

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



October 3, 2010

Idols in Our Hearts

Idolatry is a serious problem among the human race, even in our modern world. But the real problem is not the idols themselves. It's much deeper than that.

“Now some of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘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?’” (Eze. 14:1-3).

When God created the nation of Israel, the very first commandment He gave them was, “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:2). Yet throughout their history, Israel had a fascination with the gods of the pagan nations around them, and rampant idolatry was the result. Their idolatry became a contagion that introduced all kinds of moral and spiritual diseases among God's people. As God described it, their idols “caused them to stumble into iniquity.”

In prior years, several good kings had tried to eradicate idolatry among the Jews by embarking on great idol-smashing campaigns (see for example, Josiah, 2 Kgs. 23). But these external cleansings never lasted long, and the people were soon back to their beloved idols.

The idolatry eventually led to the nation's demise. Ezekiel was with a group of Jews already in Babylonian exile, and Jerusalem would soon be destroyed. Judah would pay a dear price for their infatuation with their idols.

But even in exile, the Jews were clueless about the corrosive effect of idolatry in their lives. They came to Ezekiel to inquire of the Lord, even as they held on to their idols. They saw no inconsistency in trying to serve both God and their idols.

So when these men came to Ezekiel, God forced them to look at the root cause of their problem. Their idolatry was merely a symptom of a deeper defect, the “idols in their hearts.” The real problem, in other words, was not the objects of wood and stone themselves, but the *attitude of divided loyalty* that motivated the idolators. In their minds, God was just one object of worship among many. As long as God had to compete with these other interests for their affection, idolatry and all its attendant evils would continue to be a plague in their lives.

God had a simple message for these men: “Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations” (v. 6). Repentance is a change of heart that results in a changed life. What God wanted from these people was not merely the absence of idols, but hearts that were wholly devoted to Him. God had to be first, all the time and in every way, or He was not in their lives at all.

Idolatry continues to be a cause of stumbling among mankind today. Our idols are more sophisticated and secular — jobs, money, entertainment, recreation, fast cars — but open up our lives to the same range of moral and spiritual ills — sexual immorality, drugs and alcohol, depression, family breakdown. All our efforts to attack these idols or their symptoms are doomed to fail, because they do not address the real problem: hearts that are not fully dedicated to God.

Until we remove the idols in our hearts, the idols in our external lives will never cease to be a cause of stumbling. Genuine repentance is our only hope.

– David King