

The Idol Factory – Part 1

I. Idolatry is a problem as old as humanity - almost.

Adam and Eve had to decide whom they would believe – the God who proved His provision was perfect by resting on the Sabbath, or the tempter who offered “more”. “A failure to heed this instruction could only mean a dissatisfaction with God’s provision and a disbelief in his word.... Disobeying God’s command would be tantamount to calling God a liar, since disobedience is nothing more than distrust ‘gone public’.” Scott Hafemann, p. 62.

Will we trust God as our Creator and Provider or will we settle for “more”?

II. Defining Idolatry.

“Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer’s arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions and is surrounded with ironies. Perhaps this is why many evangelicals are ignorant of the idols in their lives... Contemporary evangelicals are little better at recognizing and resisting idols than modern secular people are... There can be no believing communities without an unswerving eye to the detection and destruction of idols.”

- Os Guinness & John Seel

“An idol is not simply a statue of wood, stone, or metal; it is anything we love and pursue in place of God, and can also be referred to as a ‘false god’ or a ‘functional god.’ In biblical terms, an idol is something other than God that we set our hearts on (Luke 12:29; 1 Cor. 10:6), that motivates us (1 Cor. 4:5), that masters or rules us (Ps. 119:133), or that we serve (Matt. 6:24).”

- Ken Sande

“An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as God. All sorts of things are potential idols, depending only on our attitudes and actions toward them... Idolatry may not involve explicit denials of God’s existence or character. It may well come in the form of an over-attachment to something that is, in itself, perfectly good... An idol can be a physical object, a property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero - anything that can substitute for God.”

- Richard Keyes

“The evil in our desire typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much.”

- John Calvin

“There is always a reason for a sin. Under our sins are idolatrous desires... Sin isn’t only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry.”

- Tim Keller

- Sin is breaking God’s moral code. True or False?
- Christianity is for “rule followers”. True or False?
- Sin is attitude as well as action. True or False?
- Sin is what we do and what we fail to do. True or False?

III. Why does this matter?

A. Idolatry and Treasuring Christ cannot coexist.

- Galatians 5:17, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other...”
- “He that hath slight thoughts of sin, never had great thoughts of God.” John Owen.

B. Some of us are suffering the ill effects of our idols.

- Our souls are anemic and our affections wane. We cannot understand what it means to treasure Christ. The cross means little to us, and we cannot imagine it ever doing so.

Resources for further study:

- Study Romans 1:18-32. Next week we will see how to discern our idols.
- Read Josh's post on sin's effect: <http://eucatastrophe101.blogspot.com/>
- Idolatry Articles: http://www.monergism.com/directory/link_category/Sin--Temptation/Idolatry/
- Listen to C.J. Mahaney's sermons that inspired and informed this series: <http://www.sovereignracestore.com/ProductInfo.aspx?productid=A1040-01-51>
<http://www.sovereignracestore.com/ProductInfo.aspx?productid=A1040-02-51>
<http://www.sovereignracestore.com/ProductInfo.aspx?productid=A1040-03-51>
- Articles and books to read:
 - *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* by John Owen, Taylor and Kapic eds.
 - "Talking About Idolatry in a Pastmodern Age" by Tim Keller.
 - "Who Are We? Needs, Longings, and the Image of God in Man" by Edward Welch, *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 13, number 1. Fall 1994, pp. 25-38
 - "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair'" by David Powlison. *The Journal of Biblical Counseling*, Vol. 13, number 2. Winter 1995, pp. 35-50
 - *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Henry Soutal.
 - *The Peace Maker*, Ken Sande.

"Every unmortified sin will certainly do two things: it will weaken the soul and deprive it of vigor. It will darken the soul and deprive it of its comfort and peace.

"It untunes and unframes the heart itself by entangling its affections. It diverts the heart from the spiritual frame that is required for vigorous communion with God; it lays hold on the affections, rendering its object beloved and desirable, so expelling the love of the Father (1 John 2:15; 3:17); so that the soul cannot say uprightly and truly to God, "You are my portion," having something else it loves. Fear, desire, hope, which are the choice affections of the soul, that should be full of God, will be one way or other entangled with it.

"As sin weakens, so it darkens the soul. It is a cloud, a thick cloud, that spreads itself over the face of the soul, and intercepts all the beams of God's love and favor. It takes away all sense of the privilege of our adoption; and if the soul begins to gather up thoughts of consolation, sin quickly scatters them."

John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*, p. 64-65.

Will you make it your priority to war with your idols?

- Pray that these concepts will help us discern the subtle pervasiveness of sin in our lives so that we will be aware of our need of grace!
- Believe in Romans 8:31&32 power: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"
- The cross reveals the height of God's mercy and the depth of our sin.

O Grant that nothing in my soul

May dwell, but Thy pure love alone!

O may Thy love possess me whole,

My joy, my treasure, and my crown;

Strange fires far from my heart remove,

My every act, word, thought, be love! - John Wesley

"Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."
- Augustine of Hippo, 4th Century.