

Unmasking Idols: Five Things the Early Church Was Known For.

Introduction:

Imagine I arrived at church and introduced you to my new wife. I then explained that I was still married to Julie, but now I had another wife as well. Suppose I tried to convince you that this wasn't just "ok" but actually a good thing. Could anything I say make you agree? (I sincerely hope your answer is "no"!)

Discussion Question: Why would my attempts to justify this position seem hollow and wrong? Discuss this as a group.

Read Exodus 20:1-17.

The first commandment says, "You shall have no other gods before me." The second commandment follows with, "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below" (Exodus 20:3-4).

It's been said that the remaining eight commandments are only broken when we first violate the first and second. For the Israelites fleeing Egypt, it was easy to identify the idols God forbade them to create. But what about us? We don't see physical idols the same way in our society, but idolatry remains just as much a reality today.

Discussion Question: What are the idols of our time?

Role Play:

Have a volunteer from your group pick one of today's "idols" and pretend to justify why, as a Christian, it's acceptable to embrace this idol and still follow Jesus.

Discussion Question: What stood out to you in their justification?

Lies and Idols.

Lately, I've been reflecting on the nature of lies—where they come from and how the gospel dismantles them. As disciples of Jesus, we are made for the truth because He is the Truth. Idols are, by their very nature, lies—embodying the false belief that something other than God can be our "way, truth, and life."

Read Isaiah 44:6-20.

Discussion Question: As you consider this passage, reflect on:

1. The nature of an idol.
2. What it promises.

Verse 20 says of idolatry, “Such a person feeds on ashes; a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, ‘Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?’”

Isaiah highlights though it should be “obvious”, that idols are a delusion, and we are often blind to the lies they promise.

Discussion Question. How can we be a community that helps each other to see where idols are deceiving us?

Prayer: In contrast to the deluded heart Isaiah speaks of Paul writes in Eph 1:17-18, *“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you...”*

Take time in prayer, asking God to reveal any idols in your life, your small group, and our church. Pray that the Holy Spirit would open our eyes to the hope, glory, and riches we have in Christ alone.

Looking ahead.

Over the next few weeks, we’ll explore five things the early church was known for. Each of these five areas directly confronts the idols and lies of their culture—and ours:

1. Justice
2. The sacredness of life
3. Care for the poor and marginalised
4. Acceptance and equality of all races
5. Sex to be held within a monogamous marriage for life.

Each of these addresses a significant idol of our time. Why is confronting idols such a big deal?

Cath Livesey writes, *“The sin of idolatry was the breaking of the sacred covenant, a rejection of the precious relationship... it’s turning your back on God and saying, ‘You are not enough for us.’... The idols they turned to held out false promises and quick fixes. The prophets knew these idols appealed to a distorted sense of identity that still resonates today. If I bow to this idol, my life will be better, my social status will rise, and others will affirm my value.”¹*

As we move through this series, let’s pray that God would reveal the idols of our age and how they seek to delude us. May we turn from these lies and walk in the greater love, truth, and life that Jesus promises.

¹ Catherine Livesey, *Holy Disruption*, 100 movements publishing, 2022