

# Love's Signature

1 John 5:21



**Rock Hill Baptist Church**  
**605 Rock Hill Road**  
**Lexington, Tennessee 38351**

**Pastor David Buffaloe**  
**731-845-6104**  
**online at bibleteacher.org**

**FOCAL Read Together 1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

As the Apostle of Love - John - closed his letter, he closed it in a very unexpected manner. When we write letters we generally close them with our name. When the Apostle Paul closed his letter to the Thessalonians he wrote, "**The salutation of Paul with mine own hand; which is the token in every epistle: so I write**" (2 Thessalonians 3:17). We sign our names to our letters. Sometimes we close a letter with an encouraging word. such as the closing of Paul's letter to Timothy: "**Grace be with you**" (1 Timothy 6:21). There are a lot of ways to close a letter. You would expect the Apostle of Love to close his letter with "**my love be with you all in Christ Jesus**" (1 Corinthians 16:24). The Apostle John closed his letter with a loving warning. He said, "**my little children, keep yourselves from idols**".

What is an "idol"? An "idol" (from the original text, a εἰδωλον, pronounced *i'-do-lon*) is an image or likeness or thing that replaces the only true and living God in your heart.

The only true God is the God that is represented in the writings of the apostles and prophets - the collected writings that we call the Holy Bible. An "idol" is anything at all that you worship, desire, or obey in place of this Biblical God.

There are many idols in the world. The Egyptians worshiped many different idols, and formed images that

were honored as gods shaped like frogs, cats, dogs, and even lice. The Romans worshiped many different gods and goddesses. Every society of every age has worshiped gods and goddesses in place of the One True God. Idolatry begins in the heart when man considers himself wiser and more capable than God. **Professing themselves wise, they become foolish. They change the glory of the incorruptible God into an image that corruptible man can relate to. They make God out to be no more than a bird, or a beast, or a creeping thing (Romans 1:22-23).**

Idolatry disposes of God, and imposes a lesser god on the creature. The God of the Holy Scripture is "**merciful, gracious, patient, and filled with goodness and truth**" (Exodus 34:6-7). **His Word is truth (John 17:17)**, and the God of Scripture can never lie nor can He abide the presence of liars (Revelation 22:15). The God of Scripture is **merciful and forgiving**, but He will **never allow those who are unrepentant and guilty** to go unpunished. The false gods - the idols - that men worship teach that *all people go to Heaven*. The One True God teaches that only those who have repented of sin and who have given their hearts to Jesus Christ have the hope of Heaven.

Idolatry is the sin of sins. Idolatry caused Satan to fall from heaven. Idolatry caused Adam to question - and disobey God - in the Garden of Eden. Idolatry caused Cain to murder his brother Abel. Idolatry caused the first generation of Israel to wander dying in the wilderness, and the succeeding generations to be exiled from their land and their families.

In the English language "Idolatry" begins with the letter "I", and the idolater is the person who elevates himself into the position of God while lowering God to the position of man.

God lowered Himself from Heaven to come to this earth so that He, in love, could "**deliver us from the power of darkness, and attach us to His Kingdom**". The message of Scripture is that "**God so loved the world that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life**" (John 3:16). It is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that the God of the Bible - in love - reaches out to this world. Unless a person rejects all other saviors and all other gods he cannot receive forgiveness from the Biblical God. It is only through Jesus Christ that "**we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins**" (Colossians 1:14). It is only by faith in Jesus Christ that a person can be saved from this present evil world, and guaranteed entrance into God's Heavenly Kingdom in our next life.

John - the Apostle of Love - ended his letter by tenderly stating: **little children, keep yourselves from idols.**

Idols keep lost people from being saved, and keep saved people living as if they were lost.

In America today our idols are not carved out of stone or wood, but our idols are formed in our hearts. **Adrian Rogers** once said "**If you are saved you will have a**

**desire to be holy, a hunger for the Word (the Bible), the inner witness of the Spirit, and a desire to share Jesus. These are the birthmarks of the believer."** May I add to this that those who are saved will love the Lord Who saved them. Christianity is a relationship of love between God and His adopted Children. We who are His are to **guard ourselves from idolatry**, for idolatry robs God of what is rightfully His. It robs God of our hearts. This is why the Apostle of Love, John, closed his letter with this signature. **Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.** This is love's signature, and this is love's pleading. Turn away from false gods to the God of the Holy Bible. Believe that Jesus Christ - God the Son - gave Himself for your sins and for your salvation.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.

### **1. Idolatry Steals Present And Future Blessings**

**ILLUSTRATE** A little boy came to his mother with a cherished family heirloom - a vase - stuck on his hand. This vase was several hundred years old, and was worth several thousand dollars. The mother had planned on one day to sell that vase, and using the proceeds, to send her son to college. The child - like children will do - put his hand in the vase, and now his little arm was stuck. Mother soaped his arm, and gently tugged, rotated, and pulled on the vase, but nothing seemed to work. The child started crying and finally, with nothing else she could do, the mother shattered the vase, releasing her son's arm. That was when she noticed that her son's little hand was *clenched*. Counting to ten she looked at her little boy and said, "Son, was your hand balled up into a

fist the whole time I was trying to get you loose?" The child looked at her with his little tear stained face and said, "Yes momma, it was." Controlling her temper she asked her son, "Boy, why didn't you straighten out your hand? If you had just unclasped your hand I could have gotten you free from this vase - an expensive vase, mind you - without breaking it!" The child, opening his hand, said, "But momma, if I had opened my hand I would have lost my penny". A penny cost that mother a vase, and that child a college education.

So it is with idolatry. The Apostle tells us:

**FOCAL** **1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

The first two words, "**little children**" is actually one word in the original text. **The Greek τεκνιον, (pronounced tek-nee'-on)** is used some nine times in the Bible, and always in a *loving manner*. Just before Jesus Christ gave His followers the commandment to love He called us **little children**.

**John 13:33-34 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. .... {34} A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.**

Christ wanted His believers - **little children** - to love **one another**. When the Apostle Paul spoke of the Galatian believers he said:

**Galatians 4:19 My little children, of whom I travail**

**in birth again until Christ be formed in you,**

Paul wanted every Christian - **little children - to be more like Christ.**

**"Little children"** is a term of deep affection. If you are born again by faith in Christ, you were born again to have a living and growing relationship with God. Little children are **dependent** as well as **teachable**.

To you who are Christians, God is not just "God". God is our Father. A Father is someone who loves us. We are born to a Father. God is our Father.

We are **"little" children**. A little child is dependent upon its Father, and Christians are dependent upon their Father. Little children are **teachable**. When we were little children in the flesh we went to school and learned our letters. As little children - born again by faith in Christ - we have faith in and learn from our Heavenly Father. What would God have us learn?

**FOCAL** 1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

**"Keep yourselves"** is the Greek word φυλασσω (pronounced *foo-las'-so*) which means **"to post a guard over, to carefully watch for"**. Idolatry - like a thief - robs us of blessing. Idolatry, like an enemy soldier, will destroy our lives if we let it.

God tells His Children to **keep watch that idolatry does not enter into your life**. What is so terrible with idolatry? Idolatry robs us of God's best for us.

When God called **Abraham** to leave **Ancient Babylon** the Lord promised him that he would - at the appropriate time - have a son. Abraham waited a long time for that child. When he was a very old man the Lord blessed Abraham with a child named **Isaac**. Abraham was ecstatic! He was blessed beyond measure! God had promised that a mighty nation would come out of him, and that all the world would be blessed because of his faith.

**Genesis 17:4-8 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. {5} Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. {6} And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. {7} And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. {8} And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.**

God called Abraham to salvation. God promised to bless Abraham, and to use Abraham to bless all nations. God did that. Some ten years later, when Abraham was *a hundred years old*, Sarah had Isaac. Here was the

blessing. God loved Abraham, and Abraham loved God. Because of this love relationship God gave Abraham Isaac. But what happens next? God comes to Abraham, and says:

**Genesis 22:2 ... Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.**

A **burnt offering** was a sacrifice that was made to God by binding an animal upon a stone or dirt altar. Once the animal was killed - usually by cutting its throat - the offering was cut up and the pieces were set on fire. This is what God told Abraham to do to Isaac.

God told Abraham "I want you to go to Mount Moriah and there offer - not a lamb without blemish, not a goat, not a bullock, *but your only son Isaac*. I know you love him, but offer him anyway. Cut his throat, kill him, and then burn the pieces as a willing offering to Me.

What would you have done? Why did God do this?

You see, salvation is a relationship with God. When you were saved you entered into the greatest relationship you will ever know. In this relationship God will always want - and provide - His best for you. His Word and His Spirit guides us into His best. Listen to me, Beloved, while I tell you the truth! Never be afraid of the truth. God always wants His best for you, and will never do

anything that does not have your blessing at heart. Idolatry, on the other hand, will take the blessing of God and will begin to worship the created instead of the Creator. Idolatry will rob you of the joy of your salvation.

When we who are God's obey God then we will always be blessed. But when we begin to worship and serve the *blessing* instead of the *Blessor*, the *created* instead of the *Creator*, the *given* instead of the *Giver*, then we will never prosper.

The Bible says:

**James 4:14 .... For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.**

Life apart from a loving relationship with God is *absolutely nothing*. Life with a false god is a false life. Listen to me, dear ones. That which God has given you *still belongs to God*. When God saved Israel from Egypt, causing the Egyptians to toss their money and jewelry at the departing Israelites, these riches were not given so that Israel could make a **golden calf**. God gives His people things so that they can use them for His glory. God - in love with you - gives you things that He wants you to be willing to give back to Him. He does not enable idolatry - nor will He bless the idolator.

Abraham had a choice set before him. He could look God square in the eyes and say, "Not a chance! I waited a

long time - I'm a hundred years old - to get this boy. There is no way that I am going to give you Isaac as a **burnt offering!**" That was one choice. Abraham could have done that. He could have chose to let his love for Isaac be greater than his love for God. He could have made an idol of Isaac - just as many parents have made idols of their own children. What did Abraham do? The Bible says:

**Genesis 22:3 And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and cleaved the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.**

Abraham didn't ask God one single thing. Abraham knew that God loved him, and knew that God would keep His Word. Abraham **rose up early in the morning.** He didn't procrastinate. He didn't hem and haw. He didn't debate God. Abraham **saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son.** What else did he do? **Abraham chopped the wood for Isaac's burning!** Did you get that? He **cleaved the wood for the burnt offering.** He fully expected to be sacrificing his child to God, but he fully trusted Almighty God. You see, Abraham knew that Isaac was the fulfillment of God's Promise. This is why - before Abraham went up the mountain - he told his servants:

**Genesis 22:5 ... "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."** <sup>NIV</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_  
NIV New International Version used here for clarity

If God told him to do this thing, he was going to do it. God had never lied to Abraham before, and He wasn't about to start now. Abraham was convinced that - even if he had to kill and cut up Isaac - that from the very ashes of that sacrificial fire God would raise up his son. God was not about to leave Abraham with a broken promise!

**Hebrews 11:19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.** <sup>NIV</sup>

You know the rest of the story. God provided a sacrifice to replace Isaac, and Abraham was richly blessed. You, too, will be richly blessed if you follow God and God alone. The Christian is commanded of God to:

**Romans 12:1-2.... present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. {2} And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.**

**How can we prove what is that good, an acceptable, and perfect will of God? \_\_\_\_\_**

We can present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. We can say to God, "Here I am, Lord, send me." We can *do* as God tells us to do in His Holy Scripture. We can be

obedient to the Lord Who saved us. We can refuse to let this world dictate how we live. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

## 2. Idolatry Harms More Than Just Me

**FOCAL** 1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

The Apostle said "keep **YOURSELVES** from idols". This is in the PLURAL. Why? Because idolatry - like a communicable disease - infects more than just the idolater.

The Lord promised to give Israel - the seed of Abraham - the land of Canaan. Before God ever did this He brought Israel to Mount Sinai in Arabia and gave His people the Law. The *first ten commandments* of the Law are found in **Exodus chapter 20**. The first **three commandments** deal with the relationship that the Israelite was to have with God. The Lord said:

**Exodus 20:2-7** I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. {3} **Thou shalt have no other gods before me.** {4} **Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth:** {5} **Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them:** for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the

iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; {6} **And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.** {7} **Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;** for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

The first commandment tells us *Who* to worship. The second commandment tells us *what* not to worship. The third commandment tells us *how* to worship the Who of the first commandment.

The first commandment stated "**you shall have no other gods before Me**". God expects to be first in the hearts of His people. The second commandment said "**you shall not make an image or a likeness of any created thing to bow down or to serve it**". Nothing that the Creator made was supposed to be worshiped in place of God. The third commandment stated that "**you shall not take the name of God in vain**". These three commandments expressed how God expects to be treated by His people. His people should love Him above all else. His people should worship Him above all else. His people should speak well of Him above all else. The idolater will put the created above the Creator, but to the **little children of God God will always be first**. The idolater will make his own gods. He will make gods such as science and human wisdom and humanism, or make gods of money and riches, or make gods of rock stars or celebrities. They will bow down to these man-made gods, while mocking or speaking in derogatory manner about the

Biblical God. **Little children** will not do this, but idolaters will.

Have you ever wondered why the *first commandment* isn't "thou shalt not murder" or "thou shalt not commit adultery"? It is because any person who refuses a right relationship with the Almighty God will, in time, lose sight of all morality. If God is not worshiped but the man-made god is worshiped then morality is no longer an absolute.

Why do the first three commandments deal with a *right relationship with God*? Why are these first, and the other seven commandments following?

This is what happened with Canaan. In order to give that land to Israel the Lord would have to *take* it from the Canaanite. God told His nation Israel to enter the land of Canaan, and to drive out the Canaanites. The Canaanites had become *so filled with idolatry* that they did the greatest of evils. They not only dishonored their parents, they murdered their children. The Canaanite sacrificed their children in the arms of the god known as Baal. God told His Israel that - when they went into Canaan - to run these people out, and to occupy the land in the Name of God.

Israel didn't do that. The Bible says that:

**Psalms 106:34-41 [Israel] did not destroy the nations, concerning whom the LORD commanded them: {35} But **were mingled among the heathen, and learned****

**their works. {36} And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. {37} Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils, {38} And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood. {39} Thus were they defiled with their own works, and went a whoring with their own inventions. {40} Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against his people, insomuch that he abhorred his own inheritance. {41} And he gave them into the hand of the heathen; and they that hated them ruled over them.**

Idolatry hurts. When it spreads it damages more than the idolater. In time God's people became as evil as the Canaanites that they mingled with, and the idolatry that they tolerated caused God to be angry with His people.

When we live for God, His desires become our desires. When we live for idols, our desires become our master.

Dear friends, idolatry is an enemy that *must* be guarded against. **Guard yourselves from idols**. Guard yourselves by giving yourselves fully to the God of the Bible and the Book that this God has written. Practice what He has told you.

If the world says that a thing is *right*, **do not be conformed to this world**. Seek out the guidance of God the Holy Spirit. Seek out wisdom through His Word.

There have been many children that - watching a parachutist on the television - have injured themselves by jumping from the roof of their house with no more than a bed sheet as a make believe parachute. The child sees someone jump from a plane and - believing what he sees - he in turn jumps from the roof. The child has faith in what he sees, but his faith is an illusion. As believers we are to do as Jesus said to Peter:

**Mark 11:22 ... Have faith in God.**

If you have faith in God, then God will be first in your life. A Christian does not serve God because he *has* to. A Christian serves God because he *wants* to. The believer knows that God and God alone is the Source of every blessing. Though I look forward to a life beyond this one where all sickness and pain is gone, I always remember - and you should, too - is that this is not the main event in Heaven. When we get to Heaven we will spend every moment of eternity *praising and loving God*. We will sing to Him, and bless Him, and thank Him, and kneel at His feet to worship Him. For, you see, Heaven is not about us, but its about God.

Idolatry is dangerous - and very subtle. We can make idols of ourselves. Believers - and churches - have been known to deny the clear teachings of the Word of God in order to placate the sins of its members. This is idolatry. Members sometimes spend more time focused on the building that they worship in than they do the God Who gave them that building. This is idolatry. Some people idolize their wealth, worshiping money more than they worship the Lord. This is idolatry. Some worship their

jobs, their sports, or even their own families above that of God. **C.H. Spurgeon** rightly said,

**"Make no idol of your child, or your wife, or your husband; for by putting them in Christ's place, you really provoke Him to take them from you. Love them as much as you please; I would that some loved their children, their husbands, or their wives more than they do; but always love them in such a fashion that Christ shall have the first place in your hearts."**

What did Jesus say? He said:

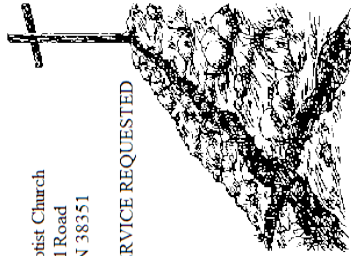
**Luke 14:26-27 If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. {27} And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.**

God must always be first in the hearts of His people. And, dear ones, the world needs to see that you love the Lord your God first and foremost. Your unsaved relatives and your unsaved friends need to see that you love the Lord your God more than anything else. This is the only way that we will win the lost to Christ.

May God touch your hearts with His Word.

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605 Rock Hill Road  
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



**FOCAL Read Together 1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.**

- What is an "idol"? An "idol" (from the original text, a εἰδωλον, pronounced *i'-do-lon*) is \_\_\_\_\_

- In the English language "Idolatry" begins with the letter "I", and the idolater is the person who \_\_\_\_\_

- Idols keep lost people from being \_\_\_\_\_, and keep saved people living as if they were \_\_\_\_\_.

**1. Idolatry Steals Present And Future Blessings**

(1 John 5:21; John 13:33-34; Galatians 4:19; Genesis 17:4-8; Genesis 22:2; James 4:14; Genesis 22:3; Genesis 22:5; Hebrews 11:19; Romans 12:1-2)

- "Little children" is a term of deep affection. If you are born again by faith in Christ, you were born again to have a living and growing relationship with God. Little children are \_\_\_\_\_ as well as \_\_\_\_\_.

- "Keep yourselves" is the Greek word φυλασσω (pronounced *foo-las'-so*) which means \_\_\_\_\_

- A burnt offering was a \_\_\_\_\_

This is what God told Abraham to do to Isaac.

- When we who are God's obey God then we will always be blessed. But when we begin to worship and serve the *blessing* instead of the \_\_\_\_\_, the *created* instead of the \_\_\_\_\_, the *given* instead of the \_\_\_\_\_, then we will never prosper.

- How can we prove what is that good, an acceptable, and perfect will of God? \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Idolatry Harms More Than Just Me**

**1 John 5:21; Exodus 20:2-7; Psalms 106:34-41; Mark 11:22; Luke 14:26-27**

- The Apostle said "keep **YOURSELVES** from idols". This is in the PLURAL. Why? \_\_\_\_\_

- The first commandment tells us \_\_\_\_\_.  
The second commandment tells us \_\_\_\_\_.  
The third commandment tells us \_\_\_\_\_.

- Why do the first three commandments deal with a *right relationship with God*? Why are these first, and the other seven commandments following?

- When we live for God, \_\_\_\_\_.  
When we live for idols, \_\_\_\_\_.