

Sept. 15, 2002

“A Fresh Look At An Old Commandment”

Romans 1: 21-25

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I prayed and thought concerning what to say today. My mind went to the first of the Ten Commandments: “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” If the prohibition against idolatry was God’s first rule for civilization, then we ought to pay serious attention to it. I think those of us who come from the Judaeo-Christian tradition generally gloss over this commandment because we tend not to worship trees, animals, or statues, (maybe computers?). However, idolatry has far greater implications for us than ever before, because it has everything to do with how we view ourselves.

An idol is that which has limits. Whatever we limit to maintain the illusion of control has the danger to become that which we worship. It is the false belief that something limited will bring unlimited happiness. We often hear in sermons that money, career, possessions, dreams, goals, and even other people can become a source of idolatry. This is true. However, there is something even more fundamental about idolatry that concerns us.

God says that we are His children and we belong to Him. He is limitless and eternal, and so is our spirit that unites us to Him. When we limit God in any way, we limit what He can do in and through us. The Bible tells us that God IS: love, truth, light, life, spirit. Whenever we connect to any of these limitless truths of God, we cease to limit God and ourselves. If we settle for anything less, we fall victim to the loss that comes through the illusion of idols. As the Apostle Paul says in Romans: “*They exchanged the truth of God for a lie (illusion).*”

When we expend the majority of our energy on what is negative, false, temporary, material, destructive, sick, or sinful, we break Commandment No. 1. All of these things are limited illusions that can only bring sadness and hurt to others and ourselves. I think if we take a fresh look at idolatry, the rest of this year may look a lot brighter. That takes faith the size of a mustard seed.