

Little children, keep yourselves from idols: 1 John 5

Little children; keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5: 21).

These are the last words of John's first letter – or the last words we have of it. It seems a strange ending. There is no explicit mention of idols in the rest of the chapter.

The rest of the chapter restates the themes of the rest of the letter.

God loves us. He commands us to love each other. He has given us the power to love each other. God is truth. And through the incarnation and baptism of Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection and through the Holy Spirit we know the truth about the nature of God and his purposes for us.

John writes these things and then signs off; *Little children; keep yourselves from idols.*

Early Christians were surrounded by idols. That's why the museums of the Eastern Mediterranean region are full of marble statues. These idols must have been everywhere in the ancient world.

And these idols were a hook on which was hung a world view. It was a world view diametrically opposed to the good news of Jesus Christ.

According to this world view, God doesn't love you, there are Gods to be sure, but they love themselves.

According to this world view, there is no commandment to love your neighbour. In fact, you should oppress your neighbour or accept the oppression you endure from your neighbours. That's why so many of the idols you would see around you walking through these cities were statues of conquerors and tyrants.

And according to this world view there was no Spirit of God that gave us the power to love each other. Instead, humanity is locked into a grim cycle of hatred and violence.

But John is saying that none of this is true. These gods are not real. These idols represent falsehoods. The true God, whom we know to be true by the testimony of water, blood and Spirit is a God of love who commands and empowers us to love each other.

Similar idols exist today. There are idols today which like the idols of the ancient world

act like hooks that you can hang a whole world view on.

You will have seen the scenes from the US Capitol earlier this week. One of the things that struck me about the people who stormed the Capitol building was the large number of symbols and idols they carried in with them.

Prominent in the pictures from the Capitol was the Confederate flag, the flag of a state established in order to preserve slavery and racism. That's an idol: a hook to hang a world view based on hatred and falsehoods. And it's just one among many. This article will explain more:

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/a-guide-to-the-hate-symbols-and-signs-on-display-at-the-us-capitol-riots/>

Little children; keep yourselves from idols.

Sadly, these idols have drawn many people who worship in evangelical churches in America away from Jesus Christ, the truth of God revealed in water, blood and Spirit. They have been distracted and confused by flags and guns and lies, but they still regard themselves as Christians.

This means that the church in America and across the world has a particular responsibility to engage with these people, draw them away from the idols that have distracted them and point them back towards Christ in whom they will once again have life.

For example, like this:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=df9viSYvV4s&ab_channel=WashingtonNationalCathedral

May these children of God see once again in our Lord Jesus Christ the true God who is his Father, the love he has for us and the commandment he has given us that we should love one another.

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