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I Believe in God the Father – The Apostles' Creed, Part 4

October 1, 2023

Sermon Text: 1 John 5:21

Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 2

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate,

was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

When we confess this creed, professing faith in God the Father, His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit – Three Persons in One Godhead, we are declaring our faith in the living and true God ALONE, to the exclusion of all false gods and idols.

Exo 20:2-6 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (3) “You shall have no other gods before me. (4) “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

In this fourth installment of our study of the Apostles’ Creed, I want to show you how it is that many, many professing Christians today are actually worshipping a false god of their own imagination. If that sounds like an overstatement, consider this:

1Jn 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Those are the closing words of the Apostle John’s First Epistle. Final words are significant and important. Little children. We are not as sophisticated and wise as we might fancy ourselves. Little children – keep yourselves from idols. This is an ever present danger.

What is an Idol?

Last time I cited a number of quotations from William Perkins (1558-1602) and I rely on him once again this morning. The 7th volume in Perkins’ works is a 3-part exposure, by the light of Scripture, of the false teaching of Rome. The third and final treatise is entitled “*A Warning Against Idolatry*,” in which he exposes Rome as an idol temple, but from which we can also learn much of what Scripture warns regarding this perpetual plague of idolatry.

“Babes, keep yourselves from idols,” that is, hold fast the true and spiritual worship of God, and for this reason avoid all things that may withdraw your hearts from God, especially take heed of idols.”

What, then, is an idol? I think you will find that God's Word provides an answer that is much broader than we might think.

When we think of an idol, our thoughts at first turn to some kind of *image*. We think of someone carving a figure of some sort out of wood or molding it from metal as a representation of a god. The Lord forbids His people from making any such thing.

Now, what may surprise you is that an idol is not only some image of a *false god*, but *any image of the living and true God!* This is why the Lord forbids us from making any image of Him. Consider this example:

Exo 32:1-6 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, "Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." (2) So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of

gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

(3) So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. (4)

And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "**These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!**"

(5) **When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."** (6) And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

The calf was meant to be an image of the Lord. They were celebrating a supposed "feast to the Lord" and claimed that the calf was the gods (God?) who delivered them from Egypt. And therefore in this we see that an idol is not only anything set up to be worshipped *in the place of God*, but also *anything worshipped as God which is not God*.

You see then the great danger. We can gather together in a Christian church to worship God, and yet be idolaters if the god we worship is a product of our own imagination rather than the God who has revealed Himself to us in His Word.

And for this reason I do not hesitate to say that many, many professing Christians today are in fact idolaters. The god they worship is a product of their own creation. *An idol can be a representation of the true God which is not in accordance with who He truly is.* Let's think further about this point.

An Idol is God Misconceived

As Perkins points out, when we worship God and Christ otherwise than He has revealed Himself to us in Scripture, we are worshipping an idol. Such a god is “a fiction of the brain.” We are bound to worship God as He has revealed Himself to us and we are forbidden from altering that revelation. *“Whoever conceives God to be what He is not carries in his mind a strange and false god.”*

For example, any person or religious system which claims to worship God but which denies the unity and trinity of the Godhead, is idolatrous. Any system of religion which alters the being of the God-Man, Jesus Christ, is idolatrous. Islam and even Judaism therefore are religions of idols. And to strike perhaps more closely to home:

“Yes, the multitude in all places today set up to themselves a god that is all mercy, and no justice, because they satisfy themselves with the light of blind nature and fashion God according to their own desires and affections.” [Perkins]

That was written some 450 years ago and yet is as fresh today as then!

Paul warned the Galatians and the Corinthians against being duped by another gospel, another spirit, or another Jesus. And yet today perhaps even the majority of Christendom worships another Jesus. Consider:

The Bible plainly tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ is our only and

perfect Redeemer. That He is the only High Priest. That His sacrifice atones for His people once and for all. That He is the only mediator between God and man. And yet we know that Rome presents Christ as insufficient. He requires, they say, another priesthood, another sacrifice, other mediators. *And therefore consider this carefully – the Jesus which Rome worships is another Jesus. He is an idol, and Rome is an idol temple.*

might obtain remission of sins for himself and others.” [Ibid]

You see the monstrosity of this wicked idolatry then. The daily offering of Christ is a denial of the true Son’s all-sufficient and once for all sacrifice for sin. The insistence upon faith PLUS works by which the worshipper is able to atone for his own venial sins. The supposed intercession of the Virgin Mary is a rejection of the sole mediatorial office of Christ.

The Pope himself is a chief idol presented to us by Rome. This supposed vicar of Christ on earth is said to have power to give pardon of sins and to make laws, in addition to Scripture, which are to bind all men’s consciences. This Pope is a false Christ – an *anti-Christ* – set up in the place of the Lord Jesus Christ – who heaps up human tradition and gives that tradition of men an authority above the Word of God.*** [see note at end]

Now, we have been speaking primarily here of Rome – but consider this: *Anytime we accept*

“The Council of Trent presents to us Christ, but yet a poor, disguised, and deformed Christ. It spoils Him of His manhood and degrades Him of His offices. His humanity is spoiled by the presence of the sacrament because if the bread is truly transubstantiated into the body of Christ. His body then is supposed to be included and contained in the small round cake. Remission of sin is to be asked of God, not because of Christ, but because of that small cake we hold in our hands. This is the offering of the popish mass in which the priest imagines that he holds and carries Christ bodily in his hands and there offers Him to the Father, that he

the traditions of man in place of God's Word, we are wandering into the region of idols. Even Protestant/evangelical churches can become enslaved to a false priesthood and false gospel just as the churches of Galatian were.

Gal 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. (2) Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? (3) Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

I have mentioned before this current example of idolatry is the popular movie *The Chosen*. An actor portrays Jesus Christ and many, many professing Christians are just raving over the thing as a wonderful work of God, a powerful tool for presenting Christ to the world.

It is apparent however that this is the grossest form of idolatry. Why? Because – and this cannot be

denied – this movie has made an image of Christ. Who carved the facial expressions, the tone of voice, the nuances – of this Jesus? How is it possible at all that an actor in digital format is going to accurately portray the glory of Christ? Or the humility of Christ? The thing is blasphemous and it amazes me that most professing Christians will get angry if you point these things out to them. The Jesus of that movie is not the Jesus of Scripture. He is another Jesus. He is an idol of man's manufacture.

Idols are Worshipped When God is Worshipped Wrongly

God has revealed to us in His Word *how He is to be worshipped*.

Joh 4:23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

God is *Spirit*. He is to be worshipped in a manner which corresponds to His being as Spirit. In other words, because God is not an idol or image which can be seen

or felt, *our worship of Him must correspond to who He is, and what His being is.* When a physical image of Him is set up, or when we insist that He must be worshipped in a church building alone, or when we introduce physical objects into worship because we demand to have objects we can touch and see, we become idolatrous. Stained glass windows of Christ, votive candles that are somehow incorporated into worship to be lit, the use of lighting for effect (or darkening) and even the manner in which we utilize music (as I know Kevin is sensitive to) can be forms which are the creation of man and idolatrous. “We must set the atmosphere for worship” easily becomes idolatry. *We worship God in Spirit, not carnally. Not in the flesh.* And this spiritual worship drives the carnal man crazy!

“When men set up devised worship, they set up also a devised god.” [Ibid]

Nadab and Abihu worshipped an idol because they introduced unauthorized incense – and God’s wrath broke out upon them.

Lev 10:1-2 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. (2) And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

And the Samaritans, though they worshipped the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in fact worshipped “you know not what” because they had set up a place and manner of worship not prescribed by God. (John 4:22)

And the Jews of the OT were rebuked by the Lord because they essentially called Him “Baal” by utilizing the same images and practices and forms which the pagans used in that idolatrous worship -

Hos 2:16 “And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’

Deu 12:1-4 “These are the statutes

and rules that you shall be careful to do in the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. (2) You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. (3) You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. (4) You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way.

“Therefore, when God is worshipped not according to His own will, but according to the pleasure and will of man, the true God is not worshipped, but a God of man’s invention is set up. When God is either represented or worshipped in any image of man’s devising, there is presently made a double idol, the one is the image representing, the other is God represented, who is by this means turned into an idol.” [Ibid]

Rome and Protestants therefore confess the Apostles’ Creed. They repeat three times, “I believe...” in God the Father, Son, and Spirit, but they worship an idol in His place. It is not enough to merely mouth the Creed – it must be done so in truth and sincerity and genuine faith.

We see very clearly the spiritual being of God and the grave and common error of trying to represent Him carnally. Consider in this sense Paul’s address at Athens –

Act 17:23-25 For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (24) The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, (25) nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.

This has been stated in our Reformed confessions such as the Westminster:

There is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body,

...the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.

Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

Consider how craftily the enemy can snare us in this business of idolatry:

Num 21:7-9 And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. (8) And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a

fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” (9) So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Now obviously with creation of the bronze serpent was good and right. It was made according to the Lord’s own direction, for a specific purpose. It even was an OT type of the Lord Jesus –

Joh 3:14-15 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

And yet Hezekiah is commended in Scripture for destroying it. Why? Because it had become an idol -

2Ki 18:1-4 In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign. (2) He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem.

His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. (3) And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that David his father had done. (4) He removed the high places and broke the pillars and cut down the Asherah. And he broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).

Listen to still another great insight from Perkins:

“We may not bind the presence of God, the operation of His Spirit, and His hearing of us, to anything to which God has not bound Himself by any word of commandment.” [Ibid]

Understand? This point is of immense importance to us in our day. The presence of God and the operation of His Spirit is connected (by God Himself) to His Word. To its preaching and to the hearing of it. He has bound hearing our prayers to praying them in the name of His Son. And yet so many professing Christians err in this.

How? They introduce forms and means of worship, and they insist upon them, which, they claim, will cause the Holy Spirit to move and will cause the Word of God to have effect. But most of such means are the inventions of man which God has not authorized in His worship. Nadab and Abihu's strange fire is still with us today. So is the golden calf by which, it is claimed, God can be worshipped in a more “effective” way.

Psa 106:13-19 But they soon forgot his works; they did not wait for his counsel. (14) **But they had a wanton craving** in the wilderness, and put God to the test in the desert; (15) he gave them what they asked, but sent a wasting disease among them. (16) When men in the camp were jealous of Moses and Aaron, the holy one of the LORD, (17) the earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. (18) Fire also broke out in their company; the flame burned up the wicked. (19) **They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image.**

A "wanton craving" is the flesh craving a god of one's own imagination. A carnal god worshipped in carnal manners that feed the flesh.

Idolatry is Also Among us When we give to Man what is due to God Alone

Isa 42:8 I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

If we study world history, we will certainly see a universal pattern of man raising up other men to be gods. Pharaoh was worshipped and declared himself to be a god. The Greek and Roman pantheons of gods were human in form- Aphrodite, Mars, Artemis, and on and on the list goes.

But those man-gods are not the danger for us – it is the Pope-god that allures so many in our day. There is the Virgin Mary goddess. The myriad of Roman saints are presented as gods.

But what about us? To bring this point home more closely – how might we be in danger of ascribing

glory to man which belongs only to God? Well, here is an example which the Apostle Paul warns us of:

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

"Lofty speech or wisdom of men." How many professing Christians today are under the idolatrous spell of some preacher or celebrity whose word is not to be questioned? I have known professing Christians who were so under the spell of a parent or grandparent that they essentially worshipped them. *Ancestor worship* is and always has been an idolatrous religion among men.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. To do so, we must:

- Avoid making them with our hands or our minds,
- Avoid possessing them (the Ephesians burned their occult books)
- Avoid using idols (looking to them instead of to Christ)
- And we must avoid the users of idols themselves.

The last point is in some ways the most pertinent to us – *avoid the users of idols.*

Rev 18:4 Then I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;

***It may be alleged that the religion of Rome confesses the unity of the Godhead, the Trinity of persons, the distinction of natures in Christ, the offices of the

Mediator just as we do. But I answer, that even though in word Rome does, but in deed it does abolish Christ. Papists in word confess him to be our Lord, but with this condition, that the Pope (the ‘Servant of Servants’ as Rome calls him) may alter and change His teachings, whose power is of the greatness so that he may not be judged by anyone, and that he can open or shut heaven to whom he pleases.

The confess Christ to be our Savior, and yet a Savior *in us*, so that He gives us this grace that by our own merits we may be our own saviors, borrowing also if need be, a supply of grace from the martyrs and the rest of the saint.

Rome confesses Jesus to be crucified, dead, and buried for us, yet with this condition, that the sin being pardoned, we ourselves must satisfy for some part of the punishment, either in this world or in purgatory.

Rome confesses that ‘He sits at the right hand of God the Father,’ to be the Mediator of intercession for us.

And yet in all this they hold that His mother is the queen of heaven, having authority to control and command her Son.

What a Christ is he that, in various actions pertaining to our redemption, has partners joined with Him? For this cause we reject this religion, because it turns our only and perfect Redeemer into a feigned Christ of man's devising. I answer with Jerome, 'Even to this day an idol is set up in the house of God, or in the hearts and souls of believers when a new doctrine is devised.'" [Ibid]