

The Root of the Problem

This Gospel is God's promise to redeem rebellious humanity through the death and resurrection of Jesus. In the famous words of J.I. Packer, "God saves sinners". There are many words in the Bible used to describe the sinfulness of humanity. Words like rebellion, darkness, adultery, lawlessness, blindness, foolishness, and poverty. In theological terms, it is referred to as human depravity. This means that every single part of our being has been somehow tainted or affected by sin - our motivations, our emotions, our reasoning, and our memories. This term does not just refer to specific sins (lying, stealing, hatred, etc.) but sin a human condition.

Big Idea: Idolatry is the root of all human brokenness.

I. The Sin Beneath the Sin

According to the Bible, behind every sin we commit or plan to commit comes from a heart of idolatry. Idolatry is the sin beneath all sins - it is the driving force.

Matthew 15:18-20: What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person.

In some cultures, particular in the ancient world, people had hundreds, even thousands of gods that they made, names, worshipped, and prayed to which covered all areas of their life. That is normally what we think of when we here "idol". An idol is anything we believe we need, apart from Jesus, to make us happy, satisfied, or fulfilled. They are where we find our identity, security, and purpose. Idols are our functional gods, or functional saviors. We look to them for refuge when we struggle, justification when we are accused, answers for when we are puzzled, and comfort when we are down. "The human heart is a factory of idols...Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols (John Calvin)."

We have hearts that were created with a drive for dependence and worship that only God can fill. We are convinced that we don't need him, so we fill that drive for dependence and worship with other things.

II. First commandment is the same as the last commandment

What has been noted by many in church history is that in the 10 Commandments, that the first commandment is the same as the last:

Commandment #1 - Have no other gods before me (idolatry)

Commandment #10 - Do not covet (idolatry)

Colossians 3:5-6: Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry.** 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming.

This is a very important observation because it reveals that all of the sins listed between them (commandments 2-9) are all forms of heart idolatry. This is explained in detail by the apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans (1:18-25):

Romans 1:18-25

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

Verses 21 and 25 tell us the two results of idolatry:

- 1) **Deception**—"their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened"
- 2) **Slavery**—"they worshipped and served" created things.

2 Major Examples of idolatry:

1. Genesis 3:1-15 – Adam and Eve try to be their own gods
2. Exodus 32 – Israel molds a golden calf to replace Yahweh as their god

III. Identifying Our Idols

We are in a constant battle with our idols. The Gospel calls us to name our idols, repent of our idols, and rejoice in Jesus as our God and Savior. We can identify our idols when we begin to consider in our own heart of hearts where we find our meaning and significance. These are often exposed when these things are taken from us, questioned, or jeopardized and we can either get very angry or very depressed

Consider the many forms of idolatry below:

Statements of the Heart	Kind of Idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have power and influence over others."	Power idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am loved and respected by _____."	Approval idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have this pleasure, or such a quality of life."	Comfort idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am able to get mastery over my life in _____."	Control idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... people depend on me and need me."	Helping idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... someone is there to protect and keep me safe."	Dependence idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am free from obligations to take care of someone."	Independence idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am highly productive and getting a lot done."	Work idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am recognized for accomplishments and am excelling."	Achievement idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have wealth, financial freedom, and nice possessions."	Materialism idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am adhering to religious code and accomplished in it."	Religion idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... this one person is in my life and happy to be with me."	Person idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am free from organized religion, living by my morals."	Irreligion idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my race and culture is recognized as superior."	Racial/cultural idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... this _____ group lets me in."	Insider idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my parents/children are happy and happy with me."	Family idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... Mr./Mrs. 'Right' is in love with me."	Relationship idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I am hurting; only then am I worthy of love or can cope."	Suffering idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... my _____ cause is making progress, rising in power."	Ideology idolatry
"Life only has meaning/I only have worth if... I have a certain look or body."	Image idolatry

*courtesy of Tim Keller/Dave Powlison

Root Idols:

If you seek...	Your greatest nightmare...	People around you often feel...	Your problem emotion...
POWER (Success, winning, influence)	Humiliation	Used	Anger
APPROVAL (Affirmation, love, relationships)	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
COMFORT (Privacy, lack of stress, freedom)	Stress, demands	Neglected	Boredom
CONTROL (Self-discipline, certainty, standards)	Uncertainty	Condemned	Worry

*courtesy of Tim Keller/Dave Powlison

1. Can you identify your idols?
2. What are your top 3 idols a single root idol?
3. Do you have any specific examples of how idolatry has deceived or darkened you? What have been the results of idolatry in your life?