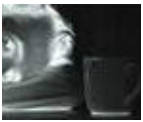


IDOLATRY 101

God + ?

Christ says, "give me **all**. i don't want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: i want **you**. i have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. no half-measures are any good."

c.s. lewis *mere christianity*



IDOL REDUX

Idols are good and basic things which have been elevated to being ultimate things. We begin to look to them for meaning in life, for covering our sense of insignificance, for developing our "righteousness" or worth. We truly believe that they, rather than the One True, Living God will make us happy.

**Both Christians and Non-Christians have idols.
The solution for every situation is the same: the Gospel.**

Idols cause us to have distorted thinking and behavior, affections that are enslaved by their demands, and cause us to misplace our love for God by trying to put something else in his place.

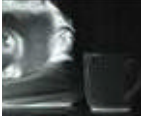
How we spend our time and money, as well as how we treat other people will tell us a lot about where idols exist in our lives.

We all have near idols (specific good and basic things which have turned into ultimate things) and far idols (deeper, motivational drives which "co-opt" good and basic things in our lives making them near idols.)

Near idols need to be returned to their correct place in our lives (good and basic, not ultimate) by expanding our love/satisfaction with God. Far idols need to be repented of so that we can rejoice in who God is and what he has done for us.

The process of repenting of idols includes seeing how poor and weak idols are in themselves, how dangerous they are to us, and how grievous they are to Christ.

In the last week, where has God opened your eyes to significant far idols in your life? How have these deep, motivational desires taken over some good and basic things making them into near idols?



A REMINDER ABOUT REPENTING AND REJOICING

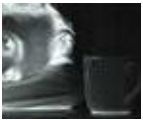
Recall from last week that scripture gives us a twofold view of the process of repenting and rejoicing.

"**put to death**" (repentance)

"**set your mind above**" (rejoicing in what you have and are in Christ).

Repentance without rejoicing will lead to despair.

Rejoicing without repentance is shallow and will only provide passing inspiration instead of deep change.



THE CONTINUATION OF SPIRITUAL HOMICIDE—LEARNING HOW TO REJOICE (II)

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!
Psalm 139:23-24

Rejoicing in Particular: The Principle

To replace idols so they cannot grow back, it is essential to learn to rejoice in the *particular thing* that Jesus brings or his particular asset that replaces *the particular* idol of your heart. Whenever you see your heart in the grip of some kind of disobedience or misery, some temptation, anxiety, anger, etc., always ask:

- ***How are these effects being caused by an inordinate hope for some one or some-thing to give me the what only Jesus can really give me?***
- ***How does Christ give me so much more fully and graciously and suitably the very things I am looking for elsewhere?***

Then rejoice and think of what he has done for you and what he has given you.

Rejoicing in Particular: The Practice

For our time together choose one of your major “far idols” (far idols are our most subtle and basic idols which exist at the level of a motivational drive) which fits roughly with one of the following categories:

- Idols of Comfort
- Idols of Control
- Idols of Security
- Idols of Success/Approval

Then turn to the exercise designed to model for you the process of:

- 1) identifying how we are trying to meet a need through an idol that only Christ can meet; (see above)
- 2) rejoicing in how Christ can meet this need in a much better way than the idol can. (see above)

Idols of Comfort

When tempted because of idolatry (out of a desire for comfort), let Jesus entice you with his life.

In prayer, praise him for his fulfilling, life-giving nature.

In order to rejoice in Jesus (and the gospel) when tempted, read/meditate through John 6:5-13; 32-40. As you do, see Jesus feeding people with his bread, the only bread that will not leave you hungry (6: 35).

Now write out a rejoicing prayer that replaces temptation thoughts:

Jesus I want to tell you...

When tempted by idols, use sample prayer language like this: *"Lord, when I forget the gospel, I begin to relate to you as a boss, not a lover. I cease enjoying you and experiencing your love on my heart. That is the reason I am tempted. Only in your presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forever more (Psalm 16:11) yet here am I trying to find comfort in something else. Why rake in a mud puddle when you have set a table for me (Psalm 23:5) filled with your love, peace, joy. This thing I am tempted by is just a pleasure that will wear off so soon – it is a sham and cheat, while your pleasure, though it may start small will grow on and on forever (Prov.4: 18). And remove my idols of pleasure, which never can give me the pleasure I need."*

Idols of Control

When anxious because of idolatry (out of a desire for control), let Jesus comfort you with his care.

In prayer, praise him for his detailed, wise care of you.

In order to rejoice in Jesus (and the gospel) when tempted, read/meditate through Luke 8:22-25 and/or Mark 4:35-41. See Jesus assuring the disciples of his care.

Now write out a prayer that replaces anxious thoughts:

Jesus I want to tell you...

When troubled by circumstances, use sample prayer language like this: "Lord, when I forget the gospel, I either feel I am living up to standards, so I get mad at you when things go wrong, or else I feel I am not living up to standards, so I get depressed and guilty when things go wrong. Both ways destroy any peace. But I live by your sheer grace-that means though I don't deserve to have things go right, yet I know you are working them all out for good (Rom. 8:28) because you love me in Christ. All my punishment fell into Jesus' heart-so you only allow bad things for my growth, and for loving wise purposes. I can relax, because my security in life is based neither on luck, nor hard work, but on your gracious love for me. You have counted every hair on my head (Matt. 10:30,3 1) and every tear down my cheeks (Ps.56: 8) -- you love me far more and better than anyone else loves me or than I love myself. And remove my idols of security-which never can give me the security I need."

Idols of Security

When hard, cold or angry because of idolatry (out of a desire for power), let Jesus humble and soften you with his mercy.

In prayer, praise him for his great patience with and mercy toward you.

In order to rejoice in Jesus (and the gospel) when cold or angry, read/meditate through Matthew 26:36-46. As you do, see Jesus being let down by his disciples, but still giving them credit for their willing spirits (Matt.26: 41). Remember that you have fallen asleep on him so often.

Now write out a prayer that replaces hard-hearted thoughts:

Jesus I want to tell you...

When irritable or cold, sample prayer language: 'Lord when I forget the gospel I become impatient and judgmental of others. I forget that you have been infinitely patient with me over the years. You are slow to anger and rich in love (Psalm 145:8). When I am anything other than tenderhearted and compassionate to people around me, I am like the unmerciful servant who, having been forgiven an infinite debt, is hard toward his fellow debtor (Matt. 18:21-35). I live completely and solely by your grace and long-suffering, and I praise you for it. Tenderize my heart toward others as I do so. And remove the idol of power -- the need to get my own way-- that is making me so hard toward these people. "

Idols of Success/Approval

When feeling hurt and rejected because of idolatry (out of a desire for approval), let Jesus' assure you of his love.

In prayer, praise him for his unchanging love for you.

In order to rejoice in Jesus (and the gospel) when hurt or rejected, read/meditate through John 15:9-17 and 17:13-26. Listen to how Jesus talks about you to his Father. Think of what you mean to him and what he is willing to do for you.

Now write out a prayer that replaces despondent thoughts:

Jesus I want to tell you...

When feeling rejected and rather worthless, use sample prayer language like this: 'Lord, when I forget the gospel I become dependent on the smiles and evaluation of others. I let them sit in judgment on me and then I hear all their criticism as a condemnation of my very being. But you have said, 'now there is no condemnation' for me (Rom.8: 1). You delight and sing over me (Zeph.3: 14-17), you see me as a beauty (Col. 1:22). Why do I pant after the approval of the serfs when I have the love of the King? Ironically, I am being a lousy friend-because I am too hurt by criticism to either learn from it or give it to others (for fear of getting it back). Oh, let me be so satisfied with your love (Psalm 90: 14) that I no longer respond to people in fear of displeasing them, but in love, committed to what is best for them. Remove my idols of approval-which can never give me the approval I need"

You should now have a better idea about how to reflect on your heart in such a way that you can deal with its idolatrous 'motions' and effects. You may have other problems besides the four mentioned above. For example, you may have a particular problem with guilt over the past or with boredom in general, and so on.

Whenever you encounter idols, you can follow the same pattern you see above:

Start by Identifying the Idols by Asking:

- ***What is the 'far' idol motivation (e.g. power, approval)?***
- ***What is the 'near' idol it is attached to (e.g. success at work, dating a particular person, ministry)?***

Then Repent and Rejoice By Asking/Doing:

- ***How does Jesus particularly provide what the idols cannot?***
- ***Pray to him, thanking him for it.***
- ***Find some passage of Scripture in which he very visibly and concretely demonstrates this gift or quality and read through it slowly using it as the basis for your prayers.***

That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn and make me new.

I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end.

John Donne, Holy Sonnet 14