

Ephesians 5:1-5 “Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children,² and walk in love, as Christ also loved us and gave himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.³ But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of⁴ among you, as is proper for saints. ⁴Obscene and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks. ⁵For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

Intro: Living and working in the Spokane WA area where the Seahawks had their training camp for a while was a big deal for the locals. Kerri and I attended a superbowl party one year (48) and the Seahawks won. The 30 or 40 people in that room were beside themselves with elation! Next year, they faced the NE Patriots led by Deflate-Gate Tom Brady himself. The game was a nail biter. The SH had intercepted the ball, Marshon drove it to the goal line. Last play, Russel throws a pass—they miss, they lose. And the mood in that room could not have been more different than the year before. I saw grown men who looked like they wanted to cry. Anger over those stupid, cheating NE Patriots. Now, at that moment, if I had said, “Folks, let’s all bow our heads and say a prayer confessing our allegiance to New England Patriots,” —*I think I might have left that party in an ambulance.*

Now, you think of your favorite sports team, your most ardent allegiance, and that is a fraction of how the Ephesians felt toward

their fertility goddess, Artemis. **Here is a picture of what she looked like.**



Artemis’ popularity and fame had brought the Ephesians great honor in the region. So much so that she was dubbed “Artemis of the Ephesians.”

For Paul to be preaching a Gospel that directly confronts their allegiance to this goddess was grounds for a riot.

Acts 19:23-27 A great disturbance in Asia arose concerning the Christian Faith. Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver statuettes of Artemis, enriched the artisan class of Ephesus. Archaeologists have discovered two massive statues of Artemis very near the theater, dozens of figurines of Artemis shrines, fountains, multiple inscriptions—her image stamped on coins throughout the Roman empire.¹

In the late 1800s, An Ephesus inscription was found that dated back to the middle of the first century listing a group of men who formed a commercial guild called, “the Guardians of the Temples.” (Arnold, 413, ZIBBC). In that list is a man named Demetrius.

Problem: Demetrius sought to guard the temple against what he perceived to be an assault on it. People aren’t showing up. The merchants sold the silver figurines—the silver would be melted down, then recirculated back into the economy.

¹ Keener, 2872.

The cult of worshiping this deaf, dumb, lifeless, and powerless idol had captured the imagination, the attention, and the devotion of the entire Asian world at the time—that is, until Jesus comes to town.

Transition: Today, the text will give us the keys to help identify and destroy false idols. How do we discern the presence of an idol and address them in our own lives?

Demetrius tells us, I think accurately, what the threat to this business of idol-making was in the region.

Acts 19:26-27 And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has **persuaded and turned away a great many people**, saying that **gods made with hands are not gods.** ²⁷ And **there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing**, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.”

We learn that the...

- **The Gospel was at odds with their gods (26a).** The two are absolutely incompatible. “Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many” Right! The Good News turns us away from worshiping false gods. When the people of Ephesus received Jesus, God’s only King—they were persuaded to abandon and turn away from false worship. There is no middle ground.

Next, Demetrius observes that...

- **The Gospel posed a danger to their gods (27a).** The Gospel isn’t just a competing ideology. Notice what Demetrius says here, “And there is a danger...that she may even be deposed (overthrown) from her magnificence (glory)”. **The Good News of Jesus reclaims the glory that is due God alone—a glory and magnificence that has been usurped, stolen, and applied to a false object of worship.** In the ***Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe***, Susan Pevensie discovers that Aslan is a Lion and not a man. She tells Mr. Beaver, “I should be rather nervous to meet a Lion” asking “Is he **Safe**?” Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe? Who said anything about safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe—But he is good.” The Gospel is good news, but it is not safe news. Demetrius isn’t wrong—the Good News of salvation in Jesus is dangerous to those idols that would compete for his allegiance.

Next, Demetrius admits...

- **The Gospel revealed idolatry to be disgraceful and worthless (27b).** Demetrius is a prophet unaware. He says, “And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into **disrepute** but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be **counted as nothing.**” The Artemis cult disappeared in the sands of history and archeologists are digging up artifacts. The Christian Faith is the best preserved, best attested religious faith in history—because God is behind the Gospel. The Spirit moves it where he wills.

What is idolatry, and how do we identify it in our lives? First, before we understand idolatry, we must understand what God is.

Definition of God: God is the infinite, personal, creator of the universe. God is the maximally greatest possible being. He alone is **infinite**, meaning he is uncaused, uncreated, and eternal; He is also supremely **personal** and personable—God is the very definition of what it means to have personhood or personality. This is why the Bible describes him as our Father in Heaven, or King and Sovereign, our Savior who has compassion, mercy, and love for his creation. He alone is the **creator** of all things. Nothing in existence has been made without him.

So, then what is idolatry, and how do we identify it in our lives?

Idolatry happens at the level of...

1. Beliefs: Idolatry is the false belief that something/someone possesses attributes that belong to God alone.

Example 1: World religions that attribute the work of creation to a pantheon of gods. Hinduism, Shintoism, Wicca, druidism, Taoism, various types of animism, and the new paganism—all of these religions that attribute divine qualities to false deities are idolatry. Again, it is the belief that something/someone possesses divine attributes that belong to God alone.

Example 2: Evolutionary lecturers or biologists who use the word “evolution” “nature” in a Neo-Darwinian sense replace the creator. Theologians and scientists debate the degree to which evolution has occurred in nature all the time. Still, I think replacing the act of creation in sweeping evolutionary terms and speaking of evolution as the creative force behind nature is idolatry.

Example 3: Individuals who claim to be the ultimate authority for their own lives. Let’s take the example of choosing one’s gender that is so prevalent in our culture today. There are at least two reasons why I would argue that you cannot choose your gender.

- **Obviously, the first argument would be biological.** If you are a male, you do not have female biology, genetics, chromosomes, your endocrine system is vastly different, your skeletal-muscular system is not the same, your anatomy has profoundly different features and functions, etc. So what does it mean to be female? Apart from biology (measurables), how does one subjectively determine that they are, in fact, a female? What are the properties of “femaleness”?
- **The second argument, and the most important, however, is Scriptural.**

Gen 1:26 “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.’”²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image; he created him in the image of God; he created them male and female.²⁸ God blessed them and said ‘be fruitful and multiply.’” God’s purpose and design were for us to reflect his dignity, represent his rule, and reproduce our kind in the world. This is why all forms of sexual of deviance are forbidden? Why?

God alone has the right, by design and by decree, to determine the purpose and function of a created thing. As the created thing, I do not have the right to determine my function nor my purpose. That is a divine prerogative and privilege

that God has not entitled to me. And God has by design and decree created us male and female in his image to reflect his glory, his benevolent care, and rule over the world.

Now, the moment I say, “I have the right to determine my purpose and function,” I put ourselves in place of God, and that is idolatry—welcome to the New gods of Americanism.

Paul encountered an Ephesian-Roman culture that falsely attributed divinity to deaf, dumb, powerless objects. So likewise, we live in a culture where people falsely believe that they are the decisive arbiters of all that true. And that is idolatry of self. **The attribute of creational authority belongs to God alone.**

Idolatry also happens at the level of...

2. Worship: Idolatry is assigning to something/someone else the worth and value that belongs exclusively to God.

Illus. Years ago, I was house-sitting for a physician, and each night I would go around and make sure windows and doors were closed and locked. I found a basement door that led to a room filled with junk. Looked like a large pile of yard sale junk right in the middle of the floor. I saw there in a pile an old chipboard guitar case and wondered, “What’s in that?” At the time, I was really into guitars—particularly well made or handmade instruments. So, I peeked inside that old chipboard case with rusty latches, and there inside was a really old Martin guitar in great condition. I wasn’t an expert appraiser, but I knew a valuable solid wood guitar when I saw one.

So I called Dr. John asked him questions, “What do you know about this guitar?” He said, “Nothing, I inherited it and knew nothing about it. *I’ll tell you what, Jeff, why don’t you keep it as payment for watching our house.*” I couldn’t. I researched it, called a dealer, told him what I had—that thing was probably between 8-10k bucks. I could not in good conscience take it. I told him he agreed it should stay in the family.

Worship is essentially an appraisal of worth—an assessment of something’s value. The difference between the guitar and God is that the instrument was only worth what someone was willing to pay for it. **Both Dr. John and I had appraised the value of the guitar.** He kept it in a 15\$ chipboard case on a pile of old junk. But God is *intrinsically worthy*. Our assessment does not determine his worth, his value, his importance.

When the Psalmist cries out in Ps 29:2 “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”

Isa 42:8 “I am the Lord. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.” Worship is due him whether the worshiper knows it or not, whether the worshiper

When the twenty-four elders say in Rev 4:11 “Our Lord and God, You who are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because you have created all things, and by your will they exist and were created.”

Idolatry happens when we falsely believe that something is God when it isn’t.

Idolatry happens when **we transfer the glory** that is due God alone to something/someone that isn’t worthy of that glory.

However, the most visible expression of idolatry, especially in our western culture, is at the level of...

3. Allegiance: Idolatry is the devotion of our lives to an unworthy competitor. There is something unique to God that requires a unique expression of devotion.

Now, God has and does encourage our loyalty toward other things. Spouses are to be loyal to each other and avoid adultery. Local churches are comprised of members who commit to each other. Some of you sign non-competing agreements in your employment contracts with your employer. The attribute of allegiance or loyalty is morally praiseworthy.

But God is supremely worthy of our worship and devotion as God. So, if something else becomes a competing allegiance—now I've got a rival god on my hands.

Jesus said, "You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money" or the pursuit of pleasure, or leisure, or the pursuit of radical independence. We can serve God with money, pleasure, in leisure, or the exercise of freedom...but we cannot serve both of them *as God*.

Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to bow down to him—Jesus responded in **Matt 4:10 "Get away from me Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve him only (Deut 6:13).'**"

This is also one of the Ten Commandments "You shall have no other gods."

Example 1: Alan and I were having breakfast the other morning at Black Bear Diner, and an older gentleman walked up to our table and just interrupted our conversation, talking on and on. Sensing the conversation was going nowhere, Alan introduced me as the pastor of our Church, then we invited him to CCC, gave him directions. Immediately he told us he grew up in Church, but now he was a "spiritualist"—he believes in a higher power, that God is everywhere. But when we invited him to come to have communion with God in the community of God, he protested, "Not during football season. Watching football with a cold beer and his smokes—that's Church!" Honest to a fault. And I appreciated that. He was articulating that in the fall, his allegiance is not God but to football.

If something else becomes a competing allegiance—now I've got a rival god on my hands.

Application:

God's truth reveals the existence and presence of an idol in my life. This calls for self-examination. Is there anything or anyone in my life that I falsely believe has God's divine attributes? If so, call it out. God's Word reveals the existence and worthlessness of a false idol.

God's truth realigns us to a right relationship with God. Puts us back in our place. We are not the creators—we have no authority to determine our purpose, function, or identity. We have no right to claim authority that belongs to God alone. It reveals my idols and then realigns me and shows me my place in the ecosystem. I know where I belong in God's economy.

God's truth requires a response. Watch Demetrius and the mob, 19:28-29 “When they had heard this, they were filled with rage and began to cry out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”²⁹ So the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed all together into the amphitheater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's traveling companions.³⁰ Although Paul wanted to go in before the people, the disciples, did not let him.³¹ Even some of the provincial officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent word to him, pleading with him not to venture into the amphitheater.³² Some were shouting one thing and some another because the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.³³ Some Jews in the crowd gave instructions to Alexander after they pushed him to the front. Motioning with his hand, Alexander wanted to make his defense to the people.³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

- **They chose rage instead of repentance. Vs. 28** says they were “filled with rage.” Once they learn that the Gospel reveals their disgraceful practices, threatening their livelihoods—seething anger takes over. Why? Because it means you can't have your old gods anymore.
- **They were confused. An injection of truth can do this sometimes.** People are initially stunned by the truth, briefly bewildered, vs. 29 says the city was “filled with confusion” vs. 32 “the assembly was in confusion.” It can be disorienting to learn that this thing you trusted in, this thing you were told is a false belief, a false god, an idol that is not worthy of your worship, is not deserving of your devotion—it can discombobulate us.
- **They attempted to shout down the truth. Vs. 34** says that when they saw that Alexander was a Jewish Christian, they all shouted in Unison for two hours, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians.” **But, listen, we can be wrong at the top of our lungs.** Despite an apparent but superficial unity of cause—we can be wrong, *dead wrong*.

I mean to tell you that the culture is dead wrong. But, for now, they're shouting at the top of their voices, in unison—on their Twitter feeds, Facebook, Instagram—in the media, in the court systems, in the halls of education. But let God be shown true and every man shown to be a liar.

- **Our other response is to believe and repent.** The Christians, the believers who've followed Paul and meet in this city—they are God's new humanity in Christ.

Prayer:

1. If you're here today and you realize "I've believed in a false god."

2. If you're here and ascribed glory, worth and value to something other than god...

3. If you're here this morning and realize you've got an idol competing for devotion—a rival god.

You've tried to serve God and money rather than serving God with money.

You've tried to serve God and pleasure, *and* leisure, *and* your own ideas—instead of worshiping God *with* pleasure, *with* your leisure, *with* your freedom and so forth.

Confess your sins that you may be healed.

Repent and turn away from your false gods.

4. Maybe you don't know. You need to search God's truth in the Word to allow the Spirit to speak, to convict, to lead you out of an idolatrous relationship with that thing.