

THE IDOLATRY TRAP

By

Curtis Dickinson

What is the biggest obstacle Christians face today?

There are many antichrists, in places of authority and power, who despise Christ and His disciples. The media gives preference to other religious groups and the movie industry glorifies all that is contrary to Christian standards. Public schools feed the children a steady diet of evolution, multiculturalism and humanism, while treating the studies as though they had no integral part in the Dine scheme of things.

Many see the federal government as the chief enemy and fear it will persecute Christians opposed to the New World Order. In fact, some advocates of the global order have suggested that religious dissidents simply be eliminated. Attacks by federal agencies are a matter of record, the most notable being those against the Weaver family in Idaho and the Davidians at Waco.

In spite of such open hostility, the greatest obstacle Christians face today is not that which is directed against us by enemies outside the camp. Faith cannot be taken from us against our wills. The real obstacle is something that comes from within: *covetousness*.

Covetousness is defined as “a strong or inordinate desire.” While there can be such desire for that which is good, the scripture repeatedly warns against coveting that which is not part of our service or relationship to God. “Put to death...covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). Paul writes that “no covetous man...has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God” (Eph. 5:5). He lists covetousness with “things which are not fitting” such as envy, murder, strife, and deceit of those whom God has given up “to a reprobate mind” (Rom. 1:28, 29).

Jesus warned about the “deceitfulness of riches” which choke out the word (Matt. 13:22). In my lifetime I have seen the United States become wealthier than all the rest of the world combined, but today it is the world’s largest debtor nation. Our goals have been set on success measured in dollars, and the goals we have reached include the highest crime rate in history, untold numbers of unwed mothers, 30 million abortions, the highest prison population in the world, and crime so rampant that citizens are prisoners in their own homes.

The world is fast crumbling and going to pieces. It is breaking up socially, economically, politically, and especially morally. The process gains momentum each year, and we now can see it accelerating at an alarming rate. Many are desperate to secure themselves from collapse, searching for something permanent in which to invest, that all will not be lost when the system collapses. This is a form of covetousness, a craving for security in a world that stands judged and condemned, a security that is sought outside the realm of God’s kingdom and purpose.

In this search for security it is easy to get sidetracked from faith in God and His calling. His purpose is not to establish us safely and prosperously in this world which is passing away (I John 2:17), but to prepare us for the world to come by transforming us and developing our faith and love, so that we are seen as lights in the world of sin and darkness (Phil. 2:13–15).

Manufacturers use every possible means to create a desire for their products, appealing to all the instincts and sinful tendencies of man: pride, vanity, sensual lust, gluttony, and fantasies of power, wealth and fame. Christians are subjected to these marketing methods just as others are. It is easy for us to fall into their trap without any conscious resistance. The result is that the believer's goals seem to be about the same as the unbeliever's.

Churches and their pastors often fall into the same trap of covetousness by worldly accommodation. Success is measured by numbers in attendance and by the wealth reflected in their buildings. Campaigns, usually directed by professional fund raisers, are organized to lead the people to strong united desire for bigger and more luxurious facilities. Gone are the campaigns, led by evangelists, to lead the people to repentance and more Christ-like lives.

In the words of LeRoy Garret we have a "system that is more concerned for getting a crowd and meeting the budget than in reaching out to the poor and oppressed of the world. We spend most of our great wealth on ourselves and in building our own denominations." (Restoration Review, Oct. 1998.)

We have encouraged covetousness by marketing the church on a worldly basis. We have sought to lure the world to Christ with recreation, and with programs that raise self-esteem and make people "feel good." By the skillful manipulation of emotions people can be made to feel good, when they ought to be feeling shame and remorse for their sins. In his book, *Ashamed of The Gospel*, John MacArthur says that we have a society filled with people who "want comfort, happiness, and success. When churches appeal to these selfish desires, they only fuel fires that hinder true godliness" (Pg. 85).

People search for the "right" church, one that will meet their self-determined needs. This is like saying, "I want a church that will condone by covetousness, so I can have what I want.

Churches that try to fill such needs may fit the description of the one in Laodicea: "You are the wretched one and miserable and poor and blind and naked: I counsel you to buy of me gold refined by fire, that thou may become rich; and white garments, that you may cloth yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness be not made manifest; and enslave to anoint your eyes that you may see" (Rev. 3:17-18).

Tenets of the Christian faith are used by some as political tools to establish circumstances that would guarantee security, comfort, and a trouble-free life. But Jesus did not die for the purpose of creating Utopian conditions for a temporal society of sinners. He called people to repentance, and to a life that demanded a break with the world's values, saying of His disciples, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:16). He reprimanded His audience for wanting entertainment (signs). He warned them that the majority were on the wrong road and that the way to life would be acceptable to only a few, who would have to walk the narrow way (Matt. 7:13). Jesus taught us to think of everything in relationship to doing the Father's will, that it might be done on earth, just as His will is done in heaven. It is the Father who provides all good things. He knows us, even to the number of hairs on our heads. He clothes the fields with beautiful flowers, and will provide for His trusting children as it pleases Him (Matt. 6:30). Whatever does not fit into the Father's good pleasure is not for us, and we, if we love Him, do not desire it.

“The things that are seen are temporal” (II Cor. 4:17). They may be used for good or evil, but even if good, they must not be allowed to hold our affections, for they are only temporary. If we lose them, we have not lost anything of eternal worth. Things that are temporal can distract us and cause us to neglect the far more important eternal things.

John wrote that “if any man loves the world, the love of the father is not in him” (I John 2:15). By “world” is meant the system that operates apart and in opposition to the Kingdom of God, a system which operates through deception, greed, oppression, sheer cruelty, and lust. One cannot love the world and still “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt. 6:33).

History will end with the collapse of the entire system of human government and material wealth. It is all destined to be destroyed in the “day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” (II Pet. 3:7–13). Peter then exclaims: “Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy living and godliness” (V. 11).

It was the collapse of the Roman Empire and the vicious persecution of Christians in the first century which enhanced their witness and set forth the power of God in bold relief against the politics of men. We see the opposite in our own day, when Christian leaders join the system with the idea that they can save it and through it give all Christians prosperity and security. As the late Malcolm Muggeridge once said, “Just suppose that the apostolic church had put its hope in the Roman Empire.”

If Christians today are to be salt and light to a dying society, we must renounce the desire for this world’s temporal security, wealth, and power, and demonstrate what it is to have our hope in Jesus as King of the Kingdom which is not of this world.

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