



NEW LIFE

BIBLE-PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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SPIRITUAL IDOLATRY

The apostle John closes his first epistle with the following tender and solemn admonition—**"Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"** Those to whom he thus addressed himself had been converted from Paganism, and needed to be cautioned against relapsing into their former idolatry, and against every practice which would in the smallest degree seem to countenance it. There is no need that I should warn you against this sin in its literal import. You have never bowed the knee to a graven or molten image, and never will—but is there no such thing as SPIRITUAL idolatry? The first commandment of the decalogue says—**"You shall have no other gods before me."** The meaning of this precept, which is the foundation of all religion, is not merely that we shall not acknowledge any other God besides Jehovah—but also that we shall *treat him as God!* That is, we must **love** him with all our hearts, **serve** him with all our lives, and **depend** upon him for our supreme felicity. It is obvious that all this, as well as prayer and praise, is the worship which God requires.

The bended knee, whether this be done to God or an idol, is of no value—but as the expression of the state of the mind and heart at the time. The affections are a much more sincere and expressive homage than bodily attitudes and outward forms of devotion. Hence it is obvious that—whatever we love most, and are most anxious to retain and please—whatever it be we depend most upon for happiness and help—whatever has most of our hearts—that is, in effect, is our God!—whether it be Jehovah or Jupiter, or whether it be friends, possessions, or our own desires, or our own selves! Is it not, therefore, to be feared that the hearts of many professors are going too much after other objects of worship than God, and need the admonition, *"Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"* Of these objects of spiritual idolatry there are many classes.

1. There are *the idols of the HEART!*

SELF is the great idol which is the rival of God, and which divides with him the worship of the human race. This is "the idol that disgusted the Lord and made him furious"—even in the temple of the Lord! It is surprising and affecting to think how much SELF enters into almost all we do. Besides the grosser form of self-righteousness, which leads many unconverted people actually to depend upon their own doings for acceptance with God; how much of self-seeking, self-valuing, self-admiration, self-dependence—there is in many converted ones! How covertly do some seek their own praise in what they professedly do for God, and their fellow-creatures! How eager are they for the admiration and applause of their fellow-creatures! How much of self, yet how little suspected by themselves, is seen by One who knows them better than they know themselves, at the bottom of their most splendid services, donations, and most costly sacrifices! What admiration do some...

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cherish of their pious experience, their painful conflicts, their deep sorrows, their lively joys, their full assurance! With what feelings complimentary to themselves do they secretly meditate on these exercises, or relate them to their friends! How much do some dote on their blameless conduct, their spotless character, and the estimation in which they are held by the church and the world—they make an idol of their reputation!

I knew a venerable man who attained to the age of seventy, in blameless conduct. He was esteemed for his sanctity by all who knew him, and then fell into odious immorality. On being asked if he could trace his fall to any ascertainable cause, he replied, "I was proud of my reputation, and Satan taking advantage of this state of mind, tempted me, and I was taken in the snare of my own pride!" In how many ways does self steal away the heart from God. How subtle are its workings, how concealed its movements, yet how extensive is its influence. How SELF perverts our motives, lowers our aims, corrupts our affections, and taints our best actions. How much incense is burned—and how many sacrifices are offered on the altar of this idol!

2. Next to these, come *the idols of the HOUSE!*

Our relatives, next to God, demand and deserve our regard. Husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, are not only impelled by instinct, but commanded by God, to love one another. It is the law of nature and of revelation. These dear objects of our affection, and all the tender charities and kind offices which arise out of the ties that bind us to them—are the sources of the purest and most lawful enjoyments upon earth. The poet has beautifully said—"Domestic happiness is the only true bliss that has survived the fall."

But then the love we bear our friends must be **subordinate** to that we cherish for God. *He* must have the **throne** of the heart—and all others must rise no higher than the **footstool**. If we depend upon these dear relations for happiness, more than upon God's favor; if in calculating our possessions, and adding up the sum total of our enjoyments, we naturally place them first; if in felicitating ourselves upon what we have, we turn to these before God; if we dread most the loss of these; if we feel that nothing could make us happy if these were removed; if we go daily and hourly to these alone for gratification; if they are enjoyed solely by themselves, and for themselves, apart from God; if instead of leading our hearts to God, they hold our hearts from God; if we are more solicitous to avoid what would endanger their continuance, than the continuance of God's favor; if the temporary interruption of their enjoyment affects us more than the loss of the enjoyment of God and holy privileges; if upon their removal we feel forlorn and desolate, as if we had lost our all, or imagine that such would be our state in the event of such a calamity—then is it but too plain, that these are our idols, and that we are worshiping them!

How evident is it to all but themselves, and at times suspected even by them, that many husbands and wives are to each other as God. Their reciprocal smiles are more to them than the light of God's countenance; and their reciprocal love more to them than the loving-kindness of their heavenly Father. And how many parents need the simple exhortation of the old writer, "Beware of the little idols in white frocks." I would not have parental affection diminished. Who would abate the vigilance, and tenderness, and ceaseless labors of maternal love? Who could interfere to arrest the care which is necessary to guard, and feed, and train those little helpless beings, who are so dependent on a mother's eye, and arm, and heart? But then I would remind that mother, that she has a God to love, and serve, and please, as well as a child—a God that is in himself, and ought to be to her,...

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infinitely more than that lovely son. And if all her thoughts, and feelings, and purposes, and aims, flow in one undivided current to that child, is he not her idol? God will not be, ought not to be, forgotten and neglected, even for a husband or a wife, a parent or a child. Nor has he rendered it impossible to love him supremely, and at the same time our earthly relatives adequately. The two are not incompatible with each other. Multitudes of husbands and wives have loved each other tenderly—and yet have loved God supremely. Multitudes of parents have loved their children judiciously, fondly, laboriously—and yet have loved God supremely. Accept, then, the word of exhortation; beware of allowing your hearts to be too much engrossed by these dear objects of your best earthly affection.

In some cases it is not so much any *one object* of home, but *the whole* that steals the heart from God—a comfortable home, made up of relatives, a commodious house, plenty, health; in short, a quiet and agreeable domicile. The pleasures of the domestic circle are some of the sweetest known on earth; and he who has a happy home, has to resist one of the most powerful rivals and competitors with God for his heart. To return from the scene of his daily toil—to a quiet home greeted by the smiles of a devoted wife and affectionate children, with plenty on his table, and ease in his mind, oh! what danger is he in, of feeling that he has little need of God's favor or heaven's glories to make him happy; of saying, or at least feeling, "This is my temple, my God, my heaven!"

In some cases, a splendid house and gardens, elegant furniture, and all the appendages of wealth—are the idols in which the heart delights, and the affections luxuriate. How vain is the owner of his beautiful domain—what a pride he takes in it. As he walks about his paradise, his spirit is elated within him; to keep it in order and beauty is the study of his mind, and the happiness of his life. Amidst all his prosperity, God is too little thought of, and less enjoyed. His possessions lead him not, as they should do—to the Giver, but detain his soul from her divine center and rest. It is a paradise, but it is also an earthly one, in which he rather communes with the visible world, than the invisible God! It is a scene where he looks not at unseen and eternal things—but at things seen and temporal.

Such are the idols of the house.

3. There are also *idols of the SHOP*. Some religious people are blessed with a prosperous and thriving trade, or lucrative profession; they have, perhaps, acquired a name, an established reputation, an extensive credit; their profits are considerable; their property increases; their respectability rises; their neighbors look on, some with envy, others with surprise. How dangerous to the soul is this state of things. Such a business often becomes a too successful competitor with God for the heart. These prosperous tradesmen are apt to embark their whole soul in their business; it is their happiness; their dependence; their one chief solicitude. They admire their success; value themselves on account of it; watch it with a most acute sensibility; tremble if anything looks like a symptom of change; see with distressing jealousy the incipient prosperity of others in the same line; felicitate themselves on the greatness of their returns; exalt themselves upon the solidity of their credit, and the esteem in which they are held by the world; go to the scene of their success with conscious pride; in short, their soul is bound up in their trade—it is their idol. They in effect say to it, "You are my God—save me." But where is their religion all this while? Did they ever possess any? If so, it is lamentably low, lukewarm, and feeble. "I assure you: It will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven! Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Let such men know, they cannot serve God and mammon. The Spirit...

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of God, like the glory of the Lord departing from the temple of Jerusalem, will retire from such a heart, for it has become the seat of an idol, which has his altar, and his service, and his worshiper there.

4. There are *idols of the WORLD*—idols which the children of this world worship, and in whose worship the children of light sometimes unite. What crowds are continually assembled in the 'temple of *fashion*'—that bright but graceful deity of taste and elegance. What costly sacrifices of modesty, sobriety, time, money, usefulness, are offered on this altar! The study, the solicitude, the happiness, of many are considerably made up of matters of fashion. A recognized defect of taste would more distress them, than a breach of truth or justice! A perceived lack of elegance be a far more serious matter, than a lack of piety or mercy! And to be behind some of their mirthful neighbors in some new mode of dress, furniture, or style of living—is far worse than to be lacking in honor, generosity or gratitude! Fashion is, in short, the God of their idolatry; before which, however frequently they go to church or chapel, or with whatever fervor they repeat their prayers, their hearts bow down, and pay their homage!

And is there no undue devotion paid to this idol by professors of religion? Is there not a turning aside, at any rate, from God, to visit the shrine of this delusive goddess? How concerned are some good people about gentility, elegance, and fashion. See them in their dress, in their furniture, in their entertainments, in their late hours. Hear them in their conversation about what is new, tasty, splendid. Behold them even in their religion, choosing fashionable beliefs, churches, preachers, and regulating even their worship to God, by taste! And could you search their hearts as God does, and observe the solicitude, the contrivance, the plans and purposes—which are cherished in their bosom—to shine, to excel, to be admired, to be thought elegant and of good taste, to be admitted to be the first of their circle for what is fashionable—you would recognize, at once, the idol at whose altar they often bow with the multitude!

How much more concerned are they about these matters than about spirituality of mind, mortification of sin, the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit, and fitness for heaven. The simplicity that is in Christ is gone from such minds. God is, *perhaps*, their God; but they linger so much, and so often, and so long, about the temple of fashion, that it is a doubtful matter whether their hearts are true to him or not. They are so anxious to get as near as possible to the people of the world in their general habits, as to leave it a question whether they do not belong more to them than to the people of God! Or, if they cannot give up the Lord, it is evident they want to serve him in the priestly dress, and with the rights of an idol.

Literature and **science** are among the idols of the world; and far more dignified are they than the one I have just mentioned; and yet they may be, and they are, with many, the supreme good, and thus are the gods of the mind and the heart. How many almost worship 'knowledge', and the means of obtaining it; not indeed the knowledge of the true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent; but the knowledge of nature. Nature is their deity, and this globe the temple in which they adore her. Even some good men who have a thirst for information, a love for books, a taste for science, carry this too far, and are in danger of being more enamored by what is intellectual, than by what is moral; and of deriving their happiness too much from the seen and temporal things—amidst which they are led by the senses; than from unseen and eternal things—which can be apprehended by faith alone.

5. There are *the idols of the SANCTUARY*. Even in God's house, as in the temple of old, there are other objects set up for worship beside himself—and above himself. There,...

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where God should be supreme and alone—are to be found altars raised, and offerings presented to his rivals! What subtle homage is paid to human names, and human theological systems; and how much do we hear from some about the Fathers, and from others about Luther and Calvin, Wesley and Whitefield. What a cry is raised by multitudes in this day about *the church*. We hear more from some about 'the church', which is but the body, than about Christ, who is the Divine Head. The church is with them Christ *visible*; and the visible Christ seems to be more thought of, and spoken of, than the *invisible* Christ. The influence and authority of the latter is by these people delegated to, if not supplanted by, the former. The church is the great object of their faith and confidence, and hides from their view, or goes far towards hiding, the Redeemer of the world himself. *The sacraments* are more talked of than the gospel, more relied upon, more inculcated, more exalted—than justification by faith. *A human priesthood*, though in their view designed to reflect, eclipses the luster of—that which is divine. Human standards of opinion and faith are raised to all but an equality with the only perfect, infallible, and authoritative one. In short, on arriving at the house of God, instead of finding God alone presented to their attention in the simplicity of his own truth and worship; instead of making him the Alpha and Omega, before which the mind and heart are to lie prostrate, they bow before various other objects, all pretending to lead to him, but which in fact interpose between him and the soul, to turn away the attention of the worshiper from Jehovah Jesus, and share the throne with him!

Others again convert the *preacher* into an idol. Ardently attached to some favorite minister, they can relish the truth only as dispensed by him; and all others are neglected, if not despised. No prayers excite their devotion but his; no sermons instruct, please, or edify but his. When *he is not* in the pulpit, they will listen to no other. Their religion and their religious comfort depend all on him. The clearest elucidation of truth, the grandest views of the Divine character, the fullest exhibitions of Christ, the most consoling manifestations of heavenly glory, are nothing except from his lips; in this case the preacher is converted into an idol, and it is he that is worshiped, and not God.

Alas, alas, in how many ways does the heart of man go astray from God! And out of what materials does it construct its idols! It aggravated the sinfulness of the idolatry of the ancients, that they paid their worship to such low objects, and changed the glory of God into creeping things. And how does it increase *our* folly and guilt that we do the same.

My dear friends, let me admonish you to worship God alone. Give your heart, your whole heart to him. Is it not your sin, and ought it not to be your shame and your sorrow—that you bestow so much of your affection upon other objects, and so little upon him—that you treat him so little as such a God deserves, and claims to be treated? Recollect he is God, God in Christ; God reconciled, your Father, your portion; all glorious and all gracious. Think how you ought to love him, with what entire, ardent, constant, devoted affection. It would seem, when we consider his glory, as if it would be the easiest thing in the world to love and serve him, and the hardest thing in the world to love any other objects; as if it would be impossible so to get out of the sight, and beyond the attraction of his glory, as to have time, inclination, or ability to take an interest in anything else than in his favor, which is life, and his loving-kindness which is better than life; as if with the hope of his favor through Christ as our portion, we should really no more desire any other object or source of delight, than the condemned criminal does besides the royal pardon, or the starving man the supply of food. Amazing baseness, that with an infinite God to love, we should be so taken up with the finite, and many of them the really minute objects of this world; and that with his love to us as our river of pleasure, we should be so dependent for bliss upon the 'drops of...

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earthly enjoyment', which ooze and trickle out from created good!

How offensive this must be to God, who knows, and who alone knows, the ineffable glories of his own nature! How ungrateful must it appear to him when he has opened this fountain of living waters for us, to see us turn away from it, to hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water! How insulting to him to see a relative, a trade, a house, a minister—exalted into a rival claimant for the heart, and receiving that affection, confidence, and devotedness which are due to him alone! Remember he is a jealous God—and as among men jealousy is inflamed to the highest pitch by seeing an unworthy and insignificant object preferred, so God will, and must, resent our preference, to him, of such objects as this world at best can present.

Our sin in this matter is our punishment. "They forsake their own mercy," said the prophet, "who observe lying vanities." This is as true of spiritual idolatry as it is of that which is literal. "Those who forsake the Lord shall be ashamed." To turn from God to the creature; to place our dependence upon, and seek our happiness in, the creature instead of the former, is only to prepare for ourselves the bitterness of disappointment, vexation, and self-reproach! It is to turn from the sun to the dim candle, whose light soon expires in smoke and offensive odor! It is to turn from the full and flowing fountain to the clouds without rain, and the wells without water. The experience of others, as well as our own, demonstrates that, generally speaking, our severest trials, our most painful inflictions, come from those objects which we have loved and served at God's expense. It is just and wise in God, as a salutary warning to us in future, and as a caution to others—that our idols should become our scourges!

Creature love, when excessive and indulgent, to the neglect of God, must draw away the strength of a renewed heart, and impoverish the soul of her spiritual wealth and prosperity. To many it is perfectly evident that their religion, under the weakening and withering influence of this undue regard to some worldly object, has sunk to a mere form; they have a name to live, but are dead; and if they reflect at all, it is in some such strain as the poet's—

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void,
The world can never fill.

Through the deceitfulness of the heart, we are very apt to be imposed upon by the pure and lawful objects which, in some cases, are thus idolized. Lawful I mean in themselves, and sinful only in the excessive degree in which they are regarded. As professors of true religion, you do not and cannot love and worship *sin*. The children of this world may do this, and exalt their vices into gods. But many of your idols are virtues—or objects in themselves quite innocent. You may, and ought to love your relatives; you may and ought to value your business, home, ministers, and ordinances of religion; and these things become sinful, only when loved **more** than God. Here lies the difficulty—to keep them in due subordination to God. Yet the deceitfulness of the heart takes advantage of this difficulty, to blind us to the distinction between lawful and unlawful love, and to hurry us over the line of demarcation.

Let me, my dear friends, earnestly admonish you to give this subject a deep and due consideration. Examine your hearts. Does not the charge of spiritual idolatry appertain to...

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you? Is there not some object, or class of objects, that have come between God and your souls? Have you no idols? Has your heart departed from the Lord? Search the mind, the house, the shop, the sanctuary, the world—and see *where* it has gone, and what you have exalted into a competitor with God. Be faithful to yourself. Is there not something for which God has a controversy with you? Ask yourself what it is you trust in, look to, depend upon, for happiness. Do you indeed look through and above all—to God? Is God your center, rest, and dwelling place? Is Christ more to you than everything else? Is it *he* that is precious? Is *he* the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely one? Is *he* the sun that makes the day of your prosperity, the moon that enlivens the night of your adversity? Is *he* your riches, your friend, your home, your pearl of great price? Say, dear brethren, is God really God to you—loved and treated as God should be?

Ask yourselves if while you are praying for the downfall of idols in heathen countries—are there are none to be pulled down in your own hearts and houses? If while you are seeking the conversion of the worshipers of the Hindu deities, *you* have not need to be converted from the worship of self and mammon? Be humbled, deeply humbled—for this your sin!

How low many live, as Christians. Seek for more grace to give your heart, your whole heart to God. He demands it, will take no denial, and allow of no excuse for the refusal. In his sight, it is of little consequence by what object this demand is set aside; there is not so much variety in the shades of criminality as many are led to suppose—the object may be more decent, and more lawful in itself, but the affection with which it is loved is still an illicit one.

In conclusion, I say to you, adopt the language of the poet in another part of the hymn already quoted—

The dearest idol I have known,
Whatever that idol be,
Help me to tear it from your throne,
And worship only thee!

So shall my walk be close with God.
Calm and serene my frame,
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb!

*By John Angell James
(adapted from <http://www.gracegems.org>)*

Note: John Angell James (1785 - 1859), was an English Nonconformist clergyman and writer.

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 20/07/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 27/07/2008</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome John Misa & family, Sammy Odai Annan, Ruby Goya, and Juliana Liang to our morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Pr Mark Chen	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Pressing Toward the Mark	Are You Earthly Minded or Heavenly Minded?	
<i>Text:</i>	Philippians 3:12-16	Philippians 3:18-21	
<i>Organist:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	To the Nation, A Message of Righteousness	God is not Mocked	
<i>Text:</i>	Proverbs 14:34	Proverbs 24:30-34	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Joy	Hubert	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	<i>Today: 20/07/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 27/07/2008</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YAF meeting with SGAT: Please note that the SGAT monthly meeting will be held on Friday, 25 Jul 08, at 7 pm. For 2008, the theme is on "Prophecy". The title of the message is "The Certainty of Prophecy". • Pray for Journey Mercy: Jonathan (Jul/Aug, US), Josh and Hannah (Jul/Aug, UK & Europe), Mark & family (next week, France), Sophia & Grace (Jul-Sep, Singapore), Rachel (Singapore & China), Evelyn (Jul/Aug, Ghana), Chin Kiong (Aug, Singapore), Mok & Carol (Aug/Sep, Israel & Singapore). • Pray for those who are sick: Douglas (knee pain), Maria (ankle and joint pain), Mr Morton (infection), Constance (shoulder pain), Josh's grandma (stroke), Hazel (wrist injury), Ming Yann (broken rib). • Those serving on the Lord's Day for both morning and evening worship services: Please gather behind the pulpit area at 10.30am for prayer. • Family Worship: For those who would like to open up their homes for family worship, please contact Pr Mok.
<i>Ushers</i>	Daniel / Sharon	Josiah / John	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Carol	Esmeralda	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Constance	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	Catechism Class	Catechism Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 25 Jul	7.00pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Combined SGAT Meeting	
Sat 26 Jul	4.00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £568.50		Lunch: £31.60	
Love Gift: £100.00			
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<p><i>Last Week (July 08 Wk 2): Psalm 139:11</i></p> <p>If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.</p> <p><i>This Week (July 08 Wk 3): Psalm 139:12</i></p> <p>Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light [are] both alike [to thee].</p>			