

MODERN DAY IDOLATRY

Message May 26, 2024

Pastor's Notes
Richard Vicknair

ACTS 17:16-28

- 16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols.
- 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with both Jews and God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.
- 18 A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to debate with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babbler trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.
- 19 Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?"
- 20 You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean."
- 21 (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.)
- 22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious.
- 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.
- 24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands.
- 25 And He is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, He himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.
- 26 From one man He made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands.
- 27 God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us.
- 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.'

HE IS THE BE ALL AND THE END ALL OF LIFE

A city "full" of idols?

Idols in the city square, Idols in people's houses
Idols in their stadiums, Idols in their places of worship
Idols in their hearts

Would you believe it, if I told you we also live in a city "FULL OF IDOLS?"

Would you believe me if I told you that we all have our own issues with idols?

We tend to think that idols are a thing of the past
Something only ignorant pagans give attention to
And that idols only refer to little statues and shrines

But this morning we are going to see idols on a much broader scale and understand that idols are as real and relevant in this city and in our lives as they were in Athens 2000 years ago

The Apostle John wrote this:

1 John 5:20-21

20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in Him Who is true by being in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

21 Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

WHERE DID THAT COME FROM?

Is he talking about staying away from little statues?
Or is he talking about something more sinister and personal

Let read this verse in the New Living Translation

21 Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.

Ah Ha! Now it comes clear

An Idol:

- Anything or Anyone that might take God's place in your hearts
- Anyone or Anything that might replace God as the number 1 priority in your life
- Anyone or Anything that might be more important to you than God
- Anyone or Anything that you might value more than God

Tim Keller in his book Counterfeit Gods says *an idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, and anything that you seek to give you what only God can give.*

Do you Want an example?

How about our Pride? How about our Greed?

Colossians 3:5

5 So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don't be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshipping the things of this world

A greedy person is an idolater? That's an Oh! Oh!

Am I the only person in this room that would admit that I am sometimes "Greedy"

Dear Children: Keep yourself free from idolatry!

Paul said pretty much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 10:14

So, my dear friends, flee from the worship of idols.

Who me? You might say, hey! I would never worship an idol? Never have and never will!

It is so vital that we make this personal and seek to have a clear understanding of the fact that we can be practicing idolatry and not know it....

Let me take you to an Old Testament passage that speaks a very important lesson to the church
1 Samuel 7:1-6

1 So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar, his son, to guard the ark of the Lord.

1st The Ark of the Lord came back to Israel-- Literally "God came back to Israel"

2 The ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time—twenty years in all. Then all the people of Israel turned back to the Lord.

Then the people came back to the Lord

3 So Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

But they still kept their idols too! Hedging their bets

"If you returning the Lord with "All you hearts?"
They were returning to the Lord with half a heart

4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you."

6 _____ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the Lord

This is what we often do!

We have come to the Lord, but we are still holding on to other idols
So! It's the Lord AND.....

OK, POP QUIZ: WHAT IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?

"You shall have no other God's before me"

This is what we call a "Non-Compete Clause"

God is saying:

I alone want to be the ruler of your life
Don't worship anyone or anything other than Me!
Don't be ruled by Caesar
Or by your own appetites
Or your lower nature
Or demons

What's the second commandment?

4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God

Don't let anyone or anything replace Me in your life -- Not now or ever

Now it may look to some people that God is a Narcissist

But these commands are for our protection and for our well being

Because when we allow other things to rule our lives We get destroyed

Evil desires, Sexual Immorality
Greed, Bitterness

Let me explain something else to you:

God made us with needs and wants -- No! The devil didn't make you that way

We all have needs and we all have wants
We will always have needs and wants

But He wants us to know, that He is the total answer to all of our needs and wants.

Matthew 6:31-33

- 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'
- 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.
- 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Everybody has needs and (desires)
But God knows what we need and what we want
And says: SEEK ME FIRST
And all these things will be given to you

The challenge is to refuse to other gods for our needs and wants

Here's what we should strive for
To know for certain that God and God alone is the answer

Refuse to go to someone or something for help
Before you 1st go to God

Do you Need Peace?
Go to God 1st before you take a vacation

Do you Need Healing?
Go to God 1st before you go to the doctor

Do you Need Love?
Go to God 1st before you seek out a human

Do you Need Comfort?
Go to God 1st before you call your mother

Do you Need Wisdom?

Go to God 1st before to go to google

Do you Need a clear conscience?

Go to God 1st before you go to another counselor

You get my point:

Now the Lord will supply your need in all kinds of ways.

He may send you here or there for help

But if He sends you it will be the right place, at the right time with the right person

The whole point is for us learn to go to Him first:

Colossians 1:17-18

17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

Revelation 2:4-5 Calls Jesus "Our First Love" and encourages us to always remember that He is our first love

Rev 2:4-5

4 But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

5 Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the deeds you did at first;

This is something so clearly seen in so many lives in the course of time:

We start out so well

Totally in love, Totally committed to

Totally excited about Jesus

But over time something begins to happen

That love begins to fade

And as it does our love for others does the same

WHAT IS THE GREAT COMMAND?

Thou shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength

That doesn't seem to leave room for me to love anyone or anything else?

But here's the deal: When we love God with all our hearts His love passes through me to others

Ezekiel 36:25

One of the greatest promises of scripture

Ezekiel 36:25-26 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols,

Cleanse me from all my idols?

I believe this is something that you and I need to sign up for. How can He cleanse me from all my idols, unless I am willing to admit that I have some?

Moreover I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

I want that Lord!

Forgive me Lord for looking to other gods to meet my needs
For looking to myself and not you

Forgive me for idolizing others
For loving the things of this world more than you

I am renouncing the gods of this world
I will have no other God but you

Amen