

“Do not be idolaters” 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 / Luke 13:1-9 (3/23/25)

After my parents were baptized, I was so excited because I expected that I could have a faith life with my family together. However, the reality was not like my expectations. My parents experienced God and confessed Jesus as the Lord, but their faith was not firm when they had suffering and challenges in life. Once they experienced the grace of God in the church, they were so happy for living God. But once they had some troubles, they said, “I do not think God is real.” In addition to my parents’ up-and-down faith, my sister started to reject Jesus and Christianity strongly.

My family’s faith made me feel more difficult than when they did not have faith. When their faith was up and down, my feelings were also up and down together. My life was a repetition of hope and disappointment. I had great hope when my parents said that they knew God’s grace and who God was. And I was disappointed when they said, “There is no God.”

I struggled with my parents for about 5 years. I hoped and expected to focus on theology study, church work, and ministry with my parents’ support. But my family became the most serious difficulty for me. I often prayed to God, “Anyway, they believed in Christ. So, I have done my work, God. I do not have any strength

to struggle with them for the next step. I have my way to go. You take care of them by yourself.” But every year, when I prayed for the guidance of God for each year on January 1st, God told me in my heart, ‘Do your best for your family. Help your family to stand firm on me.’ I did not like this voice in my heart, but God poured a very strong heart on me. So, every year, I struggled with my parents and sister.

At that time, when I shared my concern with my seminary friends and other pastors, some of them told me that my family and I had that issue because we served idols too long. They said the idol spirits would disrupt my family to make us return to serve idols.

Their advice could be a possibility. But at that time, and until now, I disagree with them. Because even though my parents sometimes said there is no God, they totally cleaned up idol things in their lives. They did not serve idols anymore. I hoped their lives would be disciplined to see Jesus in any situation. Now they have very strong and firm faith in Jesus. And they are my best supporters.

Idolatry is a very important idea that Christians should understand well. It may be a very simple idea. we say idolatry when somebody serves a visible thing like statues, trees, or anything instead of God. But idolatry has more complicated matters than simple understanding.

There are two types of idolatry in the Bible. As a simple idea, we can see many people who served other gods and followed other religious practices. They served Egyptian, Canaanite, Roman, and many other gods and goddesses. These people are one example of idolatry in that they offered sacrifice to other gods, and they carried the symbols of other gods and goddesses as totems and charms for their protection. It is very clear that we know it is idolatry. We can say just stop to serve other gods. However, idolatry has a more complicated form in the Bible.

In the Bible, there is another good example of idolatry to show the complicated case. We know this story well. The golden calf story. When Moses was on the top of the Mountain, Hebrews created a golden calf. And they called this golden calf God, who saved them from Egypt. They did not serve other gods. They served our God, but they just made a visible thing to know who God was.

Why was God so angry with the idolatry? Why was the making of a golden calf under God's name idolatry? Was God angry because the Hebrews made God an ugly cow? God said that God made humans in the image of God. God made humans with handsome and beautiful faces. But humans made God an ugly cow. Is that why God was angry with Hebrews? Of course not. Then, why did God hate idolatry so much? It is because idolatry is related to humans' sinful nature.

The golden calf story has the meaning that humans limited God under human knowledge and ideas. Hebrews formed a golden calf and called God, and they worshiped this golden calf the way they wanted. This means they wanted to live as they wanted. In other words, they wanted to escape from God's intervention. They wanted to be like God in their lives. In Genesis, the serpent tempted the woman by saying, "For God knows that when you eat from it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When humans started to think that 'humans could live without God, humans did not need God, humans could live how they wanted,' humans would be dead because the relationship with the life of God would be broken.

If we read the Old Testament well, we can see that it is the story that God says, "Do not commit idolatry." Then Humans commit idolatry, God sends prophets to make humans return to God, Humans ignore God, and they have troubles, then they return to God crying, then God tells humans again, "Do not commit idolatry." But Humans commit idolatry again. We can see that Humans really did not listen to God through the Old Testament. So, eventually, God sent the only Son to finish this repetition.

This is a complicated part of the idolatry. I believe we should apply this to

our lives. We can commit idolatry while we are calling God's name, while we say we are Christians, while we come to the church to worship our God's name. If we limit our God on Sunday, if we say, "God, we need you only when I have trouble, we need you only on Sunday," we could commit idolatry.

In today's Scripture, Paul says, "Do not be idolaters." Last week, I shared that the unique thing about Phillipi was citizenship. In the same manner, the special thing of Corinth was idolatry. Corinth was the city of idols. So, the life of Christians in Corinth was a mixture of all the habits of the world's culture. Christians in Corinth said they were Christian, but they lived as they wanted. So, Paul wrote many teachings about the lifestyle of Christians in the letter to the Corinthian church. And in today's Scripture, Paul encouraged the Corinthian Christians not to be idolaters.

Then, how can we overcome idolatry? In today's Luke Scripture, Jesus emphasized repentance. Yes, we can overcome idolatry through repentance. Repentance, which means "return to God." We can return to God through Jesus Christ. When we confess Jesus as our Lord, this confession has the meaning that "We confess our sinful nature is dead on the cross with Christ, and now we live with the life of resurrection of Jesus." When Jesus was dead on the cross, our sinful nature, which is the wish to live our lives as we wanted, the wish to be God in our lives, was

also dead. When Jesus was resurrected after defeating the power of death, we also had a new life to live as God's will. This confession is the very opposite of idolatry. Because Jesus died on the cross and was resurrected after death, we can say, "It is our great joy if God is with us. We are happy when God is the center of my life."

We are still on the journey of the Lent season. The Lent season is a good season to return our hearts to God. Jesus died on the cross to invite us into God's arms. I hope we can confess that we died on the cross with Jesus and live with Jesus through the life of resurrection during this Lent season. I hope we can continue our journey with Jesus, with the presence of God, during this Lent season. Amen.