objects of veneration by pagan worshipers. It is used in 1 Samuel 31:9; Hosea 4:17; Psalm 115:3-11 and elsewhere.

The Greek word used in the New Testament is *eidolon* and means "a form, appearance, image or

representation whether corporeal (physical) or mental." In classical Greek literature the word was used for a statue of man or even for a concept of the mind.

2. (graven) image(s)—The Hebrew words *pacal* (6458) and *pecel* (6459) means "to carve, to cut, to hew, to engrave." Refers to manufactured idols in contrast to nature idols (such as the sun or moon which were created by God to reveal His glory but not for man's worship). These words are used in Exodus 20:4, 34:1,4; Deuteronomy 10:1,3; Judges 17:3ff; 1 Kings 5:18; Isaiah 40:19, 44:10; Jeremiah 10:14, 51:17 and elsewhere.

Another word *masklyth* (4906) means "a picture, image, or figure" when used in a literal sense as in Leviticus 26:1; Numbers 33:52 and Ezekiel 8:12. However, and most important for our study, this same word means "imagination, ideals, wishes, and desires" in Psalm 73:7, where it is rendered "wish," and in Proverbs 18:11, where it is translated "conceit." Thus, any concept, wish, or ideal we set affection upon that does not glorify God would constitute an idol of the mind.

3. grove(s)—*asheyrah* (842) which is commonly known as the goddess Asherah (or Astarte). A Phoenician goddess who was worshiped by ancient idolaters in a tree grove as they committed

varieties of sexual sins with multiple partners. See Deuteronomy 12:3,16:21; Judges 6:26; 1 Kings 16:33, 18:19. This would have reference today with sexual idolatry. Asherah and other idols were often worshiped in the "high places" referred to 13 times in the Old Testament. They were hills devoted to idol worship.

4. god(s)—*el, elohim* (410,430) is used numerous times in the Old Testament for the false gods of the pagans, which Israel sometimes served. Strange as it may sound, this noun, both in its singular and plural form is used over 2,000 times in the Hebrew scriptures for the true God. The answer is obvious: "the gods (*elohim*) of the heathen are no God (*Elohim*)."

The *el, elohim* noun is used of false gods in Exodus 15:1, 18:11, 20:3,1 Samuel 5:7; 2 Kings 18:24; Psalm 86:8 and many other places. It is used of true angels in Psalm 97:7. This noun was even used of men who were highly regarded, or perhaps worshiped, as seen in Exodus 7:1 where the Lord made Moses "*a god unto Pharaoh*" because of the supernatural power God demonstrated through him. It is used in Ezekiel 32:21 of mighty, venerated, wicked men who speak in the midst of hell after they die. *El* is translated there as "the strong." We see from these meanings and references that men and angels may likewise be idols who receive undue praise (see also Zechariah 11:17, Colossians 2:18).

In the New Testament the Greek word *theoi* is most commonly used of the true God, but like *elohim* is also used of the false gods the heathen worship as in Acts 14:11 and 1 Corinthians 8:5.

5. devils—*shed* (7700) means "an evil or wicked demon, an idol, a lord." It is used only twice in the Hebrew Old Testament (Deuteronomy 32:17, Psalm 106:37). Pagans grouped their deities into good and bad classifications. The Jew regarded all idols as demons who wanted men to worship them. In 1 Corinthians 10:21-21 the word "devils" (Gr. *daimonion*) means "demons" and is used in the same sense in this passage as the Hebrew counterpart in Psalm 106:37.

6. lords—*kuriotes* (2963) means "a dominion, a power, a ruler, an authority" in its singular form in reference to our Lord Jesus

Christ. In the plural form it is used of His angels who exercise authority in 2 Peter 2:10; Colossians 1:16. And solely of evil angels in 2 Peter 2:11. In 1 Corinthians 8:5 Paul used *kuriotes* in reference to idols: "and lords many."

(Please refer back to these definitions often to refresh your memory. It would be most helpful if you would look up the references, also.)

No Other Gods

The first commandment of the decalog reads: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." The word for "gods" here is *elohim*. It is the plural, masculine form of *el* and *eloah* which are the singular forms of the noun. More than 2,500 times this term is used in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is usually rendered "God" in reference to the one true God (when emphasizing His unity or His plurality). For example: "elohim" appears twice immediately prior to the ten commandments:

And God (Elohim) spake all these words saying, I am the LORD thy God (Elohim), which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage

Exodus 20:1-2

The exact same word for the true God (Elohim) is likewise used of the false gods (elohim) which the Lord forbade Israel to put before Him. The English translators capitalize the "G" when *elohim* refers to the true God. They did not capitalize the "g" when the same Hebrew word is used of the gods of man's invention.

The Israelites asked in wonder and amazement on the Red Sea shore, "*Who is like unto Thee O LORD, among the gods (elohim)?*" (Exodus 15:11). The "el" root is used for both "gods" (idols) and "God" (the Creator) in these verses also:

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods

Psalms 95:3

...for great is our God above all gods

2 Chronicles 2:5

It appears from the first commandment that any object

receiving undue affection, whether abstract or material, constituted "a god"—an object of illegal veneration. In essence God told His people: I will permit no object of veneration to steal your love from Me! He was clearly saying He wanted all His people's love. The Lord will permit no competitors for His people's affection.

"You shall have no other gods before Me" is strikingly similar to the commandment Jesus designated as both "*first and great*" (Matthew 22:38).

Which is the First Commandment of All?

Once, after Jesus answered a question put to Him by the Sadducees, an onlooking scribe, who was obviously more sincere in his inquiry (Mark 12:34), asked the Lord a question of his own, "*Which is the first commandment of all?*"

Jesus understood him to mean "which is the most important commandment—the one which should occupy chief priority?"

*And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: **this is the first commandment***

Mark 12:28-30

Moses had given this exhortation to Israel as a warning they were to heed after they had entered Canaan and prospered in the land that flowed with milk and honey (see Deuteronomy 6:4f). In this way they would be able to properly handle the material blessings God would soon shower upon them. Yet "the first and great commandment", that is, "the first commandment of all" was strikingly similar to the first commandment spoken from Sinai. Please notice the comparison between the two: GOD'S FIRST COMMANDMENT TO ISRAEL:

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me

Exodus 20:3

JESUS SAID THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT IS:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment

Matthew 22:37-38

As we look at these two commandments we see they are actually the negative and the positive sides of one thought. On Sinai God said "you shall have no other gods." To the scribe Jesus repeated Moses' instruction to Israel: "You shall love the Lord with ALL, ALL, ALL, ALL."

If one truly loves God with all the heart, soul, mind and strength, can there possibly be any room at all for another god? In the very first commandment spoken from Sinai we see the true definition of idolatry.

Any love, affection, or worship which rightfully belongs to God but is not given to Him is idolatry.

The object of such veneration (the idol) usurps the adoration properly due God alone. *An idol, then, is any object of unlawful affection.* It may be a concept, doctrine, person, possession, ministry, blessing, ideal, or vocation which is not kept in its proper priority. The idol may actually be ***a lawful object which is given undue attention,*** It becomes an idol when it steals our love from God.

A vivid reminder of this is recorded in 2 Kings 18:1-4. There, Hezekiah began to reign,

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord...He removed the high places and brake down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

The brazen serpent had been used as a type of Christ to bring Israel deliverance (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14). Yet, instead of the Israelites being drawn closer to Yahweh their Deliverer, they had permitted this "point of contact" itself to become an object of their devotion. Hezekiah recognized this for the idol worship it was, destroying it along with the groves and other images. With God's power no longer behind it, he called it "Nehushtan"—nothing but "a piece of brass."

People are no different today. It's so easy to permit a certain building, altar, etc. to become no more than a lifeless religious

relic, used only to trigger sentimental memories of past experiences where God's power and glory once made the difference in their lives.

Just as an allegiance to lawful objects can lead to idolatry, a devotion to personalities can also be deceptive. In John 10:34-36 Jesus revealed the danger of God's messengers themselves becoming "gods" to their listeners...

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods ? If He called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the Scripture cannot be broken, Say ye of Him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?

Because of the commission they have received from God and because of the authority of their office, ministers of the Word carry an awesome responsibility. By virtue of their position, Christian leaders must continually project themselves as "under shepherds" to the "Great Shepherd of the sheep, Jesus Christ" who alone is the Center of our deepest devotion.

This is especially critical as God confirms the Word with signs following and a supernatural climate envelopes both the message and the messenger. At such times the messenger appears to be something more than the anointed servant that he is.

That is what happened to Paul and Barnabas at Lystra. The miracle of healing of a crippled man caused them to appear god-like to those who were untaught in the Word (Acts 14:8-18). Because of the wonder of God's miracle, the Lycaonians declared: *"The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men"* (v. 11). Yet, the true man of God will not allow such acclamations to develop into idolatry. He will always be quick to follow the apostles' example, refusing undue affection...

And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God

v. 15

This does not mean we can have no love or affection for anyone

other than God. it does mean we can have no object of our affection which we put before, or in front of Him. "Thou shalt have no other gods *before* Me."

Abraham's Lesson

This is the lesson Abraham learned on Moriah. Isaac, the son of promise, may have become an object of improper affection. It is noteworthy that God said,

*Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, **whom thou lovest**, and...offer him...for a burnt offering... "*

Genesis 22:2

This was probably Abraham's greatest trial of faith (see Genesis 22:1 and Hebrews 11:17), but he obeyed God's command. Right before he would have plunged the knife into his son the Lord stopped him and said,

...for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me

Genesis 22:12

It is possible for our Isaac, our special blessing from God, to become a god in our heart. We must guard ourselves from thanking the Lord for the things that He does *apart from* loving Him solely because He is who He is. We appreciate and rightly love His gifts, but not to the point that we forget the One who gave them to us. How fitting is this passage for twentieth century, North American Christians:

*For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil, olive, and honey: A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which He hath given thee. **Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God**, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes...And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, **and walk after other***

***gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day
that ye shall surely perish"***

Deuteronomy 8:7-11,19

Chapter Two

The Second Commandment

Whereas the first commandment dealt with gods in any form or ideal, the second commandment dealt with idols in the form in which they are usually associated: graven images. No likeness of any part of creation was to be made into a graven image. From outer space to the depths of the ocean (see Exodus 20:4) the Israelites were expressly forbidden to cut, engrave, carve, or picture any part of the creation as an object of veneration. The Egyptians, from whom God reminded Israel He had delivered them, worshiped more than 400 deities! The Canaanites, who were illegal squatters on Abraham's land, likewise served many gods of various names and forms.

Moses instructed Israel in no uncertain terms concerning the idol worship of Canaan. They were told to destroy all such images as they possessed the promised land:

When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them...take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD which

He hateth, have they done unto their gods...

Deuteronomy 12:29-31

But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art a holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth

Deuteronomy 7:5-6

The graven images of their gods shall ye burn with fire: thou

shalt not desire the silver or gold that is on them, nor take it unto thee, lest thou be snared therein: for it is an abomination to the LORD thy God. Neither shalt thou bring an abomination into thine house, lest thou be a cursed thing like it: but thou shalt utterly detest it, for it is a cursed thing

Deuteronomy 7:25-26

In fact, the Lord forbid Israel to make any image of Him! In referring to the day God spoke to Israel from Sinai Moses commented:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female

Deuteronomy 7:15-16

When Paul addressed the idolaters on Mars Hill he affirmed the same principle: "...we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device" (Acts 17:29).

I have often wondered if this were the reason no picture or painting of Jesus was ever made. If someone did draw His likeness it is not extant. Had it been preserved for posterity it would no doubt have become an object of veneration. Paul explained to the Corinthians: "...yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Corinthians 5:16). The disciples knew Jesus of Nazareth according to the physical appearance and dress. They did not really know Him, however, until they received the Holy Spirit who revealed Jesus to them. "*He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you*" (John 16:14). Jesus can only be known by a spiritual revelation when the eyes of the understanding are enlightened. We do well to question the correctness of having pictures of Jesus at all. Even though our motive may be totally innocent our pictures of the Godhead may be precisely the error of the Athenians.

The Israelites knew:

... our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat

Psalm 115:3-7 *There is no life in an idol*, therefore, they cannot transmit life to those who worship them. The worship of man's many inventions brings death.

The psalmist immediately added: *"They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them"* (Psalm 115:9).

Dead idols produce dead people. Only the Living God can satisfy the longings of the soul.

A word is used in the second commandment which often perplexes people. The word I refer to is, of course, "jealous," and means exactly what it says! *"You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am **a jealous God...**"*

A Jealous God

The first time I heard of "a jealous God" I was a small boy in church. I remember how strange it sounded to my little ears. I had always been taught it is wrong to be jealous or envious. Somehow it didn't seem right that God should be called "jealous"!

I wish I could say the puzzle cleared after I became a devout Christian while in my teens. Although I studied the Bible intensely, it didn't make much sense when I read about a "jealous" God! Everything I knew of Him seemed totally opposite. He was giving, unselfish, and completely loving. I continued my study of this curious aspect of His nature from time to time over the years. What follows are the basic scriptures I found which initially perplexed me.

Paul said, *"love is not jealous"* (1 Corinthians 13:4) and John said, *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8,16). Then James said, *"The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy"* (James 4:5). Some versions capitalize the word "spirit" (to imply the Holy Spirit).

Recently, while studying the Lexical Aids Old Testament, in the

back of *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, a light turned on inside when I read Spiros Zodhiates observations on the Hebrew meaning of the words: *qana*, *qanna*, and *qinah* which are the words translated "jealous" in the Old Testament (the Strong's numbers are 7065, 7067 and 7068).

the cognate Arabic root means to become very red. Therefore, the redness of the face...a very strong emotion which desires some quality or possession of another. The central meaning is jealousy (in a negative sense) and zeal (in a positive sense)...Using the marriage motif, God is often depicted in the O. T. as the Husband of Israel...Since He is not really capable of being envious like humans, perhaps "jealous" should be translated "zealous" (in those passages) ...God does not tolerate competitors...He will punish His people for their unfaithfulness (Ezekiel 5:13; 8:3,5; 16:38)...The Hebrew noun means ardent zeal p. 1634, *The Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible*, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN 37422

As I read these notes I became aware that the Lord called Himself "a jealous God" in a similar, yet clearly different way than we think of jealousy. Man becomes jealous over a spurned love because of the self-loss. Our heavenly Lover is "a jealous

God" not only because He desires our affection but primarily because He desires our good.

People get jealous for selfish reasons, or at best, self-serving reasons. God is jealous for our benefit.

Here's the light that turned on inside; when God made man He made him in His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 8:5). No other part of God's creation was so favored. When man sinned, he fell from his glorious position of domination. The first became last. Man, who was made to be a worshiper, looked to the creation for objects of worship.

Whatever or whomever one worships one becomes, or at least desires to become.

When man worships the creature rather than the Creator he is desiring to be something less than he was made to be!

This, of course, is debasing, degrading, and degenerative since

God made man higher than the rest of creation. Man only has One higher (I'm referring to man in his initial innocence and present redeemed state). Unto God only is it fitting to give praise. As we worship the Lord we are changed into the same image we behold, by the power of the Holy Spirit:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord

2 Corinthians 3:18

...when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is

1 John 3:2

Because God loves man, He hates all that hurts him. God showed how much He loves man (even in his sinful state) when He freely gave His beloved and unique Son to die on the tree (see Romans 5).

Perhaps we see in the Incarnation a purpose of God: to show men what God is really like, and so by following Jesus, to become like God.

*...neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and **he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him***

Matthew 11:27

...he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father...

John 14:9

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children

Ephesians 5:1

God is jealous for our sakes. Self-serving jealousy and divine love are unmixable. God's unselfish love allows, even causes, Him to be jealous for us. Any other god will debase us:

*For thou shalt worship no other god: for the **LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God***

Exodus 34:14

His jealousy, then, is not directed toward Himself, but toward us, to fight against the enemy of our souls:

The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man,

He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: He shall cry, yea, roar;

He shall prevail against His enemies

Isaiah 42:13

So we see in answer to the question why is our Lord "a jealous God" is that He burns red hot with jealousy and will permit no rival as that would prevent us from becoming more like Him (which is His original intention and our original inheritance).

How Godly Jealousy Functions in Man

"Godly jealousy", referred to by Paul, is the same type of jealousy God Himself possesses. It is, unlike human jealousy, totally free of self-interest, but is directed toward maintaining single purity before God or toward others in God's behalf. We will now examine several instances where an individual manifested godly jealousy toward God and/or in God's behalf. We will briefly consider the examples of godly jealousy as demonstrated by Phineas, Elijah, Jesus, and Paul.

The Example of Phineas

Phineas manifested a holy zeal for keeping God's commandments when an Israelite took a Midianite woman into his tent (see Numbers 25:118). He thrust them both through with a javelin because God had forbidden the Israelites to intermingle with the heathen and follow their gods. His action was called a righteous deed and his seed was established in perpetual prosperity due to the divine favor he obtained through his zealous action.

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Phineas...hath turned My wrath away from the children of Israel, while he was zealous for My sake among them, that I consumed not the children of Israel in My jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him My covenant of peace: And he shall have it, and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood: because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel

v. 10-13

The Example of Elijah

The holy prophet, Elijah, ministered during a perilous time in

Israel's history. The people were turning to Baal and Ashtaroth in multiplied thousands. (The prophets of Baal and Ashtaroth numbered 850 as told in 1 Kings 18:19).

Elijah entered a cave on Mount Horeb where the Lord gave him a startling revelation: 7,000 had not bowed the knee to Baal (see 1 Kings 19:9-18). When God asked Elijah what he had been doing he replied

"I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword

v. 10

Elijah demonstrated a holy jealousy for the pure worship of the LORD God of hosts. The pollution of God's people in Baal/Ashtaroth worship vexed and angered his soul.

The same attitude is manifested today when individual believers are grieved and vexed over the idolatry of the modern Church.

The Example of Jesus

Let's go to a peculiar and often misunderstood event in the ministry of Jesus for a practical demonstration of this principle.

In John 2:13-17 we have John's account of Jesus cleansing the temple at the onset of His ministry. Money changers were charging ridiculous prices for the sacrificial animals. The worshipers were being robbed both financially and spiritually of the true meaning of sacrifice.

The animal sellers made it easy and convenient for the temple entrants. Rather than having to herd the animal through town the Hebrew could wait until he arrived at the temple before procuring the sacrifice. Convenient? Easy? Yes, but not pleasing to God. The spiritual significance was all but lost among the clatter of coins.

Jesus made a holy mess that day!

He poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables: And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not My Father's house a house of merchandise

v. 15-16

His disciples, looking on with astonishment, remembered a particular scripture (Psalm 69:9):

"The zeal of Thine house hath eaten Me up."

As prophesied of the Messiah, the ardent zeal that consumed Jesus demonstrated His jealousy for God's sake.

Seeing how men had polluted the pure temple worship with their noisy merchandise and filthy lucre, Jesus was embroiled with holy rage.

Although no scripture says He actually hit anyone with the scourge of small cords, the money grabbers didn't afford Him an opportunity to do so either!

Obviously a holy terror seized the hearts of greedy men in that they allowed a single unknown man to smash their property, turn over their tables, and throw their money across the floor. This, as I said, occurred near the beginning of His ministry before He was known or esteemed as a mighty prophet by the common people. It had to be the anointing on Him that struck terror into the hearts of those robbers, who had made God's holy temple a den of thieves.

The root words, in the Old Testament, for "jealous" comes from a cognate verb "to redden" as pointed out above in the lexical aids.

I can see Jesus' face red with holy anger as He burned with fervor against the temple polluters in jealousy of His Father's worship. He was literally on fire for God!

For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God

Deuteronomy 4:24

The Example of Paul

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ

2 Corinthians 11:2

In *The Newberry Reference Bible* the term "godly jealousy" is marginally rendered "jealousy of God."

Oftentimes we read in the Prophets of God's love and jealousy over His people when they departed after other gods. He called their departures "whoredoms" and "adulteries" (see Ezekiel 16, 23

and consult your concordance for numerous other passages).

At Corinth the believers were entertaining so-called "super apostles" who were actually "false apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5, 13). They were "preaching another Jesus" causing the church to "receive another spirit" (v. 4).

Consequently, the spiritual purity of the church was sadly spoiled. Paul used the analogy of that day's marriage customs (the legal espousal before the marriage union) to the present state of the Corinthian church.

Like a father (see 1 Corinthians 4:15) who espouses his daughter to another father's son, Paul espoused the church to Christ. It was the father's responsibility to watch and care for his espoused child all the time of the child's growth and development. The heavenly Father's Son, like Isaac in Genesis 24, has a bride in the making. The unnamed servant, like the Holy Spirit who doesn't speak of Himself (John 16:13), is seeking her out.

The oriental custom, to which Paul alluded, referred to the father's responsibility to train, educate, and prepare his daughter. When the espousal arrangement was made he guaranteed her virginal purity to the other father and his son.

Paul espoused Corinth to "one husband" and desired to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ at the wedding feast of the Lamb. *"Blessed are they which are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb"* (Revelation 19:9). *"...they that are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful"* (Revelation 17:14).

Paul feared, however, that just as the first Adam's wife was deceived by the serpent, so the minds of the Corinthian believers were being subtly corrupted from the simplicity of pure devotion to Christ, the last Adam (see 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Corinthians 15:45,47).

This would come about through false apostles preaching another Jesus than Paul preached, who would exalt themselves in the flesh and cause the Corinthians to glory in appearance and not in heart. (Please study 2 Corinthians 11:4-20 for a fuller picture.)

Paul then, manifested the jealousy of God in his attitude and

ministry toward Corinth. His zeal was totally selfless and Godward. His desire was that Christ would receive a chaste, unspoiled virgin, and that she would be worthy of such a loving husband who gave Himself for her (compare with Ephesians 5:25-33).

How fitting are the words of the Shepherd (Jesus) toward His shepherdess (the Bride):

Thou art all fair, My love; there is no spot in thee. Come with Me from Lebanon, My spouse...

Song of Solomon 4:7-8

Chapter Three

Idols in the House of God

And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the LORD GOD fell there upon me. Then I beheld, and lo, a likeness as the appearance of fire: from the appearance of his loins even downward, fire; and from his loins even upward, as the appearance of brightness, as the colour of amber. And he put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of mine head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the vision that I saw in the plain. Then said he unto me, Son of man, lift up thine eyes now the way toward the north, and behold northward at the gate of the altar this image of jealousy in the entry. He said furthermore unto me, Son of man, seest thou what they do? Even the great abominations that the house of Israel committeth here, that I should go far off from My sanctuary? But turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations. And he brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, behold a hole in the wall. Then said he unto me, Son of man, dig now in the wall, behold a door. And he said unto me, Go in, and behold the wicked abominations that they do here. So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about. And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? For they say, The LORD

seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth. He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the LORD's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz. Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the LORD'S house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them

Ezekiel 8

And he built altars for all the host of heaven (the zodiac) in the two courts of the house of the Lord...And he set a carved image, the idol which he had made, in the house of God...

2 Chronicles 33:5,7

It was the sixth year of captivity for a young prophet who had been carried away in Nebuchadnezzar's second attack^{[k¹](#)} to the far away land of Babylon! The young prophet Ezekiel, sat in his house with the other elders of Judah. They were seeking the Lord concerning their removal from Judah as well as the future of their beloved city, Jerusalem (which would be destroyed only a few years later).

As these devout men waited upon the Lord a wonderful event transpired! It is recorded in the eighth chapter of Ezekiel. We are told that the Lord appeared to him in "*a likeness as the appearance of fire*" (denoting his jealousy—Deut. 4:24) and "put forth the form of an hand." He lifted Ezekiel up between earth and heaven and

carried him to the temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel had not only been carried back in space, however, he had also been carried back in time. He was shown the temple as it had existed during the reign of King Manasseh more than a century earlier!

This was the period of darkest depravity in all of Jerusalem's history. Manasseh burned his own son to death in worship to Molech. He filled Jerusalem with the innocent blood of many other young children in idolatrous sacrifices (see 2 Kings 21:6,24:3-4).

As gross as these sins were, the evil king's heart was not satisfied. He did something in his practice of idolatry that no other king before him had done...he polluted God's sanctuary with idols.

Manasseh's wicked abominations resulted in the coming of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem many decades later with tens of thousands of God's people carried away to Babylon in exile. How do we know Manasseh's sin was one of the key factors in this judgment?

*Surely at the commandment of the LORD came this upon Judah, to remove them out of His sight, **for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he did***

2 Kings 24:3

Manasseh's godly grandson, Josiah, whose "*heart was tender*" (2 Kings 22:19), diligently purged Judah's idolatry. God promised Josiah, "*Neither shall thine eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place*" (2 Chronicles 34:28), thus granting a delay, but not an aversion, from the coming judgment:

*And like unto him (Josiah) was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might...Notwithstanding the LORD turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, **because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal***

2 Kings 23:25-26; see also 21:1-18 and 2 Chronicles 33:1-10

Ezekiel Was Shown the Abominations Firsthand

And now many years later a young man who was "among the

captives by the river Chebar" in far away Babylon was seeking God. The Lord took His prophet up between earth and heaven and carried him to the temple in Jerusalem which had been strangely polluted. In this vision the Lord took Ezekiel back in time, to the dark period of apostasy under King Manasseh—more than one hundred years earlier!

No doubt His purpose was to show His prophet firsthand the condition of the temple under Manasseh. This would explain to the young man of God the "whys" and "wherefores" of the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel, in turn, would share this vision with the godly remnant and give the captives a better understanding of how the "sins of the fathers" were now being visited "even unto the third and fourth generation" as God had promised from Mt. Sinai many centuries earlier:

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 unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me

Exodus 20:5

In Ezekiel 8 the tour of the temple is described in graphic detail. The first idol Ezekiel saw an "*image of jealousy*" standing at the gate of the altar (the outer court). This image is described by the chronicler as "*a carved image, the idol which (Manasseh) had made*" (2 Chronicles 33:7). It is also called "*a graven image of the grove* (lit., *asheyrah*)" (2 Kings 21:7).

These additional insights enable us to safely speculate that Manasseh set a large image of Asherah next to the Brazen Altar!

Asherah was a sex goddess worshiped among the trees where the idolaters could hide their gross immoralities. Manasseh was so perverse he placed a carved image of her (she was always pictured in complete nudity) at the entrance of the outer court!

But the "image of jealousy" was only the beginning of the idols displayed in the temple of God. Ezekiel was shown "wicked abominations" and "all the idols of the house of Israel" drawn on the walls of the inner court (the holy place). These many idols pictured on the wall had been drawn by none other than *the priests*

of the Lord!

If this were not enough the "seventy ancient men" (highly revered spiritual leaders) burnt incense to these images in the dark. They whispered among themselves "the LORD seeth us not" in the very place where God had said some 300 years earlier to Solomon,

...I have chosen and sanctified this house...and MINE EYES...SHALL BE THERE PERPETUALLY

2 Chronicles 7:16

But there was even more idolatry—the first sin God commanded Israel against in the ten commandments—in the house of God. There were sun worshipers and Tammuz observers there too!

As Ezekiel walked back toward the other court he found "*women weeping for Tammuz*" (a Babylonian god) at the gate of Yahweh's house. At the porch Ezekiel beheld 25 men bowing down before the sun!

After he had observed these horrible crimes against God, the Lord asked Ezekiel the obvious.

Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations whey they commit here?

8:17

One who is not well acquainted with the holy purposes of the temple may be quick to wonder why it made any difference where an idol is worshiped. Did not the idols in the hills vex Yahweh? Yes, of course, but there was a distinction in all of the numerous times Israel had fallen into idolatry before Manasseh.

The difference on this occasion was that they brazenly worshiped false gods in the very house dedicated to the true God! The holy temple was the meeting place between Yahweh and Israel. It was here that He put His sacred name.

The impudence and hardheartedness shown by Manasseh and his followers was their total lack of reverence for God. Their nation's history had witnessed numerous backslidings into idolatry

for which Yahweh had consistently punished them.

These were backslidings committed in the countryside by people who still had some fear of God. (Today many Christians have idols in the secret areas of the heart, but are repulsed by the grosser forms of idolatry in the world.) I am not saying God will tolerate any idol anywhere, but that the idolaters had previously kept their false gods separated from the true God.

Manasseh's horrible crime was *he mixed the two*. He put idols in the temple of God. Paul later asked "*what agreement hath the temple of God with idols'?*" implying that the sin of Manasseh can be repeated in the new covenant period! (2 Corinthians 6:16).

God's Holy House

Manasseh placed his idols in the very house Solomon had built three centuries earlier for the worship of Yahweh.

In his dedicatory prayer King Solomon promised the Lord that the glorious temple which he had constructed would forever be a "*house of habitation for Thee, and a place for Thy dwelling for ever*" (2 Chronicles 6:2). The Lord, in response, acknowledged:

I have heard thy prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for an house of sacrifice...For now have I chosen and sanctified this house, that My name may be there for ever and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually

2 Chronicles 7:12,16

Even though Solomon sadly turned to idols in his latter years, he was never foolish enough to place them in this special house which he had formerly dedicated to the one true God. Three hundred years later, however, a deluded king fulfilled Satan's desire to receive the praise due only to God. He deceived King Manasseh to the extent that he placed all types of idols in the house whose Owner had declared,

Thou shalt have no other gods before Me... for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God...

Exodus 20:3,5

The significance is noteworthy: never before had the true worship of Yahweh been polluted with the false gods of Canaan. In

the past the idols were worshiped in the tree groves and hills by backslidden Israelites.

But now there was a MIXTURE of the holy and the profane! Jeremiah, an older contemporary of Ezekiel, was still living in Jerusalem when Ezekiel was given this special vision. He lamented the impure mixture in many of the hearts of God's prophets and priests.

For both prophet and priest are profane; yea in My house have I found their wickedness, saith the LORD

Jeremiah 23:11

Judgment Begins at the House of God

Because of these horrible atrocities, the Lord repeated to Ezekiel what He had said years earlier during Manasseh's 55 year reign: *"Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them"* (8:18). The ninth chapter of Ezekiel records the succeeding order of events leading to immediate judgment on King Manasseh and his idolatrous subjects.

God called an angel before Him who had an inkhorn in his hand. This messenger was to go throughout Jerusalem and place a mark of protection on the forehead of each person who sighed and cried over the abominations of Judah. It was not enough to not participate in the national crime of idolatry. In order to receive the special mark of protection one must be actively mourning over the abominations in the land, praying for a restoration of the nation's heart to the God of Israel.

After the man (angel) with the inkhorn had marked the grieved godly remnant and reported back to the Lord that all who wept for Judah were thus identified, the Lord called six other men (angels) before Him with the instructions to go through Jerusalem and slay every single person who did not have the special mark on the forehead. Notice where God told the angels of judgment to begin their destruction:

Slay utterly old and young...but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; AND BEGIN AT MY SANCTUARY. Then they

began at the ancient men which were before the house (temple)

9:6

It is noteworthy that the seventy ancient men who burned incense in the dark saying God could not see them were the first to die under divine judgment. The sanctuary of the Lord was the first place the men with drawn swords attacked. Perhaps Peter had this in mind when he said,

For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

1 Peter 4:17

This part of Ezekiel's vision was likewise documented earlier in the Scriptures. You may read it for yourself in 2 Chronicles 33:10-16. A foreign army came and swept down upon Jerusalem. Many people were killed. God judged Manasseh with "thorns" and had him carried away to Babylon as a prototype of the captivity which was visited on the third and fourth generations after him. God humbled this proud king causing him to know that Yahweh was God. He earnestly repented and prayed to the Lord to bring him back to his country.

The mercy of God was extended even to this base man! He was delivered from Babylon, again as a symbol that the thousands of captives more than a century later, would return from their exile following a 70-year captivity in the same land.

Once home the humbled king... took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD (Mt. Moriah), and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he repaired the altar of the LORD, and sacrificed thereon peace offerings and thank offerings, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD God of Israel

2 Chronicles 33:15-16

The New Testament tells us that an idolater has no inheritance in the kingdom of God (see Galatians 5:19-21). Because of the severity of judgment idolatry brings, the Heavenly Father chastens His children whenever they give the adoration rightfully due Him to another. He seeks to effect repentance in us whenever we look to

another as our source, instead of looking only to our Rock. Notice the following passages, in both the Old and the New Testaments:

And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer...Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God...For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their graven images

Psalms 78:35, 56, 58

For without (outside the city of God) are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie

Revelation 20:15

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen...For this ye know, that no...idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God

1 John 5:21; Ephesians 5:5

*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel...to teach and to seduce lovers of **pleasures more than lovers of God***

2 Timothy 3:4

Our Father speaks of idolatry in only the severest tones. This is why it is of utmost importance that we examine ourselves in this awesome matter. We must beware that we allow no "high places" of self-worship (pride) in our hearts. In our self-indulgent society we must take heed that we are not "*lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God*" (2 Timothy 3:4). We cannot allow our "belly" (lit. *appetites*) to be our god lest we become "*enemies of the cross (self-denial) of Christ: whose end is destruction*" (Philippians 3:18-19). But let's get back to Ezekiel's vision of the idols in the house of God and the judgment which followed:

In the case of King Manasseh the people did not share his repentant heart, thus judgment would indeed fall upon the nation for their idolatrous ways.

His son, Amon, did "*that which was evil in the sight of the Lord...and served the idols his father served, and worshiped them*" (2 Kings 21:20-21). Amon took the Asherah and other vessels used in Baal worship and put them back in the house of the Lord! His

brief reign of two years was ended when he was assassinated by his own officers. They made his son, who was only eight years old, king in his place.

His son, Josiah, put all the idols out of the house of the Lord and expelled all the priests who had profaned themselves. His zealous efforts won him the favor of a jealous God who, in turn, promised him:

Because thine heart was tender, and thou hast humbled thyself before the Lord...and hast rent thy clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard thee, saith the Lord, Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy grave in peace; and thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place...

2 Kings 22:19-20

History Repeats Itself

Some will perhaps wonder why I have taken so much time to develop this message from the pages of the Old Testament. After all, we are living in the new covenant today, and the relevancy may not at once be all that apparent. After all, the New Testament verses we quoted a short while above prove that idolatry is unequivocally condemned in the New Testament. Why then, all the elaborate history from ancient kings? Let's go to the New Testament to show you why we first went to the Old Testament:

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope

Romans 16:4

*Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them: as it is written. The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play...Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and **and they are written for our admonition**, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*

1 Corinthians 10:7,11,12

Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah are examples from whom we can learn much. In Manasseh's case we see that God can and will forgive a horrible sinner, but that does not mean that the former

sins will have no further effects on those he influenced. The people of Judah did not repent of their idolatry, into which Manasseh had led them, and Amon was intent on following his father's former ways. In Amon's case we see that God will execute speedy judgment when that person has had the godly example of repentance from those very sins in his predecessor. In Josiah's case we learn that "a tender heart" will preserve us from judgment even though divine judgment may still be reserved for others around us who do not repent.

For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world

1 Corinthians 11:31-32

*An "idolater has (no) inheritance in the kingdom of Christ...Let no man deceive you with vain words: **for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.** Be not ye therefore partakers with them*

Ephesians 5:5-7

The seriousness with which God views idolatry cannot be underestimated. It is natural to wonder if any idol in a believer's life would then make that person qualify as an idolater upon whom the wrath of God will come and for whom there is no inheritance in His kingdom. Having known of various times in my life when I had an idol or two I cannot look back on those times and honestly believe I was out of the kingdom or subjected to God's wrath. As I have sought Him along this particular line it seems to me that there is a difference between an *idolizer* and an idolater. Allow me to explain.

In the first chapter we defined the Greek word used in the New Testament for idol (*eidolon*) as "a form, appearance, image or representation whether corporeal (physical) or mental" which receives the praise due God alone.

Idolizer or Idolater?

In classical Greek literature this word is used for a literal statue or even for *a concept of the mind*. In this regard I believe

that many of God's people have a particular concept, teaching, or pet doctrine which they will not submit to God's correction as it relates to the pet doctrine's imbalance or error. These "sacred cows" thus qualify as idols in the Greek meaning of the word.

An "idolizer" is someone who has a particular idol, but whose life is not wholly given to idols. Such a person whose life is full of idols is properly called an "idolater" and has no inheritance in the kingdom of God.

When I first pondered this thought I recalled various times in the Old Testament when a king would purge all the idols out of the land except for one or two particular high places where he would allow incense to still be burned. Yet, it would be

said that his heart was right with the Lord! Let me give you several examples of this:

*And Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did David his father. And he took away the sodomites out of the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. And also Maachah his mother, even her he removed from being queen, because she had made an idol in a grove; **But the high places were not removed; NEVERTHELESS ASA'S HEART WAS PERFECT WITH THE LORD ALL HIS DAYS***

I Kings 15:11-14

*Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel...And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the LORD: **nevertheless the high places were not taken away: for the people offered and burnt incense yet in the high places***

1 Kings 22:41,43

And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the LORD...But the high places were not taken away...

2 Kings 12:2-3

*And he (Amaziah) did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David his father...**howbeit the high places were not taken away...***

2 Kings 14:3-4

The only thing I can surmise from this obvious fact is that idols are so subtle (like Satan himself) that until God reveals them in all

their ugliness to our hearts, He must give us special grace during this period until such time as we are mature enough to be dealt with and remove the idol(s) from our heart.

Even the mature man of God, John the beloved, was twice prone to worship someone other than God!

Idolatry is a subtle thing. The aged apostle, John the Beloved, warns his children in the faith, "*keep yourself from idols. Amen*" (1 John 5:21). Yet we see the same holy man prone to idolatry himself!

John, who was "*in the Spirit on the Lord's day...fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things*" (Revelation 1:10; 19:10, 22:8,9).

If John was capable of such, in the presence of a being who emitted the glory of God, is it possible that we today are capable of worshiping human messengers sent to us by the Lord? Rather than "highly esteeming them to love for their work's sake" we are guilty of "glorying in their flesh."

Chapter Four

Idols of the Heart

In the previous chapter we studied the eighth chapter of Ezekiel where we observed overt acts of idolatry in the ancient temple of the Lord. We learned that King Manasseh had erected graven images to false gods in various places in the Outer Court. The priesthood followed his evil in bowing down before Asherah and Tammuz in Yahweh's holy house.

Many of the common people gave their commendation and participated in this abominable polluting the Lord's sanctuary. We observed how the priesthood carried their idolatry into the Holy Place, too. They drew abominable creatures on its walls only a few feet from the curtained Holy of Holies in which dwelt the Shekinah!

And we saw how God's certain judgment came upon His people *"to remove them out of His sight"* into the 70 year Babylonian Exile. Ezekiel 8 and 9 were a sobering study. But there was another kind of idolatry dealt with by the ancient prophet, which is disclosed in the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel.

In this passage we are told of a different form of idolatry practiced by some "elders of Israel" who had not joined their contemporaries in open idolatry in God's temple. No, these had no part with the idol makers of their day. These leaders were outwardly upright, cleaving to the pure worship of Yahweh. No doubt they considered themselves the overcoming remnant. They abstained from the orgies, the revelings, the child sacrifices, and the voluntary prostrations before false gods. They disdained those who practiced these abominations.

YET, UNKNOWN TO EVERYONE BUT GOD, THEY WERE IDOLATERS AS SURELY AS WERE THEIR BACKSLIDDEN BRETHREN!

Does this seem unfeasible to you? Does this sound farfetched? Perhaps I am exaggerating in order to make a relative point

concerning the church of today? Look at the passage below and decide.

Heart Idols

Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, these men have set up their IDOLS in their HEART, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the LORD God; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet; I the LORD will answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols; that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from Me through their idols. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God; Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations

Ezekiel 14:1-6

These outwardly righteous elders were as their idol carving contemporaries. While they never bowed down before Jerusalem's graven images they were idolaters nonetheless. Ezekiel must have been surprised when the Lord informed him that, "the elders of Israel (have) set up their idols in their heart." *What a parallel with modern Christendom!*

Our land is filled with preachers who do not hesitate to destroy heathen America's visible gods (such as music idols, movie stars, and materialistic pleasures). Their open rebuttal is commendable, but is it possible that some have erected secret gods in the hidden chambers of their heart, hidden from everyone's sight but God's?

Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do

Hebrews 4:13

The more I study the Word on the subject of idolatry the more I become increasingly aware of the fact that we do "*service to them*"

which by nature are no gods" (Galatians 4:8). The temptation for genuine Christians is to make an idol out of something which by nature is not an idol.

Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for THOU THAT JUDGEST DOEST THE SAME THINGS...thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? THOU THAT ABHORREST IDOLS, DOST THOU COMMIT SACRILEGE?

Romans 2:1,21,22

Is it possible that we preachers who loudly decry the abominations of America are ourselves guilty of "the same things" we abhor? "Thou that *preachest* a man should not steal..." Paul evidently believed there are many who preach against stealing, yet take what is not rightfully theirs (and believe me, I have seen this firsthand). Some of us who decry the loose life style of America's immoral multitudes are ourselves overtaken in secret lust.

In the same manner we Christians abhor America's idols, but serve our hidden idols cherished in the heart.

This is precisely why Samuel rebuked disobedient Saul while the latter was offering sacrifices to the Lord. His attitude of stubbornness was so offensive to God as if he has committed an act of idolatry!

*And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. **For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, AND STUBBORNNESS IS AS INIQUITY AND IDOLATRY***

1 Samuel 15:22-23

It may be painful to admit this, but we are all prone to allow idols in our hearts. How many times have I heard believers reveal the true affections of their hearts...and found them to be things about God rather than God Himself! Pet doctrines, growing ministries, and even deeper experiences are sometimes focused upon too strongly. William Cowper expressed this beautifully:

The dearest idol I have known Whate'er that idol be,
Help me tear it from Thy throne And worship only Thee.

Cowper, a godly saint, knew that it was even possible for a mature Christian to entertain an idol on the heart's throne. Unlike the visible, profane, and outward idols the world follows after, the Christian's "idol" is harder to recognize as it may be a legitimate, even God-given, ability or ministry when kept in its proper place, but can easily become an illegal object of veneration when given the affection due only to God.

As a boy I did not ponder the meaning of the hymn we sang in our small church, "Break down every idol, cast out every foe, Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." In my teens, however, the Father showed me various forms of idolatry prevalent in the same church. A holy zeal would burn within me as I saw how Christians failed to "give unto the LORD, the glory due unto His name." The same song was still sung, but its message went unheeded.

One of the things I noticed about this time were the frequent warnings in the New Testament against idolatry. These warnings were all addressed to believers. While it is true that some of these warnings concerned literal idolatry, there were some exhortations which deal specifically with inner idols. Let's look at passages dealing primarily with out-ward, literal idols first:

Paul exhorted the Galatians that idolatry was a *"work of the flesh"* (Galatians 5:19-21). He told the Corinthians that idolaters *"shall not inherit the kingdom of God"* and that they were not *"to keep company"* with *"any man that is called a brother"* if he was *"an idolater"* commanding *"with such an one no not to eat"* (1 Corinthians 6:9, 5:11). Although Paul told them *"an idol is nothing in the world"* in First Corinthians 8:4 he went on to clearly teach that idol worship is demon worship in chapter 10:19-20 telling them *"I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils."* *"Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry"* (1 Corinthians 10:14). In the Revelation Jesus rebuked the church in Thyatira *because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel to seduce my*

servants... to eat things sacrificed unto idols

Revelation 2:20

But we see figurative idolatry in the New Testament, also. Jesus said

No man can serve two masters...ye cannot serve God and mammon

Matthew 6:24

In this declaration He equated "mammon" (deceitful riches) as a "god" that can be served in place of God. How many believers are there who follow after an unbalanced prosperity message lusting after the "things" of this life? Jesus said,

*Take heed, and beware for **a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things** which he possesseth...For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also*

Luke 12:15,34

We are to:

*Love not to the world, neither **the things** that are in the world*

1 John 2:15

Paul said, *"we should not lust after things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters..."* (1 Corinthians 10:6-7). He told the Colossians that the attitude of *"covetousness...is idolatry"* (3:5). He warned the Ephesians that no

covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience

Ephesians 5:5-6

The Apostle John may have had this in mind when he closed his first general epistle: *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen"* (1 John 5:21).

What are some of the idols we, as God's children, must guard ourselves against?

As has been already shown covetousness and the unlawful love of deceitful riches (mammon) are "idols" so classified by the Word of God. Many believers have these idols in their hearts. *"If riches*

increase, set not your heart upon them" they will surely steal your heart's affection for God. Rather we must affirm "My soul, wait thou only upon God;

for my expectation is from Him. He only is my rock and my salvation" (see Psalm 62:10,5,6).

Fantasies about the opposite sex, too much concern about one's appearance, glorying in man above God, pet doctrines which are over emphasized, monetary growth of ministry or business, are other idols often relished in a secret chamber of the heart. The list is almost limitless! Remember this basic rule of thumb: ANY PERSON, THING, ATTITUDE, ENDEAVOR, CONCEPT, DOCTRINE OR ANY OTHER POSSIBLE OBJECT OF AFFECTION CAN EASILY BECOME AN IDOL! The moment the affection due God is given to any substitute that substitute becomes an idol of the heart.

The only way we can guard ourselves from these things is to practice the admonition of Colossians 3:1-3:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

May God give us a lowliness of mind that esteems each other better than we esteem ourselves, but esteems no one or nothing higher than God. A solemn day is coming when the Lord will vindicate His praise in all the earth. In that day He will utterly abolish all idols and He alone will be exalted!

The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up and he shall be brought low: And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. AND THE IDOLS HE SHALL UTTERLY ABOLISH

Isaiah 2:11-12, 17-18 Pray this prayer in earnestness:

Heavenly Father,

I come to you with an honest heart today. Deliver me from secret idols! Show me idols in my heart, hidden idols that others may not see, but are clearly visible to You, Dear Father.

Show me if I have an attitude of stubbornness, which you said is "as idolatry" in Your sight. Show me if the idols of covetousness, the lust for things, or fantasies are lurking in some secret chamber of my heart. Show me if I have elevated a truth of Your Word above other truths, to an extreme imbalance, thus creating a sacred cow before whom I bow, rather than You, Lord.

I ask this all in the mighty Name of JESUS, knowing His blood cleanses me from ALL unrighteousness!

Amen.

Chapter Five

Idol Shepherds

And the LORD said unto me, Take unto thee yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo,

*I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. **Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock!** The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened*

Zechariah 11:15-17

The Hebrew word *elyl* which is here translated "idol" (as it is in Isaiah 2:8) means "to be weak or deficient" and refers to shepherds (leaders) who are weak and deficient in ministering to the flock. The reason is obvious: they have set up themselves as objects of undue veneration. As a result this type of shepherd does not:

1. "...VISIT THOSE THAT BE CUT OFF..."

This refers to a seeking of the cold and indifferent who have ceased assembling themselves with other believers. The enemy has lured them out of the fold, yet the foolish shepherd does not go to them and inquire of the reason(s) for the lamb's absence.

Ye have scattered My flock...and have not visited them

Jeremiah 23:2

2. "...SEEK THE YOUNG ONE..."

This speaks of nurturing the young believer in the milk of the Word (1 Peter 2:1-2). It is our responsibility, as God's shepherds, to establish the new converts in the foundational principles of Hebrews 6:1-2. We are to nourish with gentleness as Paul did the babes in Christ at Thessalonica:

But we were gentle among you; even as a nurse cherisheth her children

1 Thessalonians 2:7

3. "...HEAL THAT THAT IS BROKEN..." Ezekiel prophesied
*... against the shepherds of Israel...the diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but **with force** and **with cruelty** have ye ruled them*

see 34:2-16

4. "...FEED THAT THAT STANDETH STILL..."

He does not minister the meat of the Word to the maturing sheep. Rather, he eats "the flesh of the fat" as he fleeces the flock for his personal advantage.

*Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! **should not the shepherds feed the flocks?** Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock*

Ezekiel 34:2-3

This was illustrated vividly to me one night. We were driving through Kansas on our way to a meeting. We stopped at a restaurant for supper where I overheard three pastors boisterously talking among themselves. They were obviously not ashamed at their words because they continued to increase their volume. They boasted one to another of their fat salaries, their leisure time for the pursuit of pleasure, and how they "worked" only one day a week. I was disgusted. I wanted to tell them what a disgrace they were to the One who laid down His life for the sheep. As I got near their table one of these pastors muttered a curse word and another one reached for a cigarette!

I became intensely angry and feared I could become physically abusive. Inwardly I prayed, "Lord, help me to cool my temper." (I was surprised at how angry I had become, especially since I had been in deep prayer on the long road that day.) Instantly the Lord spoke back to me saying, "*You are feeling My red hot anger and the vengeance that will be Mine!*" Immediately the anger left me! I knew I was to go back to my table and not give them any warning—they were under God's certain judgment and His hand would not spare (see Hebrews 10:29-31).

*Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and **I will require My flock at their hand**, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver My flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them...**I will feed My flock**, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. **I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick, but I will destroy the fat and the strong: I will feed them with judgment***

Ezekiel 34:10, 15, 16

Those who occupy positions of leadership in the Body of Christ place themselves under a greater judgment before God than that faced by other Christians.

My brethren, let there not be many teachers knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment

James 3:1

God loves His sheep and we who feed them must always minister to them as we would minister unto Jesus Christ Himself. We must serve them from our hearts as unto the Lord (see Ephesians 6:7; Acts 20:28-33). Paul's example must be followed:

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

*For **neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome as the apostles of Christ***

1 Thessalonians 2:4-6 Peter exhorted the elders of his day likewise:

The elders which are among you I exhort...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint (obligation), but willingly; not for filthy lucre (money), but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock

1 Peter 5:1-3

Judgment Will Fall Upon Idol Shepherds

Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened

Zechariah 11:17

God's Word of decree from the Throne will judge the idol shepherd after time has been given for repentance. The idol minister's "arm" will be cut off and his "eye" will be darkened. The "arm" denotes his ministry; the "eye" denotes his insight into the things of God. In each instance it will be his "right arm" and "eye" which are judged.

In the Bible the right side typifies the God-ward side. The ministry, once anointed with God's power, "shall be clean dried up" after "the sword" (God's decree) severs it. The realm of insight and revelation "shall be utterly darkened" when the LORD answers him no more (see 1 Samuel 28:6).

In recent decades we see time and time again when the Lord thus judged ministers who exalted themselves and became idols before the people. The same mighty Hand which had exalted them high before the multitudes of people, turned against them to bring them low. Many who had mighty miracle ministries died tragically after they proclaimed themselves to be more than they were. God will not share His glory with "graven images." (Anointed men of God bear much of His "image" and are "graven" upon the palms of His hands.)

This honor associated with a ministry calling brings much responsibility and awesome fear with it, because the ministers are themselves but men. Sadly, God's people often polarize themselves around their favorite Bible teacher or evangelist. Repeating the error of Corinth, whose Christians "gloried in appearance and not in heart," we find many today who say, *"I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos"* (1 Corinthians 3:4).

Paul sought to correct this error when he asked,

Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (servants) by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?...So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but

God that giveth the increase

1 Corinthians 3:5, 7; and 2 Corinthians 5:12,16

No matter how gifted any preacher may be; no matter how anointed of God's Spirit he may be; no matter how successful he may be...IT IS GOD ALONE WHO GIVES THE INCREASE! It is high time we gave *"unto the LORD the glory due unto His name"* and said among ourselves *"not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory"* (see Psalm 96:8; 115:1). The age of hero worship is over for the restored church. God will not permit it to continue. He will shake everything that can be shaken so *"that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore... let us...serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire"* (Hebrews 12:27-29).

Keep Yourself From Exaltation

It is often said "the flesh dies hard." I have never known an idol shepherd who did not begin the ministry in sincerity and purity. Pride, that horrible sin, in its craftiness and subtlety, began to slowly pollute the heart and divide its purpose. The people are partly to blame—they heap praises upon praises when a man of God has preached an anointed message or moved mightily in the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Shortly after I began preaching revival meetings I was warned by a godly pastor of the subtilty of pride. What he said to me one night after a glorious service has lingered in my mind and heart down through the years. He made his remark after numerous people had come up to thank me for the message and ministry. I had prayed and studied hard and the people's praise was gratifying to this novice—much too gratifying!

As we walked from the church building to the pastor's home he said, "David, can I tell you something?" "Yes," I replied thinking he was about to comment on the service. "Son, just remember this," he advised, "Flattery is like perfume. It may be all right to sniff it, but don't dare swallow it."

Compromise follows pride. When we have grown accustomed to the praises of men we lean on the crutch of man's approval after

every sermon. "How was the message tonight?" we ask the very ones who may have needed a sound exhortation rather than a lovely lullaby. We get careful not to step on any toes while the sheep stray from the paths of righteousness. If we see a noticeable fault in someone's life we are so fearful of offending them that we do not speak the truth to them in love. We put band-aids over cancers. *"Ye have healed the hurt of the daughter of My people only slightly,"* God charged the leaders in Jeremiah's day.

When strife raises its ugly head we often "smooth things over" rather than putting "the axe to the root of the tree." We prefer to allow gross errors in the sheep rather than risk losing their wool. Pastors often end up having a program more than they have a purpose.

Pastors aren't the only ones who fall into the trap of people pleasing to vainly satisfy their insecurities. Traveling ministers are afraid to speak out on a particular subject "because my partners won't go along with it" as one well-known evangelist explained to a friend. **THEY SOFT PEDAL THE TRUTH BECAUSE THEY HAVE A BUDGET TO MEET MORE THAN THEY HAVE A BURDEN TO MINISTER.** The evangelist fills his magazine with numerous pictures of himself while he claims, "I only seek to lift up the name of Jesus." He refers to his name in third person more and more as Satan sets him on a pinnacle from which he hopes to throw him down.

The gullible sheep oooh and aaah his talents and abilities. Slowly the man of God begins to exalt himself. The lowliness of mind he formerly possessed is replaced with a defiant, all knowing attitude. All he thinks about is himself, his ministry, his plans, his messages, his meetings, his, his, his. His vision becomes narrow and selfcentered. He finds it increasingly difficult to acknowledge his mistakes and failings. The devil tells him he is more important than he really is. Saddest of all, he forgets "from whence he came."

David "sinned greatly" when he numbered his army (2 Samuel 24:1-17). This sin was especially grievous as it was David who had won his first battle with only a sling! He knew from firsthand

experience the power of Yahweh to deliver his enemies into his hand. In the Psalms he declared, *"My bow will not save me"* and *"God only is my defence"* yet he instructed Joab to *"go through all the tribes of Israel...and number ye the people!"*

Unlike his predecessor, however, David had a repentant heart whenever he sinned against God.

And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I HAVE DONE VERY FOOLISHLY

v. 10

The lesson had to be learned thoroughly so he would never again forget his Rock. Seventy thousand of the stoutest men died from a grievous pestilence. Had David remained small in his own eyes this tragedy never would have occurred.

All of us in the ministry of the Word today can heed this ancient warning knowing that

whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning

Romans 15:4

Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: THOUGH HAND JOIN IN HAND, he shall not be unpunished

Proverbs 16:5

Guidelines for Remaining Pure and Humble

God's judgment against idol shepherds will be swift and sure. How His heart must ache for those who once lived in His presence and walked humbly before Him, but who are now proud and prayerless! His mercy and goodness do not predicate a permanent tolerance of injustice and iniquity in our hearts and lives. We must periodically withdraw from all our busyness in order to seek His face without distraction. God required all the males of Israel to appear before Him three times a year under the old covenant. We who are entrusted with ascension gift callings should withdraw

often into our closets and pray and wait upon the Lord. This, above everything else that follows, is of foremost importance. Our strength will be renewed as we bask in His presence and will enable us to be strong in the LORD and not in ourselves.

We have enumerated some specific guidelines below in the hopes of aiding those involved in the ministry of the Word. None of these guidelines, are new, but will stir up our pure minds by way of remembrance.

1. DO ALL TO THE GLORY OF GOD.

"But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17). "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). "For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Philippians 2:20-21). "His watchmen are blind...Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isaiah 56:10a, 11). "Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not..." (Jeremiah 45:5a)

2. AVOID SHOWMANSHIP AND ALL VAIN GLORY.

"That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also... I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me..." (2 Corinthians 11:17,18; 12:11).

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

3. GUARD AGAINST COVETOUSNESS.

*"A man's life (and ministry) consisteth **not** in the abundance of those things which he possesseth" Jesus warned. (Luke 12:15).*

"If riches increase, set not your heart upon them" (Psalm 62:10). "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others" (Philippians 2:4). "Feed the flock...not for filthy lucre" (1 Peter 5:2).

Withdraw yourself from fellowship with greedy ministers who

emphasize godliness as a means of financial accrument (see 1 Timothy 6:3-11).

4. TAKE "THE LOVE TEST" OFTEN.

Go through the characteristics of love as revealed in First Corinthians 13. Substitute your own name for "charity" in these verses. As you honestly appraise yourself before God He will cleanse you from all that is ungodly in your attitude.

Finally, never forget that the shepherd is first a sheep. Remember Paul's admonition to walk in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way you initially received Him—humility, fervency and purity.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him

Colossians 2:6

Final Word

The Egyptians were idol crazy—they served over 400 separate deities! They not only worshiped all the various expressions of nature, but also worshiped "the works of their own hands" in the most literal sense: farm tools were included in their reverence.

Over the past year as I have studied idolatry the Lord has been faithful to apply the Word to my own heart. Early this morning I awakened with a start from a vivid dream, the meaning of which was immediately made known. I had made the same mistake I have warned others of numerous times. I had allowed "the ministry" to become an idol!

In my dream I sat in my living room gazing affectionately at an old garden hoe which I had framed on the wall above the fireplace!

Throughout this book there are numerous scriptures and insights. Practical applications, however, and specific "idols" are, for the larger part, left for the Holy Spirit to reveal. He alone can guide you into all truth. Let Him use the Word you have read (and hopefully studied) as a two-edged sword! Let Him apply the Word to your own situation.

As for me I am determined, by the grace of God, to take the hoe off the wall and put it back in the tool shed. How I thank the Lord for revealing this to me! The "hoe", like so many modern idols, placed by God was not in itself an evil thing. No, it was and is a simple, even God-given tool, which I failed to keep in its proper place! I had made it an idol.

Perhaps there is a legitimate instrument for His service which has been slowly elevated to a position God never meant it to have. If the Lord should clearly reveal this to you, do the same thing I did this morning—cry out to God until a supernatural peace is given. The relief is His way of removing the burden of prayer, but can only be had by yielding all to God without reservation.

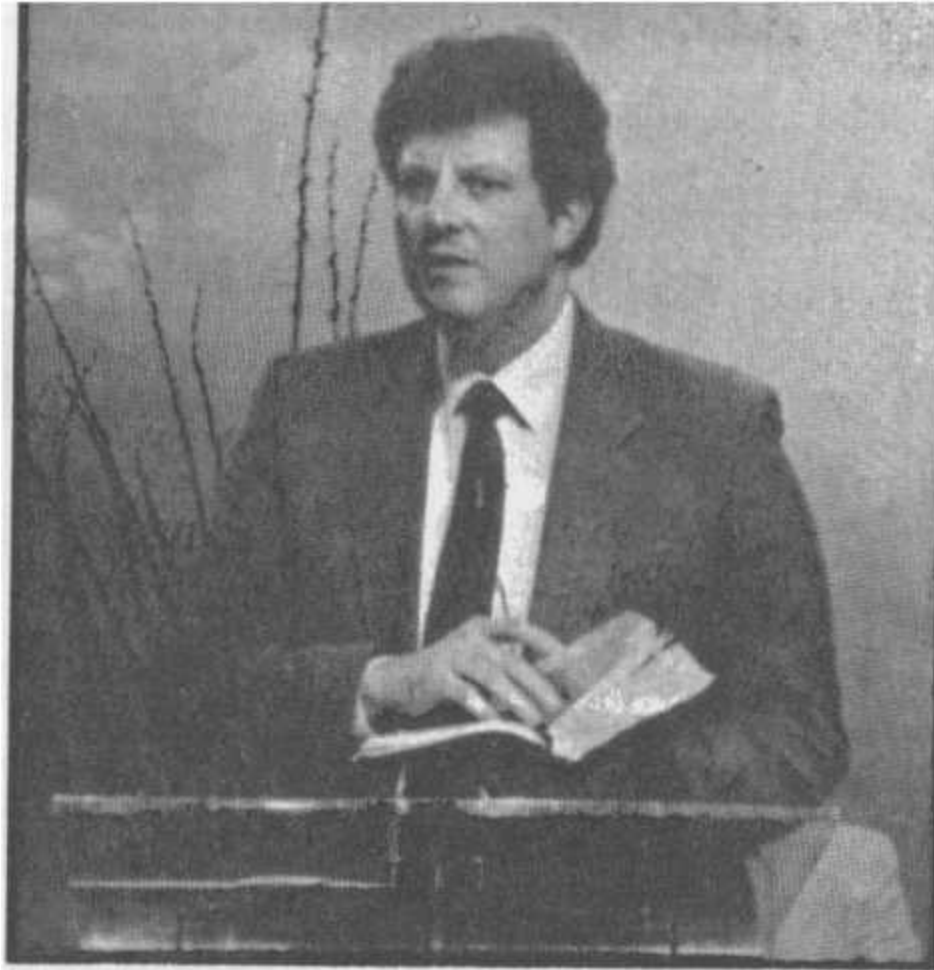
Idols which are such by nature should be destroyed. Idols which become such, by undue affection, should be put back in their proper

place and used only at the Master's bidding.

When everything is kept in its proper place, nothing can become an idol.

"My little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen."

Yes, Lord.



Although raised in a Christian home, David Alsobrook turned from the Lord at an early age and went into karate, yoga, transcendental meditation, and drugs. He was gloriously saved in 1969 and filled with the Holy Spirit in 1970. In February 1972, David Alsobrook answered the call of God to go into an evangelistic and teaching ministry. He has written 25 books, of which almost three million copies have gone out from his ministry. He and his wife, Dianne, have two daughters, Ashley and Kimberly. They reside in Paducah, Kentucky.

¹ "Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in three stages. First in 605 B.C., he overcame Jehoiakim and

carried off key hostages including Daniel and his friends. Second, in 597 B.C., the rebellion of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin brought further punishment; and Nebuchadnezzar made Jerusalem submit a second time. He carried off ten thousand hostages including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel. Third, in 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city after a long siege and disrupted ah of Judah" (*The Open Bible Expanded Edition*, p. 768).