

# The Gospel, Idols, & You

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[ 0 : 00 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! We're going to read a large chunk of this chapter, so it would be very helpful if you had it before you.

We have Bibles in the back. If you don't, obviously you can hop on your phone and find it if you don't. So Acts 19, Acts 19, I'm going to begin reading in verse 1.

If you'll look with me there, we will launch in. Acts 19, verse 1. And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

There he found some disciples. Paul said to them, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? They said, no, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

And he said to them, in what then were you baptized? They said, into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus Christ.

[ 1 : 26 ] On hearing this, verse 5, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.

There were about 12 men in all. Verse 8, and he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

Jump down to verse 11. After he left the synagogue, God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. So that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick.

And their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.

Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Siva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know and Paul I recognize, but who are you?

[ 2 : 44 ] I just love that. We're going to have some fun with that in a moment. And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them and mastered all of them and overpowered them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.

And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus. Both Jews and Greeks and fear fell upon them all. And the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was extolled.

And many who were believers came confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver. So the word of God continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Look at verse 23. About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the way. For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen.

[ 3 : 52 ] These he gathered together with workmen of similar trades and said, Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia, Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people saying, God's made with hands are not gods.

And there's danger. Not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing. And that she may even be disposed of her magnificence.

She whom all Asia and the world worship. When they heard this, they were enraged and crying out, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

So the city was filled with confusion and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.

But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.

[ 4 : 58 ] Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion. And most of them did not know why they had come together. Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward.

And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours, they cried out with one voice, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

Look down in chapter 20, verse 1. After the uproar ceased, Paul sent for the disciples. After encouraging them, he said farewell and departed for Macedonia.

That is the word of God. And a pretty thrilling passage. Hopefully some of that will come out. You know, this past Friday, our president and our country remembered the 75th anniversary of VE Day. On May 8, 1945, we celebrated victory in Europe. Three months later, we celebrated VE Day, victory in Japan, and the end of the brutal Second World War.

[ 6 : 08 ] It was a time of celebration for our country, a time of relief. It was a time when Americans, or the American people, stood alongside the allied powers of Great Britain with Winston Churchill and Russia with Joseph Stalin.

Along with President Roosevelt, these were the big three who had defeated the Axis powers of Nazi Germany, Japan, and Italy. But in the midst of their celebration, an unseen enemy was emerging. Russia was expanding and spreading its communism across Europe. Just under a year after VE Day, Winston Churchill addressed a crowd in America to warn the Western world that our most immediate and unseen enemy was Russia.

He famously said, From Stettin to the Baltic, from Trieste to the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the continent. The empire of Russia and their communism had expanded to take over these cities of Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, eastern Germany, and beyond.

The unseen enemy in this scenario had delivered a surprise attack. Over the years with a death toll that would rival the horrors of Nazi Germany.

[ 7 : 38 ] And Churchill called the Western world to stand up and to stand together. This morning, I believe in some ways, God is alerting us to some unseen enemies in this passage.

We've got to take our mind back to what the original recipients would have thought when they read these stories. Luke picked these stories from the book of Acts and from Paul's trip to Ephesus to say something.

And they warn of the unseen enemies of dead religion, of life in the flesh. They warn of demons and spiritual warfare. They warn of idolatry.

You know, these enemies are unseen, not because we don't know about them or haven't been warned about them, but because they gain strongholds in the subtle way they enter into our life. God is alerting us to these things. And even more than that, He's alerting us to the power found in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we're back in Acts this morning. And if you remember, Luke wrote that first book.

[ 8 : 39 ] He wrote his gospel to tell all that Jesus began to do and teach. And he wrote Acts to tell all that He continued to do. Jesus tells us in the beginning of Acts that Jesus was taken up.

Luke tells us that Jesus was taken up into the heavens to the right hand of the throne of God above, not because He's absent or inactive, but to tell us the place from which He still works.

And that place is the place from which He works today. And we look into Acts 19. We're going to see Paul confronting these enemies.

And I trust our confidence will be strengthened in the power of God alone. In a way where we're going, there is power in the name of Jesus above every other power.

There is power in the name of Jesus above every other power. We're going to break this out. Three points. The first one is Jesus is more powerful than dead religion. Jesus is more powerful than dead religion.

[ 9 : 38 ] You know, this scene in Ephesus, the first scene, describes the baptism of 12 disciples of John. And you saw that when we read through the text. Paul walks along, and at least the first story Luke tells us about Ephesus is that he walks along, and he meets these disciples of John.

It's my opinion that these were Christians, that they were disciples of Jesus Christ, that yes, they were disciples of John, but that they had hoped and knew some about the Messiah.

But they needed a few finishing touches. They needed a few helps. I think we all need a few finishing touches. And, you know, we have a snippet of the conversation that Luke put together. The whole conversation may have gone something like this. Are you guys believers? Paul walks upon these guys, and he sees them. He says, are you believers? And they would say, yes. Are you believers in Jesus Christ?

And they would have responded, oh, yes. We are believers in Jesus Christ. Well, what do you believe about him? I think they likely responded, we believe that he was the promised Messiah who has come, who was crucified and rose again three days later.

[ 10 : 48 ] And so Paul might have asked, are you, and you believe in him. So that's the one, you believe in him, that's what you know about him, and you believe in him. And they say, oh, yes, well, did you receive the Spirit when you believed?

And they say, what? Spirit? No, we don't know anything about the Spirit. Into what? Were you baptized? Paul next asked. Well, he asked, were you baptized?

They said, yes. Well, into what? They said, John's baptism, of course. And with that, Paul understood what had happened. Somehow, these guys had heard about Jesus Christ and trusted in him, but had never heard about the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

And so Paul lays hands on them. Look down at verse 5. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul laid hands on them, and the Holy Spirit came upon them.

Now, charismatics get all added up about these verses. They argue that these verses prove that the Spirit comes after believing in Jesus Christ. That you don't get the full down payment, so to speak, the full dose of the Spirit at conversion.

[ 11 : 56 ] And that seems to be what happens right here, right? I don't think that's the case. We're not going to spend a long time on this. I don't think that's the case for several reasons. The first is that these disciples are in an altogether unique scenario.

They had heard about Jesus and believed in him, yet they knew nothing about Pentecost. And you're like, what in the world is going on? Where were you guys? The best one theologian put it is they were in some sort of time warp.

Well, that does not help us. You know, it's not Bill and Ted's bogus adventure where you fly off into some other land. You know, they were in some sort of time warp where they didn't know about the Spirit.

So this is a unique scenario. Secondly, Paul assumes they received the Spirit at conversion. You remember his question, did you receive the Spirit when you believed?

He assumes not that you have to wait to receive it in full. He assumes that you receive it when you believe. Therefore, I believe this scenario doesn't present anything for us to follow.

[ 13 : 00 ] There's no disciples of John still wandering around. This is just another example of the gospel breaking forward. So what do we take away from it?

I think this scene teaches us something that the book of Acts teaches us again and again. The Spirit is vital to the Christian life. Or if I could put it another way, Jesus is more powerful than dead religion.

I think this kind of is getting at something that Acts is getting at again and again. Jesus did not come to put new wine into old wineskins. He didn't come to call you to repent. He didn't come to call you to do a few things each week.

He didn't come to ask you to go to church. He came to make you new. And when Paul encounters these disciples and realizes they have not received the Spirit, he lays hands on them and prays for them to be filled.

Not because he's a charismatic, which I know he believes in the Spirit, but because dead religion does nothing. Jesus did not come so that we could create a new religion.

[ 14 : 05 ] Jesus came to raise the dead, to walk in newness of life. You remember the story in John's gospel with Nicodemus. Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night, and he comes to him, and he's asking him about the kingdom of God.

And Jesus says, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. So we might ask, are you born again?

Yet, it would actually seem, claiming to be born again in this culture makes little difference. Perhaps no difference. Statistics I was reading earlier this week that are just devastating.

You know, of those claiming to be born again, 33% are pro-choice. Now, I don't want to say you have to be a certain voting block to be a Christian. But I think what you view on life is pretty vital. 46% attend services weekly. It's a little bit lower than I would hope. You know, 46% tied. The divorce rate between those who are born again and those who are not is basically the same.

[15:16] Of born-again pastors, one study I recently read, 37% say pornography is a constant struggle. 53% say they visited porn sites a few times in the last year, which is a devastating number.

Is this what it means to be born again? There must be something more. And Jesus clarifies that. Remember that. He clarifies that with Nicodemus.

He says, truly, truly, I say to you, John 3, unless one is born of water in the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. So they're like, well, what does that mean? The wind blows where it wishes and you hear it sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. I want you to read a scholar real quick. Murray Harris, he clarifies those verses for us.

He says, My point is, born again is not something we manufacture.

[16:37] It's not a voting demographic we become. Born again is not something fundamentally we do. That's what Jesus was telling Nicodemus. You don't just decide this.

You're only born again if the Lord calls you to be born again. So the idea is that Christianity is not a formula of words to recite. It's not a decision. It's not reciting a prayer. It's not asking Jesus into your heart.

Christianity is thoroughly miracle. Christianity is power from God that produces a visibly obvious new life. The problem in America is not that born again people are struggling.

They are. The problem in America is the vast number of people who said the prayer were never born again. And if those who really were born again live like it, this world would change.

Earlier this week, my kids and I finished reading *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, which is one of the terrific books by C.S. Lewis from the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

[17:44] And one of the most incredible scenes to me was when Eustace was transformed. Now, from the beginning, Eustace is a total twerp.

You know, he's just a punk. He complains. He grumbles. He doesn't want to be on the adventure. He doesn't care about Narnia. He doesn't want to work hard. And during the adventure, the gang arrives on an unknown island, and Eustace wanders off.

He's trying to kind of, he's breaking out, you know, kind of having a little self-pity moment, you know, a little pity party, and separates because he wants to rest, and they want to march forward and do whatever they were doing.

So he wanders off. He's overtaken by a dragon and becomes one. Now, his wrist is hurt because he's wearing this bracelet, and so he longs for relief.

So he's this dragon longing for relief, and Aslan the lion comes. Now, Aslan represents Jesus Christ throughout the *Chronicles of Narnia*. He takes him up on a hill.

[18:46] They look down over this hill into the garden, filled with trees and fruit and everything wonderful that you can imagine, and inside the garden is a well where he could get relief.

So Eustace is excited. This is just what he needs for the relief. But when he goes to the well, he's starting to jump in, and Aslan says, you must undress first.

Now, Eustace thinks dragons don't wear clothes. But that's not what Aslan means. You must take off your skin.

You must take all that you have off. And so this scene, and I know it's a little grotesque for our setting, but he begins to just scratch off layer and layer and layer and layer of skin.

And then he begins to get in the pool. Surely this is not these stacks of skin everywhere, as you would imagine. But Aslan says, wait. I must take off more. And Aslan peels off more skin until he's completely peeled.

[19:52] Then he throws him into the water, and it hurts a little at first. I think that captures what it means to be born again. Yes, you may have peeled a few layers off.

You may have gone to church. May have walked the aisle. You may have prayed the prayer. But if you were born again, the Lord came in and peeled a whole lot more layers off afterwards. That's what it means to be born again. And one of the things I love about this story is that Eustace, he changes dramatically. But he's still a bit of a twerk. And I think that's the way it is with us. So Jesus did not come to give us another religion. He came to make things new. Point two, Jesus is more powerful than demons. Jesus is more powerful than demons. You know, there are basically two types of people in the world. Those who see the devil behind every bush, and those who live as if the devil and demons don't exist. And yet, Paul says we can't do either of those.

[ 20 : 56 ] We can't do either of those. You know, we can't dismiss spiritual warfare, but we also can't become preoccupied with it. It's a serious daily reality. In a letter that he wrote to the Ephesians years later to this very church, he says, We don't wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

So Paul tells them we don't fear because of Jesus' power. And I love the way this little passage shows us the power of God.

So we're going to move on from John's disciples to the sons of Siva. You know, continuing through Ephesus, Luke tells us that God was doing marvelous things, or extraordinary things. Look in verse 11. He says, God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul. And so he's just going out. God's working through his hands, but it's not just through his hands. It's through his handkerchiefs and aprons. Maybe the Catholics are right. We should have relics lying around here because we need those hankies, and we need those aprons.

[ 22 : 05 ] Look in verse 12. He says, Even the handkerchiefs and the aprons that touch the skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them.

We could use some hankies in the United States right now. But then Luke narrows in on these seven sons. And this is just totally cool.

He narrows in on these. He could have told us a lot of different things about Ephesus, but he tells us about these attenerate Jewish exorcists. The idea is these were magicians that traveled around. They were attenerate.

They were travelers. They traveled around gaining a crowd by their magic. And so when they see what's happening through Paul's hanky, they get excited, and they're like, We got to get some of that.

Look in verse 13. They confronted some demonic spirits. They said, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims. And give it up for their honesty, right?

[ 23 : 03 ] I adjure you by whatever that guy's saying. I just love that. But the demonic spirit, his response is even better. Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?

I just love this. The demonic spirit sniffs out the imposter. Jesus I know. Reminds us of James 2, doesn't it?

Even the demons believe in God and shudder. Now Luke continues after that. Look at verse 16. And the man in whom the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them, and overpowered them, so that they fled the house naked and wounded.

And what I want you to see here is that Luke could have told a story about Paul casting out a demon. Those stories happen. That was clearly happening, as we see in verse 12.

But Luke tells us a story where, that makes it an even more powerful story, a story where the very best magicians in Ephesus try to use Jesus' name and fail.

[ 24 : 17 ] They fail. They're humiliated. They run out of the house naked and wounded. So it's no surprise, look down at verse 17, that fear fell upon them all.

And the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. The name of Jesus was exalted and honored. What does this mean? What's this bizarre story mean?

I think it means that Jesus is more powerful than demons and devils. It's so common to be intimidated by the devil. But this story was written to these original recipients so that they would trust in God's power alone.

So they would trust, just as Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, that Jesus Christ is exalted far above all rule and authority and power and dominion and above every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come.

That Jesus Christ holds all power. Several years ago, a Christian turned skeptic, Rachel Held Evans, talked about the resurrection in a most surprising way.

[ 25 : 25 ] Now she's from Dayton, close to here, but she spoke about it in a most surprising way. And I quote, she said, I keep thinking about the women who showed up at the tomb on Easter morning.

On the days that I believe this story, I'm struck by the fact that they showed up with burial spices. They showed up ready to do the rituals of grief and say goodbye to their friend.

That was women's work in those days. She concludes and continues, I can't promise you resurrection, but I can promise you companionship.

I can promise you friends for the journey. I can promise you fellow travelers to help you carry those burial spices. Now that's devastating.

And that's not what Jesus Christ offered. Praise God, we're not in here to celebrate and we're not tuning in to celebrate companionship this morning. We're not tuning in to celebrate that we have friends, you know, somebody to cry with or to walk with.

[ 26 : 30 ] We're coming in to celebrate that Jesus Christ has power over death. He has power over sin. He has power over suffering. He has power over every demon.

And I love the way this story concludes. If you look down there, verse 18. So after Jesus' power is extolled, many of those who are now believers, they come and confess and divulge their practices. They make it known. This is what I've been doing. And the number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together. And burned them in the sight of all. They counted the value of them up to be 50,000 pieces of silver.

They were completely transformed. They were like Eustace being thrown into that pool. They throw everything of value away from them. They're just like that guy who went and sold all that he had to buy that field.

What's going on here is that Jesus is showing his power. He's plundering Satan's house right there in Ephesus. And that's what happens when the gospel begins to break into our life.

[ 27 : 32 ] Jesus transfers people from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his son. These verses were to remind us that his power is so great.

I'm trying to think about this. How do we approach, then, the devils and demons? We pray. The devil, according to John 10, says he comes to steal, kill, and destroy.

According to Revelation, he's the accuser of the brethren, of the brothers. He comes to unleash suffering. According to 1 Peter 5, he comes to pick us apart, as he does in Genesis 3.

He comes to tempt and accuse, as he does in Genesis 3. Martin Luther used to say that the main temptation the devil throws at him is that you don't have a gracious God.

It's the same temptation that slithered into the garden in Genesis 3. You don't have a gracious God. Not after skipping your devotions. Not after that angry outburst.

[ 28 : 33 ] Not after looking at that website again. Not after drinking too much again. You cannot have that gracious enough of a God.

But that is not what Scripture says. And so we pray and hide in his power. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

Point three, Jesus is more powerful than idols. Jesus is more powerful than idols. Paul's visit to Ephesus concludes with this fascinating confrontation with the worshipers of the Greek goddess Artemis.

Now Ephesus was a massive city. And in fact, our children's ministry class this morning, if you kids didn't get a chance to watch it, was about this same passage, which is totally cool and unplanned. The Lord planned it. I've been delaying this message for weeks. But Artemis was the goddess of fertility. And while she was worshiped in many different locations, the main place of her worship was right there in Ephesus.

[ 29 : 40 ] The temple there was massive. It was two times the size of the Parthenon, which is a massive building. The pillars were 60 feet high. The perimeter was 425 feet by 225 feet.

That's a big building. It was the largest building in the Greek world and one of the ancient seven wonders of the world. And as becomes obvious from this confrontation, much of Ephesus, which was a very vibrant, thriving city, much of their economy revolved around this temple, revolved around the artifacts that they would make or the replicas of the temple that they would sell to be brought home, to be worshiped at home.

And interestingly, these 20 verses that conclude this chapter contain no words from Paul. He's MIA. Actually, he's being tucked into the shadows.

But his teaching creates waves. Look at it. Verse 9, which we skipped over earlier, Paul, he began first in the synagogue, which we talked about before, and then he went to the hall of Tyrannus and preached the gospel there, stayed there for two years, so that, verse 10, all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And so what we're reading here are not the words of Paul at the end of this chapter, but the spreading of his teaching, the ripple effect of his teaching, and his teaching was not neutral towards Artemis.

[ 31 : 11 ] Though we don't have the words, they say he taught that gods were made with hands. Look in verse 26. When he gathers all the guys of the trade, when Demetrius does that, he says, Paul, at the end of that verse, Paul was saying, Paul is saying that gods made with hands are not gods.

Now he taught, Paul probably taught them just very similar to what he taught the people in Athens. In Acts 17, we have that verse for you, 29, it says, we ought not think that a divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man.

So Paul likely taught that throughout Ephesus, and now that message is beginning to spread more and more. And the rest of the scene is just the response. The Ephesians dragged two of Paul's companions down to the theater with intentions to try them and make them pay.

Now that theater held at least 12,000 people, so those people, there were some amount of people, some crowd of people there, and that's when the confusion broke out, just like crowds often are, you know, one said one thing, one said another, they kind of having this volley back and forth. Paul wishes to go into the crowd, but his friends hold him back. The crowd takes over as it happens in our world, and a riot breaks out, and then they shout for two hours, great as Artemis, of the Ephesians.

[ 32 : 35 ] And the scene concludes, which we didn't read, with the town clerk saying, hey, if you have something against these guys, bring it in the proper way when we gather again, again, and dismisses everyone, but I just find this very interesting.

Why this story? As one commentator said, why not end on a high note? You know, it sure looks like Artemis is conquering here.

I think this little passage says at least two things to us. The first is that Jesus is more powerful than idols. Now that's a blunt, straightforward thing.

You know, Jesus announces that idols have no power. That's what he means. They're pieces of wood. They're formed and made. You know, idolatry is not a new subject to Acts 17, or to Acts 19. Idolatry is the most frequently discussed problem in the scriptures. If you go back and read Isaiah 44, there's just almost a humorous example or talk about idolatry, about a craftsman cutting down a tree and working it over the coals and fashioning it and hammering it and working it and shaping it into a man and then bring it into his house.

[ 33 : 49 ] And then with the rest of the wood he has left over, he makes a fire and cooks supper. But with that which he made something, he bows down and worship. And what, you know, Artemis is just like this.

It's just something made with hands. Now, we don't worship hands, we don't worship things made with hands any longer.

So we might think we're good. One author says, if idolatry is the characteristic in summary Old Testament word for our drift from God, then desire is the characteristic in summary New Testament word for the same drift.

both are shorthand for the problem of human beings. And the point is, idols are no longer something outside of us according to the New Testament.

Idols are something and they're often found in our desires, in what we want, what we long for, what we crave. In a word, an idol is anything or anyone you love, trust, and obey more than God.

[ 34 : 59 ] Anything you love, trust, and obey more than God. It can be anything. It can be respect. It can be a relationship. It can be acceptance. It can be a certain dream job, a title, or position. It can be comfort.

It can be a certain understanding of freedom or sex. It can be food. Often, it's not bad things. John Calvin famous said, the evil in our desire is not what we desire, but that we desire it too much.

It can be just the craving to be noticed. Andre Agassi recalls a scene before his final match as a professional tennis player in the 2006 U.S. Open.

The story reveals the effects of his father, which we've talked about before, pushing him into a sport that he hated and making him play. On the verge of retirement, he says, I was hobbling through the lobby of the hotel the next morning when a man steps out from the shadows and says, he grabs my arm, quit, he says, what?

It's my father or the ghost of my father. His father had already passed. He looks ashen. He looks as if he hasn't slept in weeks. Pops, what are you talking about?

[ 36 : 17 ] Just quit. You did it. It's over. Go home. Our idols, which Agassi's career was an idol to his father, presents only two options, win or go home.

Win or go home. Win or quit. The idea is that the idols reduce the repertoire of options in our life. Idols change the game.

They redefine good. They redefine bad. They redefine heaven. They redefine hell. Heaven is no longer communing with God. Heaven is having that thing or being liked by that person or being noticed by this or that person.

In so many ways, idols can just be ourselves. One author said, we all have met a certain type of spiritual person. She's a wonderful person. She loves the Lord.

She prays and reads the Bible all the time, but all she thinks about is herself. She's not a selfish person, but she's always in the center of everything she's doing.

[ 37 : 24 ] The point is not to isolate somebody like that. That is sin. That's what sin does. It pulls us into the center. I think about Brian Regan. He's a skit. This is the universe and we're all revolving around you.

What do you want for dinner tonight? What do you want to do tomorrow? That's what we do in and of ourselves. We've met that person. She thinks, how can I witness better? How can I do this better?

How can I take care of this person's problem better? It's me. It's me. It's me disguised in a way that's difficult to see because of her spiritual talk.

Is there anything you love, trust, and obey more than God? Is there anything you love too much? Yeah, this is a season where in so many ways the Lord is graciously pulling up a chair and saying, let's talk about that.

You know, sometimes we think our right as Americans and our right as Christians is to do what we want, when we want to do it, and how long we want to do it, but that's not our rights at all.

Otherwise, Christianity and the truths of it would be upended in cultures where oppression reigns, but it's not.

[ 38 : 44 ] Secondly, perhaps more soberly, those who worship idols become like them. Strikingly to me, the only people who don't respond in the whole chapter to the gospel are those who worship Artemis.

Now, maybe this is an argument from silence, but I think the point is those who worship idols become like them. Look in Psalm 115. We have that for you.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, ears do not hear, noses but do not smell, they have hands but do not feel, feet but do not walk, and they make no sound in their throat.

Those who make them become like them. So that all who trust, so do all who trust in them.

This is a vital principle all throughout the New Testament and the Old Testament. Idols make us blind and blind to our blindness. Idols make us unable to see, they make us unable to hear, unable to respond.

[ 39 : 56 ] They make us just only to blend in with the crowd. And I think soberly, Luke concludes Acts 19 showing us that all these who worship the idol of Artemis fail to respond to the only God.

Let's conclude. There's power in the name of Jesus Christ above every other power.

This chapter wonderfully puts it forward. You know, wherever you are and whatever you're facing, Jesus is calling you to lean on Him and His power.

And you don't have to clean yourself up to receive Him. I love verse 18. We're just going to go back there for just a moment as we conclude. Many who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practices.

Many who are now believers came confessing and divulging their practice. Maybe I'm just going to tell you something that I think is really cool about this verse and you may not. But I think it's very interesting that they become believers and then they confess and divulge.

[ 41 : 12 ] They confess Jesus Christ and then they burn the books. They trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and then they turn from everything that came before. I think the point is, for us, is that you don't clean up your life to come to Jesus Christ.

You come, respond to this gospel, and maybe He does have to burn up a few things. I remember throwing away a few CDs after I became a Lord. Maybe He does have to do some inventory, but don't wait until you do that until you come.

Come to Him. So you may need to come. You may need to freshly hear the gospel of Jesus Christ. I don't know where all of us are this morning, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is that there's one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus Christ.

There's one person who could stand equally before us and God. There's one person that was not tainted by sin and could stand and represent us and represent God, and that man is Jesus Christ. And He stood not merely in a courtroom. He stood on a cross where He bore all the wrath for sinners like you and me so that we might know only His grace and forgiveness even as we confess and divulge everything.

[ 42 : 24 ] But you may be freshly struggling with sin. And I would just say to you, don't reverse the formula. He's not wanting to meet you halfway.

He's not waiting until you have a few things cleaned up before He's ready to give you grace. You may be a mother weighed down by the choices your child has made and the heartache it has brought. You may be cowering in fear, but the promise of the gospel is that we come to Jesus. Not because we've fixed our problems, because we have no hope of fixing them on ourselves, and we need Him to rescue us. Let us pray. Father in heaven, we cast ourselves upon You and we confess our need for You.

We pray that You would help us this morning to run to Jesus Christ. We pray for help and strength and grace in Him.

Lord, we pray that whether we're in this room or tuning in, that we would respond clearly to the gospel and these truths. God, help us. We call on You.

[ 43 : 33 ] We thank You. We give You the praise that You alone deserve. Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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