

Getting Back on Spiritual Track #2 - Spiritual Battle

This morning, we are going to look at the spiritual battle that we all face. I want to say from the very beginning if you don’t acknowledge this in your life; if you treat it in a very casual manner then you will become very disillusioned with your Christian life. This spiritual battle is real. Let’s look at how the bible describes this battle. **¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6: 12.** First and second Kings reminds us that part of that battle is against false Gods and idols. These books raise the deep concern about these issues.

⁹ You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me. 1 Kings 14:9.

¹³ because of all the sins Baasha and his son Elah had committed and had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols. 1 Kings 16: 13.

²⁶ He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols. 1 Kings 16:26.

²⁶ He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel. 1 Kings 21:26

¹² They worshiped idols, though the Lord had said, “You shall not do this.” 2 Kings 17:12.

¹⁵ They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their ancestors and the statutes he had warned them to keep. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the Lord had ordered them, “Do not do as they do.” 2 Kings 17:15.

Idols were a big thing and for a good reason. You couldn’t get more off track spiritually than to involve yourself with false gods and idol worship. I mean, that was about as far off course as you could go. So much so, that this is the focus of not only the first, but also the second, of the ten commandments. Did you know that? This took up not one, but two slots on God’s Top Ten List. Which ought to give us a hint that we’re dealing with something significant here. In fact, let’s look at those two commandments because they tell us why this matters so much.

And God spoke all these words: ² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.³ “You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. Exodus 20: 1-6.

Nothing is more clearly and emphatically taught in the Bible than the fact that there is one, and only one God. While the Old Testament is in a language and time so far from our own, it can still speak to us today. God was very clear about not having other idols in our lives or worshipping other gods. Even today it is possible to worship other gods.

Other gods have no power unless we give them power in our lives. We can allow them to kick God out of first place. Whatever you allow to control you, to determine your course of action, to be the ultimate guide to decision making, the place of your loyalty, the source of your self-worth, whatever it is that you most prioritize in your life that is your god.

³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. ⁶ They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. ⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them. Psalm 115:3-8.

Let me give you an example: If you were with us when we kicked off this series, you'll recall a King named Josiah. He came to the throne at the age of eight, and because he was too young to rule, he was raised by a priest until ready to assume leadership. Things had spiraled down to such a degree that the worship of idols and false gods, along with sexual cults and rituals, had become rampant.

When he assumed the throne, the first thing he did was to try and regain some sense of moral sanity. He restored the temple, which had fallen into such disrepair that it was no longer even in use. While that was being restored, they found something that had been lost, overlooked, and forgotten. It was the Torah, the books of Moses. Today the Torah makes up the first five books of the Bible. Scriptures that told of the one true God and the horror of idolatry.

The Scriptures contained the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God. Ten commandments that started off with two that dropped like bombshells. These were about idols and the worship of false gods. Josiah gathered everyone in the land, and read it out loud, every word and they committed themselves to it. With all their heart. But then what happened?

⁴ The king ordered Hilkiah the high priest, the priests next in rank and the doorkeepers to remove from the temple of the Lord all the articles made for Baal and Asherah and all the starry hosts. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron Valley and took the ashes to Bethel. ⁵ He did away with the idolatrous priests appointed by the kings of Judah to burn incense on the high places of the towns of Judah and on those around Jerusalem—those who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and moon, to the constellations and to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He took the Asherah pole from the temple of the Lord to the Kidron Valley outside Jerusalem and burned it there. He ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people. ⁷ He also tore down the quarters of the male shrine prostitutes that were in the temple of the Lord, the quarters where women did weaving for Asherah.

⁸ Josiah brought all the priests from the towns of Judah and desecrated the high places, from Geba to Beersheba, where the priests had burned incense. He broke down the gateway at the entrance of the Gate of Joshua, the city governor, which was on the left of the city gate. ⁹ Although the priests of the high places did not serve at the altar of the Lord in Jerusalem, they ate unleavened bread with their fellow priests. ¹⁰ He desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice their son or daughter in the fire to Molek. ¹¹ He removed from the entrance to the temple of the Lord the horses

that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun. They were in the court near the room of an official named Nathan-Melek. Josiah then burned the chariots dedicated to the sun.

¹² He pulled down the altars the kings of Judah had erected on the roof near the upper room of Ahaz, and the altars Manasseh had built in the two courts of the temple of the Lord. He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley. ¹³ The king also desecrated the high places that were east of Jerusalem on the south of the Hill of Corruption—the ones Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the vile goddess of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the vile god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the people of Ammon. ¹⁴ Josiah smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles and covered the sites with human bones. ¹⁵ Even the altar at Bethel, the high place made by Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin—even that altar and high place he demolished. He burned the high place and ground it to powder, and burned the Asherah pole also. 2 Kings 23: 4- 15.

¹⁹ Just as he had done at Bethel, Josiah removed all the shrines at the high places that the kings of Israel had built in the towns of Samaria and that had aroused the Lord’s anger. 2 Kings 23: 19.

²⁴ Furthermore, Josiah got rid of the mediums and spiritists, the household gods, the idols and all the other detestable things seen in Judah and Jerusalem. This he did to fulfil the requirements of the law written in the book that Hilkiah the priest had discovered in the temple of the Lord. ²⁵ Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses. 2 Kings 23: 24-25.

When King Josiah discovered all these idols and gods had taken the place of the one and true God, he acted. Wow, did he act. No confusion here. No ambiguity or ifs or maybes, they were all destroyed. Josiah waged war, spiritual war against all idols and other gods that were prevalent in his Kingdom. No one was spared. It shows us what is called for in this area, all-out war. Did you notice that Josiah went after this in three ways? He went after people, places, and things. And all three are important.

First, things. An idol is a thing. It’s something tangible. Something you hold. Something you have. While not a god, it represents a god and it’s treated like a god and it assumes a place in your life like a god. Meaning it is prioritized, worshiped, revered, and takes precedence over things that are of God, or even God Himself. You say, “Well, I don’t have anything like that.” and that would be my first reaction, too. What one thing in all of that would you most want to protect? What one possession, or position, or talent would you most want to keep? Okay, that’s what you need to be careful about because you just may have an idol. I am not saying that you do but you might.

Then there are places. Hopefully, the church is a safe place where you can be accepted. Where you can worship, listen to God’s word, and be encouraged and challenged. Maybe there are other places in your life that you are drawn to. That gives you a quick fix, that makes you feel better but the feeling wears off. Tear them down. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, are people. What’s your relational world like? Whose influence do you fall under?

This morning, I invite you to evaluate your life and ask yourself, is God really God? Do I have an idol or two that I've allowed to creep in, another god taking over my allegiance? Am I worshipping a false god anywhere in my life, bowing down to something else before I bow down to God? Think it through in terms of people, places, and things.

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.
Ephesians 4: 17-24.

This text is about idolatry. About five hundred years after first and second Kings it is still a problem. We turn from God to the idol of self. We give ourselves to self and end up controlled by desires. Desires that promise happiness but never provide either satisfaction or fulfilment. Instead, they destroy. They are never satisfied; they always want more. As Tom Wright points out, "Idols demand sacrifices". Christians have a higher calling than being consumed by passions. Pride and self-centredness cause hardness of heart which in turn leads to choosing self instead of God.

However, no one can live free of desire. The solution is not to reject our desires but to subject them to Christ. As Klyne Snodgrass points out in his commentary on Ephesians, "**Desires are not bad in themselves. They are God-given assistants for living but they need a Lord. Give them one**".

The Christian life requires continually putting off the old and putting on Christ. This is not an optional element and is assumed for all Christians. We must be continually renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth. We must give this continual attention or it won't happen. Also, we do not want to give the evil one a footing in our lives.