

The Elves in the Self

1 John #15 – The Conclusion

1 John 5:21

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. 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. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

We have a tradition in the West household beginning the day after Thanksgiving and ending the night before Christmas. When my kids were younger, they loved it because we told them that a special scout was sent from the North Pole to make sure they were behaving the way they were supposed to behave. Now that they are teenagers, they don't like it so much. In fact, they think it's a torture tactic designed to gather intel through the appearance of surveillance. But we still do it anyway, me in particular, just to annoy them. It's called the Elf on the Shelf. A tradition made possible by another one of those children's book authors.

Friends, I want to tell you this morning that the contemporary idolatry that we see in the world – beginning in our own heart – has nothing to do with elves that we put on our shelves at Christmas time. It has everything to do with the Elves in the Self. You see, from a biblical perspective, every person is serving god(s) in his life. And every person is transformed into an image of his god(s). Consequently, if God's people, who proclaim Him as Who Was, Is, and Is to Come, try to serve two masters, with one of them being Jesus, they will inevitably love one and hate the other. And the one they inevitably love isn't Jesus. It's the Elf in the Self they created for themselves and are being transformed into the image of.

Do a study of the last verse in each book of the Bible and you'll find some palpable parting shots. "Should I not have concern about that great city of Nineveh, in which there are over 125,000 men who do not know their right from their left? (Jonah). "Surely, I'm with you always, even until the end of the age (Matthew). "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with God's people." (Revelation). John's parting shot, in 1 John 5:21, deals with the Elves in the Self. "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." My objective today is to show you how to guard yourself from the Elves in the Self. But before I do, pray with me.

²¹ Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

Guarding Against the Elves in the Self Requires:

1. Knowing Where They Come From

- **Henry T. Gifford:** (1) Henry T. Gifford built a house here in 1887. He started a citrus grove business and a general store. (2) In 1893, when the railroads from North Florida reached the Vero Beach settlement in route to Key West, the settlement became a city. (2). But it never would have become the city of "Vero Beach" without the influence of his wife, Sarah. She suggested this great settlement be name from the Latin word "vero," which means "to speak the truth." (3) More than 130 years have passed since they settled. But they still influence us.
- **Idolatry Is Our Most Famous Ancestor:** (1) Idolatry isn't one sin among many. Idolatry is the ancestor of every sin. We don't commit any other sin without first breaking the first two commands: "you shall have no other gods before me" and "you shall not make a graven image." (2) The last word in 1 John is "idols." It's one use of the word among many in the Bible. In fact, there are more than 200 episodes of specific acts of idolatry in the lives of the people of God that directly break other commands. (3) The First Example: In Genesis, when Rachel steals her father's teraphim, she thinks that such an act will protect both Jacob and her from her father, Laban. It didn't. In breaking the first two, she also broke the fourth command. (4) The Most Famous Example – Moses is up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law. But 40 days/nights was too long to wait at the red light. So, the Israelites created a golden calf and worshipped the graven image of it. Breaking the first directly led them to break the second. (5) The Most Contemporary Example – Occurs in Romans 1. God has clearly manifested himself. But instead of acknowledging Him, people trade the glory of God for an image they created. As a result, God gives them over to every kind of perversion imaginable. In breaking the first two commands, they break all the rest.
- **Idolatry is Our Most Familiar Ancestor:** (1) Because of What It Is – An idol is anything that captures your heart more than God and asks of you what only God deserves. We have a worship center called the heart. That means when we worship the right thing, our heart comes alive. But when we worship the wrong thing, or representations of the right thing, our heart begins to die slowly, but surely, just as 3000 of the Israelites died at the foot of Mt. Sinai. (2) Because of What It Suggests to God When We Have Them: (a) It's robbery because we take what is due to God and give it to something else. (b) It's perversion because we give the devotion God rightly deserves to other things. We know both of those well. (3) Because of How It Manifests In Our Lives – Idols can be a bad thing, such as the love of money. But, too often, an idol is a good thing that turns into an ultimate thing. We are all familiar with how those idols manifest. I know I am.

2. Knowing Who They Compete With

- **St. Augustine Grass vs Crabb Grass:** (1) This summer, we've had the privilege of observing how St. Augustine grass was designed to look. St. Augustine grass with sun, but without water, looks dreadful and keeps you up at night looking for the best prices on sod. But well-manicured St. Augustine grass with sun and plenty of water is exquisitely beautiful. (2) But there is a great threat to St. Augustine grass here in the Sunshine State. It's crab grass. It has broad leaf blades with stems that grow close to the ground. It flourishes in hot, dry conditions, making

them incredibly resilient during our summers. But most of all, it competes aggressively with desired St. Augustine for nutrients and space. If left untreated, your well-manicured St. Augustine lawn will become your less-manicured Crab grass lawn. (3) Idols cannot coexist with Jesus

- **Because the Apostle John Says So** – (1) Look at the phrase in the middle of the verse. It's an imperative: "keep yourselves" (from idols). It means to guard against something as if your life depended on it. That's important because what you are protecting is you. And the surest way to expose yourself to idols is to forget to stand guard against them. (2) John knows exactly what he's talking about, as did his brother, James. The Bible tells us they were "sons of Zebedee." That's a way of saying that their father was an influential man in Capernaum in Galilee. Archaeology also tells us that. We have an ancient pillar from the synagogue of Capernaum that says: "this column was dedicated by Zebedee." (3) But when the Gospel writers tell us that James and John left their father's boat to follow Jesus, it's their way of saying "they guarded against idols." You can't when you live in light of the fact that Jesus is worth following just because he calls.
- **Because the Lord Jesus Says So** – (1) "No one can serve two masters," Jesus said. He will love the one and hate the other." (2) Therefore, if you love Jesus, you will stand guard against your tendency to make good things ultimate things and the ultimate thing the secondary thing.
- **Because our Hearts Say So** – (1) Look no further than King Uzziah in the Bible. He was 16 when he ascended to the throne of Judah and reigned for 52 years. The Bible tells us that King Uzziah sought Lord during the days of the prophet Zechariah. As long as Uzziah made a point to seek God, God blessed him immensely. But that all changed with Zechariah died. His fame and strength led him to become proud. Consequently, he committed an unfaithful act by entering the temple of God to burn incense at the altar, something only a priest could do. As a result, he lived the rest of his days as a leper. What grave mistake did Uzziah make? Failure to keep watch of his own heart.

3. Knowing What They Want Us to Become

- **The What You Eat Song:** (1) The more things change, the more they stay the same. Sesame Street is living proof. They still have the same Healthy Eating Song after all these years: "you are what you eat from your head to your feet, so be sure to eat food that is good for you."
- **We Become What We Worship:** If our idol is pride, we become prideful. If our idol is lust, we are driven by desire. If it's work, we lose ourselves in our job. What we worship becomes our identity. We were made in the image of God, to be like him, and idols make us like them instead.
- **The "Children" of 1 John Were Naïve about Assurance:** (1) The second word of the verse, "children," is as important to 1 John as it is in the NT. (2) Jesus uses children to teach us something very important about the Kingdom. "Let the children come unto me," Jesus said, "for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those such as these." (3) When John uses "children" in 1 John, he's writing to (a) correct his flock and/or (b) warn them because they were naïve, much like children. Everything we've learned about assurance of salvation - the theme of the book – has been framed around this idea. Dear children, don't be naïve. What you believe about Jesus directly impacts your blessed assurance. Dear children, don't be naïve. What you do with sin in your life right now directly impacts your blessed assurance. Dear children, don't be naïve. Whether or not you love, especially those who are hard to love, impacts your blessed assurance. Dear children, don't be naïve. Whether or not you obey the Word – not just hear it – directly impacts your blessed assurance.
- **The "Children" of 1 John Were Equally Naïve about Idols:** (1) That's why he addresses v101 in the book, the final verse, about idols to his dear children. He wants them not to be naïve about how idolatry works in our lives, a message just as important as all the 100 verses before it. (2) That begs the question, "how, then, can we not be naïve regarding our idols?" Here's how: the faith of a child. The faith of a child trusts and hopes. It does it every day. It wakes up every morning saying "Father, I need you." You never graduate from that need, regardless of how many times you've been to church or what you know about the Bible. Do that and I'll assure you that you'll grow into the image of your real Maker. Forget to have the faith of a child and what the Elves in Your Self will make you like them instead.

4. Knowing Who Really Loves Us

- **Hideyoshi:** (1) Ruled over Japan in the late 1500s. In 1591, he commissioned 50,000 men to build a colossal statue of Buddha for a shrine in Kyoto. For five years they labored intensely and completed it in 1596. One month after it was completed, an earthquake brought the roof of the shrine crashing down and wrecked the statue. (2) In a rage, Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen statue said, "I put you here at great expense and you can't even look after your own temple." (3) Idols don't love us. Jesus does.
- **The First Word of Endearment Contains a Great Truth:** (1) The first word in the verse is "dear." That's a term of endearment. It's a warning written with endearment that contains has a great reason behind it. It is this: Idols don't love. Jesus does. Idols offer us what we think we want. Jesus gives what He knows we need. Idols never keep their promises. Jesus does. He put us, the body of Christ, here at great expense. And He, and He alone, is, indeed, quite capable of looking after you, His temple.
- **The First Word of Endearment Commissioned a Great Team:** (1) How did Matthew go from the worst to the first? No idols. How did Peter go from a man who said one thing but did another when the pressure became too great to a bulwark never failing? No idols. How did James and John go from the Sons of Thunder to the Sons of the Beloved? No idols. How could Andrew learn to play 2nd fiddle to his brother with great joy? No idols. How could Philip go from someone who saw the impossibility of every situation to a person who introduced people to Jesus? No idols. How did Thomas go from the doubter of doubters to the proclaimer of proclaimers? No idols. How did Nathanael go from saying "can anything good come from Nazareth" to someone who introduced others to the Nazarene? No idols. (2) How did Judas Iscariot go from being one of the 12 to the being the Son of Perdition? He served two masters: Jesus and 30 shekels of silver. The silver won.
- **The First Word of Endearment Now Commissions Us.** It's the first word of a six-word commission that was true yesterday, is true today, and will be true tomorrow and all the tomorrows thereafter: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols!" Praise the Lord.