

Deuteronomy 4:23-31

**NO IDOL GOD --- NO IDLE GOD**

*Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

*When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.*

*But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.*

Some Bible words are easily confused—idolatry and adultery. “Idolatry” is worshiping a false god, or an idol. “Adultery” is unfaithfulness to marriage. --- But then there are also the words idol and idle. I-D-O-L is a false god, such as Baal, the golden calf, Buddha, money. I-D-L-E means inactive, useless—the workers were all standing idle, the tractor doesn't idle properly. Both words, idol and idle, fit with this text.

The text is from Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Bible and the last of the five books written by God's prophet Moses, written by inspiration. Deuteronomy means “The Second Law.” Deuteronomy records Moses' words of farewell to the Old Testament people. He had led them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land of Canaan. The trip took forty years, not because it was so far, but because of their stubborn disobedience and distrust of the Lord. At the writing of Deuteronomy the People were at the (eastern) border of Canaan. Moses knew his life would end before entering the land. God had said so. He gives his people final words of encouragement in the Lord. He also gives them words of caution and warning

*Take heed to yourselves.* Pay attention. not to what everyone else is doing but to what YOU are doing! Those words are often fitting advice for children at home or at school. “Just worry about yourself, not everybody else.” Take heed, *Lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you.* A covenant is an agreement, a pact, a promise. God had promised that He would take the captive Children of Israel as His own special people, free them from slavery in Egypt, lead them to a special land, where they would prosper; from them His promised Son would enter earthly life to serve as Rescuer and Savior for sinners. This was God's covenant He had already promised their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was a generous, gracious promise. It was not a two-sided agreement, as if drawn up between two negotiating sides. God's covenant was a one-sided gift of mercy and blessing for them, as for us.

God has made a one-sided covenant with you too, not involving our country or nation, but involving clinging to His Son by faith. In the crucified and risen Jesus, your slavery to sin has been broken and the Lord is leading you through this life to the Promised Land of heaven.

The problem was, and, is that people soon forget the gracious promise and covenant of God, pursuing something that seems far more important, making their own covenant with other “players” and with things quite worthless. *Take heed, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.* IDOLS, man-made images. At VBS we were talking about the folly of calling helpless man-made objects God. I held up a little plastic monkey. “Shall we call this our God?” The class laughed. How could that piece of plastic possibly be considered our God?

Today it may not be images of plastic, or wood, or stone, or gold that you are tempted to put as Number One in your hearts, but many another thing—something you COVENANT with—whether consciously or subconsciously—as most important in life, such as movies and TV, entertainment in general, success on your terms, being in step with the latest social trend setters, etc.

Moses says, *When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly . . .* When you get used to God's gift of rescue and it doesn't seem so special anymore, when you've put on some years, and start to feel you've paid your dues, and now can cross the line without danger, Beware! There is no fool like an old fool. Do not think you have a license in old age to go your own way. There is nothing more important than God and His covenant with you, lest His anger burn against you. *For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.* Would you want battery acid sprinkled on you? It eats away at clothes and skin. Or burning sulfur? In His anger, God is a consuming fire. He is a jealous God. He does not take lightly to losing one of His children by being shoved or slipped into second or third or last place in the heart. He is jealous—not of what others have and He doesn't. He is jealous of His own, who will fall to harm when mastered by others. Like a boy whose dog follows the neighbor, and the boy knows the neighbor will mistreat the dog. God is jealous of His own and does not take lightly, your turning away from Him. If you say, "But I still worship God. I still pray," is salvation in Christ and entrance into the Promised Land of heaven still Number One, or is it slipping down your list of priorities? Thus beware of, "I'm older now, I deserve some slack."

*I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong your days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell.* God said to Old Testament Israel, "When that which I have done for you is no longer important to you, when My covenant with you is no longer of value to you, I will take it away. You will be expelled from this land, your nation will be destroyed. You will live among foreigners and you will serve idols until you choke. Beware!" His people were later taken to exile in Babylon.

God is not an "idol," nor is He "idle." In His wrath He will punish the rejector. He will leave you to your own devices until you choke.

But, in spite of all that, God's mercy in His discipline is amazing. It reaches out even to those whom He is striking down so that they turn to Him in repentance with all their heart and soul. *But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul.* Have you ever been with a group and gotten lost in a crowd? Do you simply take it for granted that they will come and get you, and you continue meandering on your way? Or do you search for them? I don't just mean glance about a bit. I mean search for them. When you have cast God aside and life is empty, seek Him with all your heart and soul. It's not a mechanical search—"I'll read the Bible 20 minutes a day, I'll go to church every week." It's letting the Word that you read and hear work in your heart. Confess, "I am a foolish sinner. Christ came to rescue me at the price of His own life. God have mercy on me for Jesus' sake!" Moses says, *When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice (for the LORD your God is a merciful God). He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.* There is joy--not in what your effort has done, but in the "finding" God's mercy.

Just as the Lord is not "idle" in His discipline which He dispenses to lead you back, so the Lord not idle "idle" in His mercy and compassion. The Bible calls Him God of the "fatherless and the widows" (Psalm 68:5). What a comforting picture! Children sorely need a father to care for them, teach them, and love them. Widows sorely miss a husband to love them and defend them. You and I are both—fatherless and widowed—because of sin. It is in Jesus we become God's dearly loved children with sins washed away adopted into His family and Kingdom--"Our Father Who art in heaven." It is in Jesus we the Church have the husband who loves us and defends us at the cost of laying down His life.

*He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.* God does not coldly and carelessly "dump off" His people, or rashly destroy them. He seeks to lead them back to Him. He is not "idle," but active in His love and mercy. He does not forget the covenant He made on an oath to send us a Savior. Just as He brought back the wayward people from exile in the foreign land of godless Babylon, so He brings you back from death and hell into His fold and family with the arms of forgiveness and doors of heaven open and waiting. He is not an idol, an image of wood or stone; nor is He idle, motionless, but has sent His Son to "seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). Seek no other Covenant!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---