

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 2-23-14 AM NOTES
"THE IDOL OF ME"
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#5 in Series, "Idol Wars"

Ezekiel 14:3a (NKJV) "Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity."

Jeremiah 2:11-13 (NIV) "11 Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. 12 Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,' declares the Lord. 13 'My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.'"

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV) "to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved."

I. The Roots of the Idol of Me

Genesis 3:1-5 (NKJV) "1 Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'? 2 And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' 4 Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'"

"Eve, I'm going to do you a favor. I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you deserve to know. God has a motive other than love for this restriction. The truth is that God wants to hold you back, to frustrate your potential. Don't you realize that God Himself has this knowledge of good and evil? He knows what will enrich life and what will ruin life. And He knows that this fruit will give you two that same knowledge, so that you will rise up to His level of understanding and control. Eve, it may come as a shock to you, but God is holding out on you. He is not your friend; He is your rival...This tree, Eve, is your only chance to reach your potential. In fact, Eve, if you *don't* eat of this tree, you will surely die!"

—John Piper and Wayne Grudem paraphrase

Genesis 3:6 (NKJV) "So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."

Every little child that is born is a "god wannabe" with a sin nature and a power called sin dwelling in him.

II. The Manifestation of the Idol of Me

A. Entertainment

"Your religion is what you do with your solitude."

—William Temple

Psalms 139:1-2 (ESV) "1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me! 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar."

“One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from a lack of time.”
—John Piper

B. Approval

Proverbs 29:25 (NKJV) “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.”

The most common manifestation of the fear of man is an inordinate desire for the approval of others.

2 Timothy 2:15a (NKJV) “Be diligent to present yourself **approved to God**...”

Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV) “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

When we become consumed with the approval of others, we violate Scripture and displease God in order to please people.

III. The Proper Response to the Idol of Me

Matthew 22:36-37 (NKJV) “³⁶Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ ³⁷Jesus said to him, ‘*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’”

Loving God is Spirit-enabled affection.

Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV) “Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life.”

Colossians 3:23 (HCSB) “Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men.”

“He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee, which he loves not for Thy sake.”

—Augustine (354-430 AD)

1 John 5:21 (NKJV) “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”

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“THE IDOL OF ME”
VARIOUS SCRIPTURES
#5 in Series, “Idol Wars”

One of the things that we have emphasized in this series is that an idol is more than a physical object that we bow down before. The idols in our culture are primarily the type described in **Ezekiel 14:3a(NKJV)** “Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity.” In some ways it is much easier to deal with physical idols

like the idols revealed in the Old Testament – Dagon, Baal, Moloch, and others. Idols of the heart are sneaky, subtle, and more often go undetected. Keep in mind that an idol is anything more important to you than God. An idol is anything or anyone you look to for what only God can give you. I am speaking of things like acceptance, significance, security, and joy. The one true God has a monopoly on all of those. Any of these that we are seeking from any other source than God is a counterfeit. What many call “psychological problems” today are in reality the result of looking to an idol to give you what only God can give you.

Not only is idolatry sin, idolatry is foolish – utterly foolish. By way of introduction, I want to look at a passage in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah that expounds on the foolishness of idolatry. **Jeremiah 2:11-13 (NIV)** “¹¹ Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols. ¹² Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,’ declares the Lord. ¹³ ‘My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.’” The Lord God shares something unbelievable. It is so shocking that in symbolic language, God tells the heavens that they should be appalled and shudder with great horror. What is this shocking, appalling, unbelievable thing? It is that people who have known the one true God would turn from Him to “worthless idols”. To show how appalling this thing is, God gives an illustration. In an arid land like Israel, water is the most valuable natural resource. Because there was so little rain, cisterns were used to catch what little water the people got from rainfall. A cistern was a hole lined with bricks and plaster to hold the water that drained in. There was a problem with cisterns. They became stagnant, but many times the water would disappear before it had time to get stagnant. A crack would develop in the cistern and the water would seep out and be absorbed into the dry ground. The best, most desirable source of water was a fresh spring where water came bubbling up out of the ground. Given the choice of having a cracked cistern or a rare and valuable fresh water spring, no one would choose the cracked cistern! But the Lord is saying that this is what we do every time that we worship an idol. When we look to career, prestige in the world, or some human relationship for our significance, we have just said no to the spring of living water and said yes to a cracked cistern – how utterly foolish! When we look to our performance in the workplace, the opinions of others, our status in the world, or to awards or words of affirmation for our acceptance instead of the acceptance that is our in the beloved Christ, the Son of God, we have said “no” to the springs of living water and “yes” to a broken cistern. How incredibly dumb! **Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV)** “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.” When we look to retirement plans, investments, our job, or another person such as a spouse for security, we have said “no” to the omnipotent, omniscient God and His glorious promises and “yes” to that which can disappear almost overnight. How absolutely idiotic! We could go on and on, but I think that you get the point. Idolatry is a really dumb sin. It no more delivers what we need than a cracked cistern can deliver fresh water.

Let’s review where we have been. After looking at some foundational truths about idol wars, we then looked at the idol of success, the idol of sex, and in the last message, the idol of money. Today, we are going to examine the idol that in a sense includes the ones we have looked at and every other idol – “The Idol of Me”.

I. The Roots of the Idol of Me

To find the roots of this idol, we must go all of the way back to the first book of the Bible. **Genesis 3:1-5 (NKJV)** ¹ Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’ ² And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; ³ but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ⁴ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” The enemy not only denies God’s Word, he now accuses God of unloving motives. Verse 5 is saying that God is holding out on you. Satan is telling Eve that there are some wonderful things out there, and God is trying to keep her

from reaching her potential. He is saying that Eve can be her own god and control her own life and destiny. To summarize, the father of lies tells Eve, “It’s really all about you Eve!” Eve and Adam after her ate of the forbidden fruit because they wanted to be their own god.

John Piper and Wayne Grudem in the excellent book, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* do a good job of paraphrasing this passage. Satan says, “Eve, I’m going to do you a favor. I hate to be the one to break this to you, but you deserve to know. God has a motive other than love for this restriction. The truth is that God wants to hold you back, to frustrate your potential. Don’t you realize that God Himself has this knowledge of good and evil? He knows what will enrich life and what will ruin life. And He knows that this fruit will give you two that same knowledge, so that you will rise up to His level of understanding and control. Eve, it may come as a shock to you, but God is holding out on you. He is not your friend; He is your rival... This tree, Eve, is your only chance to reach your potential. In fact, Eve, if you *don’t* eat of this tree, you will surely die!” [John Piper and Wayne Grudem, “Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood”, Page 107]. That is really good and I believe gets at the correct interpretation of Genesis 3:5.

In addition to the desire to be her own god, Eve saw that the fruit God had forbidden was desirable to the senses of taste and sight, and also that it would fulfill her desire to be wise. Every barrier to her disobedience had been removed one by one. The original liar’s lie was accepted hook, line, and sinker (to use fishing language). In this first sin – the one that opened the door to the flood of sin that followed – we see that Eve usurped Adam’s place as head and it seems that Adam stood by passively allowing the deception to continue without intervening. **Genesis 3:6 (NKJV)** “So when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” God held Adam primarily responsible because God designated Adam as head of Eve. Because of sin coming into the world, there was a curse upon man and indeed all creation. Adam and Eve’s spirit died to God and a power called “sin” came in which gave Satan inroad into their life to tempt and deceive. Every descendent of Adam, the federal and seminal head of the human race, received the consequences of the curse of sin. Every descendent of Adam is born with a spirit that is dead to God, a power called “sin” that indwells them and with an adamic nature that is sometimes called the sin nature. Every descendent of Adam is born with a bend, a pull to sin and the desire to be his own god. Every little child that is born is a “god wannabe” with a sin nature and a power called sin dwelling in them. I remember one of my grandchildren who was 4 or 5 that when given instructions about what had to be eaten on the plate before enjoying dessert, gave the response, “I want to do what I want to do”. Adults struggle with that same rebellious bend; we are just a little more sophisticated with how we phrase it. We think that we can improve on the plan God has for us. A part of the adamic nature that we were born with is the desire to be our own god – the idol of me!

II. The Manifestation of the Idol of Me

As I stated in the introduction of the message, in reality, every idol is a manifestation of the idol of me. Allow me to give you a few of the multitude of idols that flow out of the idol of me.

A. Entertainment

One way to discern an idol is to analyze what we think about or imagine when nothing else is demanding our attention. William Temple (1881-1944) said, “Your religion is what you do with your solitude.” What he was saying is that the true god of your heart is what your thoughts gravitate to when nothing else is demanding your attention is a revelation of your true god. What do you typically daydream about? One or two daydreams do not indicate an idol, but is there something that you habitually think about to get happiness and even comfort in the privacy of your own thoughts? I would remind you of what we see in **Psalms 139:1-2 (ESV)** “¹ O Lord, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; **you discern my thoughts** from afar.” I suspect that a very common answer to, “what consumes your thought life” would be some form of entertainment. Last week we looked at how sports can become an idol. Video games can become an idol. Some “extreme gamers” spend over 40 hours a week in front of a screen, leaving only for a bathroom break and grabbing another

energy drink. I have seen figures showing that as many as one in ten kids 8-18 years old could be classified as clinically addicted to video games. A 15 year old video game addict is described as displaying, “all the characteristics of a heroin addict. You haven’t got someone putting a needle in their arm and having a high, but you’ve got all the telltale collateral damage of a heroin addict: withdrawal from his family, withdrawal from his friends, lies to cover his addiction. He’ll do anything.” [Quoted in Kyle Idleman, *Gods at War*, page 138]. A related idol would be obsession with twitter or Facebook. I remember reading a quote a while back from John Piper: “One of the great uses of Twitter and Facebook will be to prove at the Last Day that prayerlessness was not from a lack of time.” [Quoted in Idleman, Page 138]. Are all video games sin? Is being on Facebook or Twitter sin? No, entertainment may be a gift from God to relax us and give us a change of pace, but they easily can begin to control our thoughts, our time and steal away our affection and thus become an idol. Television, movies, sports or any entertainment can become an idol. Guard your heart from idols! Take drastic action to rid your life of them. The manifestation of the god of me called entertainment like a cracked cistern, never delivers.

B. Approval

For many, being approved by others has become life controlling. Anything that has become life controlling is an idol. The Bible calls this approval idolatry “the fear of man”. **Proverbs 29:25 (NKJV)** “The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe.” Let me give you the most common manifestation of the fear of man. It is not a fear of being physically harmed by another person. The most common manifestation of the fear of man is an inordinate desire for the approval of others. There are some who are so consumed with this desire to be approved that it is life controlling, and that makes it an idol. Here is why this manifestation of the idol of me is so dangerous. Many times to receive the approval of man, you must sacrifice the approval of God! **2 Timothy 2:15a (NKJV)** “Be diligent to present yourself **approved to God**...” If we have to lose the approval of man to have the approval of God, we must be willing to do it. There is a big difference between being accepted by God and being approved by God. Acceptance by God refers to my relationship with Him and it is not earned; it is a gift of His grace when we are in His Son. I quoted **Ephesians 1:6 (NKJV)** earlier, “to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.” Approval by God has to do with obedience. The ability to obey is all tied in to grace also, but while we cannot lose our acceptance, we can lose God’s approval through disobedience. Many times you will have to lose the approval of man in order to please and obey God. If you have fallen into the idol of approval, you have a dilemma. It is not easy because people are fickle and their standard of approval is constantly changing! I can recall many times when I have had to make a decision and take action that I could not explain because of matters of confidentiality. The Elders of the church have to do that and some people reject us and leave the church because of it. At the end of the day, and at the end of our lives the Elders must stand before the Lord and give account of the stewardship of leading this church. I think that I speak for all eight of our Elders when I say that we desire His approval more than the approval of man. When we become consumed with the approval of others, we violate Scripture and displease God in order to please people. The place that shows up more than anywhere else is in making loving confrontations to a brother or sister in sin. If you are struggling with the idol of approval of man, you will not make a confrontation in love and you will have put the approval of man over the approval of god – that is idolatry.

If time allowed, we could look at the idol of food (I’m so glad we are out of time), work, fitness, and on and on. There is almost no end to the manifestations of this idol of me.

III. The Proper Response to the Idol of Me

This last point has been virtually the same in each message in this series. We have talked about the importance of repentance and the importance of replacing the idol with worship and treasuring the one true God. We have dealt with reckoning on our crucifixion with Christ and our victory in Christ over the flesh and the power of sin. Today, to conclude this message, I want to say basically the same thing from another angle. The response to any idol is to tear it down by repentance and then to obey the greatest commandment. Jesus was asked by a lawyer in **Matthew 22:36 (NKJV)** "Teacher, which *is* the great

commandment in the law?" Jesus answered him by quoting from the book of Deuteronomy in **Matthew 22:37 (NKJV)** "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" What exactly does that mean? Loving God is Spirit enabled affection. That affection always affects the behavior. Loving God is not deeds but delight in Him. Loving God is when His glory, His beauty, captures us, delights us and enthalls us. The more we know Him and His glory, His perfections, and His great love for us, the deeper is our love for Him. To love God is to treasure him above all things. This is the only solution for idolatry!

Notice the description of how we are to love Him: First, we are to love God with all our heart. The heart has different meanings in different contexts, but basically the heart is the core of one's inner being. **Proverbs 4:23 (NKJV)** "Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it *spring* the issues of life." Second, we are to love Him with all our soul. The soul is our personhood apart from the body. It includes our mind, our affections, and our will. Third, we are to love God with all our mind. This highlights our thinking capacity and our decision making. It also has the idea of moving ahead with passion and strength. It is translated "might" or "strength" in Hebrew in Deuteronomy 6:5.

We should not overanalyze the meaning of these words since they are conveying the whole person. We are to love the Lord with all the faculties God has given us. There can be no love that takes the place of this love for God. Every other love must become an expression of our love for God and his glory. For instance, I love my wife but that is an expression of my love for Him. He has commanded me in Ephesians 5:25 to love my wife and I am loving her as a manifestation of loving God since loving Him always results in obedience as a pattern of life. Everything that I do must be seen as an expression of my love for Him. **Colossians 3:23 (HCSB)** "Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men".

What we have here is a command to love all that God is with all that we are and to love Him and seek His glory in every aspect of our life. Augustine said, "He loves Thee too little who loves anything together with Thee, which he loves not for Thy sake." [Quoted in John Piper, "What Jesus Demands from the World" page 82].

CONCLUSION

1 John 5:21 (NKJV) "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." The only way to obey this command is to recognize the idols, tear them down through repentance and to fill our heart, soul and mind with a life consuming love for God.