**Idols – Ephesians 5:1-7, Colossians 3:1-17**

**Week of October 17, 2010**

**Idol (and Idle) Worship**

American Idol has at times been one of the highest rated shows on television. The singers competing for the top spot at the end of each season work hard at their craft. They try their best at various song styles, first seeking to please the judges and then hoping to be the favorite of the viewing audience. Every week one singer gets the fewest votes and is eliminated from the competition. The last one standing is named that season’s American Idol.

Is the singer an idol in the sense of being worshipped by the people who voted for him or her? Probably not, but the things the singer has come to represent surely fit the Bible’s definition of idolatry: things that we focus on instead of God, things like fame and fortune, popularity and power, achievement and acclaim. The Bible labels such things idols because if we hold onto them for ourselves instead of putting them under God’s control, they will end up controlling us instead. Thankfully, the Bible teaches that there is hope when we find ourselves tempted by these idols. Let’s study together this hope we have in our Savior God to save us from our idols.

**Monday – The Idleness of Idols**

“If [a man] worships not the true God, he will have his idols.” Theodore Parker, 19th c. American abolitionist

“What is an idol? It is anything that more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.” Tim Keller

1. Please read Isaiah 44:6-20. What trap had the craftsmen fallen into? How do you think this happened?
2. According to Isaiah 44:21-23, what hope do we have to be saved from such foolishness?

Making it Personal: Why do we lie, or fail to love, or break our promises, or live self-centered lives? Some would answer, “because we are weak and prone to sin.” That is true. But if we dig deeper we will realize that the deeper reason is that we are all prone to look to people or things to make us happy rather than looking to Jesus Christ alone. When we have done that, we have created an idol. Are there things you do, or people, or material blessings that you own that have stolen your affection away from God? Ask the Lord to guide you in identifying those things and showing you how to put them in their proper place in your life.

**Tuesday – Present Day Idols, part 1**

“All sorts of things are potential idols … As soon as our loyalty to anything leads us to disobey God, we are in danger of making it an idol.” Richard Keyes, The Idol Factory (No God but God, Guinness and Seel, eds.)

1. Please read Colossians 3:1-11. What are the various types of idolatry identified in these verses? Which ones tend to pop up in your life?
2. Now read Colossians 3:12-17. What can we focus on in order to avoid the idols of the earlier verses?

Digging Deeper: Read 1 John 5:1-21 and explain how the final verse summarizes the whole passage.

**Wednesday – Present Day Idols, part 2**

“Ambition is an idol ….” Robert Southey, 18th-19th c. English poet

1. Please read Ephesians 5:1-14. What types of idolatry are listed throughout these verses? Which do you see occurring in your life?

Text Insight: When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, idol worship was prevalent, pervasive and profitable in the city of Ephesus. Today, idol worship is more subtle and therefore, can be more difficult to recognize. Tim Keller writes, “We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes.”

2. In Ephesians 5:15-21, what is suggested as a way to avoid idolatry? What can you do to practice this advice in your life?

Digging Deeper: Read Acts 19:23-41. When have you clung to your idols as strongly as the Ephesians did?

**Thursday – Choose Your Worship: Creator or Created**

“A man can no more diminish God’s glory by refusing to worship Him than a lunatic can put out the sun by scribbling ‘darkness’ on the wall of his cell.” C.S. Lewis, 20th c. Anglo-Irish writer

1. Please read Isaiah 2:7-8. What filled the land? In what way do these same idols fill our land now?
2. According to Romans 1:18-25, what results from seeking things other than God?

Making it Personal: Are there material objects (“silver and gold” as Isaiah put it) that you treasure so much that they take your attention from God at times? Modern day objects that demand our attention and devotion might include anything from a computer to a new car. What should you do about them?

**Friday – Removing the Stumbling Blocks**

“When men have gone so far as to talk as though their idols have come to life, it is time that someone broke them.” Richard H. Tawney, 19th-20th c. English historian

1. Please read Ezekiel 14:1-6. What does it mean to set up an idol in your heart or a stumbling block in your walk with God?
2. How does Isaiah 59:1-2 help you understand Ezekiel 14?
3. How do Psalm 24:1-6, Isaiah 4:2-6 and Revelation 7:13-17 tell us we can approach God without the stumbling blocks of our own sin getting in the way?

Making it Personal: What gets in the way of your walk with God? Pray for him to guide you – through the righteousness of Jesus – past that stumbling block.

**For the Weekend:** Read Galatians 4:8-11 and Psalm 139:1-6. Why would people turn their backs on what they know to be true about God? What comfort comes from knowing that you are known by God at those times?