

Worship the Lord and Serve Him Only

6 “This is what the LORD says— Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. 7 Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come— yes, let them foretell what will come. 8 Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.” 9 All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant, to their own shame. 10 Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit nothing? 11 People who do that will be put to shame; such craftsmen are only human beings. Let them all come together and take their stand; they will be brought down to terror and shame.

Listen to the way the Lord speaks to idolaters, people caught and found guilty of idolatry. **“Apart from me there is no God.”** You can picture them caught off guard by this. You can imagine them on a Thursday night or whenever they set aside time to worship their false god, their idol. The kids are lollygagging around, not quite getting into their good clothes for the idol worship service. The mom is retouching her makeup and seemingly never quite satisfied with the way her hair looks. The dad’s tie is never on straight but the kids think it’s funny not to tell him. Then they get into their buggy and head up the road to the altar of their idol.

Are they worried about their sinful condition when they approach their idol? Are they nervous about having broken any of its laws and statutes? No, not at all. Their idol has never once spoken to anyone. It’s a handy idol because it’s so silent. In fact, it’s almost obedient, their idol. They take grain offerings or some other useful thing to the altar and they make a show their payers, to see if their idol, their idol who never says anything, to see if it’s listening.

Isaiah denounces three kinds of people here, those who depend on a thing carved from wood or stone rather than the true Rock, the Lord who is the foundation of everything and the one who holds all things together in his hands. He condemns those who make idols, who invent them and sell them, who put their own ideas into them and fashion their gods in their own image.

Then there are those who treasure them, who live by them, using them in ignorance to predict

the future or guide the present like a horoscope or an astrological chart, even though God tells us that he made the stars and planets for a different reason: not to make predictions, but simply as a clock and a calendar. And the things the gods are made of-- the wood and the stone-- are put to better use when they are burned for fuel or made into furniture for us to sit on, but not to worship.

Finally there are those who “Speak up for them,” who put words and oracles and warnings into the mouths of false gods. They are dangerous because they are blind; they should not be paid attention to because they are ignorant. They lead people to destruction and not to the one true God.

Now, the devil doesn't care if we follow idols and false gods or not. The devil only wants us to stop following Jesus. He is the one in our parable who sows the weeds.¹ His weeds are meant to choke our faith, to confuse us, to confound us, and to mislead us. Anything as long as we stop listening to Jesus.

His weeds come in many forms in our lives-- not all false idols are made to look like little statues. For there are two kinds of false teachers in the world. One kind comes in the name of the Lord, and the other comes in the name of strange gods or no gods at all. Those who come in the name of the Lord are harder to notice, except that they always twist the word of God on its head. They try to turn the law into gospel-- which means that they want people to try to be saved by obedience instead by the grace of Jesus Christ. And they try to turn the gospel into law-- which means that they want to make salvation depend upon our good works, which is the same as being saved by obedience instead of through the work of Christ.

This is why so much of the letter of Paul, Peter and John in the New Testament are devoted to warnings against false teachers who come using God's Word but whose doctrine does not stand up to what the Scriptures say.

The other kind of false teacher is the one Isaiah is warning us about here: the ones who come without any contact with the Bible at all, but they use their own words and opinions and theories to lead God's people away from the truth of the Scriptures and the comfort of the promises of eternal life.

When we are faced with any kind of false teacher or idolatry, we should run back to the Scriptures to examine our lives just the same way we would if someone said: “Oh, you've got something there on your face.” What is it? Is it food? Is it something else? Where is it?

¹ Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, the Gospel lesson for this day.

We go and look in a mirror, because we can't be sure that all of our flailing and wiping will have gotten in off, whatever it is. And so it is with our lives. "You've come into contact with false teaching!" Did any of it rub off on me? Let me go and look into the mirror of the law and see!

So we examine ourselves and our lives. Now someone can see that he has put his opinion above the word of God. He sees himself as the profitless craftsman Isaiah warns about, the one who has only tried to get away with his own ideas but in doing so has led himself and others away from Christ. The judgment God promises for this is **"to be led down in terror and shame,"** one of the many ways Isaiah describes eternal punishment in hell. When we are led to a location in life that causes us to fall into sin, we should recognize it as the very gateway of hell for us. Maybe it wouldn't be for another person, but if it leads us into sin, we should run from it. Don't go there! Smell the fire, smell the smoke, hear the cries in the distance of the agony, the shame, the everlasting loneliness of hell where there is nothing but pain, personal suffering, inside the heart, inside the mind and memory, and all through the body, with no relief.

This is what is reserved for the devil and his demons and anyone who turns away from Jesus. But Jesus offers you his forgiveness. What sin troubles you? What past habit keeps troubling you? What quiet shame brings you guilt in those terrible moments of reflection? Bring it to Jesus, because Jesus forgives.

When the weeds are sorted out by the angels on Judgment Day, you won't be mistaken. The Lord will recognize you for what you truly are: A baptized, forgiven, healthy, welcome stalk of good grain.

Do not be afraid. Put your trust in Jesus. Fear him-- give him respect, service, love, respond to his grace and his forgiveness with a life that says, "I want to walk in your way," but never forget that you are not saved on account of the things you have done, but because of the Great and Glorious Thing that he did, giving his life on the cross for you.

He chose you. He put his Spirit in your heart to make your own body a temple for him. Be careful of false teaches, and take care where you carry the temple of the Holy Spirit. Husbands, love your wives and watch over your families with it. Wives, love your husbands and care for your families with it. Children, obey your parents and grow in God's word and God's way. Single people and widows, live such good lives among the pagans that you always give glory to God wherever you go. Wherever you are, our Lord Jesus Christ is there with you. Worship him, and serve him only.