

Idolatry

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[0 : 00] Idolatry. Idol worship. Idol worship. 1 John 5.21 it says, Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Idolatry. Now when we think of idols, we think often you can picture eastern temples with various gods so-called shaped in all kinds of imagery, all kinds of shapes and sizes.

But idols is more than just those kind of things where you can see some heathen animistic religions bowing down to carved or molten images of wood or metal.

Idols. Idolatry. Really, what does it boil down to? Really, they're a replacement for God. They're a substitute for the real thing, for the real God. An attachment or a devotion to something that is other than the Lord.

And it's really true that all of us can shape a God in our own image, in our own making. A God to suit ourselves. That's really what an idol is in effect.

[1 : 23] It's when we change God into our image rather than our being transformed into his image. Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones said, An idol is anything in our lives that occupies the place that should be occupied by God alone.

Anything that holds a controlling position in my life is an idol. And J.C. Ryle said of idolatry, It's a worship in which the honour due to God in Trinity and to him only is given to some of his creatures or to some of the inventions of his creatures.

We know it's in the Ten Commandments, isn't it? In Exodus chapter 20, one of the fundamental teachings of God's Word, of God's instructions, not God's Ten Suggestions, but God's Ten Commandments in Exodus 20, verse 3, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them.

For I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.

[2 : 53] God is jealous. He doesn't want to share your love with something else. He doesn't want to share your devotion, your worship with another God, with an image, with an idol.

How do we know if we're guilty of idolatry? How do we know? And what are we going to do about it? These are some questions I've posed today about idolatry, idol worship, and are you, am I, guilty of idol worship?

Let's read it. Ezekiel 14 talks about the heart space that idols occupy. It says in Ezekiel 14, we read it in the Bible study this week, and it spoke to me.

It challenged me to think about this subject, about idols in the heart, idols in the heart. Ezekiel 14 verse 3, the prophet says, Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their heart and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face.

Should I be inquired of at all by them? God says, these people that were pretending or making a show of worshipping, God used his x-ray vision.

[4 : 21] He's, you know, more powerful than Superman. Of course, our God has got x-ray vision. He can see right into the very core of your being. He can see the real you, what really makes you tick, and who the real you is today.

You might put on a face, and others might see one side of you, but God sees right through the veneer, right through the external appearance. He sees into our very core, into our very heart.

And he says of these ones in Ezekiel 14, 3, These men have set up idols in their heart. Should I be inquired of at all by them?

In other words, why should I help these men? Why should I help these ones? These men have idols in their hearts. Why should I speak to them? And that is so true that we can all be challenged to

think, Is there an idol in my heart?

In that heart space, in that place that is the real me? Because the real problem is the heart of man. Idolatry really, it's self-sensiveness, it's the self, it's the ego.

[5 : 34] You know, the middle letter in the word, S-I-N, it's sin. Sin. The I, the ego. The real problem of sin is the heart of man.

And idols of the heart. Ezekiel, God showed Ezekiel that that was what he could see. And he sees the idols of the heart. Idolatry begins in the heart.

The very core of man's existence. As we know, the Bible says to keep your heart with all diligence. Keep your heart. Keep it guarded. Protect it. Look after it.

And the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked. Who can know it? It says in Jeremiah as well.

And the psalmist cried out, Search me, O God, and know my heart.

He cried out for that searching, that spotlight, that searching light of God's Holy Spirit, of God's searching of the hearts and reins, of that trying of the heart.

[6 : 34] And God is looking into your heart. He's looking into my heart. He's looking and He's seeing the real you and me. Where is your heart today? As God looks at your heart, what does He see enthroned there?

As you could picture a heart as a throne, so to speak, a ruling force, a controlling force. Who is enthroned? What is enthroned? What is sitting, seated, enthroned, reigning, ruling in your heart? Does He see any idols there? Idols. Where is your heart today? Where are your passions? What do you talk about? What do you love?

That is your heart. What is your heart like today, spiritually? The Lord Jesus says, Matthew 12, 34, the Lord Jesus says, Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.

Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. So what's in here is going to come out of our mouth. It's going to be what we talk about. It's what we're going to yarn on about.

[7 : 37] It's what we're going to dwell on. It's what we're going to concentrate on. It's what we're going to brag on or blab on about. It's what is in our heart. That's what we're going to go on and on about. And it says in the Word 2, For out of the heart perceive evil thoughts, murderers, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.

It's all coming out. It's all emanating from that heart. It's like the source. As the Bible says, that the word, the heart, is the fountain of life.

Keep your heart because it's like the fountain of your life. It's what shows what is inside. It comes out of our heart. And so the question for everyone here today, when we're thinking about idols and idol worship, let's look beyond those that might be of other philosophies who might bow down to, might be beautiful looking, carved idols, very beautiful images and pictures they've painted or they've cut out of stone or wood or metal.

What about your heart? What about your heart? You know, we Westerners can be just as guilty of idol worship as Eastern religions and so on.

What is occupying your heart space? Another area to think of as we look at idols in the word of God is what is it that occupies your home space?

[9 : 03] Your home space. We see that God's word, when it talks of idolatry, it uses a couple of different terms, one of which is idols and the other is images.

And in the King James, we have that word images translated as teraphim as well. And it could be translated also as household images.

Household images. We see that there, for example, in 2 Kings 23, verse 24. In 2 Kings 23, it's talked about Josiah, the King Josiah.

It says, the workers with the familiar spirits and the wizards and the images and the idols. So there's two things there, the images and the idols. And all the abominations, Joshua got rid of them, basically.

He got rid of those things that were wrong, that shouldn't have been about. And the word images, as I say, is this word teraphim or household images.

[10 : 05] There's a sense where idolatry is within the household. It's within the household. It's within the home where families have idols.

Families have idols. Idols in the home. And you see in the word of God, it talks about that you serve the gods that your fathers served. So it's talking often, the father as the head of the home or who should be the head of the home is often the one who's guilty of this idolatry, of allowing idols and

images into the home, of not living in godly leadership, but of allowing things that are questionable. And we can all take stock of that as believers here today. Have we got idols in the home space? In the home space. What is it that is central to your home?

What is it that is central? What is its foundation stone? What is it built upon? What is it that the family chases after and occupies itself with? There's an influence, isn't there, in the home, in the home space, in the culture of the home situation in which we live because every home has a culture, an image that influences and shapes the way the family thinks and behaves.

And God's word is clear that we're not to make or bow down or honour an idol. What are the idols that can come and invade the home space? When we think of this Hebrew word teraphim, it makes me wonder about the modern equivalent, the modern image of television.

[11:37] Maybe you could put, you know, get rid of the teraphim, maybe get rid of the television. You know, you could almost think as much as we know a television can be controlled.

It's like a guard dog. You can tame it, you can control it, you can manage it. But if you don't, watch out. It could be dangerous. And the idols that people can bring into their homes could be things like the world's entertainment.

It could be the leisure or the pleasure mentality of the world, the fashions of the world, the materialism of the world. Brother, sister, look out for that home space.

Guard it. As you would guard the heart space, guard the home space as well. As the word told us in 1 John 2.15, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.

In some families, it could be that sport is the household image. It's that family idol, if you like. You know, where some families, they're sport mad, aren't they?

[12:39] Everything's centred around and the family's calendar is organised around what the latest sporting event might be. They might invest heaps of time and energy and devotion into the love of the God of sports rather than the Lord.

Are we putting the influence of those things ahead of the one who should be the first in our lives, the Lord Jesus? And in some families, they're consumed also with maybe finding things that are newer and better and bigger.

And this devotion, it just predominates their thinking, this materialism, this obsession with getting more of beating the Joneses. And for some households, it's the God of entertainment.

The God of entertainment. That could be the household idol where it could be that their homes are consumed with music and movie stars that they idolise and they literally plaster these images over the walls of their home.

These images of pop stars and rock stars and film stars and what it might be. You know, you get, when you enter into some homes, they have actually got these images, these household images that are there in the kids' rooms or they're centre stage.

[14:02] And then, of course, there's the altar of entertainment itself, centre stage in the lounge rooms. Got to be careful that entertainment, we know, we all need entertainment and there's a place for entertainment, but it's when entertainment becomes centre stage and predominant and preoccupies our life and our thinking and our time.

People in the old days used to sacrifice before Molech and Molech has been called the God of pleasure. The God of pleasure, pleasure itself could become an idol or whether it could be a son might get swept along with drugs or drink in terms of a pleasure that predominates, that consumes and that can damage and hurt the family.

What about we as Christian families? As Christian families today, how do we spend our time? How do we use our time? Is it with the Lord?

Is it reading His Word and studying and worshipping and praying? Are we intent as Christian families on serving the Lord and devoted life to assembling together, to receiving fellowship and edifying, reaching out to our friends and neighbours or do those household idols to tear of them take priority?

Watch out. Guard your heart space, your heart. Guard your heart. Guard your home, your home space. And thirdly, these idols, they can occupy what you could say is the holy space, the highest space, the highest place.

[15:40] An idol is an image that is worshipped. It's something that we count as worth, worship, as worthy of devotion, as something that occupies the holy place, that special place, that special part of us, that special vacuum that really only Christ can fill.

Sometimes we try to pack other things into it, don't we? We try to jam our lives with things that aren't really what God would have us to invest our lives in. What occupies the holy place, the highest place of our lives, which really is God's rightful place?

What do we count as that which is the highest and the holiest, that which we would set apart as a priority, as central to our lives, that on which we would give the highest value?

What do you base your life around? This is something we should think of because life is only, as we know, it's like a vapour that passes and it is finite.

In the earthly sense, you've only got so much time on this planet to make a difference, to live your life, to make it count. What do you base your life around?

[16 : 52] What is it that takes the focus of your attention, of your affection, of your effort? We see in 1 Peter 3, 15, Peter exhorts the folk, he says, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts.

Set him apart. 1 Peter 3, 15, sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. In part, it says that, and idols take God's true place, they take his glory.

He is deserving of the highest place. Philippians 2, 9, wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him and hath given him a name that is above every other name. This is the name of Jesus.

He is the one who is worth our whole worship. He is the one who is deserving of that holy place, of that sanctified place, of your heart. Set it apart unto him.

Dedicate it to him afresh today. As we've heard, said, I know, yesterday, as we've said to the youngsters, that no man can serve two masters.

[17 : 54] Either he will love the one or hate the other. God says not to serve two masters. It's impossible, really, to do so. You can't serve God and mammon, God and money.

There's only one real master that can have your life. Let it be Christ. Let it be Christ who is the master. Let it be he who guides and leads and has that domination that he wants to have.

And it's a wonderful thing to be dominated by Jesus Christ. It's not an irksome thing for him to be your lord and master. It's really true freedom.

It's finding his lordship and giving your heart to him. It's true freedom. It's true liberty. Because when he becomes your lord, when you give him his lordship that he is due, he breaks the chains that really bind and chain you.

Christ is the one who deserves your all. He deserves that place, that highest place. And idolatry is the sin which every other sin comes out of.

[19 : 01] In caution strength, Paul says in verse 5, to mortify or put to death therefore your members, the parts of your life, the things of your life which are upon the earth.

He says put these to death. Fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil constipations and covetousness which is idolatry. He says put covetousness to death.

It's idolatry. It's greed. When we idolize material things, we can all be guilty of that. We all want to have a more later model car or whatever it might be.

Not that there's anything necessarily wrong with that. But it's when that becomes the absolute driving force for your life. When that is just all consuming for you. That you've just got to do whatever it takes to get more money, to get more possessions, to get more material things.

And it's when you place a value in such things that is putting God in a secondary place. It's desiring something more than you're desiring God. That's the mistake the rich young ruler made in Luke 18.

[20 : 03] From verse 18, we see this one. Our Lord spoke with him and he sounded like he had God somewhere there on his priority list.

God was there on this rich young ruler's priority list. He placed God high up there on his priority list. He had kept God's commandments since his youth.

But when Jesus told him to sell all his goods and give to the poor, he went away sorrowful. God may have been high on his priority list, but God wasn't number one.

That was the point for this man. God wasn't number one. He loved something more than he loved God. And the Lord Jesus said that this is the first and greatest commandment.

commandment. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. Love him. First, foremost, fully, completely love our Saviour.

[21 : 06] Love the Lord God. And seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. When you get that right kind of perspective, that right kind of proportion, God will bless and help with the material life as well as the spiritual.

But put the kingdom of God first and his righteousness first. It's when idols come that they can take our time, our devotion, they can drain our energies and hinder our serving God.

They can take our finances, leave us too broke to lay out treasures in heaven. Will we set priorities and make decisions through a Christ-centered perspective? Someone put it like this to think about, to question.

What about some practical things I can think about? How I can restore my love for the Lord above all else? How I can combat this affliction of idolatry? Think about some little points of someone right here to use TV for edification, for teaching, for admonition.

Now there could be some good things you can get out of TV. Use your iPod for songs of praise. I don't have an iPod as such. But use your, whatever gadgets you've got that can broadcast sound into your ear rolls.

[22 : 21] Let them be broadcasting songs of praise. Let them be broadcasting words of scripture so you can be encouraged and blessed while you're travelling on the bus or train or about your day by day.

Let the word of God be saturating your mind. Use the internet for edification, for encouragement to others, for teaching, for spreading the gospel. Now we can use things that can be used wrongly for good, for God's glory.

We can choose to not bow down to modern idols that lead to destruction, but we can serve God in every aspect, in every dimension.

it says in Joshua 24 that Joshua put to the people they were at really a fork in the road.

They were at really a decision point. There was a choice to make. There was two directions they could have gone. There was two ways they could have gone, two tracks. And he said to them, Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth and put away the gods which your fathers served.

[23 : 35] Get rid of those teraphim, those household idols, those images, those idols that your fathers have brought you up with which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt and serve you the Lord.

Joshua 24 15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom you will serve. Whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood or the gods of the Amorites in his land he dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua made a decision and you can too about the idols that are in your home, the idols that are in your heart, the idols that are in that highest place, the idols that you are worshipping.

People today, God says put them away, put them away. What are your idols? Just to close an application for you, what are your idols? An idol is anything that comes between you and the Lord, your God.

Anything that gets in the way of the relationship that God wants you to have with him. We have to tear down. The Bible talks about tearing down the high places of idolatry that have been built up over years in our lives.

[24 : 59] We know the word of God shows us times when the prophets came and they would smash the idols. They would smash them to smithereens. Those things that were interfering, that were getting in the way of their spiritual life.

We look back in the Reformation time and there was times when there was very beautiful, ornate churches and there's nothing wrong with having a lovely, ornate church but having idols there, icons of supposed pictures of our Lord and statues carved out of Mary and the saints that people would bow down to and kiss and put candles before and revere and adore and yet God's word is so plain and clear on such things that these are not to be done.

Brothers and sisters, we're not to revere or honour an image, an idol, a picture or a statue of such nature. The Bible says we're to smash them and we see that in the Reformation time, what happened and the people that love old time history and beautiful carved arts work and so on, they would be horrified to have seen it when these things were smashed and burnt but really these people were doing what the Bible says to do.

We're not to bow down to idols and worship them as much as well-meaning people might use such things to help them think of heavenly things yet the Bible says we're not to do it and that's the plain truth that we have to stand by and we need to smash the idols in our lives too.

We need to take a cleansing and a cleaner. Paul says flee from idolatry. 1 Corinthians 10, 14, he praises the Thessalonians he says that they turn to God, the living and true God, from idols in 1

Thessalonians 1, 9.

[27 : 07] Does God have that first place? God wants our first place in our devotion. Thou shall have no other gods before me. And really the answer, the bottom line today, everyone is summed up in the word repent.

Repent. That's what the prophet told the people when they were getting off course, when there was other things, other loves, when their heart was being torn and they had idols in their heart.

the one who searches and tries the reins of the heart, he wants you to cry out, search me oh God, try me, see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.

Let that be your prayer about your heart, about the home space. We don't want to follow the gods that our fathers worshipped in the sense of fathers who are not saved, but we want to serve the God of the word, we want to serve the one, we don't need images or idols to put our thoughts on him, he's given his word which is clear and plain, this is the picture that we need, Christ is the perfect representation of the father, we just need Christ to be our saviour, we need to turn from the power of idols and think about the highest place, what is it that for you is the highest place, you know in the old times it was the high places, the high places they would have these hills that they would have their altars and their statues and we know as Nebuchadnezzar he had a huge statue that just dominated the landscape as it was the highest thing that people could see, what takes the highest place for you, is it

Christ, is it that one who is deserving, that one of whom it says that there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, that one of whom it says that every knee shall bow, every tongue shall confess, that one who is the name above all other names, he deserves the highest place in your life, in mine, not whatever cheap substitute there could be, and some things may not be you could say, really that harmful in themselves, whether it could be sport, pleasure, money, there's a place for such things, but is that the predominant thing, is that what takes the preeminence in my heart and mind, what is the most important thing in my life, it is Christ, Christ is our life, to live is Christ, to die is gain, and the answer, friends, today, is repent, it's ask [30 : 00] God to forgive, that placing of anything above him, that placing of anything beside him, that placing of anything that would take his first place, but seek you first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you, smash the idols in your life today, ask God by his grace to help you to do that, seek ye first, when I start getting second things first, I'm in trouble, but Christ wants you to put Christ first, let him be your priority, and then when that happens, everything else will really fit into place like he wants it to, he wants first place or no place, it's been said, either he is Lord of all, or he is not Lord at all, he will not take second place in your life, there's no one else who compares, who can deserve a secondary place, and he certainly is not deserving of second place, he is deserving of the first place, the highest place, let us pray, dear Lord we praise your name and thank you that we can see the scriptures tell us of these idols in the heart, help us to tear any idol from that throne, that really only you can occupy, the throne of our heart, that you would rule there in our heart, that you would reign as king, supreme, as master, as lord, dear Lord for everybody here, that they'll see that great need of Christ today, the only one deserving of ruling, of reigning in our heart, in our life, in our home,

Lord in that highest place, whatever we adore and devote ourselves to, let it be glorified to your name, we pray in Jesus name, amen.