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### **The Folly of Idolatry** **Pastor Steven Gaines** **Isaiah 44:9-20** **May 22, 2016**

Turn with me to Isaiah 44. We're going to be looking at Verses 9-20 today. Isaiah 44, starting in Verse 9.

*Isaiah 44:9-20 ~ All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. 10 Who fashions a god or casts an idol that is profitable for nothing? 11 Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame, and the craftsmen are only human. Let them all assemble, let them stand forth. They shall be terrified; they shall be put to shame together.*

*12 The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. 13 The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. 14 He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. 16 Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, "Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!" 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"*

*18 They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. 19 No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" 20 He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

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Let's pray.

*Father, I come before You now and lift up this time where Your word is discussed, and explained, and applied. Father, I pray that Your Spirit would come upon me, and enable me to accurately handle the word of truth, and to bring forth the message, in which You give open ears, and hearts, to those who have come to hear. And I pray this in Christ's name, Amen.*

You know, for western people, living in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a detailed message on the crafting, and worship of carved images during the iron age may seem somewhat irrelevant. In our modern civilization people sensed that we have progressed much farther, to higher levels of understanding. Now as Christians, I think we have a better understanding, but still we struggle to make the connection between the ancient world, and the culture, and the practices therein, and our current situation. We need to remember the exhortation we are given at the book of 1 John, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols." But this is a command, and a reminder not only to us, not only to people back then, but today for us. Consider this quote from David Powlison, he says:

*The simple picture of idolatry, a worshipper prostrated before a figure of wood, metal, or stone, is powerfully extended by the Bible. Idolatry becomes a concept with which to comprehend the intricacies of both the individual motivation, and social conditioning. The idols of the heart lead us to defect from God in many ways. They manifest and express themselves everywhere, down to the minute details of both inner and outer life. Such idols of the heart fit hand and glove with the wares offered in the vanity fair of social life. In some, behavioral sins are always portrayed in the Bible as motivated, or ruled by God, or gods.*

Today, as we look at Isaiah 44, I want us to take a good look at the text, and what God was saying to the people of Israel of that time, through Isaiah, in his detailed discussion about idolatry and its folly. But I also want us to look to ourselves, and to our idolatry, so that we can learn and understand what it is about, this idolatry that is so foolish, and vain, and that we can turn from it. Today, as we cover this passage, I want to look at three points. The first one is *The Shame of Idolatry*, looking at Verses 9-11. The second point is *The Futility of Idolatry*, looking at Verses 12-17. And the third point is *The Delusion of Idolatry*, looking at Verses 18-20. This morning I want to show you the folly of practicing idolatry, and that God is jealous for His glory, and He is jealous for the hearts of His people. I also want you to follow after our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who when He was

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tempted by Satan in the wilderness, at one point Satan took Him up to a very high mountain, and he showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, and he said to Him, “All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.” I want us to follow in the path of Christ, as He responded, and said, “I’m not going to do this because you shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.” So let’s start looking at the first point, *The Shame of Idolatry*.

### 1) The Shame of Idolatry:

Now to give a little bit of context, in the book of Isaiah, in the section we’ve been studying recently, Isaiah 40 last Sunday, and if you’ve been here on Wednesday night, Isaiah 40 and 42. One of the main issues that Isaiah is prophesying against is the people’s idolatry. How they have taken the true and the living God, the one who has created the heavens and the earth, He should receive glory, and honor, and praise, and instead of worshipping Him, and glorifying Him, that the people instead have followed after the nations, and the peoples around them, and they have engaged in idolatry, and all sorts of grotesque forms, turning their hearts away from Him.

So when we arrive at Isaiah 44, we come to a point where this concept of the true and living God versus idols has already been well developed. But in Isaiah 44, these verses, we get something of an extended discussion about the details of idolatry. That is, we get a lot of information and particulars about what is going on in this process. So I think it is very helpful for us to try to pay attention to the details, to not just gloss over them, but rather, to dig in together, to understand what is being said here. And in this first point, *The Shame of Idolatry*, we see that idolatry is ultimately empty and nothing.

The definition of idolatry, one Bible dictionary has it as this. It says:

*Strictly speaking, it denotes the worship of deity in a visible form whether the images to which homage is paid are symbolical representation of the true God, or of the false divinities which have been made the objects of worship in His stead.*

Okay, so simply put, he is saying idolatry can be somebody trying to worship the true God, but using a graven, or carved image to do so. Or it can be someone worshipping a false god through the same means. And this is looking back, strictly speaking, at what idolatry was when it was talked about in the usage of the language at that time. In different translations, it can be translated in the Old

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Testament as *'idol'*, as *'image'*, or as *'carved image'*, and we know from the Ten Commandments that this prohibition against idolatry was central and foremost in God's thinking as He spoke to His people. Consider with me in Exodus 20, this is the first giving of the Ten Commandments, the other being in Deuteronomy 5. In the Ten Commandments we read, Exodus 20, starting in Verse 1:

***Exodus 20:1-6 ~***

***1 And God spoke all these words, saying,***

***2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.***

***3 "You shall have no other gods before me.***

***4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.***

So we see here this definition of idolatry that I mentioned, is represented in these first two commandments. The first commandment's focus is no other gods, there is only one true and living God, no other gods. He will not tolerate any competition, He will not tolerate, "Worship Me *and* worship this other god." He says, "That's it. Just Me, and Me alone." And the second commandment, the focus is on the worship of these carved images, of these idols, and how much He hates this. In fact, you see it there where you get the direct command itself, that you are not to do it, but you get somewhat of an explanation there where He says, "I am a jealous God." He is jealous for His own glory. We are jealous for a lot of things. Perhaps there are some times where we can be jealous for other people, and their credit, or their honor rightly, but in most cases we are jealous for our glory. If someone steps on our reputation, says something against us, or makes an allusion to us, doesn't praise us in the way that we want, we become offended, and upset. But the true and living God is the one being that should be jealous for His own glory, because for Him to delight in anything else would be folly, because there is nothing compared to Him. Now in our text, when we look at Verse 9, it starts out and says:

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***Isaiah 44:9 ~ All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame.***

So in this physical idolatry that was prevalent at this time, there were several different components to this. There was number one, someone who made the idol. That is, for a physical idol to exist, someone had to make it. Number two, there was the idol itself, whatever it was. We see later in the passage that he makes reference to an idol that was fashioned in the shape of a person somehow, that you would put in the house. But looking back over history, and what archaeologists have discovered, you know there are all sorts of idols. Some of them are very grotesque. Some of them are fanciful, and some of them are combinations of men and animals, and all sorts of beings that are there in different forms and shapes. So you have the idol-maker, and then you have the idol itself, and then you have the idol-worshipper. And so Isaiah is going to be addressing these in this section here, and it points out here that the people who make the idols are nothing. That is, they are emptiness. What they are doing is really something that is completely foolish, especially if they actually believe that what they are crafting is a god.

Now some of you may be those who like to build, or create, or make, but you know that everything you make, or create, whether it is artwork, or it is pottery, or something else, it is just a thing. It is just something that is made, it is just physical in nature. No matter how beautiful it is, or how great you are in your artistry, at the end of the day, it is just a created thing that you have fashioned, and that you have shaped. But the idol-maker could have been actually deceived to think that he was making God. Consider that for a minute. Now then there is the idol itself, which is nothing. It is just wood, or it is just metal, or whatever material that was there. There is no special nature to that. And then you have the idol-worshipper, who now goes along with the other two and takes, and believes, that this created thing now becomes something that has transcended, and has spiritual power, and is of a spiritual nature.

We see here that the result of making idols, and worshipping them, is shame, ultimately. In fact, this word is used here three times in this section—Verse 9, Verse 10, and also Verse 11. At least it is translated here in ESV, this idea of shame. Somewhat literally, it is the idea of a pale face, that is, something has happened and you feel, like we would use the word today, you are ashamed. Sometimes we are ashamed because we come to it in our own realization, sometimes we're ashamed because other people put something in our face, and we



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are found to either be lacking, or to be foolish, or to have been wrong, or to have held a high position, and were knocked off of that high position, etc., how it goes. And sometimes we are ashamed because we are convicted of our sins, and we see how far that we have fallen short of God's glory, and shame comes upon us for what we have done.

Well, the emphasis here is that those who practice idolatry, making the idols, and those who worship them, and follow after them will be put to shame, should be ashamed because there is absolutely nothing significant or meaningful in what is going on. In fact, it's worse than that because they have engaged in blatant disobedience to God's commands, and they have replaced the true and the living God with something far inferior. When we look at a passage like this, and we consider the making of idols, and the shame of idolatry, when we look back even in the history of the church, we can see that idolatry, religious idolatry, has not been absent from the Christian church.

Consider this, the rise of the use of images in worship that have led people away from worshipping the true and living God, the God who is unseen, to try to bring Him down to a point where He could be worshipped, by images made by mankind. Even consider in church history how a seemingly good and innocent practice can lead to idolatry. During the early church, there was a period of time, under Roman persecution, where there were two different groups that got specified. There were martyrs, those were the people that died, professing their faith in Christ, and died for that, and the confessors, those who made a confession of their faith in Christ, and may have been put in jail, or had some other kind of mistreatment, but did not die for their faith. But there became a practice that happened, that when a martyr died, sometimes at a year later, after that death of that martyr, that a group of Christians would come around to the burial site or place, whether it is in the catacombs, or somewhere else, and they would have a little ceremony, or get-together of remembrance for that martyr, to not forget their sacrifice for Christ.

Now you can see the benefit of that, we should not forget those who have gone before us, but then apparently, over time, people would come back again the next year, and the following year, and before you know it, what begins to happen is these people begin to somehow be elevated up in people's minds and thinking, higher than they were. And before you know it, you have a whole system of saints, and worship of saints, even if you use the word '*veneration*', it is still worship according to the Scripture. And so throughout the history of the church there has always been this battle against idolatry, religious idolatry. Think today about the

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challenges that we face, even here. We can be idolatrous in our worship of God by perverting biblical teaching, by changing God in the way we think about Him, and our understanding of Him, and taking out certain elements that are very offensive to us. Sort of like the churches where a pastor came in, and the person after the sermons said, “You know, we don’t hear of Paul in this place. We don’t listen to Paul. That is too offensive for our modern ears, what he had to say.” You want to carve out certain parts of Scripture, take out things that they don’t like that are said. This is idolatry, a form of it, as well.

I had the chance to fill the pulpit in a church once years ago in Mississippi. Someone I knew had been an interim pastor there for years, and at this church, a little country church, he said when he got there he said, “Over the top here of the pulpit, up on the wall, was a big picture of Jesus, and it was that 1970s picture of Jesus with the long flowing hair, and a certain look there.” Maybe some of you have been in a church, you’ve seen this before, and know what I’m talking about, but if you don’t, you just can imagine that every generation that tries to represent people has its own little flair, and there was certain flair to this picture. He said that when he came there, that even though he was trying to be gracious and gentle, that he basically just said, “I can’t do this. I have to take this picture down.” And he did, he took it down, and they didn’t say anything. He preached for, I think, a few years, but he was told by the next person that came, that the Sunday after he left, that picture was back up on the wall. All right? Now it’s humorous in some way, but it is also sad. It is really sad because think how it could be that you don’t even intend to take a picture of Jesus, and remember it is not really an accurate representation, it is just somebody’s idea or image of what He looked like based upon their own certain place in time, and influences that were there. But how easy, how sad it is to think that we could add things in, and we could begin to pervert our worship of the true and living God.

Of course that is one form of idolatry, but as we think about the shame of idolatry today, I want you to begin to ponder, and we’ll develop these more as we go, some of the inward idols that we face. Idols such as honor, success, the control of our circumstances, the control of other people, our personal peace and comfort. Something for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans—entertainment is a huge idol that we all have to battle against. Comfort and pleasure, for some of us it is food. For other people it is physical conditioning. These are idols, things that we can commit idolatry with. It doesn’t mean, of course, that wealth and riches in itself, or honor, are things that are necessarily condemned, but they are things that can be taken, and twisted, and used in a way that God never intended them to be used. And they

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can become things within our lives that we feel like we have to have, that we have to have to be satisfied, and to have peace, and joy, and hope. Well, let's move on to our second point, *The Futility of Idolatry*, Verses 12-17.

### 2) The Futility of Idolatry:

We are now going to enter into this really kind of detailed description about making idols, and it is a very interesting one because the first one talked about the ironsmith. It says that he takes his cutting tool, and he works it over the coals. And then he fashions it with hammers, and he works it with his strong arm. I know Ty, many times, has talked about in narratives how it is that, you know, you are going along quickly, and you don't get much detail, and all of the sudden you hit a point, and now it's like you are getting all the details of what is going on—the words that were spoken, and who said them, and how it's going. Well, in a similar way, we have here a lot of details. The question is why, and we'll work on that a little bit. What is the point of all this detail? Because the people of the day would have known about this. They would not have been ignorant of these details. I think there is a very strong purpose in that. He is trying to help people see what is really going on in making an idol, what is really taking place here. Is this some sort of magical, mystical ceremony that takes place? Are lightning bolts coming down out of Heaven where these things are formed? Is there a certain glow, or aura over the shop where the idols are crafted? Well, no, there is not. He said, "How it really works is you just have a man, and he's got a tool, and he heats it up, and then he is hammering away at this metal that is there." But wait a minute, let's talk about the guy that is doing this. He actually has some weakness. He gets hungry, and his strength fails him, so there is not some superpower in there making these idols, it is just a man. He gets hungry, and then he says he drinks no water, and he becomes faint. Think about that. Here it is, the person making your god, that you are going to worship, and bow down to, and the very person making it, he is subject to the very human limitations that we all face.

Well then he gets to the point of the carpenter. He says now in a detailed picture, he stretches a line, and he marks it out with a pencil, and he shapes it with a plane, and marks it with a compass. Now probably not a lot of us are metal-workers, but probably a lot of us are home improvement kind of people on the side, either by necessity, or by choice. So maybe on the carpentry side we have a little bit more of a connection here, and we know what it is like to get the wood, and to measure the lines, or to put the angle on the miter saw, to try to bring forth this great creation that we are going to bring forth, and to try to put it all together neatly, and fashion



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it together. And so he brings out all these details of someone who would be making an idol out of wood. Then he talks about, for example, someone making an idol in the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man. Now people who are skilled in carpentry can do wonderful things. Perhaps you've seen things that people with carpentry skills have built, and it is amazing. There is a way that in all of this that God is glorified, not through idolatry, but when we use our skills to His glory, and our talents and abilities.

But then it gets into this discussion, in Verse 14, about where the wood comes from. He says, "Well, he cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak. He lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and rain nourishes it." So here is this picture of the raw materials that are provided there as well. Now one thing to consider in this is the devotion of those who are making idols, the amazing devotion of those. This picture of the ironsmith, and how he keeps working even though he is hungry, and he keeps working even though he is faint. One missionary to the South Pacific islands commented that in his observation that it was the custom of those who made idols that when they started doing it in their devotion, that they would not stop to eat or drink until they had completed it. John Calvin picked up on this notion and he said this:

*It ought also to be remarked that since idolaters are impelled by so great eagerness to worship idols, we ought to be ashamed of our coldness in the true worship of God. Let us be ashamed, I say, that we are so negligent, and cold, and even freezing, when worshippers of idols are so ardent, and let us consider that we must render an account. We scarcely become warm, and sometimes extinguish the sparks of that zeal which the Lord has kindled in us.*

It's just a reminder to us as we see the fervor of those in idolatry, how much more fervent should we be in our praise and worship of the true and living God? Well, let's talk about the futility that goes on with the ironsmith and with the carpenter, and with the raw materials that are presented.

Futility number one is that the makers of idols are mere human beings. And the question that should come from this passage when Isaiah was being used of the Lord to bring this message, what they should have seen is that it is impossible for mortals to create immortality. For a man to create God, it's just impossible, and by lining this out in detail and all the intricacies that go on with it, it in a way should have opened the people's eyes to see that it makes absolutely no sense to think that gods can come from being made by human beings.

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The second aspect of futility is that the material of idols is earthly. He goes into the trees, the different types of trees and the wood that's there. He goes into the metals, and the point is this, that you should get the picture and ask the question, how can things that are material and from the earth be fashioned into something that is heavenly and that is spiritual in nature. How does that happen? Is there some sort of magical process that takes place wherein they become enchanted?

Another aspect of futility that we should see here as well is the confusion that takes place with those materials themselves. And this is lined out in these verses that deal with the wood and the fire and the idol. It's the confusion that goes on, a person should say, "There is no way possible that I can take a block of wood or a tree, and I can use part of it, and I can make a nice fire, and I can warm myself over it, and I can eat my food over it, and then I can go back out and I can take the other half of that tree or that block of wood, and now I can make this into a god and fall down and worship it." It should be so evident and obvious to any person looking at it that look at the confusion there. How can the thing that makes the fire be the thing that I fall down and I worship?

One comparison that we can see in Scripture with the making of idols described here in Isaiah 44 and in the usage of skills for the Lord's glory, is to compare the making of the items in the tabernacle. One aspect that we see here about idols is idols ultimately are generated, as shown in this passage, from the mind of man, for the carpenter is the one that comes up with the plan. How is it that I'm going to draw the line? If I'm making an idol in the form of a human being, how tall will it be? How wide will it be? How much will it look like a human? How many features am I going to work to carve into this thing? So it's within the mind of man that the image is generated.

Consider that in the tabernacle, God gave the plan to Moses of what it would look like, what true worship was going to be, that He selected craftsmen, but they were people that were going to be filled with the Spirit of God to accomplish His purposes, and that at the end of the construction of the tabernacle, we read that it was done just as the Lord had commanded. But with the idol it starts with the mind of man. That's where the plan starts, and then it's done without the Spirit of the Lord's power, and that in the end result, it is done just exactly opposite of what the Lord commanded, to not make any graven or carved images.

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Consider today idols in your life. Consider idolatry in general, how it is that if we turn from the true and the living God, and we make any created thing into something that it was never intended to be, that it starts with us and with our mind. That if we take our parts of Scripture or God's nature or character, and we want to craft Him in our image, then in the end it has been in our image that our god has been made, that we then fall down and worship. Today I would call you to see the folly of idolatry and its futility, to see that anything that you set up in place of the true and living God is going to be brought down to shame, that it's not going to serve its purpose, that it may for a time bring you some sense of comfort. It may bring you some sense of pleasure. It may fulfill a need or a void in your life, but it ultimately is going to fail, because it started in your mind, in your heart, it is not blessed by God, and it is set up to replace the true and living God who is jealous for His glory. Well, let's move on from that and look at our last point:

### 3) The Delusion of Idolatry:

In Verses 18 through 20, we see a little bit of a return to the first part of our passage, but a further extension in talking about how delusional it is to worship idols. Verse 18 says:

***Isaiah 44:18 ~ They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.***

And then later in Verse 20 it says that one who is worshipping an idol cannot deliver himself. One of the consequences of idolatry that we see here is a darkened heart and understanding. This harkens us up to the New Testament into Romans 1 when we read this passage, for in Romans 1, we read this:

***Romans 1:21 ~ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.***

There's a picture here in these verses in Isaiah 44 of the consequence of getting into idolatry, similar to Romans 1, that when we engage in sin, that one of the things that God has done to people that did not honor Him, engaged in sin, is He gave them over to even more depraved sin. And it's a picture of a downward spiral

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that takes place, the idea of God giving people over. And we see it here in Verse 18. It says:

***Isaiah 44:18 ~ They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand.***

The people are sinning and not following after Him, but in the same way, they are receiving the judicial consequence of their sin, that their blindness is increasing and it's not getting any clearer. We see that another consequence in idolatry is the loss of knowledge and discernment. Think about getting to a point like we read in this section here, that you could actually believe that a block of wood could be turned into a god by the mere work of a craftsman. Think about the loss of knowledge and understanding that's represented there. It's an incredible loss that is described. A third consequence that we see here is the consequence of bondage in Verse 20, that this person cannot deliver himself from this idol.

One of the deceptive aspects of sin and how it works, both in the lives of those outside of Christ, and even in the lives of those who are believers in Jesus Christ is this, that sin is slavery and bondage to us, that it is so often that a person will say, "You know, I'm doing this thing I shouldn't do, but really I've got a grip on it. I've got control on this thing in my life. I'm managing it. I'm able to manage my sin and keep it under control. I've got a grip on it. It doesn't really have a grip on me." But the foolishness of this is that sin is bondage, and that when we begin to give ourselves over to it, we are entering into something that will now take hold of us. And sin is a cruel and terrible master. To be a slave to sin, that is, to be one who is outside of Christ, is a terrible place to be today.

Today if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have not bowed the knee to Him, if you have not confessed with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, if you have not repented of your sins, then the Bible says you are a slave to sin. Today if you are in this condition, I urge you to flee to Christ, to run to Him, to turn from your sins, to believe on Him, to come to the One who said that His yoke is easy and that His burden light, to a loving Heavenly Father who will love you and who will watch over you, to a great promise that is given, that He who begins a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. I hope today that you will see the folly of your sin, that even though you may not be like these people in the iron age that bowed down to physical idols, that the idols of your heart, whether they be pleasure, or whether they be lust, or control, or greed, or even a

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desire for exalting yourself, that all of these will fail you, that God is displeased with this and will not let anything to share His glory with Him. John Piper writes this:

*The problem with idolatry is not a matter of ignorance. It is a problem of human attitudes toward God. The primary posture of fallen man is one of refusing to honor God. Idols are not made from scratch. It involves the distortion of already present truth. The truth is changed into a lie. The lie depends on the truth it is distorting for its power just as the counterfeit depends upon the authentic for its value.*

Well, today in conclusion I'd like to take a little bit longer time than usual to try to make some practical applications of idolatry to us, and I'd like to look at three different areas of idolatry. Now, when you serve as a fill-in preacher person at different places, you have to be careful, because you don't want to have a soap box that you get up on and you pick certain passages that you want to really hammer home. So do know that this passage in Isaiah 44 goes along with four other messages in Isaiah, and the idea was to hit some of the main themes in the latter part of the book. Idolatry is one of them. We're going to look at the sovereignty of God on Wednesday from Isaiah 45. We looked at the greatness of God in Isaiah 40. We looked at this concept of hoping and waiting on the Lord, in Isaiah 40 as well, and also the servant of the Lord from Isaiah 42. So it's not just picking one thing to hammer on. So it is a very major theme in Isaiah.

So what I did is I decided then in picking three idols for us to look at in our conclusion I decided I wanted to pick things that I know I struggle with for sure. And I'm not going to talk about me so much. We can do that later if you desire to talk about it. That's fine, but I tried to pick things that weren't sort of the obvious out there idols, right? If you chose three, you could do money, sex, and power, right? Those would be three very obvious ones. The Bible speaks very clearly to those things. We need to talk about those things. The three I'm going to pick are control, personal peace and comfort, and honor and respect. So we're going to work through those today. So this isn't a separate 3-point sermon. It is just a 3-point application, if you're concerned.

So my method with each of these is to try to look at a biblical approach in understanding them, and then looking at an idolatrous approach to them, because sometimes it's easy for us to mention a word or an item like this and immediately jump to the conclusion that any mention of it or thought of it is unbiblical and



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wholly idolatrous. And I think that's a mistake. I think we need to understand why it is that idols are so powerful in us in the subtle ways that they work in our lives. So number one, control, and I mentioned this word. Well, one of the things we know from the biblical approach is that self-control is something that God wants to work in us, that is, the ability to control ourselves. In fact, it's part of the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5, is self-control. That is a very biblical concept. If you're not in control of yourself, you need to pray that the Lord will help work in you. There's a Proverbs that says, "A man without self-control is like a city with the walls torn down." So I'm not trying to encourage a lack of self-control.

We know as well that there are different relationships that we are called to. For instance, perhaps the most obvious one is parents and children. Parents are not glorifying God by saying, "I'm going to let my kids do whatever they want. I'm not going to be involved in teaching, instructing, disciplining, etc., all those things." But we also have other human institutions that need to have control, like the government. There needs to be order in the church. We would all recognize that, I think, and we don't want anarchy and chaos to rule.

So I mention these things to emphasize that the concept of control is a very biblical concept, and that there are even going to be times where you're in a position where you have to exercise control, that you're going to be confused of being controlling when you're not. Okay, but then there's an idolatrous approach, and let's work this out. How does this biblical concept of control become an idol? Well, perhaps in many ways, but one of the ways you find out if control is an idol for you is if you find yourself in an ability or a place where you're not able to exercise control in a situation.

Now, that situation could be something very important. You would be a leader in a country and not be able to exercise control, or it could just be that you're together with three other people and you're trying to decide where to go out to eat, and you don't want chicken, and everybody wants to go for chicken, and you find out in that moment, "I'm about to die because I cannot control where we're going out to eat." Now, it's a small thing, and in some ways it's like every other sin. We all struggle with these at some level. The question is, to what degree? And has this thing become in your life to such a degree that it's really wreaking havoc on your life, both spiritually and in your other relationships?

Another way that you can look and see whether you have a problem with control and viewing it in an idolatrous way is do you squirm when you have to submit to

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the oversight and control of others? I mean squirm. Sometimes physically, but at least on the inside. Somebody else is leading and having control in a situation, and you are just squirming. You can't just allow that person to do it. It may be that you criticize their lack of leadership abilities. It may be that you criticize their judgment. It may be that you know that you can do it better if you were there, etc... But at the end of the day, it really comes down to the fact that they're in control and you're not.

Another thing to consider in idolatrous control is when you take upon yourself a right and a responsibility that God has never given you, then you have taken control beyond its biblical needs. And I think this is a very important one, because like I mentioned before, there are all these areas where you must take control as a Christian. You must seek to, at least. You can't be passive and let those things go, but then there are other areas that God hasn't said you have to have control over, and it's in those areas where you begin to see, "I am so bothered by this." It's the small details.

Consider this. What if you take action towards someone and you try to speak and instruct them in a righteous way, in a good way, with good advice and sound wisdom, and they go, "Well, I don't agree with that. I don't think I'm going to do that. I think you're wrong." Are you able to step back and say, "You know, Lord, the rightness of what has been said, and the wisdom in it, is not determined by that person's response. It's determined by how You see it." But it's at that moment if I get all worked up inside and furious, because I can't reach into another person and make them agree with me, then it may be a sign that there's a problem with idolatrous control. God hasn't given you control over the outcomes of your actions. He calls you to be faithful in every area of life and to trust Him for the results. So that was point one of application.

Point two is personal peace and comfort. Think about this with me for a minute. Biblical approach—we know from the Bible that God is a God of peace, right? Philippians 4, if you think about that, we have both in Philippians 4 the God of peace and the peace of God. Isn't that a wonderful thing that if you are a believer in Christ today, you can know the God of peace, and as well that you can have the peace of God, that if you submit everything to Him by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, you can experience this peace. We know from Romans 5 that peace with God is the result of our justification by faith. So it is the glorious result of the work of Christ. We also know that we should seek peace in our relationships with others, such as in Romans 12, that we are not to repay other people evil with evil,

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but as far as it concerns us, we're supposed to live at peace with all men, and that's a wonderful truth. So the Bible is all about peace, peaceful relationships, harmony, all of these wonderful things. But let's talk about an idolatrous approach to personal peace and comfort.

How about this one? "I am willing to avoid fulfilling biblical commands to maintain peace and personal comfort." What's an example of that? Well, consider this. There's something in my home as a parent, as a father, that I need to confront, but I know that if I confront it I'm going to get pushed back and it's going to cause conflict. "So you know what? I'm just going to let it go and I'm just going to look the other way and let this go, because I want peace. I want my life to be at peace. I want it arranged a certain way."

Consider this as well. If you say, "I'm going to arrange my life's schedule so that I can have the highest degree of personal peace, comfort, and leisure, that I'm going to look at work, maybe even other parts of life, maybe even ministry, in dealing with conflicts, I'm going to look at those as being only a necessary evil, that God's only called me to work enough to get to the point that I can have peace and pleasure in my life." Well, think about this. One of the metaphors that is used in the Bible for the Christian life is the metaphor of war. It's a struggle, and it's engaging in a spiritual conflict that is going on.

And if God has called you to Himself to be a follower of Him, He has not called you to a life that is going to be easy, and you can expect in this life that you are not going to have peace at all times, and that you actually need to put on the armor of God and to engage in battle with your own flesh, to sometimes engage in battle for standing for truth, to engage in biblical conflict with other people, being willing to risk and step out, to invest in the lives of others, and to deny yourself and take up your cross, and to give up some of that which you might like to claim for yourself, but you cannot.

So I'd ask you to look at this idol of personal peace and comfort, that this is the one Ty has made this application before that we all face. When you come home from work at the end of the day, you want everything to be in order, you want no issues to deal with, and you just want it to all work out smooth and right, so that then you can sail back into the world and you can go charge at it, and come home. Sometimes we are interrupted by other people in our schedules—their attitudes, their issues. Sometimes we just don't care. We care so much about ourselves that

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we don't want to reach out and deal with somebody's point of need. And when we do, we show that our personal peace and comfort has become an idol.

The last point is honor and respect. This one has some connection with the first one of control, but it is a little different. What's the biblical approach? Well, we know that we are called to honor and respect authorities. We know from words that God spoke in 1 Samuel that, "For those who honor Me, I will honor." That is something we can look at. Proverbs 3:35 says, "The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgraced." Proverbs 22:4, "The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life." So it is something very encouraging that in this life we get honor and respect from other people. Especially when it is a consequence of us being faithful to the life God has called us to.

So let's consider an idolatrous approach. Well, I think it starts here that you have a thought, whether you're willing to admit it, somewhere in your head. "I am a person worthy of respect and honor." Maybe you've been exalted in your place of work or business. You've had success. Maybe you're very talented. Maybe you're a person that other people go to for advice or counsel, and so over time, what this has produced in you is an expectation, and it's an expectation that, "Really at the end of the day, I'm up here. I'm on this level up here, and because I'm at this level up here, I always expect people to be looking up to me in this way." But then God brings an idol-breaker into your life. He brings someone with a big sledgehammer, who says, "I don't respect you. I don't agree with you. I don't look up to you." Now, I think you can see whether you have a problem with this idolatry when that happens. Now, for most of us, if we get blindsided, we're going to react in some way, but the question is do you get knocked off and then you kind of pop back on into place, and go, "Thank You, Lord, for that reminder that I'm not as great as I think I am, and that You deserve respect more than I do," or do you start to tilt and you don't pop back to center, but you go all the way to the floor and you come crashing down, because someone has not given you the thing that you have began to need in life to feel good about yourself, to feel like God was blessing you? And God takes that thing away, and now all of a sudden you're mortified by that lack of respect and honor.

Another statement or thought that can come in is that anyone who denies me respect and honor must be punished, because I am jealous for my own glory. Maybe you've seen this in the workplace or in other places, where someone will not get the respect and honor they deserve, and they will go after that person that does not do it, and they are not satisfied until they get their pound of flesh and they

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get that revenge. And then lastly in this third application, “I am justified in any behavior that I want when I am denied what I think is rightly mine in this area.” That is this callous attitude that I can respond and go crazy, and act and say and do things to other people, and I’m justified in it, as opposed to saying, “Lord, this has been painful, hurtful, difficult, I don’t understand what’s going on, but You know, Lord, I need to honor and obey You.” Well, there you have it. It’s almost 12:30. We’ll conclude there. Hopefully you do believe that you just got one sermon and not two.

So in conclusion, I think we should all pray that God would open our eyes just as He was trying in Isaiah 44, by all this detailed example about wood and iron, and all the details of shaping and fashioning things, to show us how delusional idolatry is, and how angry God is at it, how He hates it, and how our worship of those idols, that things in our lives that need to be rooted out, that need to be smashed down, that by doing so, that we will be less and less in bondage to those sins, and more and more free to glorify and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s close in prayer...

*Father, I thank You for Your word and the way that it searches us. I thank You, Father, that You, a loving God, are willing to deal with us and meet us at our point of need, that You Father, sometimes cause our idols to go crashing to the ground, that you give us cold and cruel awakenings sometimes to cause us to depend less upon ourselves and more upon You. And so, Father, I would pray today that You would take the teaching of this passage and that You would apply it to our hearts, and give us the grace to follow You in obedience, and I ask this in Christ’s Name, Amen.*

“The Folly of Idolatry”

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