

Anabaptist Idolatry

by Duane Troyer

The sermon warns against the idolization of the past and emphasizes the importance of unity in the church, following Christ, and being honest with ourselves.

Duration: 43:32

Scripture: Numbers 21:4

Topics: "Idolatry", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon delves into the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers 21, highlighting how a miraculous work of God turned into an idol over time. It discusses the danger of idolizing past movements or ministries instead of focusing on God, drawing parallels to modern-day tendencies to elevate certain traditions or leaders above Christ. The speaker emphasizes the importance of true allegiance to God, the unity of believers in Christ's body, and the need to prioritize spiritual growth and obedience over man-made rules or standards.

Transcript

In Numbers 21, starting in verse 4, it says, Then they departed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, and they went around the land of Edom, and the people became discouraged on the way. So the people spoke against God and against Moses, Why did you bring us up out of the land of Egypt to kill us in the desert? For there is no bread nor water, and our soul is weary of this worthless bread. So the Lord sent venomous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, and many of the children of Israel died.

Then the people came to Moses and were saying, We sinned, for we spoke against the Lord and against you. Therefore pray to the Lord, and let him take away the serpent from us. So Moses prayed for the people, then the Lord said to Moses, Make a serpent for yourself, and put it on a signal pole, and it shall be, if a serpent should bite someone, when the one bitten looks at it, he shall live.

So Moses made a copper serpent, and put it on a signal pole, and it happened, when a serpent bit anyone, he looked at the copper serpent, and he lived. So a pretty amazing thing that happened there, and most certainly a work of God. There's no scientific explanation for this.

No medical clinic has ever been able to duplicate anything like it. Without a doubt, it was a work of God. People were being bit by snakes, and all they did was look at this copper or brass serpent that Moses put on a pole, and they were healed.

Pretty marvelous. But something strange happened about 750 years later. We'll go into 2 Kings 18.

Apparently, the children of Israel had kept this copper serpent, and they took it with them, wherever they went, into the land of Canaan, probably kept it in the temple or somewhere. And this is what we read in 2 Kings 18. Now in the third year of Hosea, the son of Elah, the king of Israel, Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign.

He was 25 years old when he became king, and he ruled for 29 years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abbi, the daughter of Zechariah. And he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, according to everything his father did.

He removed the high places and broke into pieces the sacred pillars. He cut down the sacred wooden images and broke in pieces the bronze serpent Moses had made. Because up to those days, the sons of Israel had burned incense to it.

They called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, and after them, there was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those that were before him. For he held fast to the Lord.

He did not depart from following Him, but kept all the commandments of the Lord that the Lord gave Moses. So this thing that was so marvelous in the past, that was a work of God, became an idol. It became the thing that they worshipped instead of God.

I had said that it was a strange thing that happened, but maybe it's not so strange, because it seems to be fairly common. That people today still will look at something that happened in the past, something glorious and marvelous, something that was without a doubt a work of God, and idolize it. Whether it be some movement, or some ministry, or some minister, it becomes the object of worship instead of worshipping God.

To some extent, it happened in the church of Corinth. The people were starting to say, I'm of Paul, and I'm of Apollos, and Paul reproved them for it. He said, is this right? And we can say, people can say, well, it's no big deal.

I mean, these names that people have given us, and called us after certain names, people's names, or so forth. I mean, the people have given us those names. It's no big deal.

It's just what we're recognized by, but it is a big deal. If we accept that name, I believe it is a big deal, and I believe it was a big deal to Paul. God is a jealous God.

He wants our complete allegiance. How often did Jesus say we cannot be his disciple if we're not solely sold out for him, if we have not forsaken everything, if we don't have a single eye, if we try to go through this life with one eye on Christ, and one eye on anything else, we're not worthy to be his disciple. There's a quote here from Cyprian, around AD 250, he says, there is one God, and Christ is one.

And there is one church, and one chair founded upon the rock by the word of the Lord. Another altar cannot be constituted, nor a new priesthood be made, except the one altar, and the one priesthood. Whosoever gathers elsewhere, scatters.

Whatsoever is appointed by human madness, so that the divine disposition is violated, is adulterous, is impious, is sacrilegious, depart far from the contagion of men of this kind, and flee from their words. Avoid

them as a cancer and a plague. As the Lord warns you and says, they are blind leaders of the blind.

But if the blind lead the blind, you shall both fall into the ditch. For quite some time, I've been wanting to preach a message about this, and sometimes I, especially after talking with people that, the people who I come from, I get inspired to preach about this. Until now.

And there's many things that I'd like to say about this, about, and these may not be new things to you, but I think it's good to be reminded of them. And there may be many other people who listen to this sometime, but there's, I think there's this disease among today's descendants of the Anabaptists, who look back into history, at a marvelous movement. There's no, there's no mistaking it.

Anybody who has some concept of the kingdom of God, and looks at the history of the church and the little remnant groups who radically stepped out to follow Christ, can't miss the Anabaptist movement in the 1500s. And rightly so. And their descendants live today.

Their fleshly descendants, anyway. And I'm a part of them. I was a part of them.

I'll just give a little bit of my testimony, for those of you here who don't know me, or don't know that part of my life. I grew up in Ohio, in an Amish family, in a huge Amish community, and I was taught about this glorious heritage that we have, and I really admired it. I remember as a young child, loving to look at the pictures of the martyrs near.

And, I think when I was probably about 20 years old, around the first of the year, first, like the first of January, maybe the first day, or maybe the last day of, anyway, right at the turn of the year, my dad gave us children all a challenge for the year, kind of according to our age, that he would reward us for if we accomplished that year. And he gave me the choice of reading either the whole Bible or the Martyr's Mirror in that coming year. And because I had just gotten done reading all of the Old Testament, I decided to read the whole Martyr's Mirror.

There's surely a lot in there that I've forgotten, but I started becoming suspicious that the Anabaptists knew something we didn't, and that they had something we didn't. But, time went on, and I had already joined church by that time, joined the Amish church. But I would ask myself a question sometimes, and my answer troubled me.

I'd ask myself, if I had not grown up this way, would I be doing this? And I knew the answer was no. And it troubled me on account that there must be something other than truth that we're doing. Because if it were all truth, then I would be there, regardless of my upbringing.

Because I pursued truth. I wanted truth. And surely I would have gotten there if this is only truth.

But I would quiet these voices, I guess, when I was 26. I was ordained a deacon in the church. And I took it seriously.

And I helped uphold and build this kind of church with zeal. But, some years later, I, along with some other brothers, were really put on the spot. We ended up moving out of Holmes County, in a nutshell, because we saw that it was not right to fellowship with untruthful works of darkness.

And we started a small community that was going to be moral, that was going to be doing what was right, be rid of all these works of darkness. But it seemed like God put us to a challenge pretty quickly. And

moved a family right into our midst that none of us had known.

Who did follow the teachings of Jesus. Who did walk in His ways, albeit they weren't our age. And I look back and I think, I think God was testing us.

Like, okay, you're not going to fellowship with untruthful works of darkness, but are you going to fellowship with my people? I remember the day that I was, I would, this was really a hurdle, this was really a challenge. This was a lot, maybe not so much for some others, but as much as I had admired and gloried in this heritage that we had, this was a big thing for me to lay down. But I remember the day that I was mowing pasture with a team of horses, sickle bar mower.

And I was thinking these things and I just, I got real honest with myself. And I faced the facts and I admitted to myself and to God that I know that my love is divided. It's divided between God and this heritage that I have.

I haven't completely sold out for Christ. And I knew some things that were going to happen if I did, but there were a lot of things that I didn't know. And people would ask these questions, well what's going to happen with your children? I don't know.

Who are they going to marry? I don't know. Think about all the stability and the financial aid and all the things that are at your fingertips or available to you. I don't know what's going to happen, but Jesus never offered us much security on this earth.

All He wants is servants who trust Him, who are completely yielded to Him. Another question is how are you going to build a church? Jesus said, I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I think today, and I say this with all honesty, the things that I'm saying are not isolated to the Amish.

Neither to the Mennonites or Hutterites or just the Anabaptist descendants. You can almost find this problem throughout all the denominations that have a history of some glorious beginning. But I'm just speaking about this because this is the one I'm familiar with.

The most. I believe there's many ark builders today. People trying to build arks.

I think Noah is a type of Christ. And the ark is a type of the church. And as Noah built the ark, Christ will build His church.

What we need to do is enter in. How many arks were there to choose from in the days of Noah? There wasn't much choice. You were either inside or outside.

The one ark. Suppose these people would have started building themselves boats. And they could have tried to decide, well, which one fits for me? Which one fits for my family? Which one will my children come along with? That wasn't an option.

That wasn't an ark. A crude looking shell. Nothing beautiful by appearance.

But done according to the will of God. You could either get in or be drowned. When we baptize people, we don't baptize them into a local church or community, but into Christ and into His kingdom.

The true church of the firstborn. I think scripture is plain about this. In Romans 6, 3 and 4, He says, No ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death.

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. In 1 Corinthians 12, 13, He says, For by one spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bound or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit. In Galatians 3, 27, He said, For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ, we then are members of His one body.

Why then would we seek some secondary membership? What do we think we're looking for or trying to have? Jesus has one body. He's coming back for one bride. He's not a polygamist.

He's not going to take a whole bunch of churches with Him to the Father. But one church. And when we enter into the kingdom with Christ, He is building His church and setting His members in order.

In Romans 12, 5, He says, So we being many are one body in Christ, and every one member is one of another. In 1 Corinthians 12, 12, I'm going to read four verses here, and they all have the word members in them. But I want you to see that in these verses, He's talking about members of His one body.

1 Corinthians 12, 12, He says, For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body, so also is Christ. 1 Corinthians 12, 25, He says, That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. In 1 Corinthians 12, 27, He says, Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

When we enter into the kingdom of God, we go from being aliens and foreigners and strangers to being fellow citizens and brothers and fellow heirs. But if we seek for more than that, what are we seeking? Beware lest we forsake Christ in our search for more security. Something that could make us feel more secure.

Something that would give us a little more assurance that my children can get this too. God has no grandchildren. The church has no cousins.

Either we are God's children, and therefore we are brothers, or we're not His children at all. I understand that there will be portions of this church in certain geographical areas. There's the church at Corinth.

The church that was in the city of Corinth was the church of Corinth. There's the church at Ephesus. There's the church in Smyrna.

There's the church in Philippi. I understand that. And I understand that these local brothers will work things out together.

They'll work together. They'll have elders. They'll make judgments.

They'll do these things. But unless we start with these foundational truths of God having one body, and that there is one foal and one shepherd, we are just about certain to fall into the sin of sectarianism. Some more questions that I would get asked is how will you keep your unity without rules and standards? Ephesians 4.3 says, Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in bonds of peace.

Philippians 2.2 says, Fulfill ye my joy that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind. There's numerous other verses that talk about being of one mind, one heart. But, to look at those verses and come up with the idea that this is teaching us to have some uniform pattern in the way we dress, in the way we drive, in the way we comb our hair and all the colors we do, and so forth and so

forth, is not only fleshly minded, it's not following these scriptures at all.

Does a local church have the liberty to do so? Maybe. I wouldn't be sure, but maybe. But I will say this, once it separates brothers from brothers, it is hostile to the kingdom of God.

Uniformity does not create unity, but division. Recently I was talking with a brother from Tennessee, and he was asking about our vision here, what we do, and he asked me how do you view church standards, or standards, I'm not sure, church standards he might have said. And I said, well in the true sense of the word, we have a standard.

But, as far as what's typically known amongst these Anabaptist churches as church standards, I said we try to stay away from the type of standards that are supposed to bring uniformity. And he said, you mean division. And I just, I think he saw it.

We must ask ourselves, who creates the division? I was talking with this, I'm going to be honest with you, it was a little hard getting this message ready, because I don't, I don't enjoy just ripping things down. I don't, and I'm not trying to do that either, but, and I'm not, but I think there's things that need to be said sometimes. I think there's things that I need to be reminded of, and that we need to be reminded of.

But I was talking with this, this man from some Mennonite group, who, who was with some Mennonite group that was not, that did not allow people to have beards. And I just challenged him about that. And I said, well, so what are you going to do if there's somebody comes and wants to have a beard, or feels convicted that he should have a beard? I mean, that can, obviously that could happen.

He said, well, he'd just be creating division. And I said, wait a minute, who's creating the division? Who's creating the division? When this man would just want a beard to be a part of you, and be a part of you, but you're the one saying, no, you can't, because you're creating division. That's a question that we had to face ourselves, like, who is creating a division? How, how can we more be the cause of divisions when we divide or separate from people who are in the kingdom of God, but they can't be a part of us because of these extra things? Sometimes these, these kind of things, it's called church standards, brotherhood agreements, or whatever it's called, you know, people would say, well, it's not a big deal.

It's just something we agree on. It's not a salvation issue. It's not a big deal, but it becomes a big deal.

Just challenge it, and that's what we found out. As soon as it's challenged, it becomes a very big deal. And I would just like for us to, and I would like for all these people to think about something.

It should alarm us if when these things are removed, the whole thing crumbles. That should alarm us. What are we building on? What's the foundation? Why? The church is something that's alive because Christ's spirit is there, and there's life there, and it needs no props.

That's what I think a lot of these things are. They're there as props to prop up a dead skeleton that once, sometime in the past, had life. But now the props make it to appear to stand.

If we remove these props and it results in a crumble, we must ask ourselves, what is it that unites us? What is this unity of the spirit that we say we have because we have these things and all come together and agree on these things? Because someday it will be shaken, and all the things that can be shaken will be shaken, and only Christ's kingdom will remain. Hebrews says that. Hebrews 12, I believe.

If anything else unites us other than the teachings of Christ, great will be the fall of him. And I think some of this just comes down to being real honest with ourselves. You know, in the setting that I grew up with, we spoke German, the German language.

We preached in German. In other words, should the people around us whom we should be witnessing to come to our meetings, there was really nothing to understand. There is no logical or scriptural reasoning to insist on something like that, and yet it was insisted on.

And the things that God told to me was that the facts show that nobody loses the language and keeps the faith. Some people would say that, or maybe some people would say nobody loses the language and keeps the culture. Facts are stubborn.

This is just what facts show. But that was really troubling to me. It was troubling to me because what changes? Which one of Jesus' teachings changes when we speak it in another language? When we go down how do you come up with a different meaning when you speak it in German versus English versus Spanish or anything else? It means the same thing.

And I had to conclude, if I face this honestly, that there was other things that could not stand on their own, that had not the life or the strength to stand on their own without being protected by something like this. You know, there's that story in 2 Samuel 6 about how David was bringing the ark, transporting the ark from one place to the next. It is my understanding that according to the law, the ark was not supposed to be transported in any way except carried.

But they got some oxen and a cart and he put this ark on a cart. And they were transporting it and it says when they came up on a threshing floor somewhere this thing started to wobble. And Uzzah puts out his hand to stabilize it and God smote him on the spot.

I don't think God wants man-made things to try to stabilize what he has. It'll stand on its own. And in my opinion one of the biggest problems with these kind of rules is that it keeps people from actually excelling.

These kind of rules and standards are meant to keep the world lover from going too far. But you know God created us with a will and it is that will that he wants. And if he doesn't have that he has nothing.

It doesn't matter how well we can conform to it. If it's not our will that he has he doesn't have what he wants. And besides that does the Christian automatically pursue the world? Does he pursue vanity? Does he ever and ever drift? Or does he ever pursue holiness and righteousness and perfection and higher ground? And if a person in search of holiness and greater simplicity is hindered from doing that because he needs to conform to a certain agreed upon standard there is a stumbling block that's been laid in his way.

Let's read a little bit in Philippians 3. I'll start in verse 12. Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet but one thing I do forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us therefore as many as are perfect have this attitude and if we have a different attitude God will reveal that also to you. However, let us keep living by the same standard to which we have attained. Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.

For many walk of whom I have often told you and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ God is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame who set their minds on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a savior the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of his glory by the exertion of the power that he has even to subject all things to himself. We do have a standard.

In fact the King James in verse 16 says let us therefore walk by the same rules. This in fact was a verse a part of a verse that was sometimes used to try to convince me that we need this uniformity this sameness in practice Paul just got done laying this out he says I forget what's behind me and I press forward to that which is before me in the life that I have I'm pressing forward and what gets revealed to me I'll still keep this process and as many as are perfect will walk in this way and then he says this is the standard the same rule in which we all need to walk by else we're enemies of the cross he says Idolatry makes us do foolish things very foolish things just like the children of Israel did a foolish thing turning incense to this brazen serpent so idolizing some glorious movement in the past makes us do foolish things if we think that being descendants of the Anabaptists makes us special we'd be better off without it Peter Huber wrote in his book The Secret of the Strength that time has come to rely on Christ and one on the church structures that we have built trying to promote one while preserving the other at all costs God will not accept such stubborn double-mindedness I want to read one more quote from Hippolytus I don't know if that's the way you say that or not but one of the early church says a serpent cannot mark its tracks upon a rock so the devil cannot find sin in the body of Christ for the Lord says behold the prince of this world comes and will find nothing in me for as a ship sailing in the sea leaves no trace of her way behind her so neither does the church which is situated in the world as in a sea leave her hope upon the earth because she has her life reserved in heaven and as she holds her way here only for a short time it is not possible to trace out her course God is a spirit God moves the church is a movement that moves from age to age from place to place from people to people wherever God finds people sold out and committed to him I want to say one more thing in that earlier quote that I read from Cyprian he said whatsoever is appointed by human madness so that the divine disposition is violated is adulterous is impious is sacrilegious depart far from the contagion of men of this kind and flee from their words avoid them as a cancer and a plague as the Lord warns you and says they are blind leaders of the blind and they will not get to it if we only flee from these things we will very likely end up in straits as bad as we are if there is nothing to flee to and I'm sure he meant this and knew this too and Lord willing sometime in the future I would like to preach a message that maybe links on to this on what it means to flee from these things and into the kingdom and what the difference is between his kingdom and just another church to be a part of the Lord add his blessing

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