

# Idolatry

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[0:00] 1 John 5 verse 21, we're going to start with here. Talking about the subject of idolatry. It's a major theme in the Bible.

What is it? Idolatry. 1 John 5 verse 21, it says this, Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. Keep yourselves from idols.

What is idolatry? Idolatry means the worship of idols. Basically. It's a worship. A corruption of worship really.

The heathen make their idols, but our God is in the heavens. It's a stark contrast. We can pick that up in Psalm 115. You might want to follow it here or in your word in front of you.

Psalm 115. Where it contrasts the heathen's idols and the living true God. Psalm 115 from verse 3 it says, But our God is in the heavens.

[1:07] He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not.

Eyes have they, but they see not. They have ears, but they hear not. Noses have they, but they smell not.

They have hands, but they handle not. Feet have they, but they walk not. Neither speak they through their throat.

They that make them are like unto them. So is everyone that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the Lord.

He is their help and their shield. What a contrast. Our God is in the heavens. Their God of silver or gold, the work of men's hands, is empty and vain.

[2:15] God is our help and God is our shield. Trust thou in the Lord. In the word of God it talks about a man going to the wood and cutting down a tree and then chopping and fastening it and carving it and then ultimately bowing down and worshipping it.

It's utter foolishness, isn't it? It's utter foolishness. I know I've related a story lately. I know and I'll recount it again. But I had occasion to go into a Buddhist temple.

Not that I would recommend doing such a thing, but it was what happened at the time for me. And I went inside and there was a great big, they took me up to the top floor where the Buddha was.

And this golden Buddha was sitting there in all of his glory with all the votive worship and smoke and candles and flowers and whatnot.

They wanted to lay around him. And it looked resplendent in gold. And I went up to the Buddha and banged him on the head. And I asked them, what is this?

[3:34] And they said, it's concrete. Honestly, they're bowing down to a lump of concrete. What utter foolishness, isn't it? And I know some, even some who might profess to be believers in Christ might have these various items around their homes.

Little Buddhas. No, don't do that. I would urge you to destroy that. Destroy that. If you've got a little Buddha, destroy that.

It has no place in your home as a believer in Christ. It's vanity. It's vain. It's falsehood. It's evil.

Idolatry.

Whatever a man seeks or honours or exalts more than God, that is idolatry. Someone has said. To honour, to exalt, to seek, to worship other than God.

That's idolatry. It's to worship, to place value on something. To value anything above other things so that we serve and spend energy and time on them.

[4:37] We can worship all manner of things, can't we? Let's be honest before God today. And when we worship God, we value Him above all else.

And that's what He wants. He wants and He deserves. He warrants that place of priority. And we ought to give Him that. Friends, the Word of God urges us to worship, to worship the Father in spirit and in truth.

To worship properly, not to worship idols. Idolatry. The worship of idols. Idolatry. The bowing down to images. To statues. To pictures.

To anything other than God. Idolatry. Idolatry. Now we might think idolatry is for other lands and other religious persuasions.

But really, idolatry can touch our lives. Idolatry. You could say it could be anything. An activity.

[5:35] A pursuit. A philosophy. A sport. An occupation. A habit. That is above our love and trust and loyalty to our Lord Jesus.

Anything. Can be an idol. As someone put it, anything that comes before God or our worship and service unto Him in our lives is idolatry.

I know we can go overboard with thinking about what's an idol and what's not. I know someone was telling me even having a garden gnome could be questionable. You know?

It's up to your conscience really, isn't it? If it's something that you would have as an image. If it's questionable, get rid of it.

It's the best result really, isn't it? But it could be even what we might think are harmless things that can become an idol to us.

[6:39] Really, an idol is a rival to God. It's an unreal God. A substitute for God. Anything we allow to dominate our life. Whatever takes God's first place in our life and heart.

If it's something that divides our loyalty away from God. If it takes away our service and love that we should give unto Him. Then we would best remove it.

If it's something that replaces our desire and devotion for God. Then we ought to be honest before God.

And let Him deal with it. Sometimes an idol could be our job. I'm not saying give up your job necessarily. But, you know, there's a sense where your job becomes the be-all and end-all.

And your life gets consumed with some kind of career or some profession. And it overtakes your whole way of thinking. It could be your house.

[7:40] You know, you buy a house you can't afford. And you spend a lifetime trying to pay it off. It can be an idol, can't it? It could be our family. It could put our family before God. Oh, there's a birthday on.

We've got to miss church. You know, honestly. What's more important? Our hobbies. Our hobbies can become idols too, can't they? Prans for you. Or consider.

For yourself. Well, consider these things. Martin Luther said, That to which your heart clings is your God. What's your heart clinging to? Whatever is it that you're relying upon, that is your God.

There's really only two kinds of worship. The true and the false. True worship is found only in the Bible. False worship is found in all systems of so-called religion.

Not founded upon God's work. Man-made gods are no gods at all. Like the man carving out a God he bounds down to, or fashioning out a silver or gold.

[8:40] Some would worship pleasure, possessions, position. Worship such as that is described as we see in 1 John, chapter 2.

The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life. It's the world. It's of the world. There's a story about a Japanese warlord who ruled over Japan in the late 1500s, and he commissioned a colossal statue of Buddha for a shrine in Kyoto.

It took 50,000 men, five years to build this thing, this shrine in Kyoto, Japan. And the work had scarcely been completed when an earthquake struck and brought the roof of this shrine, this building down, and it wrecked the statue.

And the Japanese warlord, Kaya Hideyoshi, he shot an arrow at the idol because he said, I've put you here at great expense and you can't even look after your own temple.

He was so annoyed. All of this labor and expense and this idol couldn't even look after its own temple. I know I've seen some pictures, you see them on the internet, of people carrying idols when there's a flood.

[10:05] They get their statues of Mary or their statues of Krishna or whoever it be, and they carry them so that they save them from the floodwaters. Now they've got a God they have to save, not a God that can save them.

But friends, our God, our God, he is in the heavens, our God. We see idolatry in the church today too, don't we? People, they won't bow down and repent.

They won't come to the Lord. They disobey the first and greatest commandment, which is to love the Lord thy God with all the heart, soul, mind, strength.

Friends, the Bible says that God is a jealous God. He's jealous for our worship, isn't he? He doesn't want us to have some half-hearted lack of loyalty.

God doesn't want us to share him with idols. He wants our entire allegiance. He demands our faithfulness. It says in Exodus 34, 14, For thou shalt worship no other God.

[11:13] For the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God. We should have a jealousy. Know that our God is jealous for us.

And that should make us wholehearted in our love, shouldn't it? You know, you hear of some that have got, in marriages, there's a jealousy.

And it's motivated by love, isn't it? You want your wife, your husband, to be wholehearted.

And it's the same with our God. He wants us to be wholehearted. He wants our love, our loyalty, our obedience, our faithfulness. He doesn't want us to dishonour, to be unfaithful, but to honour him as he deserves.

And his jealousy is such, it's elsewhere described as a consuming fire, his very person. His anger to those who worship wrongly or unfaithfully is very clear in the Word of God.

[12:21] It's a repeating thing. Idolatry is like a spiritual adultery. God wants your wholeheartedness today. God wants us to cling to him, alone, without anything in between.

Friends, idolatry is sin. It's sinful. It's spiritual fornication. In other words, it's infidelity. It's unfaithfulness to our loving God.

Our affection belongs to him, not to other gods. He wants our purity, our dedication. The throne, so to speak, of every man's heart, belongs to God alone.

Not to be shared with anything else. Even the self. It's almost the gospel of today, isn't it?

The self-promotion. That there's printers out there talking about self-confidence and self-confessing the self and positivity of self.

[13:28] Where it's almost elevating self to a place that God doesn't put the self. We can only truly be fulfilled in ourselves when we know the saviour of the self.

When he is our saviour. Martin Lloyd-Jones says, A man's God is that for which he lives.

For which he's prepared to give his time, his energy, his money. That which stimulates him and rouses him, excites and enthuses him.

A man's God. It's what he lives for. We have a jealous God. He wants your love. Your wholehearted love. The question is, what are the idols in your life?

We all have to ask that question and have this prayer of Psalm 139. Where it says, Search me, O God. And know my heart.

[14:25] Try me. And know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting. What are my idols?

What is my heart set upon? What do I think upon? What do I spend my time on? What motivates and drives me? What does my heart cling to?

What competes for my time with God? What do I seek after? Am I looking for something or someone to provide what only God can give?

Search me, O God. It's a good prayer to pray. There are idols all around us. It says of Paul, as he came to Athens.

It says in Acts 17, verse 16. As he was there at Athens, it says, His spirit was stirred in him. When he saw the sitting wholly given to idolatry.

[15:25] Then he went to Mars Hill and proclaimed the gospel. I've been there to Athens, to this place.

And it's like every street corner in certain parts. There's idols everywhere. It was like a museum with all these statues and figurines and images.

And of multiple, multiple gods, so-called. And I can imagine what Paul saw. The sitting wholly given to idolatry.

Idols were all around Paul. And friends, they're all around us too. They're all around us too. We don't see representations or statues of gods so much.

But there's idols everywhere in this land. The Australian idol. There's multiple of them. Paul was spiritually disturbed when he saw these idols.

[16:29] So what ought we to do with idols? We should get rid of them. We should get rid of idols. It says in Ezekiel 14, verse 6. Repent and turn yourselves from your idols.

If you have an idol, if you ask God to search you and you discern that's an idol, then you ought to part with it.

Throw it away. Throw away the things that are keeping you from God. It could mean for some. It could mean like the television or some things that tend to take his place.

Find a way of putting it out, of putting it away. Wasteful things that we commit our time to. What takes away our time that we could give more wisely to God?

Our money, our energy. What are we spending it upon? It can become idols for us. And let's refresh our commitment to the Lord.

[17:35] It's a repeated theme in the Word of God of tearing down of altars, of idols, and of returning to the true and living God. It's a very repeated theme.

Where the children of Israel committed whoredom. They were unfaithful. They were turned aside to idols, to false gods.

The false gods of the world they lived in. And we can be too. We can be just as subject to those things. For the modern day idols of our world.

And friends, an idol is a vain thing. It will do you no good. It will give you nothing. It's a counterfeit. It's a satanic substitute for the real.

There's a time in February 1999. The authorities around Japan wanted to encourage albatrosses to come and to breed.

[18:43] Because they're an endangered species. And so they got some 100 decoys. These, I guess, wooden or such representations of albatrosses.

That they set up. And they floated around this particular area of the sea. To encourage the albatrosses to come. And to breed.

And for more than two years, there was a five-year-old albatross tried to wound a wooden decoy. And he was quite taken with this decoy.

With this wooden representation of an albatross. And he built some fancy nests. And he fought off rival suitors. And he spent days standing faithfully by her side.

And a Japanese researcher said he seems to have no desire to date real birds. Friends, it's the same with some people, isn't it? They get attacked.

[19:41] They get attracted to the idols of the world. And they're false and vain. There's no point to that. When we place our affection on other gods.

On the gods of this world. Instead of the god who's in the heavens. We can miss the whole point. But he wants us to know him. When we place our love that ought to be given unto him.

On idols. Let's get rid of the idols. It's like some people who worship false gods. And they miss the real one. Now it's said there's a problem with a lack of food in India.

But the real problem is the false gods of India. India does not have a hunger problem because of a lack of food. The Hindu religion teaches reincarnation in the form of animals.

So the religious law is not to kill rats, mice, cows and other animals. Every cow eats enough food to feed seven people.

[20:48] And there are 200 million sacred cows in India. They're sacred. Can't touch them. Can't eat them. If the people of India would just stop feeding these cows.

They'd have enough to feed 1.4 billion people. About one fourth of the world's population. That's probably an old figure though. It's astonishing isn't it?

They will not get rid of the false idols. And it's vanity. It's actually hurting their country in India. Friends, we need to get rid of the idols. What can our idols be in our own lives? Let me put to you some suggestions as to what some idols might be.

Number one, the self. The self can be an idol. It says of the last days. 2 Timothy 3. In the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves.

[21:51] You know, isn't this the selfie generation? You know, take a selfie. It's the selfish generation, isn't it? The Facebook generation. The self generation.

Lovers of their own selves. They just can't stop taking pictures of themselves. Mind you, I took a picture of myself lately too. But just to show my ugly face.

We can be such that we're possessed and obsessed with ourself. With ourself. That's what the world wants, isn't it? It's all about self. In 1 Samuel 15, 23 it says, Stubbornness is its iniquity and idolatry.

This self-obsession. This obsession with self. It's humanism really, isn't it? Where we make a golden calf out of the self. When humanism gets people to seek answers within their own hearts. Rather than in God. And to inflate their own self-esteem. Our world finds it difficult to punish criminals or label anything a sin.

[22:57] I know I saw something a bit crazy lately in America. They're saying that where some prisoners are working in like a factory. That they're actually going to be considering paying the prisoners a living wage.

A standard daily wage. So you're actually better off going to jail. Working in their prison factory. And the food's all laid on. Accommodation.

That's all provided. And you get the living wage. It's almost crazy, isn't it? It's pampering after self. Self can become an idol. We've got self-indulgence.

There's self-centeredness. Selfishness. Self-serving. Self can be an idol. Another idol can be money.

It says men shall be covetous. In other words, lovers of money. That's the sense of it. Man, they're going to be such lovers of money. In the last days. And of course we know the love of money is the root of all evil.

[23:58] And Colossians 3.5 says to believers, covetousness, this love of money, is idolatry. And we ought to put it to death.

Covetousness is the desire to have more. Now you hear of millionaires and billionaires. They're always still wanting more. They're just never satisfied. They want more.

More, more, more. More power. More money. More possessions. More glory. They've just got to have more. And it's never enough.

Whereas the Bible says, set your affection on things above. Not on things on the earth. Friends, what is first place in our life? Is it our self, pleasure, sports, music, sensuality, entertainment, possessions, our job?

What? What is it in your life that attempts to become your first love? That place of your devotion, your loyalty, your trust, your service?

[25:11] What did it be to our living God? The God is in the heavens. What did he to have the very first place? What did he to have that love? It's not idolatry.

It makes us vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy. And it undermines our fellowship and communion with our Lord. We cannot serve two masters. You cannot.

You cannot have God and material wealth. You cannot have them on the same throne of your heart. We must heal the hearts thrown fully to him.

Money can become an idol. When we value its pursuit over the pursuit of godliness, of Bible knowledge, when time with God and family is suffering, our account in heaven suffers, neglect.

One day we'll reach the day of judgment. And there may be regret for some. Friends, it says, What shall a man profit if he shall gain the whole wealth and lose his own soul?

[26:23] So self can be an idol of money. Pleasure is another one. Another feature of the last days. It says, Men shall be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

This love of pleasure is not necessarily sinful pleasures. It's the same. There's harmless pleasures. They be wholesome pleasures. But it's when pleasures become an idol.

That's when it's wrong. When pleasure that may otherwise be harmless to the soul becomes your priority. For example, a Christian fishing on Sunday morning has made a harmless Saturday pleasure into an idol.

Because it's more important to him than worshipping God. The same could be said for many things, couldn't it, mate? Where we might have a particular TV show we attend rather than the Bible study that we could get to.

Well, as a harmless pleasure could become an idol. Pleasure can become an idol. When our duties to God are left undone. Because fleshly enjoyment must be served first.

[27:33] When a Christian is willing to sit for three hours at the footy. But wins just about an hour or so in a padded pew.

He loves pleasure more than God. Another idol is the praise of men. That's what the Pharisees had. It tells of them, They did all their works to be seen by men.

They fed their self-esteem with public acclaim and acceptance. More concerned with the reward of men than of pleasing God. That can be true for us too, can't it?

Where we care more about what people think than what our Lord wants and thinks. Another idol can be things. As we talked earlier, There's love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

For any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. The things of the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life.

[28:36] Some would sell their souls to obtain them. But all of these things are passing, friends. Unlike our souls. That will survive moths, rust and worms to appear before God on the last day.

It seems like every week you hear of some well-known music star or star of film or fame. Passing into eternity.

Often at a young age. You wonder, what vanity. What a waste. Friends, we are to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. He will care for us.

Let that priority be what matters with God. It tells how the people of Tyre and Sidon may inherit their human idol.

In Acts 12. They call his voice the voice of a God in order to flatter him. Some people idolise people, don't they? They idolise them.

[29:44] I think back to my sisters as a youngster. They had all kinds of pop stars, posters around their room. I didn't care for such myself.

Not that I was any more spiritual than them. But some, they make a big thing about those that they idolise, don't they? You know, there's a shrine in America to Elvis Presley.

They go and virtually worship his image. Don't they? It's sad, isn't it? Really it is. There are many kinds of idols. We could name others.

Like success can be an idol. We're just obsessed with getting to the top of the pile. Our family can be an idol. Popularity.

Sports. Our health. Good works. Some of those things are good things. You can see how I've been working on my health.

[30:43] So this trim-toe, terrific body. But no, there's things we can spend our time on that actually it takes away from what matters. Friends, that's the point.

And it's been said, the heart of man is a perpetual factory of idols. We're constantly making idols. One after the other. Anything but God.

Anything but the God who's in the heavens. Give us the chance and we'll replace God with any and every object, person, thing.

An idol can be a good thing. But it takes over your life. And it becomes a God to you. Search me, O God.

It's a good prayer to pray. Is God number one in my life. Where do I place my heart's affection? What is always on my mind? What do I talk about the most?

[31:40] What do I truly value? What do I spend my money on? What is it that consumes my time, my energy, my affections? What am I living for? The answer to those questions can reveal whether there's something that's an idol that we need to be rid of.

Friends, the Bible tells us what we are to do with our idols. Paul says, 1 Corinthians 10, 14. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

He says, run from it. He says, don't hang around that which is idolatry. Run away from it. Choose you this day. Then you will serve.

Friends, I urge you today, each one, to make that personal conscious determination. To hate the darkness and to love the light. To walk by the light of God's word.

To renew our mind with godly thoughts. To keep short accounts with God. To be led by the spirit of God, by his word. To be firm and resolute in our commitment to Christ.

[32:52] And I urge you to decide today to get rid of your idols. Your idols might be different from mine. But anything that can intrude in his place has no place for you.

Worship is pulling our affection off our idols and putting them on God. It's taking that shift, that mind shift, isn't it? Saying, I'm going to stop worshipping my idols.

And I'm going to worship my God. Will you put away your other gods and trust in the Lord Jesus? Will you give him your undivided heart, your whole heart of worship, your love, your faith, your faithfulness?

Ask him to help you tear down the idols. To smash the images that are in your heart. I'm preaching to myself too. This is for all of us.

It's about coming under the lordship of our Lord Jesus. Here's what someone has said. One who trusts in Christ alone will completely give up his idols, horoscopes, and other such practices of his old life that go against Christ's lordship.

[34:09] You know, some innocently have got baggage they're holding on to. You might, I don't know whether that speaks to anyone here, but horoscopes, some, it's kind of what they've grown up with.

They turn to the newspaper and they say, oh, this is what I am and this is what it says about me. Well, of course, there's a load of hogwash for one thing, but it's an idol.

It's, there are practices of the old life, of the sinful life, of the world's life. It's not of God. It's of the evil one. Some people would hang on to the pokies or the cross lotto or the racers or such things as that.

It might become such a habit for you that you haven't broken it yet. Addictions can be idols. Friends, for whatever your situation, it's between you and the Lord.

For God to put the finger on it and say, get rid of that. It's not for you. The quote goes on, when a true believer is made aware of any area in his life that is not yielded to Christ, he will yield it.

[35:29] When he is made aware of a Christian principle to be followed, he will follow it whatever the cost. I urge you today, friends, to keep yourselves from idols, to flee from idolatry.

The answer for idolatry truly is to love the Lord thy God, to love him. If you love him, then every other false God must dissolve and be forsaken.

If you love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength, then idolatry has no place for you.

You will flee from it. You will run from it. You will keep yourselves from idols. I urge you today to these things. Let us pray. Our Lord God, we thank you.

You are the God that is in the heavens. And the gods so called of this world are of clay, of silver, of gold, of stone, of vein.

[36:35] And really it's every imagination of our heart, every idol of our making, of our mind, of our heart. In this factory that is within us that seems to manufacture things to worship and take your place, we know we must be rid of them.

Lord God, help us to see them for what they are, these substitutes for you, these counterfeits, these false gods. Lord, we pray for each one, for ourselves, that we might search.

Lord, you would search our heart. And Lord, reveal to us where these things are that are taking your rightful place. Help us to recognize them for what they are, idols that we must keep ourselves from and flee from.

Lord, we pray for anyone who is here present, but yet to know you as saviour, as Lord, that they will come to know and trust you. They will say, Lord Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for my sin. You are the one and only true God. And I want you to be my saviour, to trust you and receive your saving. We pray, Lord, help us to walk truthfully with you.

[37:49] Reveal to us their idols and help us to crucify our flesh and be rid of them. We pray, Lord, we pray, give us strength to yield to your spirit in whatever department of our life that you have touched on today.

We ask you, Lord, be glorified in you, your church, your people here this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.