

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

"GUARD YOUR HEARTS FROM IDOLS"

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: August 28, 2022

SPEAKER: Brian/Frank

SERIES: Deuteronomy

PASSAGE: Deuteronomy 4:15-31

Family Dinner Table

American Idolatry

The popular reality show, where aspiring singers take center stage to compete before a panel of judges and a TV audience of millions, is aptly named *American Idol*.

In his probing article, *American Idolatry*, Dr. Carl Trueman scrutinizes the TV phenomenon through the lens that "the human heart is a perpetual idol factory," and concludes that in the zeitgeist of American culture, idolatry of self takes center stage: *American idolatry, the idolatry of the self, focuses on the centrality of the individual, and his or her needs, as the primary locus of value and meaning. The end result of this is narcissism, the notion that I am singularly important in the grand scheme of things; and consequently anyone who attempts to relativize me, my abilities, or my needs, is blaspheming the god-like importance my narcissism leads me to ascribe to myself. The idolatry embodied in American Idol is thus twofold. First, that of the contestants, who want fame as if fame was something worth the effort. Yet fame is only so to the extent that it deceives us into thinking we are indispensable and important, as it allows us to realize our latent idolatry of self. Second, that of the viewer, who rejoices at the sight of others being told, in no uncertain terms, that they are talentless, dispensable laughing-stocks, that they are not, in short, gods. Not as good as being god yourself, of course, but seeing others denied divinity is probably the next best thing. The key to understanding and critiquing so much of human culture is total depravity. The drive to be like God is that which brought Adam to grief in the Garden of Eden; the desperation engendered by the success of a sibling was what drove Cain to murder. We might be more polite and superficially respectable than these two, but so many aspects of our culture, even trivia like American Idol, indicate that the central concerns of fallen human nature remain stubbornly intact, even in our most apparently harmless pursuits.*"²

PRAY FOR HOME MISSIONS

Alex Bosgraf, serves as RUF campus minister at Boise State University.

PRAY FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Laura and Mike Lothers, supported missionary partners at wycliff.org.

An emerging theme in the book of Deuteronomy about covenant renewal is that it requires returning to God and listening to his voice—listen and live. In Deuteronomy 4:15-31, Moses now calls the children of Israel to action—listen and obey: "Watch yourselves very carefully...lest you act corruptly" (vv. 15-16). The same admonition lies before the church today. Having a faithful orthodoxy is insufficient without a robust orthopraxy, as the author of the *Epistle of James* directs, "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (1:22-25). We too must diligently guard our hearts from idols.

God's covenant people are called to constant watchfulness because of our idolatrous tendencies (vv. 15-24).

Moses recounts an important moment in the history of Israel when God spoke to them "out of the midst of fire" at Horeb. From *Keil & Delitzsch Old Testament Commentaries*, the authors explain why the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai set the context for Moses' admonitions against idolatry:

*As the Israelites had seen no shape of God at Horeb, they were to beware for their soul's sake (for their lives) of acting corruptly, and making to themselves any kind of image of Jehovah their God, namely, as the context shows, to worship God in it. The words which follow, 'a form of any figure' and 'a likeness of male or female' are in opposition to 'carved image' and serve to explain and emphasize the prohibition.*¹

- What reasons were given by Moses to dissuade the children of Israel from idolatry (v. 15)?
- Idolatry is at the root of all sin because worshiping the good things that God gives us, instead of worshiping God himself, robs God of the glory due to him alone. What are some of the things that compete with God for worship in your life? How can you keep those things in their proper place? (cf. John 4:19-26.)

God's covenant people are given clear warnings about the consequences of idolatry (vv. 25-28).

Do you remember how the intensity of God's justice was inflamed toward Moses for his disobedience at Meribah (Numbers 20:10-12)? Here in verses 25-28, Moses warns how much more severe God's judgment will be upon the children of Israel if they fall into idolatry.

- What consequences did God promise against them in case of disobedience (vv. 25-26)?
- Read Psalm 115 and Isaiah 44:9-20. What can you learn from these passages about the inferiority of idols and the superiority of God that could help recalibrate your worship?
- Read Deuteronomy 18:9-14. Describe the worship services of pagans, performed before their idols. Why should the Word of God be central when we gather to worship our invisible God? (See 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:105.)

God's covenant people are promised a compassionate welcome upon our repentance of idolatry (vv. 29-31).

In the final verses of our lesson, God presents himself to his people as a merciful Father, and not a terrible judge, if they "return to the LORD your God and obey his voice" (v. 30). In Jeremiah 29, the prophet proclaims God's compassion to the exiled children of Israel if they turn to him: "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (v. 13). Like Israel, if God's covenant people listen and obey, God's promised renewal will come. "Return to me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you" (Zech. 1:3).

- Are you seeking fulfillment in created things? Return to God; there is no need to look for it anywhere else. Read Psalm 103. Meditate on God's merciful and steadfast love this week.

¹Keil, Carl and Delitzsch, Franz. *Old Testament Commentaries Volume 1*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1960. Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., 995.

²Trueman, Carl. *American Idolatry*. August 25, 2005. reformation21 <https://www.reformation21.org/counterpoints/post-21.php> August 22, 2022.