

"I" AS IN IDOLATRY

The account of the "fall" of Adam and Eve has always been considered the result of an act of "disobedience." They disobeyed the one thing God had told them not to do. They were told to not eat from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." (Genesis 2:17) As we know the devil came and began a conversation with them which ultimately led to their fall. If

we look closely at the account in Genesis 3 we see that there is much, much more to this account than the breach of relationship between Adam and Eve and their God caused by an act of disobedience.

James 1:17 tells us that sin is allowed to come forth when we are drawn away by our own "lusts" that are found within us. The enemy then comes to entice us to act upon those lusts that are within. If we look at the account in Genesis we can grasp the origin of this concept that James is speaking about. Unfortunately, the deep underlying "lust" or, we can say, the "root problem" that lies within all of us in which the enemy always come and tries to entice us to act upon is based upon the following - who do we trust, who do we believe and then who will we serve. If the answer to any of these is not 100% trusting in God, 100% believing in what God tells us and 100% choosing to serve Him, which are all expressions of our 100% love of Him, then we are open to the crux of all sin and the purpose of all lusts that lead us to sin – idolatry.

Adam and Eve were created with a free will. They were free moral agents created with the ability to think and to make choices. When the enemy came, he found their "soft spot." Even though we are not specifically told this in the scriptures, the thought must have crossed their mind that there was something different about that particular tree. Could they have thought at one time or another, "Why couldn't we eat of that tree?" However, we know that up until that time they chose to not eat of the tree. The enemy came and, as we know, enticed them. We are not told how many times previous to this time that the enemy had tried to come and cause Adam and Eve to fall. However, we are told about this particular time in which he had succeeded. It was this time that he found the right "soft spot" that was in both Adam and Eve.

Notice that one of his enticing words was that he told them that if they were to eat of the tree that, "*God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*" (Genesis 3:5) Did you hear what the enemy said – "*ye shall be as gods.*" This must have struck a chord down deep within Adam and Eve for right after he said that we read, "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*" (Genesis 3:4; ref. 1John 2:16) The enemy found their "soft spot."

When the devil enticed them with his seducing lies, it began a thought process within Adam and Eve that caused them to begin to distrust God. After all, why did God not want us to eat of that tree? What was He hiding from us? What was God holding back from us? Could this have been something that was on their mind but they never mentioned it nor were they "up front" with God to ask these questions. I believe that if they did have these questions and if they did bring them to their God, He would not have scolded or chided them. Rather, I believe He would have been delighted to discuss and explain it further to them for the scriptures tell us that in Isaiah 1:18 we read, "*Come now, and let us reason together.*" They also had every opportunity to bring this before their God because we know that God had come to be with them and fellowship with them every day. (Genesis 3:8)

I believe this is the same serious problem with many people today, even believers. We are not honest and upfront with God concerning the questions that may come up within our hearts about things concerning what God desires for us to do or not do. These are things that we hide down deep and never deal with. Whether we realize it or not, these become our "soft spots" where once the enemy finally hits upon it he will continually and relentlessly come after us in those areas. Unfortunately, we are taught many times that

we are never to question God. We are taught that if we have questions concerning God's ways that we are not walking in faith or we are in rebellion because we have questions. Actually, the opposite is true.

God desires for us to be open and up front with Him. We see that many times David had "issues" with the way God was doing things or with the way things were going. We see this written in many of his psalms. He "lets it all out" before His God. He felt that he had such a good relationship with God that it allowed him to be honest and open with His God and speak to Him concerning what was truly on his heart. Because of this relationship he knew that he could be real with his God. Again, it is called having a true relationship with your God. Many times we read that once David had "let it all out," either David realized his error or God answered and brought comfort to David so that he could go forward. The key is "fellowshipping" with God everyday through His Word and through prayer. This will always keep the flow of communication and relationship flowing and growing.

As we return to our discussion concerning Adam and Eve, we see that they began to believe the lies of the enemy and decided to deposit their trust in the "father of all lies" instead of the God of Truth. This led to them making a decision based on their own understanding against a direct command given to them by their Creator, the one and only true God. They did not even stop to think that this command by God may have been for their own benefit. They did not stop to think that it was because God had loved them so much that he told them not to eat of that tree. We must understand that it was God's love that placed that tree in the midst of the Garden in the first place. By doing so God expressed His love to Adam and Eve because He gave them an opportunity to choose. They were not puppets. He was not a dictator God. By giving them a choice He was expressing His love for them. The unfortunate thing was that when confronted with the choice of believing and trusting the God who loved them so much or believing the lie that He was holding something back and couldn't be trusted, they chose incorrectly.

This lack of trust towards God and believing the lie that it was God who was the one who was untrustworthy, stirred something within Adam and Eve. This was the same process that caused Lucifer himself to rebel against God. We all know how that turned out for Lucifer and a third of the angels who believed Lucifer's lies of becoming gods. This is what James wrote about. It is the process that not only leads to sin but it really leads to - idolatry.

Before we continue, let's take a moment to discuss the term "idolatry." There are a few Hebrew words used in the Jewish scriptures translated to either "idolatry" or "idol." One of those words is "*miphletseth*" (noun) which means a horrid thing, a horrible thing – from the root word *palats* (verb) – "to shudder, tremble." Another word used is *atsab* (prime root) which means "to hurt, pain, grieve, displease, vex, wrest, to shape, fashion, make, form, stretch into shape;" One more word translated in the Jewish scriptures to "idolatry" is *aven* which means "trouble, wickedness, sorrow, idolatry." Isn't it interesting to note that the common thread found in these words for idolatry is that they all refer to unpleasant, horrible and dreadful things leading to horrible and dreadful actions, rituals and lifestyles? The idea being was that anything that tries to take the place of the true God, Yahweh, is and would lead their followers to become vexed and end up in horrible situations and lifestyles with revolting rituals and sacrifices.

We see this in the historical records of ancient pagan cultures. They were all brutal and barbaric with absolutely no sense of morals or value to human life. Unfortunately, when the Jewish nation, especially the Northern Kingdom, fell into idolatry and went after these pagan gods, they ended up becoming just like those pagan cultures. That is exactly the strategy of the enemy. He wants God's people to become just like the cultures that worshipped and served these pagan gods. This ultimately led God's people to enter into the worship, devotion and service to the devil, himself. The pagan god that we read of in the scriptures known as "Baal" represents this strategy of the enemy. The word or term "Baal" literally means "lord." This is exactly the antithesis to the Lordship of Jesus. Not only does idolatry represent a devoting of one's

worship and service to a false god but it also declares that this false god is their “lord” – their absolute, supreme and final authority.

The Greek word used for idolatry in the New Testament is *eidōlon* which means “an image, likeness, the image of a heathen god, for the purpose to turn the eyes, the mind, and their attention to anything.” Notice that this word expressly says that the purpose of the image was to cause the individual to “turn their eyes, their mind and their attention” to this false god. Actually, that sounds a lot like the definition of worship which is to turn towards and kiss towards the one true God, Yahweh, and His son Jesus, our Lord and Savior. Again, that is the strategy of the enemy – to turn our worship and devotion to something other than the one true God, which is idolatry.

As we again return to the account of Adam and Eve, we can see this strategy of the enemy being played out causing Adam and Eve, to not only disobey, but to actually fall into idolatry. Our definition of idolatry points this out – the worship and excessive devotion to, or reverence for a person, thing or physical object. They wanted to become their own god. The idol they would end up worshipping and devoting themselves to would be themselves because they would obey their own “lusts.” In doing so they made themselves their own god, their own lord, their own “absolute, supreme authority” in place of the true God.

Adam and Eve rejected the Word of the Lord. They chose to disobey. However, we must understand that their disobedience was rooted in a distrust of their God which led them to believe the lie that their God was holding back on them and that HE was really keeping them from becoming their own “god.” This led to them rebelling against God and deciding to become their own god, which is idolatry. 1Samuel 15:23 tells us, *“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and **idolatry**...”*

Yielding to the devil’s enticing words and rejecting God’s commands and instruction actually caused Adam and Eve to also enter into worshipping the enemy. At that point when they chose to not trust but rather distrust and disobey God it signified a decision on their part to take control of their own lives and do what they wanted to do regardless of what God had commanded. It was at this point that not only did sin enter the world, but even worse, idolatry entered, as well. As mention previously, it was at this time that they made themselves their own “Baal.” They made themselves their own lord and chose to do what they thought was right. However, it really was at this time that the enemy, the devil, in a very subtle way, really became their “Baal” as they made this liar and this deceiver their absolute, supreme and final authority by listening to, believing and then acting on his words instead of God’s Word. Their worship turned from God to themselves and ultimately the devil.

We must ask ourselves, “Why were Adam and Eve even by the tree?” It was something that God had told them to stay away from. There must have been something within them that bewildered them about that tree. Isn’t that the same for us? If you tell a child not to do something, that immediately seems to tell them in their own little mind that the thing you are telling them they should not do or go near is the very thing that they must have. It must have been a similar scenario with Adam and Eve. They were told by God not to eat of the tree. Yet, there they were, right by the tree. This allowed for the enemy to come and bombard them with his lies and enticing words. The enemy’s ultimate goal is to get God’s most beloved of all creation to choose to rebel, just as he did, and decide to walk in disobedience. In doing so, the individual defies God for who He is, the one and only true God. They rise up and worship another idol – the idol of self.

As disciples of Jesus and sons and daughters of the Most, High God, we read throughout the New Testament scriptures exhortations for us to “flee from idolatry.” Paul states this in 1Corinthians 10:14 where he pleads with those in the Corinthian church, *“Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.”* Paul was writing this to a body of believers who were getting away from the fundamental truths of the Gospel. They were falling back into their old ways of thinking. Throughout their lives their minds were permeated with Greek and Roman philosophy. Now they were mixing their pagan culture background with

their new lives and lifestyles that Paul had taught them when they first became believers in Jesus. They went back to partaking in things that were actually pagan rituals. They used the excuse that they knew that these gods that they used to worship and that now their friends worshipped were false. Therefore, if they went to their feasts and parties they would not be partaking in the actual worship of the pagan gods because they “knew” that they were really false gods. In other words, they thought that they were too spiritual and “knew the truth.” Therefore, in their thinking, they could still partake of the things they used to do because they “knew the truth.” In other words they were saying they could still do things from the old lifestyle because they were now “free in Jesus.” Hmmmm.....

Paul, in responding to their actions, states in 1Corinthians 10:12, *“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* Paul warns them about being too high minded in thinking that they are above being tempted and falling into sin. He then pleads with them to *“flee from idolatry.”* We immediately think he is referring to the idol worship of the pagan gods with their statues and rituals. Yes, he is saying that but he is also saying that they needed to “flee” from their way of thinking that would cause them to think that they are above it all and actually become wise in their own eyes and become their own god. They were going “beyond what was written,” and taking God’s Word to make it fit what they wanted. They were getting close to being on a “slippery slope” by thinking that they were above even God’s commands found within the Ten Commandments because now they were, after all, “saved by grace.” Hmmmm.....

Being “saved by grace” does not mean that we negate the greatest commandment – *“to love the Lord thy God with all your heart, soul and mind.”* This commandment entails the first four of the Ten Commandments which I would like to reintroduce to our thoughts - Exodus 20:3-7 (KJV) ***“³ Thou shalt have no other gods before me. ⁴ Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; ⁶ And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. ⁷ Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.”*** Anything contrary to these in any way is idolatry. Is it any wonder that God hates idolatry?

Idolatry is a matter of the heart. It entails and involves pride, self-centeredness, greed, gluttony, a love for possessions and ultimately rebellion against God. Many times it involves making God into our own image. We make Him to be what we want Him to be therefore we justify our incorrect actions and attitudes and yes, even our sin. We must remember that we were made after His image and likeness. Through Jesus He has placed His Name upon us – not the other way around.

In conclusion, I believe we must remove and put away everything of self, the me, and the I. My life is no longer my own. I must be dead to self and present myself as that living sacrifice unto the one and only true God which is my only reasonable service. It is the only rational, sensible thing to do because of all that He has done for me. I must totally recognize and acknowledge with all that is within me that God is God and I’m not. I must stop trying to make Him to be what I want Him to be, nor try to make Him conform to my ways and thoughts. Instead, I must be transformed by the renewing of my mind through His Spirit and His Word which will result in me being changed into the man or woman of God that each of us have been called to be. I would like to exhort and encourage each of us to keep ourselves from the idol of “me, myself and I.” The Apostle John puts it in simple terms as he concludes his letter in 1John 5:21, *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.”*