

What is Jesus Doing?

POWERS AND PRINCIPALITIES: AMERICAN IDOLS

Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame—who set their mind on earthly things.

- Philippians 3:17-19

This scripture was written while Paul was under house arrest in either Rome or Ephesus, to the followers of the Way of Jesus the Christ in the church at Philippi. The Philippian church was the first church that Paul had planted in what is now modern Europe, in Greece.

Philippi was a global center (global in the sense of the then-known world) of commerce and politics and although under Roman rule at the time of this writing, had been the center of the Greek Empire under Alexander the Great, and was, in fact, named for Alexander's father Philip of Macedonia.

In Acts 16, we see that Paul was called to Greece (Macedonia) in a vision on his 2nd missionary journey.

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

- Acts 16:9-10

In the church at Philippi were found both Jews and Gentiles (all believers). In the scripture noted above, Philippians 3:17-19, Paul is recognizing the worldliness of the culture surrounding this flock of believers. He implores them to follow his example, and walk worthy of the calling with which they were called by emulating those who like Paul and Silas and Timothy, are mature in the Lord.

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We are living today, in the USA, in a center of commerce and politics much like Philippi and face the same temptation to “conform to the world” that the believers in Philippi faced. Our popular culture, like that of ancient Philippi, is filled with idolatry of various kinds. This idolatry might take the form of sexual perversions (adultery, fornication, prostitution, homo, trans and pansexuality, pornography), which may seem obvious to the believer called out of the darkness and into the marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9), or it may take other, more subtle forms. Perhaps just as obvious to some of us who follow Jesus, is the idolatry that He specifically warns us makes it impossible for us to serve God, the love of Mammon (money).

Idolatry is simply anything or anyone that we place above, or even alongside of God. This includes nation, family, jobs, politics and even ministry.

However, let's focus for the purposes of this message on the two major idols that troubled and eventually seduced the people of Israel.

These two were Ashtoreth, the goddess in several of the Caananite cultures who represented fertility, but also sexual licentiousness, and in whose worship were included temple prostitutes of both sexes, and abominable practices such as “passing their children through the fire” to receive favor from their gods, and Mammon/Money which leads its followers to covet, steal, lie and distort the truth to gain their riches or comfort at the expense of the poor and their neighbors

The Spirit drew me to Philippians 3 and these verses specifically for this reason. The current American political and cultural landscape is rife with Idolatry, whereby it's idolaters, either directly, or through their political Proxys (representatives that they vote for and support) further the agendas of Satan's two Lieutenants, Powers and Principalities.

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Let's start with the Powers. The American political Right, on its extreme edge, is Mammon. Those who serve Mammon seek their own comfort and security at the expense of those less fortunate and the neighbors whom they are supposed to help. This includes warmongers and the wealthy who benefit from wars and throw young people into harm's way for their greed and self-interest. These are people, including believers, whose "God is their belly".

As for the Principalities... The American political Left, at its extreme edge, is Ashtoreth, whose supporters are doers and enablers of all kinds of sexual perversion, abortions, and lies about God. These are those whose "glory is in their shame".

Is one worse than the other? They are both the epitome of evil. However, let's take a deeper look...

We are now living under the New Covenant. Hallelujah! The Messiah has come and done the one thing that men could not do for themselves, namely, provide salvation by His death and Resurrection on the Cross. Those of us who believe, should rest in the power of God's Grace and walk out this great salvation in fear and trembling by extending the same Grace to those around us, including sinners, among whom we were when we were saved. The ultimate Grace is to forgive and tell them the good news about Jesus Christ.

So... let's take a step back. The snare of the OLD Covenant to the people of Israel was the Ba'al (or Idol) Ashtoreth (also Molech, Chemosh, etc.) who were the gods of the peoples of the land of Caanan who were under God (The Lord's) wrath because of sexual immorality and just plain old disobedience to the one true God. Worship of, and simple obedience to the "gods of the land" were what ensnared God's people and caused Him to send them into captivity time and time again.

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Before Jesus came to provide salvation, the woman caught in adultery, who we see in the New Testament Gospels, would have been stoned to death by the righteous among God's Chosen People and this is where the confusion begins about what sin remains under the new Covenant...

In short, the only sin that remains under the Blood of Christ for believers is unacknowledged and unrepentant sin. Since the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin (convicting meaning bringing it to mind, not condemning us), we who are true believers must acknowledge our sin and cannot use ignorance as an excuse. Also... if we acknowledge active sin in our lives, we must repent of it, and if we repent of it, then we must also allow the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and strength to turn from it.

So... back to the woman caught in adultery...

When the Jews (mostly Pharisees and Sadducees) brought the woman to Jesus, their purpose was to trap Him into contradicting the Levitical Law, which demanded that she be stoned to death. Hypocritically, although the man involved in this adultery was also 'caught in the act' they did not bring him. Perhaps he was even one of those who cried out for the woman to be stoned.

Jesus response was to begin writing in the dirt with his finger and saying to the crowd... "let he who is without sin cast the first stone." I have always thought that Jesus was writing each of the Commandments given to Moses one by one and that as he wrote the command that each person in the crowd was guilty of breaking, they slunk away until there were none left. At this point, Jesus said to the woman that since all of her accusers were guilty of the same or equally awful sins and were therefor unable to accuse her, that He, God incarnate, did not condemn her either but did acknowledge her sin by saying "now go, and sin no more."

Now... back to the question of the sin of political idolatry in our modern times.

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Let's look at the parable of the Prodigal son. The one who disrespected his father and then wasted all that was coming to him, acknowledged his sin when he was living in the pig sty and repented by saying that he had sinned against his father, and also against God. He turned from his sin by getting up from his filth and beginning the long, hard walk back to his father and apologize, willing to forego his sonship as punishment and be a slave of his father. As we know, his Father, who represents God in the image of Jesus, was already aware of his repentant son's heart and ran down the road to restore him fully into the family.

Clearly this part of the story represents the carnal sinner who truly repents and receives salvation and not only is restored to his position as son but also the power that comes from being the son of a great and wealthy man (Robe, Sandals and Ring).

The parable does not end there, however. The elder brother who remained with his father was angry that his brother got to go off and "do his thing" and was then forgiven. His response was to disrespect his father by questioning his forgiveness of the younger son and as the parable ends, he remained angry.

So... the prodigal son represents a sinner who is saved by Grace, and the elder brother represents the Pharisees and Sadducees who rejected the Grace of Christ. They, like the crowd who accused the woman caught in adultery, were guilty, as was the elder brother, of rejecting the Grace of the Father who was now in their midst in the Person of Jesus.

The extreme political Right movement in the American Church is clearly like the elder brother. Angry at the entitlement of those they consider lazy and undeserving of Grace that they themselves have received.

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Willing to ignore their responsibilities as followers of the Way of Jesus to protect the poor in their midst and being eager to cast stones at their neighbors who believe differently than they do. In other words, New Testament Grace for me, Old Testament judgement for you, and without irony apparently.

These believers, to their shame, are circling the wagons in fear of “the other side” and are ignoring the Great Commission. The extreme adherents to the Idol of Trumpism are the greatest transgressors in current times, especially those who lie and support liars and hoard guns and ammunition, waiting for their opportunity to “avenge” God against the Godless. Many of these use as their excuse/mantra that we are “in the end times” and God wants them to bring violence to overthrow those they consider to be “evil” (or more evil than they are) on the Left.

The extreme political Left movement in the American Church is not, however, blameless either, in that unlike the prodigal son, they neither acknowledge nor repent of carnal sin, but rather celebrate it by proclaiming as good and right many of the things clearly described as sinfulness in the Bible. Fornication (“free love”), abortion as a means of birth control, homosexuality, transvestitism, trans and pansexuality, etc. are being celebrated, often in church under the “rainbow flag”. Ironically, many of the adherents and celebrators of this licentiousness in society are also the defenders of the poor and those of races other than Caucasian who may need legitimate redress to their having been enslaved, belittled and undervalued by a society that claims to provide “freedom for all” but has historically practiced “freedom for some”. Jesus approves of the latter, I believe, but given the odious nature of the former, cannot bless it.

So where does this leave the Body of Christ in America? It’s fairly simple.

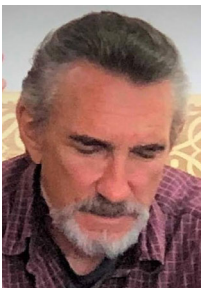
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Jesus is in the center

Think of the Cross as being in the Center of God's "perfect and acceptable" will for all humanity. Remembering that the sin of the people of Israel was worshipping strange gods AS WELL AS the God of Israel.

It is not acceptable to God that those that have received and proclaimed the greatest gift given to man, Jesus Christ, also give absolute obedience to ANY worldly political or religious construct that are, quite literally, the Powers and Principalities that are the rulers of darkness in the world.

We, the Body of Christ, true followers of His Way, having taken up our own crosses as He commanded, should not be standing on the Left or the Right, throwing stones at the other side, but we are to be united as one true Church, encircling the Cross at the Center of human experience, with our faces outward and arms open wide, attracting and embracing the lost that are running from both Left and Right, Powers and Principalities, and inviting them to receive that great Salvation, prepared for them from the Foundations of the world, growing the Kingdom of Heaven to the Glory of God!



Humbly, In His Grace,

- John Henry Raskin, Roadhouse Rabbi