

Letters to 7 Churches 06 Thyatira-Careless Heart

by James Booker

The careless heart allows idols to creep in and take the place of God in our lives, and we must repent and turn away from them to seek God.

Duration: 43:05

Scripture: Hosea 14:4-5, Hosea 14:7, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 5:27, Revelation 2:20-21

Topics: "Idolatry", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having the Lord as the center of one's life and turning away from idols. The speaker encourages the audience to focus on Jesus and make Him the priority in their lives. The sermon highlights God's willingness to heal and love those who turn back to Him, emphasizing His eternal love. The preacher warns against allowing idols, such as television or material possessions, to take precedence over God, as this can lead to negative consequences in one's life and family.

Transcript

I trust we all can say from the heart tonight that His love is wonderful to me. Shall we turn, please, to Revelation chapter 2. Revelation chapter 2. Once again, thinking of the Church of Thyatira. We looked at the Church of Thyatira this morning, and we want to just finish our theme on this particular church this evening.

I'd like to read verse 20, Revelation chapter 2. Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants, to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. I gave her space to repent of her fornication, and she repented not. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deed.

Our gracious Father, as we again have the privilege of opening thy word and meditating upon it, we are conscious that it is thy Holy Spirit that delights to reveal and unfold the things of God to us. We read in thy word that thou hast revealed them unto us by thy Spirit, for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. We long to be fed, we long to be challenged, we long, our Father, to be conscious of thy presence, of thy power, and speaking to each one of our hearts.

To this end we pray in our Savior's precious name. Amen. We have been considering together various heart conditions as seen in the various churches.

It seems to me as we go along in these studies on the seven churches that each particular church seems to lead from one point to the next, and when we come to these last few churches the challenge becomes even stronger, at least it does become stronger to me. For example, tomorrow we're going to be looking at the church of Sardis, tomorrow morning, and I'd like to suggest to you, just by way of encouraging you to get involved in the reading and studying of this portion, we've been looking at various heart conditions. I want you to look at chapter 3 and verses 1 to 6 between now and tomorrow, and I'd like you to come up with your own judgment as to what heart condition is suggested to you in the church of Sardis.

Don't wait until you come here and find out what I feel about it, just see what the Lord speaks to your heart along that line. For example, we've been noticing the heart condition of the church of Ephesus, the cooling heart, cooling off, the church of Samarna, the crushed heart, under pressure, the church of Pergamos, the compromising heart, the church of Thyatira, the tearless heart. Now we're going to look at the church of Sardis tomorrow and notice what kind of a heart condition there, and we're thinking a little clue beginning with the letter C, so see if you can come up with a word that might just fit the situation.

In connection with this careless heart, we were noticing this morning that it is so easy to become just careless about things, allowing certain things to creep into our lives almost unperceptive, but that carelessness can lead us and very quickly lead us away from the life of fellowship and communion and devotion with our Lord, and we have to be constantly concerned that we do not become careless in the Christian life. Satan is constantly on the watch, seeking to step in the moment he sees a careless step among God's people. I want to think primarily tonight, as I mentioned also this morning, of the challenge that has brought before us for this woman, Jezebel, a woman who, among other things, was bringing in and teaching in this church that it was all right to get involved with the heathen worship.

It was quite all right to get involved with the trade guilds that were operating at that particular time in order to hold on to their employment, in order to maintain a position in the community, and this involved idolatry. And I want to zero in on idolatry tonight as the practical challenge to my own heart. You remember we divided the passage, and I'll just the discerning prince, our Lord, who sees the whole situation and is deeply concerned, for the diligent people who were actively involved in working and serving in love and faith and patience and so on, and then this dangerous prophet or prophetess, Jezebel, and finally from verse 24 to 29, the delightful promises that were given to the overcomers.

But let's think a little bit, shall we, tonight about idolatry and how easy it is to become involved in such a situation. Do you realize tonight that it is possible for every Christian to get involved in idolatry? Do you remember what John said in his epistle as he came to the close of his epistle, and as he just was about to finish, in the very, very last little comment he made, he said, little children, referring to all the saints to whom he was writing, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Now he was challenging believers.

He wasn't writing in the Gospel of John, writing to the lost, seeking to challenge them to come to Christ. He was writing to God's people. He was writing to a group, and he was encouraging them to have fellowship with the Lord, telling them that our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, and thus with one another.

And his whole point, of course, in the epistle of John, was to bring us into the warm, close relationship with our Father. And he closes by saying, now little children, keep yourselves from idols. What a strange close

after talking so much about fellowship with the Lord, because when idols come into the life, fellowship with the Lord goes out.

A certain missionary some years ago wrote to a friend of his in the United States, and in the little package he sent home, and he was describing the condition of things where he was laboring, he enclosed this small idol, and he said, this is one of the idols that they worship over here in the land where I am working. He said, how thankful you need to be in America that they do not worship idols anymore. And the friend, in writing back to him, acknowledged the letter and the idol that was enclosed, and he was very interested in reading his comments.

But he said, I'm afraid that I have to inform you that we do have many idols over here in America. And he said, to prove my point, I'm enclosing one from America to you, and inside was a dollar bill. Well, there are many idols, and of course one of them is materialism.

Notice what it says, please, if you will, over in first, or at least in Colossians chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3. And before reading this particular verse, may we just challenge ourselves with the idea of an idol. What is it? The dictionary says that an idol is a person or a thing that is the object of excessive devotion. A person or a thing that is the object of excessive devotion.

And Vincent, in his word studies, Greek word studies, speaking about an idol, in relation to the scriptures, he says, it's the soul's devotion to any object which usurps the place of God. May I just repeat that? It's the soul's devotion to any object that usurps the place of God. Notice what it says here, please, in Colossians chapter 3, and verse 5. Mortify, or put to death, therefore, in your members which are upon the earth fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil consupposence, and covetousness which is idolatry.

Covetousness which is idolatry. Now the very same thing is said over in Ephesians chapter 5. We won't bother to turn to it, but there again it says covetousness which is idolatry. And what is covetousness? It's desiring to have more.

It's giving out or going out after things of time and sense, of every form and every kind. That's the thought of this word covetousness. Not simply the longing to have more money, that's included, more gain, more materialism, but the longing to have more of whatever it might happen to be.

Do you realize, beloved, that is idolatry? Over in Psalms it says, if riches shall increase, set not thine heart upon it. Set not thine heart upon it. We know, of course, over in Exodus chapter 20 when the Lord is speaking about idolatry there, it's anything that comes up between my soul and God.

Anything that takes the place of the Lord, and instead of the Lord becoming first in my life, I've got something else first there. It becomes an idol. It usurps the place of God.

Galatians chapter 5, please, and verse 19. Now the works of the flesh, verse 19, chapter 5, are manifest, which are these, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry. Idolatry is part of the flesh.

It's the works of the flesh. Now what can be an idol in our lives today? We can't exhaust all these idols, beloved, but may I suggest a few of them? Your business can become an idol. I think of a dear young man who went into business in the Ottawa Valley where we work, and he was deeply concerned when he went into that business that he wasn't going to make a goal of it.

He put all his money into it. He was married, had a child, and another one on the way. And I remember him calling me and asking if I'd go to visit him, and we met in the store, and he said, I'd like you to pray with me that this business might be honoring to the Lord.

And I said, I'd gladly do that. And I remember getting down on the back of the store, and we, on our knees, and we had a time of prayer together about that business, and I recall him praying so earnestly and sincerely, Lord, if you get this business on the road, if you open up this business for me, I'll honor thee, and I'll keep thee before me. Well, the Lord blessed the business, but unfortunately as the business prospered, his interest in the things of the Lord began to wane.

And it wasn't long before the business was his goal. The business took the place of the things of God. He became so busy after a while that, of course, he couldn't get out to the prayer meeting.

Then he got so busy, he was working on late and Saturday night, and he found it difficult to get out but once on Sunday. Then he got so busy, he couldn't get out even once on the Lord's day, and then he got involved in other things and other affairs, and the love of that dear young man is so far away from the Lord today, he set up an idol, his business, his business. And the Lord took second, in fact, I'm afraid the Lord took last place in his life.

Business can become an idol. Our home can become an idol. Interesting, isn't it? The things that we just take for granted, how they can become an idol in our life.

My mind goes to a number of dear folk who were so actively involved in the Lord. I think of one young man so actively involved in the Lord, and then he got interested in wanting to expand his home and enlarge his home and add this and add that and add something else. But you see, this took a lot of time.

And so he had to find where this time was going to come from, and it had to come from the effort in which he was putting into the things of the Lord. So he had to cut this out, and he had to cut that out, and he had to cut something else out, until a point now where today he just has lost his interest in serving the Lord. That home became an idol to him.

It became something he wanted others to rejoice in, so he could say, I built that, and I built this, which was fine in itself until it took first place, and the Lord was crowded out. It became an idol. The family can become an idol.

We can become so wrapped up in our family. I think of another young couple who were so zealous for the Lord, and then the Lord blessed them with a child, another child, and then they decided, well, you know, we have these children, we've got to stay home with them now. And they got so accustomed to staying home with them that since the children have grown up, they're still staying home.

And their family became the center of attention, the center of object, the first thing in their life. And the Lord was relegated to a back seat, and they got an idol built up in their life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

From idols. The careless heart that allows the idols to creep in, into our lives. Sports can become an idol.

I enjoy sports, and godly exercise is profitable, little, but beloved, when that becomes the center, the thing that comes first, and the Lord's things become second. Whatever that sport might be, it's become an idol in my life. Make sure that God is not crowded out, but He has the first place in whatever area, whatever

adventure you're involved in.

Television can become an idol, and how many of God's people have become involved, so that it becomes the idol, and so they cannot miss this particular program, so I'm sorry about the prayer meeting, this program is very important to me, and it becomes the idol, it becomes the first thing in my life. And many a Christian has gone downhill, because it's become the idol in their life. I remember staying at a home, one time, and this young man came in, and I found he had an idol, rather an innocent looking idol, it was a car.

But that car was his idol. That car was his life. He was a fine Christian young man, but he could talk about that car morning, noon, and night.

He just stepped inside the door, and the first time I met him, he started to talk about that car, and he talked about it until he left. And I went, they put me into his room to stay, while I was staying there, and lo and behold, the room was filled with pictures of his car, and a few models of the car, and magazines about cars. His whole life was cars.

When it came to meeting time, he said, my, I'd love to go to the meeting, but I'm going for a ride to try out my car. He had an idol. It was his car.

It was his car. And of course, money can become a car, become an idol, can it not? Self, self-interest, anything that comes in, beloved, and puts the Lord out of place, so that he is not first in my life, becomes an idol. Now let me suggest something to you, and this is a tremendous challenge to my heart.

I want you to turn over to the book of Ezekiel, chapter 14. Ezekiel, chapter 14. Because these idols are not necessarily things that are material.

Because notice what it says here, in chapter 14, verse 3. Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart. Idols in the heart? That's right. Ezekiel, chapter 14, verse 3. And they put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face, should I be inquired of at all by them? Notice verse 4. Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart.

Notice again, please, down in verse 7. For every one of the house of Israel, of the stranger that sojourneth in Israel, which separated himself from me, and setteth up his idol in his heart. Three times over in these verses, they put an idol in their heart, we're told. Now how does that come about? Is it possible that as a believer in Christ, I can set up an idol in my heart? Yes, if I'm careless.

If I have the careless heart. Something can come into my life, and I become so involved in that thing, that the Lord is crowded out. Instead of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, I'm seeking something else.

I've got an idol in my heart. Just keep your place, if you will, in chapter 14, and go over just for a moment to chapter 20 of the book of Ezekiel. And notice the reason why the idol was set up in the heart.

How it came about. Verse 16, Ezekiel chapter 20. Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my sabbaths, for their heart went after their idols.

Their heart went after their idols. Why? Because they did three things. What were the three things? Well, notice them.

They neglected the word of God. That was number one. They despised my judgments, or my truth, my words.

The Lord had revealed to him His words, but they despised them. They set aside the judgment of the Lord. Number two, they walked not in my statutes.

So they neglected the word. They neglected their walk for Christ, or for the Lord, Jehovah. And then, they neglected their worship.

They polluted the sabbath day. You notice the order? The word of God was set aside. Their life began to be affected by this, and they were not walking pleasing to the Lord.

And as they were not walking pleasing to the Lord, they never gave the Lord the honor and the worship that was rightfully His. So they had a heart set on an idol. Another goal had come into their life.

Another object. Another pursuit in life. But it wasn't the pursuit for the Lord.

Go back, please, to Ezekiel chapter 14. Notice what it says in verse 5. That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. He says, as a result of this idol built up in their heart, they got estranged from me, that they got away from me.

Now notice again, please, in verse 6. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God, Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols, and turn away your hearts or your faces from all your abominations. The Lord's challenging these dear people. He says, listen, you've set up idols in your heart.

But he said, Repent. Get rid of those idols. Get your eyes back on me and seek to honor and glorify me again.

And he goes on to describe in this particular passage, down to verse 11, that if they would not, then the Lord's face would be against them and the Lord's hand would be against them, and both are mentioned as you go down. And in verse 8, I will set my face against the man, and in verse 9, I will stretch out my hand upon him. God says, if you turn your face away from me, he said, I'll set my face against you.

If you turn your hand to other things, I'll turn my hand against you. Turn with me, please, if you will, to the book of Hosea. Hosea chapter 4. Now notice what it says, please, in the latter part of this particular chapter, verse 17.

Hosea chapter 4. Ephraim has joined to idols. Let him alone. Ephraim is joined to idols.

Let him alone. Now, go back to verse 6. How come these idols were becoming so prevalent to the people of Israel? Verse 6, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because thou hast rejected knowledge. I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me.

Seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. You know, I'm impressed, beloved, as the more and more as I read the word of God, the more impressed I am with the importance, and this might sound like repetition, but it's repetition that's needed, it seems to me today, how we need to cling to the word of God. The moment we become careless about our reading and studying of the word of God, and just getting into the word and getting some food from the word day by day, one of the things that's going to happen is an idol is going to come in its way, and we're going to become occupied with something else.

The moment I say I haven't got time to read, you know what's happened? You've got time for something else, and other things become an idol in your life. If you're too busy to spend time with the Lord and in His word, you're far too busy as far as the Lord's concerned. No matter how busy we get, we always take time to eat.

Or you say, well, I sometimes even miss a meal, I get so busy, but you don't miss a meal for a whole week, and it's evident you don't miss a meal for a whole day. Or you say, well, you have to eat, you know. That's possibly true, but at the same time, you have to feed upon the word of God.

It's equally, if not more important. Then notice again, we're told here in verse 10, for they shall eat and not have enough. Isn't that interesting? They shall commit warden and shall not increase, because they have left off to take heed to the Lord.

He says they'll eat, but they'll not have enough. They'll not be satisfied. Not be satisfied.

Beloved, when a child of God gets out of fellowship with the Lord and sets up idols in their heart and has new objectives in their life, they're never really satisfied. I hear this dear young man that I spoke about a few moments ago, who had his business before him and that's become his idol. And I spoke to him just a matter of two or three months ago or less.

And that dear young man is very unsatisfied. He has gained materially. He has his own private plane.

He flies all over the place. And he has many other things. But he has a sorry home.

His children are giving him problems. He's having domestic problems. He's having business problems.

He's having health problems. And the Lord is really dealing with him, but he's fighting. He's feeding on these things, but he's not satisfied, because he's out of touch with the Lord.

Notice again in verse 13, and this is rather a sad commentary to me, it says they sacrifice, speaking of these people who are given over to idols, they sacrifice upon the tops of the mountains and burn incense upon the hills. They take the highest places, the best places, and they sacrifice their efforts upon it. Isn't it a sad thing when we become so involved with other things other than the things of the Lord and we have an idol before us? We put all our energy, we put our best into it.

And we give the Lord the leftovers. And you know what happens as a result? The things that we see happening today is what is told us here, because we're told in this passage, under oaks, populars and elms, because the shadow thereof is good. Now notice this, therefore your daughters shall commit wardom, and your spouses shall commit adultery.

Why so, the Lord? Because you have put all your effort into these idols, and you're devoted to other things than my things. He says, now you're seeing your family going the same way. Now you find your family in such straits.

And how many of God's people, how many of God's people have gone through this experience? They become so bogged down in other things, and they have neglected the Lord in their life, only to see how it's affected their family. Idols set up in the heart. For sake of time, notice verse, or chapter 8, please, of Hosea, chapter 8, verse 4. They have set up kings, but not by me.

They have made princes, and I knew it not. Of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off. That they may be cut off.

And again, for time, shall we just look over to the last chapter, the last chapter, please, of Hosea. And this thrills me. I want to close with this point, because it's so, it's so delightful, and it's so much like our Lord, and it's such a tremendous, I don't want to leave on a low note, I want to leave on a high note for each one of us tonight.

Notice it says in verse 1, O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. You see, all the way through Hosea, he's been talking about the idols. They've joined themselves to the idols.

They're living for their idols. They've got into all sorts of difficulties because of them. But the Lord hasn't given them up.

And the prophet is speaking to them and says, O Israel, it's the Lord calling, and he says, O Israel, return unto the Lord, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Will God take me back after I've dishonored him? So of course he will. Take with you words and turn to the Lord, and say unto him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously, so we render the calves of our lips.

Call upon the Lord. Confess that need in your heart to him. If you sense there's an idol there, beloved, and it's got such a grip on your heart, you say, oh, I'd like to get rid of it, but it's got such a grip on me.

Well, confess it to the Lord. So Lord, you know this idol in my life, and it's just robbing me of my spiritual strength. Lord, just come in and just deal with this thing in my life.

And then also confess this. Asher shall not save us. We will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any more to the work of our hands.

Ye are our gods, for in thee the Fatherless findeth mercy. Lord, we're not going to turn in the other direction. We're going to turn to you now, and we're going to lean upon you, and we're going to make you first in our lives.

Now, notice what the Lord says in verse 4. What a wonderful verse. I will heal their backslidings. I will heal.

Four or three times he speaks about I will. I will heal their backslidings. I will love them freely, and I will be as the dew unto Israel.

Why, the Lord just delights when we turn to him. He says, I'll heal their backslidings, and I'll love them freely. His love is an eternal love.

And he said, I'll be as the dew unto Israel. And then notice these wonderful things that are going to happen. He said, if you'll return after serving these idols and being so barren in your life, if you turn and give your whole heart to me, and commit your life to me, and present your bodies a living sacrifice unto me, if you know what I'll do for you, he said, I'll water you like a garden.

I'll water you like a garden. He said, I will be as the dew. The power of the Holy Spirit of God will fill your life.

Because the dew here, I believe, is rather symbolic of the Holy Spirit. And as the Holy Spirit begins to take a hold of your life, you know what's going to happen? After being watered by the Holy Spirit, you're going

to grow like a lily. He shall grow as a lily.

Behold the lilies of the field, how they grow. They don't try to grow. It's of God, with its fragrance, with a smell for the glory of God.

The beauty of the lily. And the Lord says, if you as a child of God commit your life to me, instead of having a careless heart, have a careful heart. He said, I'll just water you and you'll just grow like a lily.

Not only will you grow as a lily, He says, you'll bring forth roots as Lebanon. You'll be rooted, firm like a tree. He said, I'll give you strength.

Not only give you beauty, I'll give you strength. He said, your branches shall spread. You'll not only grow down, you'll spread out.

Not only will you spread out, He said, His beauty shall be as the olive tree and His smell as Lebanon. He said, as a result, He said, you'll begin to bring forth the fragrance. How I remember when we had the privilege of going to Lebanon a few years back and to go down through the valley of Lebanon.

How the beautiful fragrance, even yet today in that luscious valley, the fragrance of Lebanon, the fragrance smell. And the Lord wants from our life that fragrance, which is by the work of the Holy Spirit of God and producing the fruit of love and joy and peace and long suffering and gentleness and meekness and so on. That fragrance that delights the heart of our God and becomes a blessing in our own life.

They shall dwell under His shadow and shall return. They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine. The center of shall be the wine of Lebanon.

Now notice this, and I close with this verse. Verse 8, Ephraim shall say, what have I to do anymore with idols? How come I was taken up with these idols when there's such a joy and blessing in having the Lord as the center of my life? I have heard Him and observed Him. I am like a green fir tree.

For me is thy fruit found. Why, he said, I've seen the Lord in His beauty. I've heard Him.

I've seen Him. No more idols for me. No more idols for me.

May that be true of us tonight, beloved. Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace. Our gracious Father, we thank Thee tonight that our Lord Jesus Christ indeed is the altogether lovely one. We thank Thee too that it's Thy desire and delight to receive Thy people and to bless Thy people.

And even in our cold and backslidden state, Thou hast still called to us in crying, Return unto me, and I will love you freely. May we know, each one of us, the dew of heaven upon our lives. And may we bring forth the fruit of fragrance to thyself.

And Lord, if there be any idols in our hearts, we might set them aside by Thy grace and power, that Christ may rule in our hearts. For we pray in His name. Amen.

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