

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

**TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...**

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

By – Stuart H. Pouliot

Article #54

Idols of the Heart [Graven Images]

August 2012

This article is about idols of the heart and what this means to us today. However, before we get to this, we need to lay a foundation.

The Invisible God is Known to All

(18) For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, (19) because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. (20) For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (21) For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (22) Professing to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:18-23 NASB)

Years ago, I read this verse and wondered why God would be so severe with people for creating images of what they supposed God looked like or was like. After all, according to Paul, God made Himself evident to all mankind. We could say that knowing God is in man's DNA. Man has been encoded within his very makeup with evidence that God not only exists but also what He is like. The proof of this internal code is made evident by what man sees all around him. All one has to do is look at creation itself to learn of God's attributes. Through this internal knowing and this external observation, all born of Adam's race, without exception or excuse, know God, even if they deny it. Only a *nabal* [Hebrew], a stupid or wicked person, says there is no God. David called such a one a fool.

The fool [*nabal*] has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good. (Psalm 14:1 NASB)

Paul quoted David: *Professing to be wise, they became fools.* Instead of seeing and understanding the glory of the incorruptible God throughout His creation and in direct violation of what they knew within themselves was the truth, they made images of creation and worshipped these false images instead of worshipping the invisible true God, the Creator of ALL.

First and Second Commandments

(3) "You shall have no other gods before Me. (4) "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. (5) "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, (6) but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exodus 20:3-6 NASB)

When God called the sons of Israel out of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai (Horeb) to receive His commandments, statutes, ordinances, and judgments, He spoke to them from the midst of fire that engulfed the mountain.

At first, Yahweh spoke directly to the entire nation made up of Hebrews and a mixed multitude. He gave them the famous Ten Commandments so that each one heard it for himself and not through a mediator. They heard, but it was too much for them. Even though they survived and were not killed by Yahweh speaking to them through fire, they nevertheless feared that if it continued, they would be killed for sure.

(18) All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. (19) Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." (20) Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." (21) So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. (Exodus 20:18-21 NASB)

The LORD knew that the heart of the sons of Israel was rebellious toward Him and His commands. But, the sons of Israel knew this as well; they knew there was rebellion in their own heart, if not consciously, then deep within. It is for this reason that, most likely, they knew they could not continue hearing directly from the LORD. The purity of His fire would have discovered (revealed) their true nature and consumed them, even shattered them.

Another way to state this is that their **carnal flesh** could not withstand God's direct presence without their flesh being consumed. By the way, the same principle applies to the **lake of fire**, which is a judgment emanating out of the **Great White Throne Judgment**; judgment of the carnal works (flesh) of man (Revelation 20:11-15). However, this judgment does not involve eternal torture but rather **eonian correction** until **God is All in ALL**. See my book, *The Ultimate Purpose of God*.

"Is not My word like fire?" declares the LORD, "and like a hammer which shatters a rock?" (Jeremiah 23:29 NASB)

On Mount Sinai in Arabia (not Egypt), God's word (law) was heard in fire; His word was like fire. **From His right hand went a fiery law for them** (Deuteronomy 33:2 KJV). Earlier in their

encampment around Mount Horeb, the LORD's word did go forth to strike (shatter) a rock to bring forth water for the sons of Israel (Exodus 17:6).

The LORD purposely did not reveal Himself in a personal image. Knowing the heart of man, He knew that they would try to create earthly images of Him and worship these instead of the invisible God whose attributes are known throughout His creation, both on earth and in heaven. After their 40-year sojourn through the wilderness and as they were about to enter the land of promise, Moses reminded the sons of Israel.

(15) "So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, (16) so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, (17) the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the sky, (18) the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water below the earth. (19) "And beware not to lift up your eyes to heaven and see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, and be drawn away and worship them and serve them, those which the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19 NASB)

This goes back to the words of the LORD spoken to them through Moses.

(22) Then the LORD said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'You yourselves have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. (23) 'You shall not make other gods besides Me; gods of silver or gods of gold, you shall not make for yourselves. (24) 'You shall make an altar of earth for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause My name to be remembered, I will come to you and bless you. (25) 'If you make an altar of stone for Me, you shall not build it of cut stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you will profane it. (26) 'And you shall not go up by steps to My altar, so that your nakedness will not be exposed on it.' (Exodus 20:22-26 NASB)

In making the altar to sacrifice for their sins, they were not to carve the stone. In Hebrew, the word *graven image* refers to something carved into wood or stone. If they had carved into the stone altar, it too would have become a form of an idol. Nakedness speaks of sin and rebellion, which was the very reason for the altar and its countless sacrifices, until the one true Sacrifice arrived on the scene.

Graven Image

If we consider most cultures of our day, there are few that worship graven images in the physical sense; that is, they carve an image in stone or wood and bow to it as if it were actually a god. Even ones who have carved images generally do not believe these images are their gods; they are representations of their gods but not actually the gods themselves. Simply, graven images have been used so that people could have some depiction or visual image of their gods.

Since man has been given a genetic code to know God, we could say that graven images are man's creative way of conceptualizing God. It could be likened to painting a picture of an object or a person, except that it is memorialized in a carving made of stone or wood. Actually, it is not restricted to these two materials, for it could include metals, such as silver or gold, or any other inorganic material that can be shaped and formed into a graven image by the hand of man. Case in point is the golden calf created by the sons of Israel while at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Dr. Stephen Jones (God's Kingdom Ministries) states:

"A graven image was an artistic rendition of men's concept of God. In this way the conceptual artist was establishing a visual "tradition of men" in the same manner that the lawyers did when they interpreted God's laws according to the carnal mind and human reasoning. ... This is the key to understanding the difference between the fire of God and a graven image. Fire is always moving and changing, so one must rely upon the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to understand the mind of God. A graven image establishes a viewpoint, a concept of God, and then fixes it in stone, wood, or metal—as if it were truth."

"It all boils down to the basic difference between God and our *understanding* of God. ... A graven image is a tradition of men expressed artistically. However the artist expresses it, we can be sure that it falls short of absolute truth, for the mind of man in its present state is incapable of comprehending the full glory of God."

Tradition of Men

The tradition of men could be likened to the teaching of men (not inspired by the Spirit of God) carved in stone that never changes or grows. Simply, it is fixed, and when confronted with the truth, it will not change.

(6) And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. (7) 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.' [Isaiah 29:13] (8) "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." (Mark 7:6-8 NASB)

Jesus stood in the midst of hypocrites who questioned why His disciples did not follow the tradition of the elders. These traditions were oral in nature until after 70 AD when they began to write them down into what is called the Talmud (as well as other documents). This is not scripture but interpretation of and addition to scripture based on man's mind, not the mind of God. Jesus called them the precepts or commandments of men. In other words, they did not come from God but from man. The Pharisees and scribes that questioned Jesus were interested in holding to the tradition of men (i.e., the elders); as a result, they neglected the commandment of God or God's word regarding the things that mattered most.

Another way to look at it is that the religious leaders of that day carved their tradition into stone. As the saying goes, the traditions were "cast in concrete," so when the One came along who is the Truth and the fulfillment of the Law (the commandments), they rejected Him

because He conflicted with their tradition. In fact, Jesus challenged their traditions by asserting they were of men and not of God. This was a strong indictment.

This is the nature of the tradition of men. It becomes so set that when truth comes along according to God's word, it is often rejected because it challenges, even threatens, the tradition.

We might think that this ended with Calvary in 33 AD or with Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD, but it did not. The fact of the matter is that the tradition of men has continued undaunted down through the last 2,000 years of church history. Christians have divided and even killed over the tradition of men, all the while claiming their tradition is the truth of God. Of course, some truly believed it was of God while others knew it was not but saw it as serving their purpose or advancing their carnal cause or self-serving agenda.

Christendom has developed its own form of Talmud through denominationalism, ministries, institutional Christianity, and innumerable printed and electronic materials on topics from A-Z; all the while claiming to speak for God and holding to His truth, according to His word. This is not to say that there is no truth contained within these things, for there most certainly is. However, we must admit that traditions are either born or reinforced out of these things, and God's people often embrace them unquestioningly.

Today, how many of God's people study what they hear coming from the pulpit to see if is the truth according to God's word?

The tradition of men overtakes God's truth or, we could say, His commandments. When this happens, the traditions often become crystallized or, as stated already, formed in hardened concrete that cannot be easily broken. Figuratively speaking, it takes the brute force of a jack hammer to break it up. Is this not the heart of much of denominationalism or any other Christian *ism*? But let us not be too proud of ourselves if we are not caught up in a denomination, for it can happen to any group of God's people, particularly ones that have been together for a while.

Pride

The biggest danger is pride. The danger sets in when we start to think that we have the best of everything. We have the best speakers, the best conferences, the best teachers, and the best worship. Simply, we are the best! When you start to hear this from brothers and sisters in Christ who gather together, look out, for the mountain of pride is rising in their midst. We know that destruction comes next (Proverbs 16:18) if it continues unfettered because God is opposed to the proud (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

I can speak to this firsthand. We were with a group for about 17 years. The first 10 years that we were with these brethren were wonderful years as we all grew together in the Lord and learned to love one another in practical ways. But gradually, we began to see the mountain of pride rising as everything about us was the "best." This pride was in me as well, so I am not critical of these brethren. I still love each and every one of them. The day came when the Lord

began to deal with us as a group. There was a lot of pain and many of us were thrust out of the nest, so to speak. It was when we were thrust out that my wife and I realized how much pride had grown in us. We repented and moved on.

As Jesus reminds us, pride is a most serious matter; it is counted as evil. Take special note of what is included along with pride

(20) And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. (21) "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, (22) deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. (23) "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23 NASB)

Idols in Their Hearts

We are given the Lord's view of idols of the heart through the prophet Ezekiel. Starting in Ezekiel 13, the Lord told Ezekiel to speak a word to the prophets of Israel who were prophesying from their own inspiration.

'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Woe to the foolish prophets who are following their own spirit and have seen nothing. (Ezekiel 13:3 NASB)

"They see falsehood and lying divination who are saying, 'The LORD declares,' when the LORD has not sent them; yet they hope for the fulfillment of their word." (Ezekiel 13:6 NASB)

After this indictment of the prophets, some elders of Israel came to Ezekiel as if to inquire of him; however, the LORD knew their heart. They had already made up their mind on what they wanted to do. In a sense, they were looking for the LORD to "rubber stamp" their decision. But, the bottom line was that they were going to do what they had decided regardless of what the LORD spoke through the prophet. The LORD put His finger on the matter; they had idols in their hearts.

(3) "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? (4) "Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the LORD will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, (5) that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols.'" (6) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations. (Ezekiel 14:3-6 NKJV)

The LORD gave a very strong word against idols of the heart. He was not speaking to external graven images (although they existed) but to graven images written on hearts. But take special note that it was not a matter of just one idol in their heart; it was a multitude of idols. This was a most serious condition that required true repentance.

This raises the question: Does this apply to us today, and, if so, how does it apply? The answer is: Of course, it does!

In the Western Christianized nations, we do not have graven images of stone or other materials physically placed on high places for people to bow to and worship. Most of us would be appalled if this were to occur openly in our country, and, if it were to occur, the ones doing it would be labeled a cult. However, most would readily agree that there are many other types of idols, idols that emanate out of the world system in which we live. This type of idol can be and often is manifested through such things as the love of money, cars, entertainment, sports, food, the physical body, etc.

We can readily identify some of these idols of the world when we see them, and we must guard ourselves from them, for we are not immune to their pull on our lives. These types of idols steal away our love for the Lord. John warns us.

(15) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. (1 John 2:15-16 NKJV)

However, as believers, we face something far more subtle but just as dangerous, if not more so, and they are **idols of the heart that mischaracterize God, His nature, and His truth**. They manifest in how we perceive God and interpret what He is saying to us, especially in regard to divine revelation.

These idols are like filters. Filters are designed to remove certain materials; they could be good or bad. Obviously, if we are filtering for gold in river sediment, we want the gold to be stopped by the filter while allowing all the unwanted sediment to pass through. In contrast, if we are filtering water to remove impurities, we want the good qualities of the water to pass through while removing the bad stuff.

Unfortunately, idols of the heart alter what passes through them. They might remove or add things. In a sense, they operate in reverse of water filters. An idol of the heart brings about impurities whether it removes or adds. In a sense, these heart idols make things murky and not clear; they either remove the value of what is passing through the heart, or they add to it to create a proud heart.

In addition to the idols of the world, an idol of the heart can be anything that comes between us and God that hinders us from accurately hearing and interpreting what He is saying or revealing to us through prophecy, visions, dreams, words, or any other mode of communication He chooses to use.

These idols manifest as any pre-conceived idea or understanding of God's truth that hinders us from accurately interpreting what God is saying or revealing to us. These pre-conceived ideas can come from a variety of sources, such as a church or ministry teaching or emphasis that is repeated often enough from the pulpit, in books, or through other media that it becomes cast in concrete. These ideas can also be developed or reinforced through the secular influence of

news, commentary, movies, social media, etc. All of these can serve as the source of a graven image that gets written on a heart as if etched in stone; an immovable object that cannot be touched or challenged. In essence, it becomes a closed book, so to speak.

Obviously, if it is the truth of God's word, then this is actually a good thing. Unfortunately, much of what is presented to God's people is not God's truth but man's interpretation resulting from man's filters and biases. In other words, it is more carnal than spiritual. Most often, it results in a misrepresentation of God's truth and His character, notably His very essence of love and mercy for all mankind.

For example, the whole notion of multitudes toasting in an eternal oven called *hell* is one such carnal filter. Someone can have a dream of a place that matches Dante's *Inferno*, wake up, and proclaim he was in hell; therefore, hell as Dante allegorized it is real. The dream may have been real enough and perhaps even of God, but this does not mean it was about billions of people going to hell as man conceives it. This sort of conclusion comes from the carnal mind and has been set as concrete in the heart of many as a truth of God's word when it is nowhere to be found in scripture. The same case could be made for dreams of heaven being a grand amusement park.

So, we develop these prejudices by which we judge all that we hear and see. Our filters are our prejudices that keep our thinking narrow. Rather than having an open mind, we have a shut mind, especially in regard to anything new that does not match our thinking, teaching, emphasis, etc. This can manifest as: "Pastor said it, so it must be true. So-in-so said something contrary to pastor; therefore, it cannot be true."

What about the things that God speaks to us directly in our prayer life or through prophecy, visions, dreams, signs, or divine revelation? If they are of God, we can be assured that they are accurate and true. However, how we interpret these things is another story. This is where our heart idols kick in to lead us astray. These idols can distort God's communication to us so that we interpret them according to our preconceived ideas that emanate out of the graven images. God speaks or reveals things to our heart, but the filters kick in and our mind receives a distorted communication. Then, our pride kicks in as well, telling us that we have the truth because it came from God. Perhaps it did come from God, but this does not mean that our interpretation of it is of God.

We all have idols of the heart. Over the last decade, especially, I have repeatedly begged the Lord to keep me from deception in all that I hear and the revelation I receive. Simply, I do not trust myself. This is why many things I receive from the Lord I let sit for awhile to see if the Lord has more to reveal or has some correction of how I see it at that moment.

We must be open to the possibility that the idols of our heart have far more influence on our thinking than we realize. We need to ask the Lord to expose all idols of our heart with His light so that we can repent of them and have a clear line of communication with and interpretation from the Lord. Another way to pray over this matter is to ask that all filters be removed so that the communication freely flows, unhindered and unfiltered, from our mind to our heart. We need the Holy Spirit to clear away all idols. May the Spirit of God lead us into God's truth!