

Intro: “Last week Mark Steyn wrote, “America is seizing up before our eyes,” and that is a spot-on image. She is like a brilliantly conceived machine that, poorly maintained for more years than any of us cares to admit, has gone too long untuned; the oil of her invention has thinned out and broken down and now bit-by-bit, gear-by-gear—economically, socially, spiritually—she is making an ungodly noise and grinding to a halt.

And yet people want optimism. They crave it, especially when a president is telling one half of the country that it is “time to eat your peas” while simultaneously encouraging another half to take to the streets and demand more dessert...

...There are probably ten thousand articles to be found on the Internet all fleshing out their theories of what is behind America’s swift collapse. Curiously, most of them will touch—all without realizing it—on the seven deadly sins; Capitalist Greed; Spiritual Sloth; Physical Lust; Nationalist/Military Pride; Consumer Gluttony; Partisan Wrath; Class Envy. Good arguments can be made blaming some or all of these sins for our current dire straits and for the sense that we are standing upon a precipice.

But I wonder if it is not the first and greatest sin named by Yahweh and given to Moses, that is most at fault: the sin of idolatry. We have loved ourselves so well; we have denied ourselves nothing and placed too much of what we love between ourselves and God; we have cherished mere things or other people; over-identified with ideas or ideologies and made an afterthought of God, who will not be mocked.” - Elizabeth Scalia, [www.firstthings.com](http://www.firstthings.com) November 8, 2011

## 1. God Crushes Idols

- a. 2 Kings 17 describes it
  - i. Link between idolatry and sexual immorality
  - ii. Sacrificing their own children (relate to abortion)
  - iii. Trusting in other idols and selling themselves to them
  - iv. How are we like this in our society, our people, us?
- b. It is a theological event: “For if God should suddenly appear, who could withstand his fury?” – Calvin
  - i. He is the one who makes the mountains melt like wax
  - ii. The LORD is behind it though Assyria is the means
  - iii. “The blind eyes of unbelievers saw only the immediate cause of Samaria’s fall, the inexorable march of Assyria’s crack international army under the leadership of its brilliant kings. But Micah’s open eyes saw behind the juggernaut of the invincible God” – Bruce Waltke
- c. Israel and Judah’s sin was idolatry
  - i. THEIR capital cities are the “high places” of idolatry in the land
  - ii. They had “prostituted” themselves to these gods and now they would be sold like a prostitute
  - iii. God was going to “crush” their idols

## 2. What is an Idol?

- a. An idol is anything that we depend (faith) upon to make things the way they’re supposed to be (righteous)
  - i. NOT necessarily a physical object
    1. Ezek 14:3, “Idols in their hearts”
    2. “epithumiai” – “over-desires” is the New Testament word (“lust”)
    3. Idolatry is the over-desire for anything: Reputation, Approval of People, Beauty, Family
  - ii. Set up *beside* God, or in addition to Him, not in complete exchange of Him
    1. Israel didn’t leave Yahweh behind when they sinned with other gods in the OT
    2. They simply added other gods to Yahweh
      - a. One of the oldest archeological finds in Israel has the inscription, “YHWH and His Asherim” as if God had married Himself to the goddesses of fertility!
      - b. What about God and country? Christ and Buddha? God and nature?
    3. God desires and demands exclusive love, “I am a jealous God”
- b. Idols mimic the one true God
  - i. System of “right”

1. Principles which one must obey that define whether or not a person is good, acceptable, and righteous
2. There are laws that, if one fails, makes you a failure, a sinner, replete with coming judgment and makes you bad, unacceptable, and unrighteous
- ii. System of works
  1. Rituals that must be made
  2. Sacrifices that must be given to appease said idol
  3. If sacrifices are made, you are acceptable
  4. If sacrifices are not made, you are unacceptable
- iii. Idols make promises
  1. If you obey its law and perform its sacrifices, then it promises you joy, fulfillment, happiness, MEANING
  2. As long as you perform, you feel worth something
  3. But, idols will never forgive you if you fail
- c. Idols Enslave Our Hearts
  - i. Idols are Sourced in a Lie
    1. Each life is distorted by a major "life lie"
      - a. We functionally think, feel, and behave as if our idol can give us the life and joy that only God can give
      - b. Our hearts operate like this:
 

"If I can just achieve \_\_\_\_\_, then my life will have meaning and joy."

OR

"Since I have lost or failed \_\_\_\_\_, my life is worthless and doomed."
  - ii. Darkness of our Hearts
    1. Emotional confusion and frustration
      - a. We are made to worship God and to find our meaning and joy in an unhindered relationship with Him
      - b. Our idols never deliver and so we get frustrated as they don't satisfy, leading to depression, anxiety, boredom, despair
      - c. Oddly, we never blame the idol, we blame God or others or ourselves.
    - iii. Enslavement
      1. Whatever we feel that we "must" have, outside of God Himself, will rule us.
        - a. Rebecca Pippert: "Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lords of our lives."
          - i. Whatever becomes the "bottom line" of my significance and happiness, that which defines and validates everything else, it is this that we will be driven to do. We have to have it to be happy and we must obey its laws to "have life the way it's supposed to be"
      - iv. These anxious pursuit of our idol's righteousness, leads to the surface sins that we usually think of when we think of sin (lying, stealing, fits of rage, unkindness, not loving others, etc., etc., etc.)
  - d. An Idol is All About and Only About Getting Power and Control
    - i. Idols are tempting to set up because we want to control our own lives
      1. Rom 1:18-29, "they did not honor God or give thanks to Him...see fit to acknowledge God...they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images of the created."
      2. We exchanged the immortal God for idols that we can control, that we can perform for, because we want to play a part in our righteousness and salvation (so we can boast of our power)
        - a. Ultimately, we don't trust that God makes us righteous or counts us as valuable by His own grace, so we try to "prove" it, "control" it, and give evidence that He couldn't possibly ignore that we are good

- b. Idols are what we *functionally* depend upon to make us righteous, i.e. the way that we believe we're supposed to be (honorable, glorious, wise, beautiful, etc.)
- 3. Our idols are all about reputation, so we outwardly sin to protect that reputation and are, in fact, seeking our own glory and to build our own reputation of righteousness
- ii. Idolatry, then, is in contrast with God, who saves us by grace
  - 1. Idols are manipulated and bargained with by performance and sacrifices
    - a. They never operate by grace: you either perform and *feel* accepted, or you fail to perform and feel rejected; idols can't save you and they will not forgive you
      - i. "If I obey, then I am accepted."
    - b. This is why we swing back and forth in our life, because our tossing between success and failure of our idols (those things that define our acceptability and righteousness) makes us bounce from boasting to depression
      - i. Both success and failure with an idol is about getting power (sometimes you attain it, sometimes you don't, but the system is the same: works-righteousness, power, and control)
  - 2. God can only be responded to by repentant faith – a loss of power
    - a. Jesus' performance and sacrifice makes us righteous – *we receive it by faith*
    - b. We lose our power and simply receive by faith the performance and sacrifice of Jesus (Rom 3:22)
      - i. "I am accepted in Jesus, so I obey"
      - ii. His glory and His righteousness in my salvation
      - iii. His reputation is my desire
  - 3.

### 3. The Proper Response to Our Nation's Idolatry is Lamentation

- a. Lamentation is different from mere grief, in that it gives reason for its grief vocally
- b. For judgment comes from God "her wound is incurable"
  - i. Micah feels the shame (nakedness) that his people bear
  - ii. Is anger our response? Is it "their" sin or "our" sin?
    - 1. Daniel, etc. claim the people's sin as his own
    - 2. In modern times, we tend to segregate into camps: "It's their fault, not mine"
  - iii. Or, is grief our response? What was Jesus' response? (Luke 13:34; Matt 23:37)
    - 1. If we will not come to Jesus, our house is left desolate
- c. He sees Samaria's fall was like the death of a family member
  - i. "I lament and wail"
  - ii. How do we respond to our nation's fall? Tears or Tattle?
- d. Puns of city names:
  - i. Bethlephrah (house of dust) – so "roll in the dust"
  - ii. Shaphir (beauty) – shame and nakedness
  - iii. Zaanah (going out) – "do not go out"
  - iv. Bethel (standing place?) – lamentation takes you away from its standing place
  - v. Maroth (bitter) – wait for good
  - vi. Lachish (Solomon's chariot city) – Micah uses the words "steeds" referring to racehorse for speedy flight, not the word for warhorses
  - vii. Moresheth (possession) – would be given away to Assyria
  - viii. Mareshah (phonetic of spoils of war) – I will bring a conqueror to you
  - ix. Adullam (caves where David hid from Saul) – "glory of Israel" would hide in caves
- e. Where is Our Nation Going?
  - i. Eugene, RUN, RUN away from worthless idols!
  - ii. Springfield, spring up from your spiritual lethargy and return to the LORD with zeal!

### 4. We Proclaim the Hope of God's Mercy

- a. The promise of God remains: those who turn away from idols and trust in Him find the sweet joy of salvation and all the blessings of God in Christ
  - i. There is hope, not only for individuals, but for our people if we will turn from our idols of individualism, greed, self-centered pleasure, and the high hand of the deification of creation
  - ii. Our proclaimed hope is not that God will make our idols deliver, but that God Himself is the supremely valuable end of our pursuits and He alone draws us by grace, forgiving our sins against Him through the blood of His own eternal Son
  - iii. Our hope is that in humbly turning to Him and utterly depending upon Him for all things we find the joy of being the way we're supposed to be, the righteousness received by dependence
- b. When we recognize the futility and the wickedness of our own idols as God-fakers, then the gospel becomes powerful and sweet to our souls!
  - i. Jesus saves us by His grace, not to enslave us but to free us: THIS IS GOOD NEWS!!
    - 1. This is why the gospel is for sinners, not for the "the righteous" (Luke 5:32)
    - 2. Only those who know that they are in desperate need of life and salvation will come to the giver of life AND point to the giver of life: we deserve death but are offered life
  - ii. Our repentance from idolatry leads to joy in the salvation of God and His nearness as a FATHER, not a SLAVE-MASTER (like idols)
  - iii. PROMISE: If we turn from our sins and trust in Jesus as our treasured Savior, we will be free from the wages of our sin and given the gift of eternal life in God...what we are supposed to be...righteous...by His grace, through faith alone, we receive it as a gift
    - 1. This humbles our pride, for we cannot control our own destiny and must humbly and utterly rely upon God for ALL (wisdom, righteousness, life, etc)
    - 2. This emboldens our fears, for we belong to the One True God and He cherishes us as His children
- c. This hope is why God brings judgment upon our idols:
  - i. Thus, the LORD removes national idols so that we will see the truth for what it is and run to Him to find mercy and grace in our time of need.
  - ii. We proclaim His mercy upon those who humbly turn from trusting in idols and trust in Jesus as their treasured Redeemer and find in Him the fullness of our joy: that's the way it's supposed to be.

**Benediction:**

"It is a trustworthy saying deserving full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason: in me, as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example for those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. Now unto the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim 1:15-17)