

Idolatry Part 2
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Turn to Acts 7

1 John 5:21 states “Little children, keep yourselves from idols”. First of all this teaching series is for the benefit of the individual. Not only is the individual believer to keep from idols, but the administrator and the visionary is to avoid leading people into idolatry.

1 Corinthians 12:2 and Isaiah 44:20 make it abundantly clear that people are deceived, seduced and led into idolatry. We avoid idols by not being deceived by corrupt, counterfeit leaders. We are to walk by the spirit!

Another purpose of this series is to have a better understanding of the subject when ministering to people. Isaiah 44:20 indicates that the idolater is feeding upon ashes, they are in a weakened condition, they need spiritual nourishment and strengthening. The person involved in idolatry is looking to the senses realm, to the works of their hands for deliverance that can never come. They cannot discern or understand that they hold an abomination in their right hand. Their eyes are shut and their understanding is darkened.

Sometimes when you are ministering you will be shown the idol or the idolatry that is at work in the persons life; you will then have a good understanding of the spiritual devastation that is at work. (see Ez. 14 for an example)

Paul was sent to the gentiles who were raised in the practice of idolatry. His calling is recorded in Acts 26; I will read from verse 18:

“18 to open their eyes (*remember, their understanding is darkened*), so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”

It requires the power of God functioning in a believer to bring deliverance from the bondage of idolatry to the Jews and the Gentiles. May God work mightily in each one of us so that such deliverance is imparted in our day and time.

Idolatry Part 2

Remember that the Bible is an oriental book, originally spoken and written to people who lived in what we call the “middle east” today. Many of the ideas and concepts expressed in these scriptures are foreign to those of us who were raised in the western culture. As we make the effort to understand the common day ideas and concepts of those of the Hebrew nation the wonderful details of the scriptures can become clearer and more meaningful.

In Acts 7 there is a brief narrative of Moses as declared by the wonderful man of God Stephen, who was speaking to the leadership of Israel in his trial.

Acts 7:30

30 “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. **31** When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord: **32** ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. **33** Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **34** I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

35 “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Verse 30 clearly states that it was an angel who appeared to Moses. Yet verses 31 through 34 indicate that it is the Lord who is speaking to Moses. Verse 35 summarizes by saying that God sent Moses by the hand of the angel. Stephen was not confused; he did not miss-speak. Stephen and his audience understood a concept some have called “divine agency”. The angel was sent by God as God’s agent to do a particular task. In Hebrew thought and understanding, a persons agent is regarded as the person himself. As an agent, it was not out of character for the angel to say “...I am the God of your fathers...”. The Hebrew audience understood what was being communicated; they would have no problem with this expression of the angel.

Turn to John 10. In the western culture and legal system, the “power of attorney” is a concept with which we are familiar. Yet this concept is a poor approximation of the Hebrew concept of “divine agency”.

Idolatry Part 2

John 10:22

22 At that time the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, **23** and Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. **24** So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” **25** Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, **26** but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. **27** My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. **28** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. **29** My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. **30** I and the Father are one.” (*again, this is the concept of divine agency, a persons agent is considered to be the person himself*)

31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. **32** Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” **33** The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.” (*all the prophets and the angels serve as agents of God; the same could be said of them. However none of the prophets claimed to be the son of God. This claim held special significance. If Jesus was the son of God then he is God's agent and heir.*) **34** Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? **35** If he called them gods to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be broken— **36** do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’? (*Is this what Jesus said in verse 30? It is the meaning of verse 30 according to the Hebrew understanding of the concept of divine agency*) **37** If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me; **38** but if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.” **39** Again they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands.

Turn to John 14, where Jesus describes himself as the son of God, the agent of God.

John 14:6

6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **7** If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

8 Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the

Idolatry Part 2

Father'?

John 14:10

10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. **11** Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

The agent does not do his own will, nor does he deviate from the will of the one who sent him.

John 14:12

12 “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. (*the believer becomes the agent of Christ*) **13** Whatever you ask in my name (*as his agent*), this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14** If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Turn to Matthew 16

I repeat, the agent does not do his own will. He is moving and functioning to do the will of the one who sent him or her. Whatever the agent asks in that name is according to the will of the one who sent the agent.

Matthew 16:13

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” **14** And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” **15** He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” **16** Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” **17** And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 16:21

21 From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. **22** And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” **23** But he turned and said

Idolatry Part 2

to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

One moment Jesus is praising Peter, indicating that the heavenly Father revealed to Peter by revelation exactly who Jesus is. The next moment, Jesus is calling Peter “Satan”. How is that possible? By the concept of agency. In verse 21, Jesus is sharing with his disciples prophecies concerning himself. However Peter actually rebuked Christ, the Son of the living God, and uttered a false prophecy of his own - “...this shall never happen to you...”!

Regardless of Peter's motive, in this instance, he was acting as an agent for Satan. Jesus reproved him as such. Notice that there was no devil spirit influence, no spiritual pollution to clean up. The reproof was sufficient for Peter to recover himself.

Turn to Acts 7

Now that we have been introduced to the Hebrew concept of agency, we can continue on with the record of Moses in Acts.

Acts 7:22

22 And Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds. **23** “When he was forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brothers, the children of Israel. **24** And seeing one of them being wronged, he defended the oppressed man and avenged him by striking down the Egyptian. **25** He supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand, but they did not understand.

Moses knew that he had been sent by God as His agent to give the Hebrews salvation by his hand. However they did not understand this and thrust him away.

Acts 7:26

26 And on the following day he appeared to them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, ‘Men, you are brothers. Why do you wrong each other?’ **27** But the man who was wronging his neighbor thrust him aside, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?’ **28** Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ **29** At this retort Moses fled and became an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons.

Idolatry Part 2

30 “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush. **31** When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he drew near to look, there came the voice of the Lord:

Acts 7:32

32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob.’ And Moses trembled and did not dare to look. **33** Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. **34** I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send you to Egypt.’

35 “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

Moses was sent by God to function both as a ruler and a redeemer. He was God's divine agent!

Acts 7:36

36 This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. **37** This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers.’ (*this is a prophecy of the coming messiah, the Christ*) **38** This is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. He received living oracles to give to us.

As God's agent, Moses prophesied of the coming messiah. The law was to bring them to Christ, the messiah. The righteousness of the Hebrews and their access to the promise of Abraham depended upon their believing God as Abraham did. This included the anticipation of the promised messiah. (See Romans 4).

Acts 7:39 – 41

The leaders of the children of Israel ordered Aaron, the high priest to make idols (plural) for themselves. The leaders and the people were rejoicing in and worshiping the works of their hands. They suppressed the truth. They explicitly exchanged the truth of God for the lie, worshiping and servicing the creation rather than the creator. Who is truth? The messiah, the Christ! Idolatry involves the suppression and the rejection of the messiah, the Christ. There is no salvation, there is no savior in idolatry! What is the exchange? In this case the people would get to return to bondage in Egypt, they would get to do their own will, worshiping and rejoicing in the works of their own hands.

Idolatry Part 2

Acts 7:42 – 50

Even though Solomon built a house for God, God did not dwell there; the believers had no right to rejoice in or worship the works of their hands. Recognize that it is God who made the creation, the physical, the senses world.

Acts 7:51 – 53

They persecuted and killed God's agents that He sent to them. Then they killed his only son, the Righteous One. Now that we know about the concept of divine agency, what does this say about their actions? The leaders of Israel, generation after generation, desired to kill God Himself! They rejected the messiah, looking instead to the works of their hands and the creation for their salvation.

Turn to 1 Kings

Remember, whenever there is a turning to idolatry, there is a price given for the exchange, there is a supposed benefit to the exchange. Recall king Jeroboam in the previous teaching:

1 Kings 12:26 – 28

What was the exchange? He imagined that the idolatry would guarantee his power as king, and deliver him from being murdered by the people.

The people believed the lie, that these idols were their saviors. The price of the exchange? They could stay close to home, they would not have to journey all the way to Jerusalem four times a year. They would not have to pay the tithe any more. They could worship how they wanted, right there at home.

Turn to Daniel 3

The exchange is not always a pleasant or fair price for exchanging the truth of God for the lie. We see this in Daniel 3:13 – 18.

Sometimes idolatry is forced upon people by the leaders in the physical realm. In this case, the peoples worship of idols and service of the creation would save their physical lives. This was the price paid to force them to exchange the truth of God for the lie. It is almost always easier and more convenient to get into idolatry and to stay there. There is always a good excuse and a good reason for it.

Turn to Hebrews 2

The religious mindset would conclude that all these people were either evil, or they had done something wrong to deserve what was happening to them. However, the spiritual mindset would see the spiritual attack, the spiritual causes behind the idolatry. In each of

Idolatry Part 2

these examples, fear was used to pressure people into idolatry.

Hebrews 2:14

14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **15** and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 1

It is Christ our savior who is able to deliver us from the fear of death and from the worship and slavery to the physical realm. He delivers us from the scourge and forced labor of religion that can save no one.

1 Corinthians 1:20

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **23** but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

It is Christ the power of God and the spiritual wisdom of God that enables us to minister and enables people to break free from the forced labor of religion and idolatry. Look beyond the senses for the cause of the ensnarement, and move with believing on the answers that the heavenly Father gives to your new spiritual self.