

Wow, that was a lot of work right there. That was really, really well done. Amen? Yeah. (applause) That is, that is Ephesians 2:10, and that is also very much a part of where we've been lately, people realizing who God has called them to be and coming to a place of willingness and readiness to move away from idols and mover toward all that God has called them to and I just am so grateful. Thank you, church, for the time we had last Sunday morning. Thank you for the courageous way many of you were willing to be a family. Thank you church for the way you received those who shared all that they shared. I'm so grateful to be a part of a family that wants to grow and wants to be who God has called us to be, and God has called you, God has made you his workmanship, His masterpiece. I can't wait to get to Ephesians 2 in our study of Ephesians—can't wait to get there, can't wait to teach you more about that, but I hope you were listening to every line of that drama. What an amazing picture of what goes on in your heart and mind and my heart and mind way too many times, and thank the Lord that God's word is there to remind us, thank God for the relationship that we get to have with his son who reminds us. Thank God for the spirit of God that reminds us, and the word of God that reminds us that we're not junk, that we are special and unique in the way that we've been made, and that is a great truth that we can celebrate today. All right, Ephesians. As we move away from our six week discussion and teaching on idols and idolatry and our need to repent, and as we move on this morning to a new study in the book of Ephesians, I want you to take your Bibles if you would and open up to 1 John so I can read to you what the Apostle John says about idols. It will all make sense here in just a moment. 1 John, chapter 5, verse 21. As you go to 1 John 5:21, you'll notice just visually as you look at the page, you'll realize it's the very last statement in the entire epistle of 1 John. 1 John 5: 21, where John says: Little children. Stop right there. In the original language, in the Greek, that "little children" would be translated, dear ones whom I love. Dear ones, whom I love greatly. Dear ones, who I have a passionate and deep love for. Little children, he says, guard yourselves from what? Say it out loud. Idols. Little children, dear ones who I love, guard yourselves from idols. So you ask yourself the question, as many do, who study this passage and look at this epistle, why does John seemingly, sort of out of nowhere, end his entire epistle with something he hasn't directly mentioned once in five chapters? You read through 1 John, you'll find some indirect references but there is no direct reference to guarding oneself from idolatry, from idols. Now some will say that this final word of caution does relate to the context at the end of chapter 5. You understand context, what's said before or after a verse. Well look at verses 19-21. If you read 21 in light of 19 and 20, see what you think. Verse 19: John writes, We know that we are of God and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one, and we know that the Son of God has come, Jesus, and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true. And we are in Him who is true—in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, guard yourselves from idols. If you look at that, there's some idolatry language there; there's some panting after the true God; there's some desiring the One who is real and right and true. I can see that. I'll admit one could make that connection. It's not a stretch by any means, but what I found, listen, what I found extremely compelling as I looked into this was that many New Testament scholars believe that this final stand-alone plea of a conclusion has more to do with surroundings than it does context. Watch this. They believe that it's where John was writing from that leads him to as he closes his epistle, throw in this last plea.

But it was where he lived, literally where John resided, while writing 1 John that his surroundings and the influence of his surroundings and the influence of that culture bring him to this place where he can't keep it in any longer. He has to almost blurt it out, pick up a weapon, run for the hills, either way, guard yourselves from idols. It's very interesting. Well, guess where John lived when he wrote 1 John. Guess where he wrote from when he pleads against idols. Guess why it's so important for us. Guess why it's so timely for us. Guess why it's just so right for you and me to study Ephesians after our study of idolatry. Anybody want to take a guess? Because the Apostle John wrote 1 John 5:21, John wrote the entire epistle of 1 John, from the city of? Ephesus. He writes from Ephesus. It was in Ephesus that he wrote and it was the condition; it was the climate, if you will, the culture of Ephesus that most certainly inspires his warning. Here's what I mean and I'm quoting here, there was no city in the then-known world that was as inundated by or connected to pagan worship, the ancient gods, and the system of living and worship that's connected to the ancient gods and the dark depths of idolatry than Ephesus. It was the third largest city in the world at that time, a port city through which a majority of all the world's trade and commerce traveled. It was a world hub for finance, politics, education, the arts, entertainment and the occult. It was a modern day mix of Vegas, New York City, and Washington D.C., all wrapped up into one. Picture that. And in no place were the occult and idolatrous practices more overt and rampant than in the confines of that city's most treasured and famous landmark. Does anybody know what it was? The temple of Diana. My friends listen, nobody should even think about beginning to look into the great truth about Ephesians, you don't study the book of Ephesians, you don't look at this letter from Paul to the Ephesians, without taking time to understand the significance of this temple in the everyday lives of those who lived in this city. So I want to introduce you if I can in just a few minutes this morning as we start to the temple of Diana. The temple of Diana. While it was named one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, it was destroyed by fire and rebuilt seven times in its history. Each time on a scale larger and grander than before. The wealthy King Croatas supplied it with many of its white stone columns and pilgrims and travelers from throughout the oriental East brought their wealth and their worship to Diana and her temple on a regular basis. Thousands, tens of thousands, of people would traffic through Ephesus on a regular basis from all over the then known world to bring their goods and their worship and their activity to Diana and this monstrosity of a temple. In time the temple possessed valuable lands in the region. It controlled the fisheries. Its priests were the bankers of its enormous revenues. Because of its strength and security, the people stored their money there for safekeeping and in time it actually became a world bank. That's right. Not only was the temple of Diana was a place of pagan worship and a treasure house for resources but it was also a museum as well in which the best statuary and most beautiful paintings were reserved. The glory, my friends, of a citizen of Ephesus was to be a worshiper of the great goddess, literally a caretaker or warden of her temple. The temple of Diana was for those in Ephesus everything. Now there were three main practices that comprised temple worship; three main practices that were central activities and realities there at the temple of Diana. As we get a backdrop and a look into this city of Ephesus, I want you to take note of these things. Number one, the temple of Diana was the center of illicit and immoral sacrifices and ritualistic worship. The temple of Diana was the center of illicit and immoral sacrifices and ritualistic worship. Now there's about 15 or 20 things I could tell you just from what I've read

and learned about this. And I know you've heard it all and I know in our culture and in our day on this front there's not a whole lot that surprises us but I'm here to tell you that if I told you all 15 or 20, it'd shake you, the things that were going on, the stuff that took place openly on a regular basis, in the name of worship and god and religion. One of the things, I can share this, virgins from Ephesus could come at any point in time, any day of week. If you were a virgin in Ephesus, it didn't matter how old you were, you come and for a price offer yourself sexually to a temple worshipper, a male, temple visitor. The young girls would then, having performed that act, would then give the money that they made from doing that act to the temple authorities as an act of worship on the girls' part to Diana with the promise of blessing and ongoing protection for their lives. So go to the temple, pay for virgin. In that sense the temple authorities became nothing more than revered pimps. It happened all the time, constantly. Number two, the temple of Diana had established a right of asylum. This was interesting. I didn't know this. The temple of Diana had established the right for that culture in that region in that time, the right of asylum, which means any criminal in that day guilty of any crime, no matter how severe or twisted, if he could reach the temple steps at the temple of Diana was safe. No charges could be brought. No prosecution could come. No result was that the temple was a home for hardened criminals. Tacitus, an early church father, accused Ephesus of protecting the crimes of men and calling it the worship of the gods. To have anything then to do with the temple of Diana was to be associated with, to be in the company of, to be close to, to be in relationship with the very dregs of society, many of whom were more than ready to pay for a worshipful visit with a virgin, and on and on, it went. The center of illicit and immoral sacrifice and ritualistic worship, a home for criminals through the establishment of asylum, and number three, and this is not only extremely interesting but very, very pertinent to what we're about to see and where we're about to go in our study of Ephesians. Number three, the temple of Diana was the center of the sale of Ephesians letters, they called them. Ephesians letters. These were charms worn as amulets which were supposed to be effective in bringing about blessing. If you are writing down words, write down that word. If you want to store a word in your mind, store that word in your mind. These people were all about blessing. They wanted to be blessed and they wore these amulets with the hope of being blessed. The wishes of those who wore them were to come true. Ephesus was and I quote, preeminently the city of astrology and sorcery and incantations and amulets and exorcisms and every form of magical imposter. To have anything to do with the temple was to be brought into contact with commercialized, superstition, illicit prostitutions, and the black arts. This was Diana and this was that world. This was Ephesus in that day and dominated the scene. It would be impossible for us today to imagine how much and to what extent Ephesus and the Ephesians were influence by the activity and the mindset of the temple of Diana. Ok. Did you get all that? Now with that as a backdrop, that's what's going on, that's where we are, here's our new study. These are the people. This is the city. This is what's going down. Think about it, what an enormous challenge for young believers, let alone a young church. Can you imagine being in a church down the street from the temple of Diana. What an incredible challenge for young believers and young church to live everyday in the midst of that culture, with all of its dark, accessible, and incessant temptations. Sound familiar? I know it's different but you and I both know its not. Why study the book of Ephesians? To live everyday in the midst of that culture with all of its dark, accessible, and incessant temptations, carnal and empty blessings to be had

anywhere with anyone at anytime. So back to John. John from Ephesus says, guard yourselves from idols. And Paul, who actually writes Ephesians, who ministered there for almost three years and was himself quite familiar with its setting and context, quite familiar with Diana, quite familiar with the goings on at the temple, quite familiar with how it all worked and played out, Paul says right out of the gate, watch this. Go to Ephesians 1:3. I want to read Ephesians 1:3 with you and many of you have read Ephesians 1:3 for a lot years but I wonder with all of that as a backdrop if Ephesians 1:3 might sound a little bit different to you this morning. It sure does for me. Ephesians 1:3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has, what? There's that word. Say it out loud. Blessed us. Everybody was looking for a blessing. Everybody today still looking for a blessing and here Paul says to those, dear brothers and sisters in Ephesians who live in the shadow of Diana, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual, what? Say it out loud. Blessing in the heavenly places in who? In Christ. I read that verse after reading everything I just read to you and studying all that I've studied these last several weeks and it just pops like never before. It's like you can just see Paul speaking to those people who live in the shadow of that temple trying to be the people God has called them to be, reminding them what He has given them, reminding them of what's true and real about their condition in the midst of that kind of culture. Let's just look at a few things this morning. Look at verse 1 there, blessed is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That means praise God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and just to be clear, it's as if he's saying, just to be clear, not Diana. This isn't about Diana. This isn't about all that you see and that you hear everyday of your life. And you and I could today in our context just pick a god; pick a little "g" god. Don't praise it, he says, don't praise Diana. Praise is due to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who has, it says there, and I want you to stop there just for a moment and as you chew on the great truth of this verse, in order to really take it in, I want you to jump to the bottom of the verse. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has, and then go down to the last two words of the verse, which are what? In who? In Christ. It's very important that you understand this today. I know for some of you this might be redundant. For others of you it may just be the thing you needed to hear for some reason today, but none of what we're about to talk about, none of the blessings that God brings, none of the life that God offers, none of the benefits and joys, none of all that God brings to the life of one that's depicted here in Ephesians 1, none of it is possible, none of it will be realized. You'll never touch it. You'll never see it. You'll never taste it. It'll never be yours unless you are in, who? Christ. In Christ. Praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has, in Christ, and I want to just ask you this morning, if you are in Christ? Really? In Christ. Have you come to that place where you have fully surrendered your heart and life to Him, fully devoted yourself to following after His ways and His teaching and His truth because when you fully surrender your heart and life to Him, not to religion, not to a church membership, not to what mom and dad taught you, but when you fully give yourself in submission to Him to follow, love, and give your life to Him, what He brings, what He offers, and what He establishes in you, it's mind-boggling. We're about to study it for the next few months. But none it will ever be a reality for you if you're outside of and not in Christ. Let's look and see what happens with those who are in Christ. Praise God, not Diana, who has in Christ blessed us with everything. I love how the text reads, blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing, it's important that you just stop

there and think about that for a moment. In the context of that day and the context of their lives, in the context of what they'd seen in the temple of Diana, it's not temple hookers, it's not black magic potions not illicit, barbaric acts of sacrifice. No, God brings every spiritual blessing. A spiritual blessing is something that's lasting. That would be something that's eternal. That would be something that's meaningful. That would be something that's life-giving. Something lasting, something eternal, something meaningful, something life-giving. He has blessed you with every spiritual blessing and what the text really says there is, He's blessed you with every spiritual blessing that is available to God, in the heavenlies. It's so huge of a truth and it's such an amazing concept, I struggle to even explain to you what it really means. I don't know that I can. The heavenlies, the heavenly places, that speaks to, if you will and I hate to even use this phrase, because He's so beyond this but that's God's account. That's His account. You and I have accounts. Some of them are overdrawn. Some of them are really small. Some of them struggle at times. There not very big. Some have big accounts. I understand that. But we're talking about the resources, all of the resources, that God can in His divine nature draw from. It's His warehouse. It's His storehouse. It's His account of every spiritual blessing and gift and reward that He could ever imagine He gives to you. Every spiritual blessing. It's just vast. It's unspeakable. I mean it's a bad illustration. It really is. It doesn't even measure up. But I mean it's like I found out this morning Bill Gates is worth 40 billion dollars. We googled it in the back. It was 52 billion last year but he had a really bad year and lost 18. I know you feel bad for him. He's down to 40 billion dollars. It's like Bill Gates waking up one day and saying, all right, I'm going to just dedicate the rest of my life just to meeting Rick's needs. I'm going to exist to meet Andy's needs. Andy, I'm all yours. I'm Bill Gates. I'm all yours, Andy. What do you need? And it's like Andy thinking about that for a little bit and going, you know what Bill, can I get 200 bucks. You know what I mean. It's just 200 bucks. We all just kind of gasp, like, oh Andy, come on you missed that one because we know there's so much there. It's a bad illustration but my point is you can't even fathom how much is there in the heavenlies. The text here says doesn't say He's going to, the text says that if you're in Christ, He has. It's in your account. He has blessed you. He has deposited into your heart and into your life and into your reality every spiritual blessing that He has to give He has given to you in Christ. It's an amazing thought. All of those blessings given to you and I, everything, the heavenlies, have to offer. So now we get back to the last six weeks, now you see why this is so cool how it all lines up, where we've been, where we're going, why would you. Now I'm going to sound like I sounded 4 or 5 weeks ago. Why would you with every spiritual blessing conceivable, available to you in Christ nibble at the table of the world? Why worship an idol, why spend your days hoping food or booze or the pursuit of the perfect body or your own arrogant self-sufficiency will bring you blessing, the one thing they wanted and the one thing you and I still want, when God, Paul says, right out of the gate wants to bless you with every blessing available in His account. We came to the realization over the past few weeks that we are idolaters. So many of you were willing to stand in front of your family last week and admit that very thing with specifics attached. We've been captivated by our culture's preoccupation with little "g" gods just like in Ephesus. Paul writes to the Ephesians, to a people who were surrounded by idolatry and little "g" gods who couldn't bring blessings, only emptiness, only heartache, only loss. Idolatry always leads to what? We told you. Destruction. Paul says, you know what? Praise be to God, those of you that know Him, because you know

and you're aware of the fact that every spiritual blessing has been made available to you and you can ask and others have over the years, what are the blessings? My friends, that's where I want to invite you to come back next week and for the weeks to come because we will in the weeks to come as we study this amazing letter. We will identify specifically the blessings, the gifts that God has given you. It's going to be an amazing study and we're going to take a careful and close look. Watch this. We're going to take a careful and close look at these blessings that God has brought. You see, chapters 1, 2 and 3 are all about what God has accomplished in you when He saved you, when He redeemed you. Theologically. Doctrinally. Practically. Everything He has brought to the table, so to speak, everything He has deposited in you, spiritually, we're going to learn about in those first three chapters of Ephesians. How He has built you up. How He has put this package together, if you will. So that, we can get to, and I can't wait for this to get to chapter 4, 5 and 6 where in a very practical, very honest way, He says OK now it's time to learn how to live that out. How you're made. What God deposited into you. How He has positioned you spiritually. Now we're going to talk about the practice of that in your everyday life. I promise you the things we're going to talk about, the things that the text talks about, the teaching that we're going to be able to dive into on the everyday of life front, it's staggering. It's so real and honest and important for you and I. We're going to talk about how our position in Christ, how the blessings and the truth about how we've been made, and what God did to us when He redeemed us, how that should carry out and impact our unity as a body. It's going to talk about how we're supposed to live out our faith in an immoral world. Ephesians 5:1, 2 talks about there not even being a hint of immorality among us. Later in five we're going to spend probably a few weeks talking about marriage, how husbands and wives are to relate, how husbands and wives are to be in relationship with each other in a way that fulfills God's design for that relationship. We're going to talk about parents and kids. We're going to talk about employers and employees. We're going to talk about the armor of God in Chapter 6 that we need every day to live in a world that's absolutely fraught with demonic attempts to dissuade, diminish and discourage you and I. It's going to be an incredible study and I can't wait for you to be a part of it. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 the truth about what has happened inside of me if you're in Christ. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 the way you and I are to live in light of what went on inside of us and when you marry the truth of what God did in you and the way in which we're supposed to live, you get then, and only then, the life that God intended. The Truth. The Way. The Life. Somebody else talked about that I think. His name was Jesus. Remember that. John 14:6. I am the Way. This one that we're in said I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man comes to the Father but through Me. And so it is Him who we will follow in the days to come. Amen. Would you stand and let me pray for us as we go this morning. Father in Heaven, God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Your Son, how grateful we are. I'm so thankful this morning for Cory and for Jared in the way they gave themselves to that drama today of the great picture of you at work in us and on us and for us. Oh God I pray that the people of this church would in the days to come have the courage to stand on that stool and allow your loving chisel to shape us and form us into the people that you called us to be. Oh God how grateful we are for your Word. It is life-changing, eternity altering. I pray God that we would surrender ourselves to it. I pray that we would bring ourselves to this gathering week after week after week to allow your Spirit and your Word and your people to encourage us toward that which you've

made us to be. Masterpieces. You've designed us to be masterpieces who in our own unique worlds where we work, where we live. God there's a way that you've called us to function. There are things you've designed us to do. And God we want to function that way and do those things and we know we desperately need your help. So God we commit as a family to come before you. We commit to the digging deeper resources that will allow us in the days to come to continue this discussion, to keep your word and its truth. Parts of the scripture we didn't even get to today that have to do with these truths we've consider, oh God, would we as a people be committed to keeping those things in front of us, keeping those things in front of our kids and our families and our friends. God, walk with us through these days as we pursue the truth and the way and the life that you've called us to and we'll thank you for it. And all the people in the room agreed and said Amen.