

How Can the Church Effectively Resist and Reject Idolatry?

In the context of our studies, how can the church effectively reject idolatry? What are some of the primary means God has given her in order to equip her to forsake this sin?

In the first place, the church needs to recapture the biblical significance and weight of God's word. In doing so, it will be reminded that the word of God is God's efficacious power in *ex nihilo* creation by which he brings into existence the things that are not. The creation accounts in Gen 1:3, 6-7, 9, 11, 14-15 are punctuated with the same joyous refrain: "And God said, "Let there be.... and there was " or, "And it was so." In other words, there was no lapse or hesitation between God's command and his desired result. This truth is plainly corroborated by the psalmist, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." Ps 33:6, 9.

This divine principle, pattern and power also apply in the realm of re-creation or redemption in which the Lord God commands his saving light to shine in the heart of the elect sinner, "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Cor 4:6. In so doing, God brings the dead to life and calls into existence the things that are not, Rom 4:17. How are we saved? We are saved in the same manner in which the Lord God created the heavens and earth. That is to say, we receive the Lord's salvation when he commands his light to shine in our dead and darkened hearts. The light obeys the word of God who gives life to all things, 1 Tim 6:13, overcomes the darkness and achieves the end for which it was sent. In other words, we were born again because the Lord God commanded it; he spoke (it) and it was so! He said let there be life in this dead sinner and there was!

The word of God is therefore the word of life, Phi 2:16, that is, the gospel message, and the word of faith, Rom 10:8, that is, it requires and calls for the exercise of faith in order to effectuate its saving design. This is explained in vv. 9-18. Sometimes it is termed the *words* of life, Jn 6:63, and of eternal life, v. 68. This word of God is also able to sanctify us, 2 Ths 2:13; Jas 1:21. Further, this word of God is both the source and means by which God will render his judgment on the last day, 2 Pe 3:7 (1-7).

God who has promised eternal life in ages past has now manifest it in the preaching of the word of God, Tit 1:2-3. To this proclamation the church's response is that of receiving it in faith. Among other things, this entails that the church is to listen to God's word diligently, with adequate preparation and prayer, dutifully examining what it is hearing by the Scriptures and to receive it with love, meekness, and readiness of mind as it indeed is — the very word of God upon which it is to meditate, and so on, and through which it is to live a holy life. (*The Westminster Larger Catechism Q and A 160*).

In being re-awakened to the comprehensive magnitude of God's word, the church will also recall that this word (along with the sacrament) is God's chief means of grace by which he not only reaches down to and justifies sinners but also through which he nurtures, sustains and establishes them in their journey. Thus, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* teaches that the Holy Spirit works in conjunction with "the reading , but especially the preaching of the Word, [to make it] an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation." (Q and A 89). This activity takes place within the life of the church as she gathers in corporate assembly to hear from heaven. The church therefore needs to recover its delightful covenant obligation of hearing the word of God, that is to say of receiving God's external Word, by faith. Yes, the church needs to hear again with sanctified hearts, the *Vox Dei*, the voice of God, whose words are never idly spoken but which come down to her with its full impact and perspicuity.