

The Sin That Almost Defies Detection

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The Carnal Heart

Jesus said, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."** (Matthew 7:13,14)

The road to destruction is broad, has many lanes and is well traveled these days. If we stay in the "I'm real busy" lane, there is danger ahead. It is easy to allow ourselves to speed excessively down the broad road that Jesus spoke of, even though we do it at great peril.

Busyness and sin are like blindfolds and it is impossible to see where we are going if we are blindfolded. Busyness diverts our minds with things that have no real value. Sin deadens our perception for harm. Busyness crowds out spiritual introspection. Sin distorts reality. Busyness produces fatigue.

Sin confuses the facts and makes a lie appear to be the truth. If a person is spiritually blind, he cannot grasp or understand the obligations and accountability God requires of him or her. A blind man cannot see where the curves, potholes and ditches are located.

Consequently, a blindfolded man will inevitably stumble and fall because of his life in darkness. If the majority of a nation's population is blindfolded by the deceitfulness of sin and operates on 24/7's (24 hours a day, seven days a week), it is only a matter of time until that nation morally crumbles, stumbles and falls.

In previous editions of *Day Star*, I have presented Bible evidence showing that God sends destruction on a nation when its cup of iniquity becomes full. God destroyed the world in Noah's day because men's thoughts were continually evil and He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for sexual perversion.

He also destroyed the nations of Israel, Judah, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Grecia, Rome and numerous empires since, but for what purpose? God destroyed those great nations when their majority became morally cold and degenerate. God destroys nations when they become filled with violence and rebellion.

God is sovereign and the Earth belongs to Him. He is keenly interested in the use of His property and He will destroy a degenerate nation so the land can be given to another nation. God is also the Judge of mankind. He who numbers the hairs on our head is also very concerned about our behavior.

Consider this warning and the underlying principle given to ancient Israel: **"Do not defile yourselves in any of these [sexually immoral] ways, because this is how the nations that I**

am going to drive out before you became defiled. Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you." (Leviticus 18:24-28, insertion mine)

The Sin That Almost Defies Detection

Idolatry is one of the primary causes for moral degeneracy and it seems almost impossible to detect. If Gallup pollsters were to survey 1,000 Americans, I suspect that less than 3% would confess to idolatry. Today, little is said about idolatry from the pulpit.

When was the last time you heard a good sermon on idolatry and its consequences? When the word "idolatry" is used today, many Christians picture in their minds an ancient group of people bowing down before some type of rock or wooden statue as though it was Almighty God. Yes, this imagery is used in the Old Testament several times, but it is only one aspect of idolatry.

Remember, idolaters in the Old Testament did not consider themselves idolaters. *Idolaters* is a term that God uses to describe anyone who worships imaginary gods. Idolatry occurs when we use any type of justification to violate God's will.

Idolaters do not recognize they are idolaters. This is the problem! Ancient people knew their images were made of wood and stone. They also knew their images could not speak or walk. So today we wonder how they could bow down before lifeless statues and believe they were gods?

The truth is, the ancients looked on their statutes as icons (a visual representation) of *real gods* that existed in the spiritual realm. Understand that ancient Israel did not abandon the worship of Jehovah to worship the *statues* of Baal because they were marvelous to look upon.

Not at all! Ancient Israel abandoned the worship of Jehovah (who forbid the making of icons in the Second Commandment) for several reasons, but let us consider two:

1. Israel abandoned Jehovah's commands because Baal's *doctrines* were far more agreeable with the carnal nature. Temple prostitutes, sexual orgies, sensual dancing, ungodly music, feasting, extensive rituals and human sacrifices were far more stimulating forms of worship than listening to an old priest reading the law of Moses every Sabbath. Worshiping the gods of Baal offered a religious experience that was sensual and appealing to the young. Over time Baal's teachings became a religious blindfold that released the Jews from the chaffing accountability required by Jehovah. Within 450 years of the Exodus, the northern ten tribes of Israel had become so detached from Jehovah that no one would listen to any of his prophets.
2. Many ancient civilizations believed that *if* the gods were pleased with their behavior and sacrifices, the nation would prosper and be blessed with fertility, health, prowess and

national sovereignty. Israel was no exception. For example, the Canaanite nations believed that the great god, Molech, could only be appeased through the sacrifice of innocent blood of children. (Leviticus 18:21; 1 Kings 11:4-7) Powerful rulers and nations believed their prosperity and sovereignty came when the gods were more pleased with them than other nations. (See Deuteronomy 28:1-14 and Isaiah 36.) So, when Israel's good fortunes began to fail after the time of Solomon, Israel's kings converted to the religion of the Baals who *appeared* to be more powerful than Jehovah. (2 Chronicles 28:22-26) Of course, the truth is that Jehovah allowed foreign nations to overrun Israel because Israel refused to obey Him (Leviticus 26:14-46; Ezekiel 12:14-21). Unfortunately, the apostate leaders of Israel interpreted their loss of prosperity and sovereignty as proof that Jehovah was weak and inferior.

Serious parallels exist between ancient and modern civilizations. Modern civilizations are convinced that prosperity, prowess and sovereignty are the achievements of man. U.S. citizens may say, "In God we trust," and presidents may invoke, "God bless America," but these statements are meaningless if we refuse to accept the standards of righteousness that God demands.

Second, when religion ceases to aggravate and agitate the carnal nature, allowing the spiritual nature to grow strong and dominant, apostasy becomes inevitable. Rebellion against God is like a tap root that silently, and almost imperceptibly, grows deep and strong. Only when challenged with a plain, "Thus saith the Lord," does rebellion make itself known. Israel's fall into apostasy came through their consistent murmuring and rebellion against God's requirements.

Idolatry Defined

Idolatry is anything that causes a person to distort, compromise or diminish the authority of God. Paul says that idolatry is based on greed. **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming."** (Colossians 3:5,6)

For a moment, let us focus on the aspect of greed. What is greed? Greed is a grasping desire for possession. Greed is an insatiable appetite for "something." Greed thrives in a self-seeking heart and is the basis for self-aggrandizement. Greed is at the root of covetousness.

Greed can be expressed in many different ways and taints every aspect of life. We can be greedy for authority, control, power, money, material possessions, recognition, food, sex, pleasure and anything else the human heart desires. There are no boundaries or limits to greed.

Needy or Greedy?

Every person has basic needs. People need shelter, food, love, clothing, health, happiness, etc. So, how does a person draw the line between needy and greedy? The answer is found in the appetites of the heart. If the Holy Spirit lives within the human heart, love exalts the interests and needs of others above itself.

On the other hand, the carnal heart is assertive, self-seeking, always putting self first. The carnal heart resists authority, it wants to be in charge, like God. *The carnal heart is afraid of two things: the truth and the future.* Preferring darkness over the searching light of truth, the carnal heart always puts a spin on its actions, justifying its gross behavior. The carnal heart is also afraid of the future. The carnal heart justifies today's greed to insure the survival of self in days to come.

Because everyone on Earth has a carnal heart, everyone on Earth has a natural propensity for greed.

Consider the Difference

The spiritual heart realizes that loving and obeying God must be higher than any consequences. (Matthew 22:37,38) Therefore, the law of God must be exalted first and foremost. The spiritual heart knows that concern for our neighbors is as important in God's sight as taking care of ourselves. (Matthew 22:39,40)

We are our brother's keepers. The spiritual heart recognizes that facing the truth with a contrite heart, although sometimes painful, is the only way to please God. (Isaiah 66:2) The spiritual heart is not afraid of the future, since God is already in the future and sustains all forms of life by His mighty power. (Isaiah 41:10)

The spiritual heart does not seek first-place, but instead puts the needs of others first. The spiritual heart does not revel in the momentary applause of men, but focuses its desires on the eternal approval of God. The spiritual heart is more concerned with what is right than with its rights.

Stepping Over The Line

When we become willing to violate the commandments of God in order to have our heart's desire, we step over the line from needy to greedy. The *focus* of the desire becomes the idol. For example, a person may desire money to the point that he is willing to cheat or lie. This is idolatry.

Relationships can also be a form of idolatry. When a person becomes sexually immoral, they violate the will of God and step over the line from needy to greedy. A job or a career can be an idol. A person may justify working on God's holy day because the threat of losing his job has become more important than his or her obedience to God. The carnal nature says, "I cannot afford to lose my job".

The spiritual nature says, "I cannot afford to ignore God's commandment, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' " Entertainment, food, pleasure, material possessions, work, etc. can be forms of idolatry. If we desire something to the point that we are willing to violate God's requirements, we are idolaters.

What is the benefit in being an idolater? In the long run, nothing is gained through idolatry. We simply wear ourselves out. Solomon said, "**Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.**" (Proverbs 23:4,5) Jesus also encouraged us with words of comfort: "**So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.**" (Matthew 6:31-34)

Idolaters Have To Be Destroyed

The United States has become the richest nation on Earth, but only because God blessed this country in marvelous ways. If the rapid growth of idolatry continues in America, its citizens will inevitably separate the country from God's blessings.

The U.S. is drifting away from obedience to God at an alarming rate. Television and all forms of media are contributing to this decline. The slippery slope of sin only gets steeper and faster. God deals severely with nations who give themselves over to idolatry.

Destruction comes because idolatry forces a nation to forsake the divine principles necessary for the quality of life that God wants for His creation. Man is accountable to God. The rise and *fall* of many nations during Old Testament times confirms this salient point.

God uses an arsenal of four deadly judgments to destroy nations: Sword, famine, plague and wild beasts. "**The word of the Lord came to me [Ezekiel]: 'Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men—Noah, Daniel and Job—were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord. . . 'For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!'**" (Ezekiel 14:12,13, 21)

I believe these same judgments are about to be unleashed upon an unsuspecting world. The fourth seal is the next one to be opened. Notice what the Bible says, "**When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.**" (Revelation 6:7,8)

When God spoke the first commandment from Mt. Sinai, "**You shall have no other gods before me**" (Exodus 20:3), He foreknew the consequences of idolatry.

The Bible confirms that destruction is God's solution for stopping idolatry. **"Outside [the holy city] are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."** (Revelation 22:15, insertion mine)

Idolatry can be hard to define because the carnal heart is so devious. Jeremiah said, **"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"** (Jeremiah 17:9) The devil preys upon our carnal nature. A great unseen war is waging – the prize is to take possession of every soul.

The devil and his forces are doing everything they can to entice people into idolatry. Demons have intensely studied us and are highly skilled at influencing people toward evil behavior. Make no mistake about it, the sin that almost defies definition today is idolatry.

In our passionate reach for money, power, pleasure and possessions, millions are defying the commands of God. This is serious! Idolaters do not know they are idolaters unless the Holy Spirit can penetrate our carnal heart and reveal it.

It is imperative that we seek the Lord as we study His Word, asking Him if there is anything in our lives that stands in the way of total submission to His will. Listen for His response. We can be sure that when Jesus appears at the Second Coming, He will be like a roaring lion to idolaters and a gentle lamb to His followers.