

FINDING AND REPLACING YOUR IDOLS

All Sin Is Rooted in Idolatry

Idolatry, which is a breach of the first commandment, is always the answer as to why we do anything wrong. We never break any of the other commandments without breaking the first one!

The Culture Hosts Our Idols

The specific idols of any generation are ultimately rooted within their geographical and cultural context:

- Israel (Judges 2:11-13) – As it settled in the Promised Land, Israel rejected the pleas of Moses and Joshua and began to worship the idols of its neighbors.
- Ephesus (Acts 19:26) – When the Gospel came to Ephesus in power, it displaced the idols of the surrounding culture.

“Contemporary observers have often noted that modern Christians are just as materialistic as everyone else in our culture. Could this be because our preaching of the gospel does not, like Saint Paul’s, include the exposure of our culture’s counterfeit gods?”

Tim Keller

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

James 4:1-4

Identifying Idols

“... that most basic question which God poses to each human heart: “Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart’s functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? Questions bring some of people’s idol systems to the surface. ‘To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance? What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?’ These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors.”

David Powlison

Scripture calls us to consider our ways (Hag. 1:6). Indeed, Paul continuously calls us to put off the old self and to put on the new self (e.g., Ephesians 4:24, Colossians 3:9-10), which cannot be accomplished apart from an examination of consciences. We cannot see our idols unless we look at ourselves.

Replacing Idols

“When we repent out of fear of consequences, we are not really sorry for the sin, but for ourselves. Fear-based repentance (“I’d better change or God will get me”) is really self-pity. In fear-based repentance, we don’t learn to hate the sin for itself, and it doesn’t lose its attractive power. We learn only to refrain from it for our own sake. But when we rejoice over God’s sacrificial, suffering love for us—seeing what it cost him to save us from sin—we learn to hate the sin for what it is. We see what the sin cost God. What most assures us of God’s unconditional love (Jesus’s costly death) is what that most convicts us of the evil of sin. Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin.”

Tim Keller

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Joy-Based Repentance Meditates Upon Christ

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Philippians 3:17-21

Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:2

A Picture of Joy-Based Repentance

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "Say it, Teacher." "A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, for whom he cancelled the larger debt." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Luke 7:36-50

Discussion Questions

1. Think about some everyday sin struggles (anger, lying, lust, etc). How do these sin struggles ultimately have their root in idolatry?
2. If idolatry is cultural and the Gospel is counter-cultural, what does that say about pursuing the "American Dream."
3. Have someone read aloud Luke 11:24-26. What does this passage suggest about the dangers of a fear-based negative repentance? Who should fill the empty house of the soul instead?