

THE GOLDEN CALF
The Old Testament Today
Banska Bystrica, 24th October 2021

Τεκνία, φυλάξατε ἑαυτὰ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδώλων

1Jo 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Exodus 24:12-18; 32:1-35 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." ² Aaron said to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD." ⁶ They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel. ⁷ The LORD said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; ⁸ they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'" ⁹ The LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. ¹⁰ Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." ¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ¹⁴ And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people. ¹⁵ Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets. ¹⁷ When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." ¹⁸ But he said, "It is not the sound made by victors, or the sound made by losers; it is the sound of revelers that I hear." ¹⁹ As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. ²¹ Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" ²² And Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. ²³ They said to me, 'Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ²⁴ So I said to them, 'Whoever has gold, take it off'; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" ²⁵ When Moses saw that the people were running wild (for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of their enemies), ²⁶ then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. ²⁷ He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.'" ²⁸ The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand of the people fell on that day. ²⁹ Moses said, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day." ³⁰ On the next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ³¹ So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, if you will only forgive their sin-- but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written." ³³ But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin." ³⁵ Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf-- the one that Aaron made

1Cor 10:14 Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρείας

1Cor 10:14 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry

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- Egyptian goddess *Hesat* (?) → “Minor guardian of pregnant and nursing mothers whose milk, the “beer of Hesat,” nourishes humanity.” (*Dictionary Of Gods And Goddesses*)
- **Dt 29:(16)17** And you have seen their detestable things (אֲתֵּשְׁקוּצֵיהֶם וְאֵת נִלְיֵיהֶם), their idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, which were among them
- [CHAMBERS] The Babylonish captivity put an end to idolatry for ever. When Our Lord came the people were guilty of Pharisaism. The characteristic of Pharisaism in Our Lord’s day was an intense hatred of idolatry (cf. Luke 11:24-26). → → →
- [BEALE *We Become What We Worship*, 28] Israel’s idolatry at the time of the first century, which was not bowing down to cult images but trusting in tradition instead of God and his living Word.

0.2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF IDOLATRY

- **Psalm 115:4-8** Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. ⁶ They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. ⁷ They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. ⁸ Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

[BEALE *We Become What We Worship*, 307] The Hebrew words for idols are significant in this respect, since they refer to the essential worthlessness of idols. One word for idols is the noun *gillulim*, which comes from a Hebrew root meaning “roll.” The noun form can mean either “pellets of dung” or “shapeless, loggy things.” “Either way, ‘loggy’ or ‘dungy,’ the word expressed the utmost contempt, and conveyed a double entendre, since the one would inevitably suggest the other.

- **Jer 2:5** Thus says the LORD: “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless (וַיִּלְכוּ אַחֲרֵי הַהֶבֶל וַיִּהְיוּ)?”

0.3. MODERN IDOLATRIES

- There are more idols in the world than there are realities. (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*)

- Tim Keller: idol → “your functional saviour” (A Vision...) → collectivist idols; individualistic idols;
 - “It may be my (1) talents, (2) moral record, (3) personal discipline, (4) social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them, so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God. ...inordinate loves,

[Keller *Counterfeit Gods*] Our contemporary society is not fundamentally different from these ancient ones. Each culture is dominated by its own set of idols. Each has its “priesthoods,” its totems and rituals. Each one has its shrines—whether office towers, spas and gyms, studios, or stadiums—where sacrifices must be made in order to procure the blessings of the good life and ward off disaster. What are the gods of beauty, power, money, and achievement but these same things that have assumed mythic proportions in our individual lives and in our society? We may not physically kneel before the statue of Aphrodite, but many young women today are driven into depression and eating disorders by an obsessive concern over their body image. We may not actually burn incense to Artemis, but when money and career are raised to cosmic proportions, we perform a kind of child sacrifice, neglecting family and community to achieve a higher place in business and gain more wealth and prestige.

- → [Keller] Delbanco [] traces three phases of American civilization by looking at the fundamental hope of each era, which he names in sequence “(1) God, (2) Nation, and (3) Self.”

1. IMPATIENCE

- "Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."
- **Luke 18:1-8** And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.² He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man.³ And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'⁴ For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man,⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says.⁷ And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?⁸ I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

1.1. IMMEDIATE ANSWERS TO PRAYER

- **1Sa 1:17-18** Then Eli answered, "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you have made to him."¹⁸ And she said, "Let your servant find favor in your eyes." Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.
- **Mark 11:24** Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours

1.2. SHORT TERM GUIDANCE

- Saul waiting for Samuel → **1Sa 13:8-9** He waited seven days, the time appointed by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and the people were scattering from him.⁹ So Saul said, "Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings." And he offered the burnt offering. ... **13:14** now your kingdom shall not continue
- **Mt 17:24-25** When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half-shekel tax went up to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the tax?"²⁵ He said, "Yes."

1.3. LIFE-LONG HOPE

- **1 Thessalonians 1:9-10** you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

2. IDOLATROUS RELIGION

- IDOL → anything that is an END IN ITSELF (“untouchable”, loved for its own sake), “centre of gravity”
- the signs of self-made / man-made religions: (1) familiar, (2) visible (3) carnal

2.1. GOLD → VALUE

- the symbol of wealth → POWER
- idolatry → sacrifices
- Col 3:5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: ... and covetousness, which is idolatry.
- 1Tim 6:9-10 But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a **snare**, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs

2.2. ART → BEAUTY

- the symbol of talent, achievement, fame (Hab 1:11 → ...whose own might is their god!)
- idolatry → a substitute religion
- figurative arts; literature; music (church iconolatry; Dante → Beatrice; Goethe → *Ewigweibliche*; Wagner → Parsifal; Mahler → 8th Symphony)
- religious methods: [CHAMBERS] Earnestness is not by any means everything; it is very often a subtle form of pious self-idolatry, because it is obsessed with the method and not with the Master.

2.3. ENTERTAINMENT → PLEASURE

- the symbol/substitute of joy
- idolatry → avoiding pain at any cost
- [TOZER] The sacred has been secularized, the holy vulgarized and worship converted into a form of entertainment. (*Sanctifying the Ordinary* Born After Midnight - Chapter 16)
- [TOZER] People should come to a church worship service not anticipating entertainment but expecting the high and holy manifestation of God's presence.
- [TOZER] Without Biblical authority, or any other right under the sun, carnal religious leaders have introduced a host of attractions that serve no purpose except to provide entertainment for the retarded saints. ...It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God.

3. DISCIPLINE – SPIRITUAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL

[CHAMBERS *God's Workmanship*] This attitude is spreading amongst us to-day amazingly, people are enchanted with the truth, sympathetic with the truth of God, but remaining in sin. “**Repentance**” is not in their vocabulary, only regret; there is no confession of sin, only admitting. Religion is turned into education, and the Christian life is made to mean a happy life instead of a new life. (Lectures and sermons given by Oswald Chambers in England and Egypt, 1910 to 1917.)

3.1. UNCOMPROMISING

- [Levites] ²⁷ He said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.'"
- Rev 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: "The words of him who has the sharp two-edged sword ...Rev 2:16 Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth."
- 1Tim 5:20 As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. (Τοὺς ἀμαρτάνοντας ἐνώπιον πάντων ἔλεγε, ἵνα καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ φόβον ἔχωσιν)

3.2. MERCIFUL

- [Moses' prayer] ¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ... ¹³Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel,
- **Job 33:24** 'Deliver him from going down into the pit; I have found a ransom.
- **Jude 1:22-23** And have mercy on those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

4. TO REMEMBER

- Idolatry has many subtle forms. Its main attribute is enmity against the living God.
- Idolatry ascribes divine properties to finite beings and things to worship. Today it is SELF-worship.
- Idolatry must be drastically dealt with. God must be absolutely first in your mind, heart and will.