

Sonoraville Baptist Church
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American Idols - Colossians 3:1-5

Introduction: What began last August, with some 200,000 people auditioning in 10 U.S. cities, culminated last week as the field had been narrowed down to a competition between a former paint store clerk from Mount Prospect, IL, and a diabetic single mother from Elliston, OH to see who would become America's next singing sensation. Roughly 29 million Americans tuned in to hear the host, Ryan Seacrest, announce that Lee Dewyze, the former paint store clerk, had been voted the next American Idol.

American Idol has become an American phenomenon and has become the most watched show on television. This year was the 9th season and to give you some perspective on how popular the show is, over the years, the show has averaged about 25 million viewers per episode and in the 2009 finals competition between Adam Lambert and Kris Allen, over 100 million votes cast in the two hours after the broadcast. That means that Americans voted at a rate of 50 million votes per hour. In contrast, in the 2009 Presidential election, Americans went to polls and voted at a rate of about 10 million votes per hour. You tell me – who are the real American idols?

Now, before this show came on the scene, whenever we'd talk about idols, we'd think in terms of ancient religious icons or statues such as Baal, or Dianna, or maybe statues of Buddha (I think I could be a model for one of those!), or totem poles. But in the New Testament, we see that there is a different kind of idolatry.

Colossians 3:1-5 (NIV): *“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”*

The New Testament concept of idolatry is not so much a thing to worship as it is an attitude or a desire. Beth Moore defines a modern idol as, *“Anything we try to put in a place where God belongs is an idol.”*

Well, what are some of the things we put in the place where God belongs? There are probably many more than these, but I want to point out what I feel are the top four idols that Americans worship today:

1. Money – One American idol is the almighty dollar and what can be bought with it. Oscar Wilde was once quoted as saying, *“When I was young I used to think that money was the most important thing in life. Now that I am old, I know it is.”*

Now, people don't really bow down to money, they just tend to worship the things money can buy. That's called materialism, and that is the condition of believing that having things brings happiness. The problem is that the more one has, the more one wants. Or, once you have something, you see that someone else has something better, so you are never truly satisfied. That belief makes money a most dangerous idol because unless one has an unlimited supply of it to buy whatever one wants, it can only lead to anxiety brought on by debt. So it is very true what God says in **1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV)** *“...the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil...”* Another American idol is:

2. Self – I've seen a lot of folks who are in love with themselves. Now, Jesus did tell us to *“love your neighbor as yourself.”* (**Matthew 22:39 NIV**), but He didn't say that we are to be so **in** love with ourselves, that we think it's all about us.

There are people like that in this world. They think the world revolves around their lives; that everyone ought to adjust to their schedule; and that they were put on this earth to be admired and emulated by everyone. I mean, I've seen some people who think so much of themselves, they probably stand in front of the mirror every morning singing, *“How great thou art!”*

Again, the Bible predicts it accurately when it says in **2 Timothy 3:2 (NIV)** *“There will be terrible times in the last days, people will become lovers of themselves...”* Another American Idol is:

3. Power and Success – It's amazing how many people have bought into the belief that all they are and ever hope to be is wrapped up in how powerful or successful they are. The more money they accumulate, the more powerful they are. The more powerful they are, the more prestige they have. And the more prestigious they are,

the more successful and valuable they are.

I believe this is why a lot of people don't want to believe God. They don't want to give Him praise for all He's done because it would mean it's not about them or their own efforts.

It is like I read somewhere; *"A lot of people spend their lives blindly climbing their way to the top of the ladder of success, only to discover late in life that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall!"* Another American idol is:

4. Beauty and Fame - Many people are obsessed with celebrities. You don't believe it? Just watch TV between the hours of 6 and 8 pm, or watch many of the specialty channels such as "E" or "Bravo" and you'll see how celebrities are glamorized and idolized. Many people even base their value system and their self-esteem on what Hollywood says. I have no doubt that the reason many of our kids and young adults do what they do, wear what they wear, say what they say, and believe what they believe, is because they think that what comes out of Hollywood is all there is. And much of what comes from Hollywood is teaching that right is wrong and wrong is right! We'd better watch out! A lot of people are becoming indoctrinated, and it's going to get worse.

I mean, when I read a 2010 Time Magazine poll that ranked Lady Gaga and Adam Lambert 5th and 6th in their most influential people poll, and Billy Graham was ranked 99th, I said to myself, *"Something is wrong with this picture!"*

So what are we going to do about these American idols? Should we lock our kids up in a Sunday School classroom and forbid them from watching TV? Should we boycott the fashion stores, and everyone go Amish? Should we stop going to the lakes and sporting events, and go join a monastery? No! I don't think the answer lies in tearing down the idols.

If we're going to reverse the trend, we're going to have to simply start worshiping the one true God, and when we worship Him for who He really is, these idols will fall.

In 1 Samuel 5 we read that the Israelites were at war against the Philistines. The Philistines captured the Ark of God. The Ark was a very ornately decorated box containing the 10 Commandments, a bowl of manna, and Aaron's rod, but it primarily represented the presence and power of God.

1 Samuel 5:1-4 (NIV) *1 After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. 3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. 4 But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.*

The Philistines' main idol was Dagon. I have a picture of Dagon on the screen, and you can see that it was depicted as a statue that was half man and half fish—sort of a merman.

Well when they put the Ark of the Covenant next to their god, and they saw what happened to their god, it didn't take them long to become convinced that they didn't want anything to do with the Ark of the God of the Israelites. They took it to several of their cities, but nobody wanted it. Finally they gave it back to Israel saying, *"Here, your God is too powerful for us!"*

The lesson we learn about idols is that if we'll worship the one true God in the right way, all the other idols will fall, just like Dagon. But in order to worship God correctly, we have to know who He is. And God reveals much about who He is through His many names. So I want to use four of the special names for God which are identified in the Old Testament that will help us defeat these five idols that America worship today. First, we'll see that when we worship God, we are:

1. Crumpling the Money Idol

What do we use money for? We use it to provide for our needs, to build security, for power, as leverage, as a status symbol, and on and on. But basically, we have come to depend on money for almost everything we have or do. That is why we pursue it like we do.

In Genesis 22, we read where Abraham was called by God to go up on Mt. Moriah and worship Him by sacrificing his son Isaac. But when he had laid him on the altar and was ready to sacrifice him, at the last moment, God spared Isaac and provided a ram as a substitute. That's a beautiful picture of how God has supplied the Lamb of God, Jesus, to be our substitute.

Abraham had a real need. He was ready to do as God said and provide his own son as the sacrifice, but

when the angel stopped him, and showed him the ram caught in the bush, Abraham realized that God was able to provide in ways he wasn't even aware of. He was so in awe of what God had done, he sacrificed that ram and worshiped God, and in vs. 14 he called that place, "*The Lord will provide.*" In the Hebrew, that is **Jehovah-Jireh**. God is our Provider. We don't make money, we simply have been given the health and wisdom and ability to earn money by God Himself. He is our provider, not money!

If you're hungry and need food, He's your daily bread. If you have bills to pay, we'll pay them because God provides us with the means. When we fully come to understand that God is our source we too will worship Him as **Jehovah-Jireh** and that money idol will crumple. Next, we see that when we worship God, we are:

2. Conquering the Self Idol

We want to think that we are good and that our deeds are good enough to make God like us. Or in some cases, people think so much of themselves and their abilities, that they are convinced that they are either god, or they don't need God. But the Bible says our self righteousness is like filthy rags compared to the holiness of God. The "*self*" idol leads us to say, "*It's all about me.*" But true worship says "*It's all about Him!*"

Jeremiah 23:6 (NIV) says, "*This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.*" That phrase in the Hebrew is **Jehovah-Tsidkenu**. (Sid – ken- you)

Isaiah realized his own inadequacies when he came into the temple one day to worship, and saw God high and lifted up. That's when he fell down before Him and worshipped Him and said, "*Woe is me... For I am a man of unclean lips.*" (**Isaiah 6:5 NIV**) If we think it's all about us, it's like worshipping ourselves, and that will always pull you away from God. Worshipping yourself puts you on the throne. But true worship – a worship that recognizes God as **Jehovah-Tsidkenu**, who is our righteousness, will lead us to conquer the self idol, and elevate Jesus. Next, we see that when we worship God, we are:

3. Crushing the Success Idol

The world teaches that one can be successful on merit alone. All one has to do is think smart, work hard, make the right connections, maybe lie and cheat a little when necessary, and run over anyone who gets in the way, and you'll find success. A lot of people have bought in to that philosophy, and may have reached a measure of success. But God teaches that ultimately, His strength is what really matters in the end.

In Exodus 17 we read an account where the Israelites, who were on their way to the Promised Land, had been attacked by the Amalekites who outnumbered them. Moses sent Joshua to lead the warriors in defending themselves, while he, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill to worship God, and overlook the battle. Vs. 10-12 says that as long as Moses raised his staff, which represented God's strength, the Israelites prevailed, but when he lowered it, the enemy prevailed. He finally figured out that the battle didn't depend on what was happening down there, but by what was happening on the mountain. So, when his arms got tired, Aaron and Hur stood on either side and held up his arms. The Israelites won the battle. So in **Exodus 17:15 (NIV)** it says that "*Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner.*" The Hebrew word here is **Jehovah-Nissi**.

We need to come to the place where we realize that in this life, the battle isn't really taking place down here; but rather, it's taking place in the spiritual realm. **Ephesians 6:12 (NIV)** tells us "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*" And it goes on to tell us that this battle is not fought with earthly weapons. It is fought with spiritual weapons and spiritual armor that must be utilized every day. That is why worship and prayer and Bible study is so important. When you know that your strength comes from God alone, you will run to worship Him as **Jehovah-Nissi**. He will be your banner, and it will crush that need for what the world calls success. Finally, we see that when we worship God, we are:

4. Cheapening the Beauty Idol

We are so obsessed with outward appearance, but the Bible says that God isn't as concerned with the outside as much as He is concerned with the inside. The Bible says that He looks on the heart. So to God, the only kind of beauty that matters is the inner beauty of holiness. And that is something that only He can give us. **Psalms 29:2 (NIV)** says, "*Worship the Lord in the splendor (beauty) of His holiness.*"

Many people pray for God to make them happy, but what we really should be praying for is that God would make us holy. Don't just seek to be beautiful on the outside, which tends to fade over time. But rather seek the inner beauty of holiness. That is something that will last for eternity. God says, "*Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord who makes you holy.*" **Leviticus 20:8 (NIV)**. Seek **Jehovah M'Kaddesh**, for He is the one

who can make you beautiful and holy on the inside.

Conclusion: For America to be founded as a Christian nation, we're sure are surrounded by a lot of idols. We've erected shrines everywhere. We've erected shrine after shrine dedicated to the god of our stomach.

We've built multi-million dollar shrines to house the god of sports. Recently, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys had Cowboys Stadium built. It is a stadium unlike any other – a simply magnificent place to watch a football game. In that stadium, is a giant HDTV monitor suspended from the roof. It is 160 feet wide and 72 feet tall. That is roughly the size of four rows of busses parked nose to nose and stacked 7 rows high. That TV screen is in a place where one goes to watch a LIVE FOOTBALL GAME!

And speaking of TV, have you ever noticed how we place our TVs in our homes and point all the chairs and sofas facing it so we can watch it. It's almost as though we're worshipping it.

None of these things are bad, but they can become idols if we use them trying to fill that God-shaped hole in our heart. And the point of this message is that the only way anyone can fill that hole and be completely satisfied, is to *“Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and when you do – when you turn your heart toward heaven and worship the one true God, the things of this earth – those idols – will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”*