

THE GRAVEN IMAGE, THE IDOL, AND THE CROSS

The Bible tells us many times about worshiping idols and not making graven images. How does that apply to us today? We all understand that an idol can be anything that distracts us from the God that we give a lot of our time to. Let's explore things that I think Christ would want us to stay away from in our world. *Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry* (1 Co 10:14).

Does this scripture just mean stay away from the idea of idols or actual idols? Is an idol only something that somebody worships? If someone makes a graven image and no one worships it, is it an idol still, or just a graven image? Is an idol only something that someone worships, or could it be something we give our time and attention to and perhaps even value more than we should?

I want to look at a few things that we should think about more. Have we ever seen a real idol? Maybe if we have traveled overseas in other cultures, we would see more idol worship prevalent. Most idols are kept in churches or temples of other faiths, and we do not see them, but we know they are there. Some might believe it would be wrong to enter a temple and even gaze upon the graven image. We know from scripture we should never make an idol.

There was one time when God told Moses to make a serpent of brass. *And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live* (Num 21:8)

But the people started to worship the serpent and burned incense to it. Many times, Kings came and destroyed idols, but the serpent always remained. It wasn't until King Hezekiah reigned that he broke down the images and finally brake in pieces the brazen serpent Moses had made. We can take something that God wants us to use for good and worship it in a wrong way.

Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the

axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not (Jer 10:2-4). This is why we don't put Christmas trees in our homes.

If we see the value in not having graven images or having any likeness in our homes to give any attention to anything that might be supporting something other than God, then can we consider other man-made graven images. We know that the Tower of Babel was destroyed because of their prideful ambition, yet we admire and visit large towers and buildings that are man-made. Is this wrong or only our flesh desiring to see greatness in man-made creation? We value monuments and bridges, and most countries have a monument or tower that is a tourist attraction and symbol for their country. There is the Eiffel Tower, the Big Ben, the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Colosseum, the Tokyo Tower, the Great Wall of China, and the Great Sphinx.

America alone has the Golden Gate Bridge, Empire State Building, Washington Monument, and probably the most famous, the Statue of Liberty. Is it wrong to visit these places and admire them? Is admiration worship? It can come very close. If the structure has a useful purpose like a bridge, it has value and can be beautiful to see. So many people will flock to these places to visit. The statue of liberty alone has 3.5 million visitors a year. 3.5 million! Do we even know anything about this statue that represents freedom in America? The Statue of Liberty is a figure of Libertas, a robed Roman liberty goddess. She holds a torch above her head with her right hand, and in her left-hand carries tabula ansata inscribed in Roman numerals with "JULY IV MDCCLXXVI" (July 4, 1776), the date of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Libertas is the Roman goddess and personification of liberty. Should God's people desire to visit a Roman Goddess graven image that stands for the symbol of America? This is an American idol that we should not be supporting or admiring. Even in Paul's day, some men made and worshiped idols.

"For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that

not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused: and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter" (Acts 19:24-35).

We know that there are many idols in temples and churches of other false faiths. How about graven images in Christian churches. We know that some churches that claim to be Christian make graven images of Christ, the saints, and even Mary. They hold these images very highly and even worship them, thinking they have power. Some have claimed that statues of Mary or Christ have bled and produced miracles. The churches themselves are man-made idols that so many people admire and value and believe they are closer to God when they are in them.

For many Christians and all throughout history, the Christian symbol for Christianity has been the cross. If you wore a cross around your neck, you identified as a Christian believer and follower of Christ. The Vikings saw this, and many knew that they could benefit from trading with the Christians by swapping out their Thor Hammer with a Christian cross since the Christian would never trade or do business with the pagans. There are many Christians that see power in the cross. They will hold it while they pray, will fill their houses with the cross, and in many churches, will have a huge cross with a crucified Jesus hanging on it. A lot of emphases is on the cross and

its power. *For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent (1 Co 1:17-19).*

Some will say the scriptures say the cross has power, but the power came from God: *Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you (2 Co 13:3-4).*

We worship Christ, Who died on the cross. We do not worship the cross. We worship the One who died and rose again with His own power. The cross has no power to save us; only the man who died on the cross can save us. There is a reason God and Christ are in capital letters, and the cross is still lowercase. We do not need a man-made cross to symbolize our faith or identity with Christ. We need to live a life that is separate from the world to stand out and look like Christ. Satan has tricked many people into worshiping the cross and not the Crucified Lord. Even the image of Christ graven in wood can become more of an idol for a believer than following Christ in faith in what we cannot see. Other religions worship images of their gods. So many graven images of false gods exist. Christ does not desire for us to have a graven image of Him to worship. We worship in Him without knowing His image, by faith. The Bible says no one has even seen God to know what He looks like. God does not want us to make an image of Himself for us to worship because he calls us to be the Image of Him.

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen 1:25-27).

God made us in His image. We do not worship ourselves but the Creator Who made us in His image. We worship God! Christ does not need us to make an image of Himself for us to worship.

Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Co 3:17-18).

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 Jo 3:1-2).

Christ wants us to be Christ-like and live our lives like Him. We need to let the light of Christ shine through us to the world. Christ wants His image to be living in us and with us every day. People need to see Christ's power through the Holy Spirit in us more than in the graven images of Christ and the cross that are everywhere in Christianity.

We must consider why we have crosses in our Churches and if they add any value in our walk with Christ. I hope that we will value God-made wonders like the Grand Canyon, the heavens, the stars and oceans, and nature. Not to worship it but to admire God's creation and worship Him. We should remember no matter how wonderful man-made creations are; all things will be made new. Even God's creations here on earth will be made new.

Let's not give in to admiring graven images, idols, or the cross. Let us not be guilty of false worship. Christ wants us to be His walking image; Christ wants us to point people to the wonderful experience of conversion and a changed life. Christ desires for us to help people worship the unseen in faith. The day of the Lord is coming, and every knee will bow before the creator and risen King. God bless us all as we walk as the image of Christ together.

~ Will Taylor