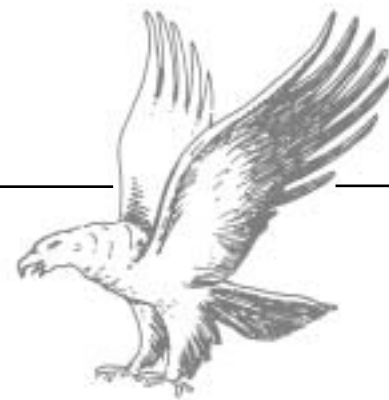


Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



April 29, 2012

Idols in Our Hearts

When we read of ancient Israel's struggles with the sin of idolatry, we wonder how they could be so foolish—until we see the same foolishness at work in our own hearts and lives.

"Therefore speak to them, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Everyone of the house of Israel who sets up his idols in his heart, and puts before him what causes him to stumble into iniquity, and then comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him who comes, according to the multitude of his idols, that I may seize the house of Israel by their heart, because they are all estranged from Me by their idols." Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations"' (Eze. 14:4-6).

When God brought Israel up out of Egypt, the very first command He gave them was, "You shall have no other gods before Me," followed by a second command, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Ex. 20:3-5). Throughout the rest of their history, however, Israel struggled to honor those

simple commands. For generations, idolatry was the besetting sin of God's people, eventually leading to the destruction of their nation and exile in Babylon.

It was to these exiles in Babylon that Ezekiel directed his warning against "idols in the heart." The physical images were gone, but the inclination to serve a substitute god was still there. Until the people could learn to honor God's original demand to elevate *Him* to the highest place of honor in their lives, idolatry would continue to drag them down.

When we read this story, we shake our heads at the foolishness of these people. How could an intelligent person see any possible benefit in worshipping a chunk of stone or wood? We are grateful that we live in a more enlightened age, where such primitive beliefs no longer hold sway.

Or do they? Idolatry is the honoring of anything as more important in our lives than God. We may not bow down before pagan images, but we have plenty of other God-substitutes in our lives: money, sex, pleasure, alcohol, drugs,

work, education, power, fame, entertainment, hobbies—the list could go on and on. Whenever we allow an activity or goal in life to become so all-consuming that it crowds out God as the most important influence in our life, we have become idolators.

Thus, we are faced with the ultimate irony: In a culture that prides itself on its secularism—its freedom from the superstitious constraints of religion—people are overwhelmingly given over to the worship of idols. False gods are everywhere, and just like the ancient Israelites, they are dragging us down. The idols in our hearts do not deliver the fulfillment we seek, and distract us from that which would. We are no better than the pagans of old.

Ezekiel's plea is still as valid today as it was then: "Repent, [and] turn away from your idols." Until we can open our eyes to the role that God should play in our lives, and genuinely devote ourselves to His service, the idols in our hearts will continue to take us down dead-end paths that are illusory and destructive.

— David King