**Grace Guide**

**12-6-17**

**1 John 5:18-21**

I’ve said it before from the pulpit, but I have to be very careful with the types of entertainment I allow myself to enjoy. I can’t handle video games very well. I also can’t handle engrossing television series. I’ve even had to throttle back my reading habits. I don’t know what it is, but there’s a switch that gets flipped sometimes and I become consumed with watching the next show, or reading the next chapter, or defeating the next level.

I remember back when Mandy and I lived in Idaho (before kids) when we had time and energy for recreational things. I started reading the “The Hunger Games” trilogy one evening about 8:00. It took about 3 minutes for me to fall hook, line and sinker into the story and the next thing I knew, Mandy’s alarm was going off on her phone. I had read the ENTIRE night! I was completely useless at work that next day. Not so much because I was tired from reading all night, but because I couldn’t focus on the tasks at hand due to the fact that I just HAD to know what was going to happen next in that stupid trilogy.

For three days, I lived in unreality. I was so caught up and engrossed in a world of fiction that I didn’t pay any attention, nor did I care for what was going on around me in the real world. The same has happened when I’ve started to watch a particular television series and I have access to the whole series. They call it “binge watching.” I’ve been guilty of it on more than one occasion.

But, as in all things, the Lord has been very gracious and patient with me and eventually, I felt a gently prodding by the Holy Spirit that I was allowing the idol of entertainment to creep in and take hold in my life. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying that reading and playing video games and watching television are bad things. There are just certain cases where I can’t handle them and in those cases, I stay away from them.

Steven Cole gives a very practical application of John’s warning against idols - application of John's warning against **idols** – “*In the most basic sense, an idol is anything that takes the rightful place of God in your life. Paul equated covetousness or greed with idolatry (*[*Eph. 5:5*](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Eph.%205.5)*;*[*Col. 3:5*](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Col.%203.5)*). Your career, your pursuit of money, your possessions, excessive devotion to leisure and recreation, or even putting a human relationship ahead of your relation-ship with God, may all become idols. Putting your intellect above God’s revelation is idolatry. Watching hours of inane or immoral TV shows each week or spending hours playing computer games, while not having time to spend with God or serve Him, is****idolatry****. At the root of all of these is the idol of****self****.****The idolater has not yielded the throne of his life to the true God.****Rather, he wants his will and his way, and he tries to use God to get what he wants. If his god delivers, he sets the god back on the shelf until the next time he needs something and then uses it again. If it doesn’t de-liver, he’ll shop around for a better god who gets him what he wants. But the idolater does not submit to the living and true God. I fear that even many who claim to be born again Christians are only trying to use God to get happiness or peace or a better life. If He brings trials, they look for a new god. That is idolatry!”*

**Where are you most tempted towards idolatry?**

The scriptures are very clear about the sin of idolatry and I find it very interesting that John closes his letter with that warning against it.

A Newsweek article many years ago (1/31/1983) told about how treasure hunters looking to make a huge profit were stealing rare idols from the Hopi reservation. The worst theft happened in 1978, when looters took four ancient stick figures representing the most sacred deities of the Hopi religion. “Without the idols, there could be no Hopi rituals,” the article stated, “and without the rituals, the tribe’s spiritual life was in danger of extinction.” A tribal leader explained that these ceremonies “bring blessings in rainfall, bountiful crops, good health, and long life. That is being lost to us.” What a sad description of idolatry! You make up your own gods and then use them to get what you want. The problem is, these gods may be stolen and your way of life is destroyed. If it can be taken from you, it isn’t the true God! Make sure that even if you claim to follow Him as a born again Christian, you don’t fall into the idolatry of using Him to get what you want, or accepting the parts of Him that you like and rejecting the parts you don’t like. That is no different than pagan idolatry… Guard yourselves from idols!

The Greek word for guard here is “[phulasso](http://www.preceptaustin.org/psalm_121_a_commentary#phulasso).” It means to watch, keeping on guard like an armed military sentinel guarding a restricted base ready to repulse any enemy incursion. Elsewhere “phulasso” is used of guarding or maintaining truth (1 Tim 5:21, [6:20](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1Ti%206.20), [2 Tim 1:14](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/2%20Tim%201.14)) It describes the shepherds "keeping watch (phulasso) over their flock by night” ([Luke 2:8](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Luke%202.8)), which brings up the image of savage wolves seeking to devour the helpless sheep. John's only other uses of phulasso are in his Gospel - [John 12:25](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%2012.25), [John 17:12](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/John%2017.12).

**How can you practically guard yourself against idolatry?**

In [1 John 5:18](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/1%20John%205.18) the saints have been assured of God's keeping activity of their behalf, but now he stresses their responsibility in guarding their spiritual security. This combination of God's provision and man's responsibility reminds one of Paul's words to the saints at Philippi…

“So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out** ([**present imperative**](http://www.preceptaustin.org/greek_quick_reference_guide#present imperative) - command to make this your habitual practice - only possible as we rely on and surrender to the truth in the [Phil 2:13](https://biblia.com/bible/nasb95/Phil%202.13)!) your salvation with fear and trembling; **for** ([**term of explanation**](http://www.preceptaustin.org/observation#te)) it is God Who is at work in you (Who is this but the Holy Spirit!), both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure”( Phil 2:12-13).

If you look at the New Living Translations’ paraphrase of Phil 2:13 it says ***“13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”***That means that the Spirit gives us both the "desire" and the "power." Praise God!