

Image Worship

by Ian Paisley

The sermon argues that image worship is a form of idolatry that has been accepted in the Church of Rome, and that it is a departure from the true worship of God.

Scripture: Exodus 20:4, John 4:24, Romans 1:21, Colossians 2:18, 1 John 5:21

Topics: "Idolatry", "Image Worship"

Description

Ian Paisley preaches about the dangers of idolatry, emphasizing that when people cease to worship the God who made them, they will turn to worship idols such as graven images, the sun, the moon, stars, or even the devil. He highlights the consequences of losing the knowledge of God and the punishment that follows. Paisley discusses the significance of the second commandment in cutting down idolatry and how it has found its way into the Christian Church, particularly pointing out the practices of the Church of Rome. He delves into the history of image worship, its introduction, and progression into idolatry, especially within the Church of Rome, citing the Council of Trent's stance on image worship and the veneration of saints.

Transcript

MAN must have religion of some sort; should he cease to worship the God who made him, he will worship the god whom he himself made-an idol graven or molten-or it may be a stock, a stone, a creeping thing, the sun, the moon, the stars, or even the devil!

Men, by degrees, lost the knowledge of God a result which was the punishment of their previous misconduct, since, "when they knew God they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful;" and "because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, He gave them up to a reprobate mind."

This state of things gives a fearful significance to the second commandment, and shows how wisely, and with what decision Moses met the reigning evil of his times through the earth when he thus enacted, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything 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."

This law not only cut down the tree of idolatry, but also extirpated its root among the Jews. This is a point on which there can be no dispute; the only question then, is, was there any loophole left for its introduction

to the Christian dispensation? This question, too, we presume, can only be answered in one way.

The point, therefore, to be determined, is, has idolatry found its way into any portion of the Christian Church, so called? and if so, is it the Church of Rome? The reply of the Protestants, is "Yes, she is guilty!" Such, and so grave is the charge we have to bring against the Popedom.

The priest will of course deny it; and even affect to resent the charge as a calumny, and a slander. No matter. Protestants are quite familiar with this mode of proceeding. It is very convenient for the advocates of a bad cause; they will try to make the use of images among them, a very harmless and even an edifying thing; they will tell you they use images only as one does a portrait, or a bust of a deceased friend-to excite the memory of by-gone days, and to rekindle reverential affection, and that images of the Godhead are highly serviceable in helping the worshipper to stay his mind, and to keep alive the affections.

This is all that can be said for the practice, but might not every word of this have been said by the Jews in the days of Moses? Did not men then require such aids at least, as much as now? But was it not found then, that the sure tendency was to stop short at the image, instead of looking through and beyond it, to the object it was used to represent? Was not this the case universally, and did not Idolatry fill the land and bring captivity and destruction upon the Jews? In this way, was not the Most High shut out from his own universe through all the world, and actually forgotten by his own creatures? Again, is not God a spirit, immortal and invisible, "dwelling in light that no man can approach unto, that no man hath seen, or can see?" How, then, is it possible to make an image, carved or molten, that shall represent the Godhead?

But there is something serious in the history of this image worship, and which must not be overlooked. How came it that the Papists have taken such liberties with the second commandment, if it does not in some way militate against their system? It is an adage that wicked men never oppose the Bible till they find that the Bible opposes them.

We are not without a suspicion that such is the case in the present instance. Else how comes it that in many editions of the Sacred Scriptures, which, from various causes, the Church of Rome has been induced to issue, she has actually expunged the second commandment altogether? And how is it that, as if to conceal the fraud, by still keeping up the number to ten, she has divided the last commandment into two? Does such conduct as this comport with honesty? Is there not something very suspicious about it?

Such conduct is all the more suspicious when it is remembered that so strongly did the Primitive Church feel upon this subject, that many of their most distinguished ministers entertain serious scruples as to the moral character of the arts of painting and sculpture. During the first 300 years the Christian Church stood at the furthest remove from all approach to the use of images for any purpose whatever. There is no subject, -the true history of which is better known, and the unanimous testimony is to this effect.

Images were first introduced as mere ornaments, by some Christians in Spain, early in the fourth century, and were promptly condemned by the Council of Eliberis, as fraught with danger; and the event has showed that the objectors were men of penetration. Images were preceded by the introduction of pictures of saints and martyrs into the churches, so called, which prepared the way for them a fact, which shows the tendency of the human mind, and the necessity of making a stand at the outset.

The evil increased apace; but only still in the way of ornament, and that in the midst of opposition from many of the wise and good. By the sixth century, however, they became universal throughout Christendom; step by step they were allowed to be used as an aid to devotion by the weak and the

superstitious; till at length they began to be worshipped.

By this time, too, the zeal of the Councils began to relax; and, as aids, images were allowed by them, but as objects, denounced. Gregory the Great vehemently condemned them in the latter capacity; and with such effect as to give a powerful check to this incipient idolatry; and for a time, the worship ceased. The Councils gave image worship no encouragement; but in the eighth century it found zealous patrons in the lazy monks and the stupid populace. Thus much for its history; we must now bring the charge home to the Church of Rome at the present hour.

As this is far from a light matter, it must be gravely dealt with, we shall, therefore, at once appeal to the standard of Popish doctrine the Council of Trent. By that Assembly it was determined, "That the images of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the saints, are to be had and retained, especially in churches, and due honour and veneration to be paid to them; because the honour which is exhibited to them, is referred to the prototypes which they represent; so that through the images which we kiss, and before which we cover our heads and lie prostrate, we adore Christ; and pay veneration to the saints whose likenesses the images bear; as is ordained by the Decrees of Councils, particular the second Nicene."

This Nicene Council speaks with still more decision on the subject of the images and saints in the following words: "To those who diligently teach not the whole Christ-loving people to adore and salute the venerable, and holy, and precious images of all the saints; let them be anathema."

Image worship is not less certain throughout the Papal world than Virgin worship; the image of St. Dominic may, perhaps, in the intermediate roll, be entitled to precedence. This famous block has often rejoiced in 100,000 pilgrims paying devotions and making offerings at his shrine during a single anniversary! We might traverse the entire kingdom of Antichrist, and adduce from every part of it proof of a desperate addition to image worship; but it is useless. It is better to assume the fact, and reason upon the folly as is admirably done in the Homily on Idolatry by the Church of England. The following are extracts:

"What meaneth it that Christian men, after the use of the Gentiles' idolaters, cap and kneel before images? which, if they had any sense and gratitude would kneel before men carpenters, masons, plasterers, founders, and goldsmiths, their makers and framers; by whose means they have attained this honour, which else would have been ill. favoured, and rude lumps of clay or plaster, pieces of timber, stone, or metal, without shape or fashion, and so without all estimation and honour; as that idol in the Pagan poet confesseth, saying, 'I was once a vile block, but now I am become a god,' etc. What a fond thing is it for a man, who hath life and reason, to bow himself to a dead and insensible image, the work of his own hands! Is not this, stooping and kneeling before them, adoration of them, which is forbidden so earnestly by God's Word? Let such as so fall down before images and saints, know and confess that they exhibit that honour to dead stocks and stones, which the saints themselves, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, would not to be given them, being alive; which the angel of God forbiddeth to be given to him. What meaneth it that they, after the example of the Gentiles' idolaters, burn incense, offer up gold to images, hang up crutches, chains, and ships, legs, arms, and whole men and women of war, before images, as though by them, or saints as they say, they were delivered from lameness, sickness, captivity, or shipwreck? Is not this colere imagines, to worship images so earnestly forbidden in God's Word?"

Reader! We have done! The facts are before you. Have you duly weighed them? If so, to what conclusion have you come? Is not this matter a most important addition to the fearful indictment, which the Prophets and Apostles of God have to deliver against the Church of Rome? Does not the mutilation of the second

commandment alone suffice to determine the question of Papal guilt? Must there not be an intolerable consciousness that there is something in the system which cannot bear the application of that enactment? Is not the deed that of a forger, destroying the only document that can prove his guilt? How would the subject be viewed by a British judge, and a British jury? Would not the court denounce it as guilt of the deepest dye, and would not the jury, without a moment's hesitation, and with perfect unanimity. Bring in a verdict of guilty, without recommendation to mercy?

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