

Holding on to Idols

by Ralph Sexton

Ralph Sexton's sermon warns against the dangers of idols in our lives and calls for a return to genuine faith and revival in the church.

Duration: 40:27

Scripture: 1 John 5:19

Topics: "Idolatry", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of keeping ourselves from being influenced by the world and its idols. He highlights how we can easily become desensitized to the truth of God's word due to the constant exposure to worldly things. The preacher also emphasizes the need to truly know God and recognize His presence in our lives. He urges Christians to let go of any idols or distractions that have taken hold of their hearts and to return to a fervent relationship with God.

Transcript

As we look at 1 John chapter 5 and verse number 19, 20 and 21, and we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. Now, ladies and gentlemen, that's not a self-edifying verse of Scripture. We're not putting our thumbs in our clothes and saying we're holier than the rest of the people in town.

But what God is saying, there is a body of believers, there is a body of Christians that love God, and if you're not in the fellowship of believers, that the world actually lies in wickedness. Verse number 20, and we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

Now, our text verse is verse number 20, little children, keep yourselves from idols, amen. Dr. John Phillips says that that word, amen, is in the Greek, and that's all I've got to say about that. I like that phrase, because what he's saying is, little children, keep yourselves from idols.

It is a basic tenet for anyone that has been to Calvary and knows Jesus. Now, some Bible truths are very difficult to accept. We read the Holy Scriptures, but many times the truths are blocked from our understanding, and they are blocked from our understanding because the things of this world have so infiltrated our mind and our thinking process.

You think about how little exposure we actually have to the word of God. You think how much radio we hear, how much television, how much of the things of the world through magazines and through programming and videos, and how much we're literally saturated with the world. And so many times, sometimes we'll come across a scripture or a truth in the word of God, and we'll only experience a casual glance with that truth, because there's so much world in us, we just bounce right off the truth.

We never grasp it. We never see the opportunity, because we've been around things of God so long, we take them for granted. Do you know you can learn church talk? You can learn church behavior? You can learn church fellowship and die and go to hell off a church pew? And that's the danger.

That's what is killing our churches all across America, is that we have religious form, but we don't have power. And the way to know that God is back in the church house is when the power is back on the church. Now, society that we're in is very comfortable with sin.

Our society is very comfortable with that. Our polls that we're seeing on the president's behavior is a living proof that our society is comfortable with sin. Sin in high places? Oh, it's okay, it's all right.

You say, well, Brother Sexton, you shouldn't mix politics and religion. I'm not. I'm just going to tell you what God says about conduct and morals and values.

It has nothing to do with parties or process. It has to do with what's right and what is wrong. Now, if we understand tonight that we're comfortable, what do we become fascinated with? Everyone says, well, in this opinion poll, we say, I'm not happy with what the president has done or his conduct.

But on the other hand, I'm very comfortable with his job performance and the economy and the stock market. So let's not rock the boat. Let's leave that alone.

So we, we come out with an attitude of yes, it's wrong, but who cares? It's wrong, but does it really matter? It didn't hurt me. So I become very, very comfortable. Now, do you know what that is? That is a sick society.

Number one, number two, it's a place for God to out his judgment. And number three, it testifies to the fact of how tolerant of sin that we have become. And here's the danger, ladies and gentlemen, when the world goes that wide and that far, then all of a sudden over at the house of God, we lose our standards and we lose our convictions.

And all of a sudden we can't define right and wrong. And we're swept up into the things of this world. I'm telling you, our nation is in trouble.

I'm telling you that we've become tolerant of sin and we no longer have a defining force in the community as the people of God. Now, if I understand the position and the place of a church, we are to be salt. We are to be a preservative.

We are to be one that keeps anything. And the purpose of salt when it comes to processing meat is to keep that meat from going bad. It's to keep it from souring or decaying or rotting.

It's to preserve it. That's where we get a salt cured ham and country ham. It comes from that process.

And if you've ever been around where they were in the process of packing the meat after the hog had been butchered, the old timers would always take the fresh hams and they would go and pack around that

bone. And then they would pack again the second time because they didn't want it to go bad. They wouldn't want the meat to ruin.

And the salt had the job of preserving. But now let me tell you something. If the community is in trouble, if the schools are in trouble, if the nation is in trouble, the problem is not with the world.

The problem is not in the adult nightclubs tonight. The problem is not because there's liquor being sold in a store down the street. The problem is not because some guy has got a crack house here in Kingsport and he's selling crack cocaine.

The problem, ladies and gentlemen, is that those people are already in sin and they are doing the bidding of their father, the devil. They belong to him. The problem is the light is going out in the church.

The problem is the salt is losing its savor. And so if we have any hope of reclaiming our communities, if we have any hope of reclaiming our cities, if we have any hope of having a Christian nation going into the next millennium, then churches are going to have to get under a burden for revival. And a church doesn't get under a burden for revival by saying, Pastor, we want you to have an evangelist come and preach, and we'll have someone come and sing, and we'll have a special singer and a special speaker, and we'll call that revival.

Revival is not in a special singer. Revival is not in a special speaker. Revival is in an individual doing business with a holy God.

It's with men and women getting desperate before God and saying, I don't want to remain the same. I've got things in my life that are displeasing to God, and I want God to turn the searchlight of heaven on in my soul and to reveal to me my own wickedness and my own unrighteousness. The only hope we can have is an old-fashioned heaven-sent awakening where men once again fear God.

And there is no fear of God on the land. There's no fear of God in our churches anymore. We've turned the house of God into political sessions.

We choose upsides and politic against each other. We get saved, and we slide down on the back of our neck and say, well, I'm saved. I've been saved.

I've been around here long enough I can just relax and let somebody else do my praying, let somebody else carry my burden, someone else do my visiting. After all, I've paid my dues. Well, I've got news for you.

You don't pay your dues in this business and walk away from the battle. This man's 80 years old, and he's more in the battle today than he's ever been in his life, bent double with the burden for America and for this country. Why? Because if we lose what we have now, there's no getting it back.

What is the problem then? Verse 21 defines the problem. It says, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Now, before you can keep yourselves from idols, there are nine things given here that you have to know.

If you're making notes, you can write these nine things down. Now, what do we know in verse number 19? And we know. What do we know? Number one, we know that we are of God.

Bless God. I know who I belong to. I know who died for me.

I know I'm not worthy of it, but I know God. And I know when God's around, I know very little about preaching. I know even less about pastoring, but I do know when God's around and I know when God's happy and I know when God's not happy.

There are some things you can know and we can know God. Number two, listen, we know that the whole world lies in wickedness. We know that.

Number three, we know that the, that the son of God has come. I love going to the holy land. And one of the reasons I love going to the holy land is because it thrills me to prove and to document, even from the secular archeological sites, that there was not only a historical Jesus, but there is Jesus, the son of God, and that he came and he invaded this world.

And the prophecies of the old Testament are fulfilled in the new Testament and have given my Bible that the position that I know it is the inerrant, infallible word of God. Number four, we know that the son of God has given us understanding. God didn't put you in this world for you to stay stupid.

He means for you to learn something. If you go to church, you learn something. Every time you go through the door, the old writers used to tell me, said, Ralph, if you ever have a day, you don't learn something.

You start dying. There ought to be a growth process. Every believer here, you ought to be hungry to know God and to know God's word.

You say why brother Ralph, because this world is getting ready to come unglued. Society is getting ready to come apart. Men's hearts are going to be failing them for fear.

Do you understand we're living at the crossroads of Bible prophecy? You can play church. If you want to, you can think I'll get right with God tomorrow and get serious tomorrow. But ladies and gentlemen, you may not have a tomorrow.

God's got us with the opportunity. That's why I am so burdened and so concerned about the opportunity that God's given to higher ground. I don't know of another church that's going to have on their hands.

What you're going to have on your hands when you meet a holy God, a church that's been so blessed with so many opportunities, how have we responded to the hand of a holy God? We know the son of God has given us understanding. The fifth thing we know is that we may know him. The sixth thing that we know here is that we are in him.

God. The seventh thing we see in this verse is that we are even in his son, Christ Jesus. The eighth thing we see is that we know this is the true God.

And the ninth thing that's in verse number 19 is that this is eternal life. Nine things. We know you want to live forever.

Then you got to be in the Lord. You can't be in the church to live forever. Church membership cannot help you.

Water baptism cannot help you. Holy communion, Eucharist, candles, confessions, catechisms, those things are not salvation and they cannot help you. The only way you can have eternal life is to be in God.

I'm so convinced that the Lord's coming that I'm believe there's not an accident in this building tonight. I believe God has people in this building to hear the warning from God's word. So the number one that you don't leave here, not knowing you're saved tonight.

I believe God's got you here that you can know that you know, that you know, that your name's been recorded in the Lamb's book of life. Number two, God's got people here tonight, Christians that have gotten cold and careless. You've gotten out of sorts that God would get you to where you would turn loose of the idols of this world and get back in business with a God.

Number three, that God would shake the church from lethargy and raise up men and women of faith once again to pray and to fast that God would revive us again and shake us from our death rattles and give us another opportunity to do business with a holy God. Now, if you'll notice, it says in verse 21, little children, keep yourselves from idols. Do you understand the power of that? Keeping yourselves from idols, little children.

He didn't say world, keep yourself from idols. He didn't say lost people, keep yourself from idols. He said little children.

He's talking to the family of faith and he's saying, keep yourself from idols. Why? Because it's easy for us after we've been saved to go back and pick up the idols of this world. Todd, Dr. David Gibbs gave a powerful story about while he was preaching over in Asia that he went into a conference there to meet with some missionaries and training seminars for them.

And they had a rally that night at the soccer stadium, thousands of people gathered into that stadium for the service. And you know what happened? He said, as people were coming into the service that night in the soccer stadium said that two thirds of those people came in the soccer stadium like this. They came in carrying their little gods, their idols with them because number one, they were foreigners.

Number two, they were afraid and they brought their gods with them, afraid of any evil spirits that might be there to harm them. So they brought their God with them to protect them. Dr. Gibbs said to his host, he said, I can't believe that they're coming to a preaching service and they're carrying their heathen God with them.

He said, there's hundreds of them, thousands of them. And they're coming into the stadium carrying their little gods with them. You know what that missionary said to him? He said, Dr. Gibbs said, don't you worry about that.

He said, that's not a problem. You can see those gods. He said, the problem you got is when you go back to America, you got to walk into churches every Sunday where they're walking in and you can't see the gods they're carrying.

And that's where we are. You see, ladies and gentlemen, it's so basic. It's so elementary in this passage of scripture.

He's saying little children, he's saying, pay attention. He's saying, please don't hold on to the idols of this world. Now, you know what idols are? You know what idols are? Idols are the things that the devil uses to bleach the power of God out of your life.

An idol can get a hold of me. An idol can get a hold of you. And an idol bleaches the power of God out of your life.

It keeps you from being what God wants you to be. That's why he said, keep yourself. That is a phrase in the Greek of active, aggressive, contending for the faith to keep yourself from the idols of this world, that you would keep yourself.

Idols, what do they do? They steal your joy. Idols cause you to lose your testimony. Idols rob you of your spiritual vitality.

Idols literally have the power to shred your testimony. Little children, keep yourselves. The warning that's given there is that we would keep ourselves.

Now watch this, this very day in this auditorium, we can start the journey to real revival by God convicting us of idols that we're holding on to. Every man, every woman, every boy, every girl, every teenager, every preacher, every deacon, every missionary, every evangelist, every layman, every choir member, every Sunday school teacher, every officer of the church. God says, if you want to have revival, then keep yourselves from idols.

Are you holding on to an idol and you don't even realize it? You see, you can start the day of spiritual healing and heading for revival. I'm going to ask you tonight by the help of God and by the grace of God, for you to have the courage to go to the altar of a holy God and to lay your little idol down and say, God, by your help, I surrender my idol to your holy hands. You cannot serve Jesus with an idol in your hand.

You said brother Ralph, what is an idol? How would you define that? An idol is anything that takes God's place. An idol is anything that changes God's order. An idol is anything that replaces God's power.

If you substitute something for the power of God, then that is an idol. If something takes the order of God away, then that is an idol. If something takes the place of God, then that is an idol.

Ladies and gentlemen, idols are incredibly deceptive. Idols do not play fair. That's why God warned us Bible believers, keep yourselves from idols.

Paul Harvey tells the powerful story about the cunning method that the Eskimos have for trapping wolves. The wolf is a very smart animal. The wolf is an intelligent animal, is also powerful and it is also dangerous.

More than one careless person has died at the hands of a wolf. More than one animal has been snared by the wolf pack. Eskimos know how to bring them down.

Eskimos have a plan to get wolves. You listen to me closely right here, would you please? Unless you're sick, no walking around and leaving the building. Don't let the devil distract the very night God wants to deal with the heart.

Now watch this. You know what the devil does? Here's what the Eskimos do. They take a razor sharp knife, a skinning knife, and they take that razor sharp knife and they dip it in seals blood.

They take a basin of seals blood and they dip that cold metal knife blade in that blood. They take it out and lay that knife outside the igloo and it freezes. They bring it back inside and they dip it in that seals blood.

They take it outside and they freeze it and they repeat that process over and over until they have covered that blade with several coatings of blood to actually make a blood popsicle out of that knife blade. Then they take that razor sharp knife and they go out where the wolves are and they put that knife down in the snow and bury the handle and they leave that blood popsicle sticking up out of the snow. A wolf can smell blood for 10 miles.

Those wolves begin to smell and track and they're always moving and sure enough they get the scent of that fresh blood and then the pack begins to track and to trail and to follow the molecules that are leading them to that that blood covered encrusted knife. When they finally find it they run up to it and they test it and they take a lick and then another one biting and nipping at each other they take a lick and then the next thing they know they're fighting each other to lick on that seals blood. That's what they're after is that blood and in a matter of minutes their warm tongues melt and consume that blood and now they're fighting each other for the opportunity to lick on the blood knife and all of a sudden the ice covered blood is gone and then the next lick is that their wolf's tongue is on that razor sharp knife and it split his tongue.

But he's in such an enraged and engorged attitude of seeking blood he doesn't even realize it's cut his tongue and the taste of blood in his mouth now is his own blood and then another wolf pushes him out of the way and he licks and the same process and now they're tasting fresh blood and in a matter of one hour that whole pack will have bled to death and every wolf will die from one blood covered knife. Ladies and gentlemen I submit to you tonight when we take on idols the devil is deceptive he masks the very thing that'll kill us and he comes into a local church and he tries to get you to turn on each other and to bite at each other and to think each other's the enemy and this one and we end up hurting this one and we push this one aside and we go over to this one and the next thing we know we're turning in a feeding frenzy and instead of realizing the devil is the enemy we turn on each other and we lick the blood knife.

You see if the devil can't get a church to crumble from the outside he'll move inside and it causes us to turn to the idols of this world the devil is a pro he's a professional he knows what I like and he knows what my taste enjoy and he knows what your taste enjoy he knows what to put on the knife to get me do you understand that teenagers the devil knows how to destroy your life he knows how to ruin your life he knows how to cause your life to be destroyed single adults do you understand he knows what to put on the knife to get you to lick mom and dad grandparents there's something at every age level he knows what to coat the knife with to get you to lick I want to give you three or four idols just to think about number one idol I think that gets us in trouble is the idol of

performance the idol of performance we go to church we sing in the choir we teach Sunday school we work here God if I do more will that make you happy the idol of performance if we're not careful we're licking on the knife of performance instead of worshiping God we're wanting people to pat us on the back for our performance you're if you get caught up in that idol if you get caught up in that the next thing you know your life becomes an act rather than worshiping God and we end up we don't do it for the Lord we do it for ourselves you said brother Ralph what do you mean he says if you love me keep my commandments it's that simple whether I get patted on the back whether I get recognized or not whether I'm in the limelight or not if I love the Lord I'm going to keep his commandments

bottom line whether the rest of the crowd understands whether my friends understand or not I'm going to keep the commandments of God you'll be surprised what's slipping in to churches all across America how do you think people are excusing the lifestyle that we're allowing to come into the house of God how do you think we're allowing those kind of things to happen it's because we've gotten caught up with this idol of

performance I want to ask you a soul-defining question when was the last time you spent precious moments with Jesus just because you love him and that's the only reason not because somebody was with you not because you were in a group bible study not because you were in a prayer meeting not because somebody was standing next to you but just because you are in love with Jesus

and you spent precious moments with him because he's your best friend some of us behave and perform at church because of the approval of our circle of friends and if you were removed with that circle of friendship then you would not have the walk of faith your performance is for their approval rather than for God's approval second idol is the idol of reputation he said little children keep yourself from idols and you know what we can do even at the house of God we get influenced by what we think people think of us what's their opinion of me not one person in this auditorium can be a disciple or be ready to walk with Jesus until you walk over and you lay down the idol of reputation are you willing to be misunderstood are you willing to have people say well I don't know you see sometimes I

have members at my church they'll say brother Ralph I'm having a real battle at work I don't mind if they know that I'm a Christian but I don't want them to think that I'm foolish I don't want to think I'm a holy joe I've gone off the deep end or something what they're saying is pastor I'm still worried about my reputation I'm still worried about what people think of me they're holding on to the reputation idol that's why a lot of pastors get in trouble instead of pastoring their church and what God has called them to do and to be obedient to the leadership of the Holy Spirit they pastor their church how they think other preachers want them to pastor their church and they're holding on to the idol of reputation by the way the easiest idol of all to pick up after we go to an altar and pray

God I want to get rid of my idols is the easiest one to pick up is to go back and get that idol of reputation because it goes back to the ultimate sin which is pride which gets us in more trouble anytime and anything in our lives the third idol for your consideration is the idol of criticism criticism is what we do so artfully well ladies and gentlemen there would never ever be gossip in church if there was not the idol of criticism you can't how are you going to gossip if everybody's laid down the the idol of criticism if you were to tell them something it would die in their ear the only way it can be gossip is to go in the ear and then they'd be repeated and passed on that's why God said he hated that so in discord among the brethren the idol of criticism and and we do it so well we're

trained as baptists from the from the nursery department on how to do this and we pass it on from one generation to another you say well brother ralph they asked me what do I know I mean they really were searching for spiritual truth and so God left you assistant number one in charge right and you're going to pass judgment on everybody else I know it's quiet tonight I know you wish I'd got hung up on the mountain but I didn't I'm here I talk about revival's chief is getting down here to where the rubber meets the road's expensive huh ladies and gentlemen that idol can get a hold of all of us someone asked you what you know you say I know everything a good about everybody that's what I know everything good about everybody I know that you say brother Ralph I'm saved well if you're saved let

me tell you something here's what helped me God saved me and I did not deserve to be saved I should have gone to hell I am in no position to be critical of any other person in the body of Christ so I'm so happy I'm saved and I've got a full-time job trying to keep me right and to keep me in a right relationship with God than to try to run somebody else's life and tell them how to do it if you don't think the devil will offer you the blood knife you just hang around church and he'll give you an opportunity to lick he'll give you an opportunity to see things happen ladies and gentlemen I really believe that if we're going to develop any

skills at the house of God we ought to develop the skill that we'd be able to love each other and encourage each other the Bible says you know you've passed

from death unto life because you love the brethren I'd like to be known for being an encourager you say well you don't know how she gets on my nerves you don't know what a aggravation he is well won't you just leave that up to God God's the one that made them and God's the one that saved them so won't you let God straighten them out why should you run over there and grab a hold of that blood knife and lick your brains out God I'm going to help you get them right but you see if we grab the idols of this world that's exactly what we do that's why real revival is so expensive is because not one of us can say I don't need revival Booker T Washington in his diary he tells about the flat shirt experience Booker T was very smart he was out front intelligent obviously very intelligent a genius

the shirts of that day were made from leftovers and the flax leftovers were filled with bristles and when they made a black shirt if you had no undergarment you put those black shirts on they would actually dig into the flesh and make raw places very painful until that flax would be worn off Booker T Washington wrote that one of the greatest days in his life is he had a younger brother John and John was not as gifted and was not as intelligent and the boss man came by and he said I've got new flax shirts and handed Booker T one told him to put it on and everybody knew the pain that was going to cause and the sores that would erupt on that body and they said as Booker T reached to put that shirt on the boss man walked away his brother John said Booker I'm not as smart as you are I'm not

out front like you are but I can wear that flax shirt for you let me wear it till the hurt's gone what if you came over here to church and said let me carry your burden till the hurt's gone let me help you pray to your son saved let me help you pray to your daughters off drugs instead of saying if they'd have done this if they'd have done that if I'd have been them well you're not in their shoes won't you quit licking on the blood knife and say let me help you carry a burden why don't we start weeping for our homes and weeping for our schools and weeping for our church and weeping for our families and share this load of burden and prevail on this old planet earth turn loose of the idols of this world become a love specialist before a holy god the fourth idol I want to give you is the idol

of accomplishments the idol of accomplishments don't we love for people to think we've arrived I am somebody well the truth of the matter is we haven't arrived and the only way you can ever be anybody is to be in him because without him we're all lost and undone it's easy to say what we've done and what we've accomplished and we want to take credit and I'm going to tell you something ladies and gentlemen there's no way we can take credit for anything so while we're getting proud and puffed up about what we've done we're going to give our babies to the devil we're going to give the community to the new agers and to the witchcraft worshipers we're going to give the thing over to the gods of this world and the lust of the flesh well you might but I'm not I've decided I'm going to serve God

with everything that's within me and take it for another generation that we can have revival in the midst of all this wickedness that we'll stand and having done all the saying that we will make the sacrifices and whatever it takes we'll do business with a holy god as for me and my house we will serve the lord you say brother Ralph how are we going to do that only way we can do it turn loose of our idols we got to get rid of the idols I was just mentioning for there's hundreds there's hundreds what are you holding on tonight money fame ego pride well they they hurt me they did me wrong and I'm not going to forgive them they'll have to come to me will you hold on to that while this thing rots around your ears I'd rather forgive them and let God sort it out at the judgment seat and have my

power back and have my tears back and have the anointing back on my life and have God walking around with me you're not going to be understood if you're sold out for revival you're not going in a popularity contest I'd rather go with Jesus and I'd rather God turn the searchlight on my soul and say God you reveal anything in me that's not like you and send revival to my being

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