

THE FUTILITY OF IDOLATRY



+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

Idolatry is rebellion against God, born in the hearts of people when they worship parts of creation rather than the Creator.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Isaiah 44–46

+ **SETTING:**

Isaiah prophesied during a relatively good time for the Southern Kingdom of Judah, but the Northern Kingdom of Israel was in its death spiral leading to their eventual fall to Assyria. Still, idolatry remained a struggle for both kingdoms in varying degrees until both met their demise in exile as God's punishment. One place Isaiah addressed this issue was in a portion of his prophetic book aimed ahead to a time after the people had been deported to pagan lands. Through Isaiah, the Lord made the case that idols, whether local or abroad, were nothing but a dead distraction from the one true God.

DAY 1

READ:

Isaiah 44:1-5

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:1-5

NOTES

When we stop and really think about the fullness of what God has done, does, and will continue to do for us, it can stop us in our tracks.

God made us. He thought our life was worth living and gave us breath. He formed us in our mother's womb before anyone else had seen our face. And He knows us completely, our past, present, and future, and He loves us still.

God provides His Spirit for us. God Himself is dwelling inside of us as believers, giving us the hope and courage that we need to carry on. This Spirit gives us comfort and peace in a world that is in constant turmoil. The support of the Spirit is unmatched. He guides us and gives us counsel, convicts us, and seals us as His own.

God also blesses us with offspring. Even if you have never had children of your own, you are able to carry on in the Spirit and multiply children in the faith by sharing the love of Christ and the gospel message with others. God allows us to partner with Him in growing His kingdom, in creating a multitude of worshipers for His glory.

God has also written His name on us. This means that no threat can truly harm us. We are sealed with the promise of eternity with God forever. God has sealed us with His name because we are His children by faith in Jesus and He is our God. He is the same God who has always existed and who is the only true God to be worshiped forevermore.

What are some blessings in your life that have come from God? What praise will you give Him today for the love He has lavished on you?

DAY 2

READ:

Isaiah 44:6-11

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:6

NOTES

We cannot mess up God's plan. This may be a profound and uncomfortable thought, but it is absolutely true. Even our best efforts to ruin things are thwarted by a God who is not surprised by anything. What a strange truth that should bring us incredible comfort.

As we are daily following Christ, when we are left to make a difficult decision, maybe one where both options seem good, we can step out in faith and choose without fearing that we will be outside of God's will. As our desire is to do what God desires, that is a very good thing. However, we can sometimes become paralyzed because we have put so much emphasis on figuring out God's plan, not wanting to make a mistake. We then live a life of inaction and complacency.

But God says many times in the Bible not to fear, not to worry. Seek God and His kingdom first and everything will turn out as God wills it. For He is the first and He is the last. Everything is in His hands.

God's sovereignty and His omniscience actually free us to live our lives with great comfort and peace. We are not so significant that one decision will disrupt the cosmos and cause the world to implode. As we daily walk with Him, He gives us much freedom and wants to guide us and give us good gifts. The key, though, is that daily walk.

If instead we are following the idols of our modern world, the straight and narrow path starts to get foggy and we might end up lost. But God is gracious with us still, knowing that we are sinners in need of the Savior, and desiring that we find the right path home.

In both cases, we rest in the comfort of His knowledge and hold on to the knowledge that all things are in His hands.

Are you holding back on making a decision because of fear of what might happen? How can trusting in God's knowledge of all things bring you comfort and confidence to do the next right thing?

DAY 3

READ:

Isaiah 44:12-23

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Isaiah 44:12-17

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #40: SIN AS IDOLATRY

Sin is not only a physical act of rebellion against God, such as lying or stealing, but it is also a matter of the heart. The physical displays of sin are the fruit of what has been birthed in the heart of a person (Matt. 15:10-20). In Scripture, idolatry usually refers to bowing down to a statue made of wood or gold, worshiping created things instead of the Creator. But idolatry can take on more subtle forms: a seeking of approval, security, power, pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous demands (Jas. 4:1-2).

Giving up something we cherish has always been difficult. When we were children, giving up a pacifier or beloved toy was about the most devastating thing that could occur. As older children and teenagers, giving up time with friends or playing games could disrupt our entire week.

Adults are above that, right? What about the relationship you know needs to end? What about the money you know you should start saving? What about that job promotion that would cause you to be away from your family more often? The list is endless.

As adults, we are still scared to lose something we want. It can be even more difficult if we have invested time, energy, and money into something that God is asking us to give up. We like comfort and security, we like what is familiar, but sometimes these are not the best things for us. These may be good things in a general sense, but if they have become an idol in our lives, something we treasure above God Himself, then we have fallen into idolatry! Idolatry in our modern world is a sin that creeps up on us so gradually that sometimes it's difficult to spot it. We might even think something we worship is a blessing given by God, and it actually could be, but we have turned it into a gross idol.

Let's remind ourselves to release our grip on things, to stand before the Lord with open hands. Sometimes God is calling us to be uncomfortable for a season so that we might learn to find our comfort in Him. Whatever it is that may be taken from you at some point, the Christian can have hope because we know God is a good, faithful, and holy God.

In your life right now, what are some things you believe God might be calling you to let go of but that you are struggling to release? Who are some trusted believers you could discuss this struggle with for wisdom and help?

DAY 4

READ:

1 Corinthians 10

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Corinthians 10:14-17

NOTES

In 1 Corinthians 10, we see that fleeing from idolatry has corporate implications. When we give in to idolatry, we not only harm ourselves but those around us.

Paul speaks about the bread and cup that believers share immediately after he warns against idolatry. This meal done in remembrance of the Lord is a sign of unity and commitment to follow after God. When one member of the body of Christ walks in idolatry, he or she is harming the whole body. Sin never affects just us. When we think about potential or current idols in our life, we should be motivated to remove them for two reasons.

The first is that God is calling us to serve only the one true God, Himself. Only He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present. Only He sought to save and redeem us. Only He created us and loves us and calls us His own. There is only one powerful, supreme being.

The second reason is because we are part of the body of Christ and our decisions affect everyone around us. As followers of Christ, we are not only a group of believers, we are a body. This is a powerful image we sometimes take for granted. When one part of the body is in pain, the whole body hurts. When one part of the body sins, the whole body is affected and sometimes experiences the consequences of it.

Out of love, concern, and compassion for other believers and the church, we should thus remove idols from our own lives because we are a family and we are the body of Christ.

What idols or potential idols in your life can or are currently harming those in your church? How will you confess these sins and seek repentance for the sake of the whole body?

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"We must see the arrogance in this; we the created have turned unfulfilled away from our glorious Creator, and we take his place, shaping a god out of our own imaginations. In the end all idolatry is just self-worship."¹

-Andrew M. Davis

DAY 5

READ:

1 Thessalonians 1

FOCAL PASSAGE:

1 Thessalonians 1:8-10

NOTES

When the Word of God goes forth, people turn from their idols and wait for Jesus's return. In today's passage, when the people of Thessalonica heard the gospel, they realized their idolatry was empty and began to worship the God who is alive. Not only that, but Paul says they were waiting for Jesus.

The church at Thessalonica is a wonderful example for us in our own discipleship journeys. First they "turned to God from idols" (v. 9). This wasn't a half turn. It was a full turn toward God and away from idols. Unlike the Israelite kings who wanted to worship both God and idols, the Thessalonian church knew only one could be worshiped. For it is when we remove idols from our lives that Jesus has all the more room to fill our hearts and lives with Himself. No idol has died for us, and no idol has raised from the dead to restore our relationship with God. Only Jesus, the Son of God, has.

Next, Paul says they turned to God "to serve" Him. Our role is to serve God, yet sometimes we think it's His role to serve us. We pray for this or that and in His goodness, He gives us good gifts. But we must remind ourselves that our worship is in our service. Serving doesn't save us, but we serve because He is an almighty, loving God.

And last, in this passage, Paul says that this early church waited for Jesus, understanding that their lives were in constant preparation and waiting for Christ's return. Are we waiting in the same way? Are we prepared? Do we live with that mind-set?

The power of the gospel is this: Those who repent from their sins, turn from their idols, and follow after God in Christ will receive the gift of eternal life. One day, Jesus will return to earth to rule His kingdom with all the children of God, protecting them from the wrath to come against idolaters. What a Savior!

When you think about the gospel, what transformation should take place in your life? Where do you need to repent today and turn to God?

GROUP

NOTES

POINT 1: Idolatry begins by rejecting God (Isa. 44:1-6).

Despite the Israelites' idolatry and rebellion, they remained God's _____ people, and one day, God would bless and _____ their numbers through the gift of His _____ .

Because the Lord is the _____ God, our Redeemer, He alone is worthy of worship. Yet our idolatry, the worship of other "gods," rejects His _____ status as God.

? Why do people, even believers, succumb to the temptation of idolatry?

POINT 2: Idolatry leads to futile religion (Isa. 44:7-11).

The Lord has confidently laid out a challenge to any other gods to contend with Him—none can—and He calls on His people to be _____ to the world of God as our _____ .

? How has the Lord been your Rock?

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #40: SIN AS IDOLATRY

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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"How could he fail to pity them in this also, seeing that they worship them that cannot see. In hearing, they pray to them that cannot hear. Born with life and reason, people, as they are, call gods things that do not move at all but do not even have life. Strangest of all, do they serve as their masters beings whom they themselves keep under their own power?"²

—Athanasius (d. 373)

pleasure, etc. We can diagnose the idolatry of our heart by examining the areas where the desires of our heart have turned into idolatrous _____

(Jas. 4:1-2).



Why must we remember that every act in service to an idol is ultimately futile?

POINT 3: Idolatry results in foolishness

(Isa. 44:12-20).

Idols are crafted from metal, wood, or other resources God has created, but these are _____ more than a reflection of _____ and a _____ from the only God who saves.



What are some of the empty promises of idols that only God can fulfill?

We have all been _____ by idolatry and are rightly counted as fools. But God still calls idolaters to find salvation through _____ in Jesus Christ.

MY RESPONSE

Because we have come to know and taste the goodness of God through Christ, we proclaim the freedom that can be found in Him to all those enslaved by idols.

- **HEAD:** What does an examination of your thoughts reveal about your focus and your worship?
- **HEART:** How will you cultivate your love for God today so that you might become more like Him?
- **HANDS:** How will you lovingly show someone that what they idolize is insufficient and cannot satisfy but Jesus can?

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Our God lives! The idols we have created with our hands and our own desires are worthless and undependable. They are mere objects or ideas. Let us not compare them to God or allow them to take the place of God in our lives."³

-Africa Study Bible