

This commandment is directed to those who the apostle under inspiration called "*little children*". These are not literally little children, those too young to understand what is being said, but those who are spiritually innocent or immature and have yet to face the full weight of the vagaries of the old man of sin.

Earlier in the letter, there is a declension between, fathers, young men, and little children, chapter 2v12-14 where each is specifically addressed twice. Fathers are those who were the elders, the experienced members who had spent time in the service of the truth and had assisted in bringing others to the good news of the gospel and had therefore sired spiritual children. Those who are described as "*young men*" are those who are between the state of novice and elder who are strong in their stance thus far with regard to the need to stand firm against the temptations of the flesh, "*ye are strong, ye have overcome the wicked one*". The little children are the new converts who struggle the most with the adaption onto a new pathway where service to God and obedience to the commandments of Christ are the necessary course of action which needs to be established.

That the closing verse is addressed to those called "*little children*" does not mean that only this class need to be concerned about idolatry, but rather that idolatry should be one of the first aspects that all believers counter in their new lives in Christ. If a firm stance is taken from day one in our new life begotten in Christ Jesus, then this will make the following days that bit easier, remembering the promise that Jesus made, which we read recently, my yoke is easy and my burden is light, Matthew 11v30.

Idolatry was the main form of religion in the ancient world. It was a rejection of the creator God and demonstrated their foolishness in seeking answers elsewhere than His revelation, Romans 1v20-23. Such people were idolaters because they had changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man and to birds and four-footed beasts and creeping things. Making an image of man and substituting it for the glory of the divine being.

Anything that is a substitute god is an idol. Many people substitute many things for God and try to fill the God-shaped hole we all possess inside us with rubbish. We can put family, friendship, our job or career, our homes, our dreams, our heroes, wealth, power, glory, fame; so many things but none can truly replace the Omnipotent and we fade away to dust in our foolishness.

In the first century, the political stability and economic wealth, which Rome brought to a war-torn continent, the Pax Romana, permitted the idea of the emperor as being himself divine was propagated. This was only possible in a polytheistic environment where there were literally gods for everything. Gods for the weather, for the army for childbirth, for the descent to death, for craftsmen, for cities and rivers, and animals, where yet another god could find a place. This departure from sacred truth which had been taught from the beginning is a symptom of the relativism of the individual when the sovereign prerogative of the Creator is swapped for everyone's own position as being equalling important and relevant. Rather than surrendering to the Truth, people invent something else.

The Holy spirit in Colossians 3v5 teaches that covetousness is as idolatry. Also Ephesians 5v5 *“For this know ye know that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God”*. Even a good thing can become as an idol. The brazen staff which Moses raised up above the people had to be destroyed in subsequent generations because it had become the means of distraction from the true path, 2 Kings 18v4 *“He removed the high places and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it and he called it Nehushtan”* (a piece of brass).

How then do we keep ourselves from these false influences? The avoidance of bad things is possible only when we fill our lives with better things. A positive construction of Biblical material into our lives will counter any power that idols might otherwise have over us. In context the passage emphasizes the need to be truly born of God. Verse 18 *“We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself and that wicked one toucheth him not”*. This is not saying that an individual will not sin after being born again, but that the new man, born within, will not sin, but needs to be fed constantly with spiritual food from the Word, which begat him.

There is no middle ground in this. We cannot navigate a way through our lives where we allow big influences to fill our lives and leave little place for God. He is the biggest thing in our existence, but we must live our lives in the practical expression of that truth. If we examine our lives and see that we have spent too little time on Him and His Son, then we have succumbed to idolatry in one form or another.

*“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness”*. We come from God, created ex-deo, made in the image of His character with divine potential, which we can squander on more trivial pursuits! In contrast the whole world pursues a different alien course to the sons and daughters of God.

Christ came to bring this truth to the people, whether they be Jews or gentiles, black or white, male or female, old or young! *“And we know that the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life”*. Why substitute reality with a falsehood of our own construction.

*“Wherefore my dearly beloved flee from idolatry”* 1 Corinthians 10v14.

The verse ends with Amen, so let it be!