

Idols of Our Heart

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[0:00] Isn't that interesting? So, please open with me to 1 Corinthians 10, verse 6. I'll read verse 6 and 7 and verse 11 and 12 in 1 Corinthians 10.

And it says, Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were.

As it is written, the people sat down to eat and drink and stood up to play. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. The passage that we're going to look at today should really serve as a warning to us.

And it's going to warn us, and thank you for that prayer, Jim, about idolatry. An idol in the Old Testament is defined as a physical or material image, or form representing a reality or being considered divine, and thus an object of worship.

[1:14] Idolatry is the worship or adoration of anyone or anything other than the Lord God. Idolatry may look different to us these days, but the principle remains the same.

We turn to other things other than God. Romans 1.25 puts it this way, For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

Listen to these words from Paul Tripp in his book, Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands. He puts it this way, An idol of the heart is anything that rules me other than God.

As worshipping beings, human beings always worship someone or something. This is not a situation where some people worship and some people don't. If God isn't ruling my heart, someone or something will.

It is the way we were made. At the level of what we are really living for, we have forsaken God for something else. This is the silent cancer that weakens the church, robs individuals of their spiritual vitality, and leads to all kinds of difficulties in relationships and situations.

[2:33] At its core, sin is moral thievery. It steals the worship that rightly belongs to God and gives it to someone else.

It robs the Trinity who purchased the creation. Every sinner is in some way a worship thief, and at its center, sin is also spiritual adultery.

It takes the love that belongs to God alone and gives it to someone or something else. It is a life shaped by satisfaction of cravings, rather than by heartfelt commitment and faithfulness.

Every sinner is in some way a spiritual adulterer. So now, as we come to our passage for today, I would like you to do a little bit of introspection today.

I would like you to look within yourself and look at elements of moral thievery and spiritual adultery that would be in there, in your heart. And in order to do that, we're going to look at the story of Laban, Laban, as Americans say, right?

[3:44] And see what we can learn from Laban's life and be resolved to worship God alone. Let's go to the context of our passage.

Please open to Genesis chapter 30 and in verse 25. In Genesis chapter 30 and verse 25, we could see there that Jacob was prepared to leave empty-handed to return to Canaan.

He was fed up with his relationship and the time that he has spent with Laban and he was ready to go home rather than continue to work for his cunning father-in-law.

Maybe the worst father-in-law ever. How would you feel if you worked for someone else for 20 years, who is your father-in-law, being deceived and underpaid the whole time?

Jacob worked for Laban first for seven years because he loved Laban's daughter, Rachel, and after seven years of hard work, he gets Leah.

[4:48] Not the one he was after, right? And so he works for another seven years to get Rachel. So after 14 years, he gets two for one, like those good shampoo and conditioners we have nowadays.

He gets two wives for the price of one, having stayed 14 years. And he was prepared to leave. But as you can see there in verse 25 and 26, Laban desired for Jacob to stay.

And that was not because he wanted his children and grandchildren to stick around, but because he saw that with Jacob around, he was prospering. It was all about self-interest.

He recognized that God was blessing him through Jacob, and so he didn't want that to stop. So he got to deal with Jacob so that Jacob would stay for another six years working for him.

But God would continue to take care of Jacob and would prosper Jacob during those six years. And so after 20 years, finally, God tells Jacob, it's time to leave.

[5:48] So without Laban knowing, Jacob informs his wives of his plan to live, to leave the country that they were in, to go back to Canaan.

And now, we get to our passage. In Genesis chapter 31, starting in verse 14. Follow along with me. In Genesis chapter 31, we will start in verse 14.

Rachel and Leah said to him, Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners?

For he has sold us and has entirely consumed our purchase price. Surely, all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children.

Now then, do whatever God has said to you. Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels and he drove away all his livestock and all of his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan Aram to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac.

[6:52] When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing.

So he fled with all that he had. And he arose and crossed the Euphrates River and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead.

God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad. Laban caught up with Jacob.

Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country and Laban with his kinsmen camped on the hill country of Gilead. Then Laban said to Jacob, What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword?

Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre and did not allow me to kiss my sons and daughters?

[8:09] Now you have done foolishly. It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night saying, Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.

Now you have gone, you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house. But why did you steal my gods? Let's pray.

Father, it's so easy to come to a portion of scripture like this and be just seeing Laban in the story and fail to see our own hearts.

I pray, Lord, that as we study this passage, we would be encouraged to take heed, to expose the idols of our own hearts and to put them to death.

Please be with me as I bring your word, Lord, and may you speak through my feeble efforts and may you prepare the hearts of your people. In Jesus' name, amen.

[9:15] Amen. We will see two aspects in this text. Two aspects revealing Laban, exposing Laban. And if you want a title for this message, that's what it is.

It's exposing Laban. Two aspects of Laban so that we would be encouraged indeed to expose and kill our own idols, the idols of our own hearts.

And the first aspect that we're going to see is from verse 14 to 22. We're going to see, we're going to expose Laban's parenting. We're going to expose Laban's parenting. Well, we had kind of a hint already that Laban wasn't running for that of the year when in Genesis chapter 29, after Jacob worked for him for seven years, he does not give to him the beautiful Rachel, but the weak-eyed

Leah in verse 17.

And he did this for material gain because he knew that he was blessed through Jacob's work, so he wanted more of that, so he tricked and lied to Jacob.

But so, his daughters are already, as we could see, kind of part of the bargain. He's just using his daughters to keep Jacob around. So after 20 years, Jacob has now two wives, two maids that he also has kids with, 11 children as well as a lot of specked and spotted sheep and goats, as you see in the context.

[10 : 39] And we see there in the beginning of chapter 31 that Jacob takes the responsibility to go and talk to his wives because God has appeared to him that he needs to go.

And he goes and talks to his two wives to persuade them that it's time to leave their father, to leave the house that they've always known and to follow him to Canaan.

And Rachel's and Leah's reply gave us an idea of the kind of relationship that they had with their father, as well as showing us the value that they've put into their faith based on what they have observed in their father.

Well, we might have expected the two wives to kind of push back against the idea of going. But instead of having some kind of resistance, you can see that the women, as we have read, are really willing to go.

And they give four reasons for that. If you follow with me, look there in verse 14. They give four main reasons for why they are willing to go. And they are voicing in that way their frustration against their father.

[11 : 43] And you can see there first in verse 14, he says, Do we still have any portion or inheritance into our father's house? This is not a true question. This is called a rhetorical question.

They are making a statement. They are saying, We do not have anything to expect from our father. We do not have any inheritance in this house.

We are not part of his plan. So whether we go or we stay, it doesn't make any difference for us because our father has resolved not to give us anything, not to give us any inheritance.

We are ready to go with you because there's nothing for us here in terms of inheritance. That's the first reason that they give. But they don't stop there. Look there in verse 15. They say, Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners?

Well, this is an amazing sentence by those two daughters. He says, Not only do they feel like Laban ignores them in their future plans, but he actually treats them as foreigners within their own house.

[12 : 49] The word foreigner, in other places like Proverbs, it's the same word actually used to describe an adulterous woman, someone that you really don't want, someone that you set apart.

But in this context, it is a stranger, it is a foreigner. What are they saying? Not only are we not part of his plan in the future, but in the present, there is no intimacy.

He just doesn't care about us. There is no intimacy. There is no relating to one another. We share the same roof, but that's it. We barely talk to one another, and the girls, these two women, feel like they are just guests within their own home.

Not really the kind of home you want to stay in. Right? But they continue. Look at what they say there, and still in the second part of verse 15. They say, for he has sold us and has also entirely consumed our purchase price.

So not only are they not inheritors, they are strangers in their own home, but their dad see them as goods to be bargained for.

[14 : 04] Just goods to be exchanged. Jacob paid with 14 years of his life and allowed Laban to be quite wealthy, to become quite wealthy in this time, but he has kept all this wealth for himself.

He didn't share it with his daughters. The girl didn't get anything from it. They have been traded out. They have been used for a greater gain, and they didn't even receive a dowry as part of the deal.

They didn't get anything. Laban loves money, and his daughters clearly see it. He loves money so much that they can see that he loves money more than them.

When money comes into the deal, when money comes into the picture, the daughters come out of the picture. That's what's happening here.

And the fourth reason that they give, in verse 16, they say, they recognize that the father of the Lord is upon Jacob, so they agree to go. The two women have been offended all their life, and all along with the actions of their father.

[15:17] He's been unkind, uncaring, and unfair to his daughters. They have nothing more to expect from him. So in this case, leaving and cleaving to their husband is a really easy decision to make.

Rather go with you rather than to stay in this home. It's like they were saying, we were aliens in our own house, so being alien in another country would not make that much of a difference.

So we would rather go along with you and follow you as God told you. But let's be careful as they say there in verse 16, you know, that they will want to go with what God has told Jacob.

We need to be careful not to interpret those words of Rachel and Leah in the same way that we would the word of Ruth in Ruth chapter 1 verse 16 where she says, your people shall be my people and your God shall be my God.

In the case of Ruth, it was a pious statement. It was a recognition of her submission to God. In the case of Rachel and Leah, it is not a pious and heartfelt commitment to follow God.

[16:28] It was more part of a statement by which they recognized that God has blessed Jacob and that it is the way that they see that they could get some kind of compensation. Look closely there what they say in verse 16.

In verse 16, they say, surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to who? To us and our children.

He is saying, we did not get a dowry. We did not get an inheritance from our dad. Surely, we will get what we deserve with you.

So we will come along with you. That's why those two girls are so ready to go. So we see there immediately the contrast between Jacob there who is ready to go but just taking what he has earned.

As you can see there in verse 17 and 18, it goes on and repeats the fact that Jacob only took what he has earned and what he has worked for during those years that he worked for Laban.

[17:33] And in contrast to that, look at Rachel in verse 19. What does she do? She waits for her dad not to be there and she doesn't take what belongs to her. She waits for the father not to go to the fields and she steals the father's household's gods.

The Hebrew word for those idols is teraphim and it describes pennants. Small figures probably often resembling human form in some way and they were honored as guardians of the home, as the guardians of the household property and also representing some kind of an aspect of the family inheritance like the family legacy.

It represented those household gods ended up representing the home, the house that you are in. They were believed also to be oracles or talismans and they were used to bring a blessing upon the household.

household. Now, there's been all sorts of theories that have been proposed as to the reason why Rachel stole those statues. I've read some very good ones.

One of them is to say that Rachel stole them as a virtuous act because she wanted her dad to stop his idolatrous practice of bowing to those idols so in a noble manner she stole those statues so that her dad would no longer bow to those little statues.

[19:01] That doesn't sound right. Right? Because if it was the case at the moment that they were away what would she have done with those statues? She would have tossed them away. Yet, look in verse 35 what she does with it.

In verse 35 of the same chapter she hides them and lies so that she could keep them. So it means that it has some kind of value to her.

So, I don't really think that it was one of those noble acts that she did to save her dad from idolatry. Some say that it was just for nostalgia. That it would be a way for her to have a little bit of home.

Like you would do you would take a picture from your house when you go and move somewhere else. In order to remember something of home she took those statues. Well, we kind of saw in verse 14 to 16 that she was not really nostalgic about home.

She was in a hurry to go away. I think that we have seen that quite clearly. And some believe that because of the power ascribed to those idols to grant fertility, Rachel wanted to win the Rachel Leah kids contest and to have more kids than Leah.

[20:10] She stole those statues so she would be more fertile than Leah and so she would have more babies. Likely, but it seems unlikely in this contest. But some would argue that that's the reason why. But some would argue that in a way or another she wanted to worship them.

She believed in their ability to grant some kind of blessing and protection. So for her own security, she's going to a foreign land, she's going far away, let's have something to which I could hold on in those difficult times.

Let me have those household gods that I could keep to keep me safe should things go wrong or should things become hard in the place that I would go to.

And some others would also argue that also because of those statues representing the family inheritance, she kept those statues so that she would make sure that later on she could still claim an inheritance from her dad with having those statues.

I would lean towards a combination of those last two options, but one thing is sure, one thing we know, she stole them. That we know for sure, that's in the text.

[21:23] So the fact that she stole them means that she regarded them, she wanted them, so it does not exclude the idea that these idols had a measure of magical power for her.

And so she wanted to hold on to them. And by doing so, she revealed her true colors. She revealed what she truly believed in. Ligon Duncan says about this, she says, she was holding on to pagan spiritual practices embraced by her father's family.

Someone has said, reputation is what people think we are, character is what we really are. And that character, who we really are, is nowhere more revealed than within the home, than within the household, than what's happening when no one else, when society is not watching.

friends, who you are at home will be reflected in your children. What you place value into will be seen into what your children put value into.

They will see as important what you see as important. Laban was full of treachery, was crafty, was cunning.

[22:43] What about Rachel? Rachel. She actually, in a way, outwits her father. Right? In verse 35, sorry, can't stand up. The way of the woman.

Can't look under my dress. That's cunning. That's treachery. And Laban here drinks of his own poison. Laban held on to traditions and to pagan practices and so did his daughter.

His daughter saw him as a selfish, money loving, aloof, and caring father and was just looking for a way to make him pay. What kind of relationship is that within the home?

I pray and hope that none of you experience this kind of estrangement from your children. And if you do, please know that God is a God of reconciliation and that God can mend and can repair anything that has been broken and that there is hope in him.

but in all cases, your testimony in your home reveal who you really are. Who would your children say you are when nobody else is watching?

[23:54] Do those who are close to you long to be at home with you or dread that time that you are at home with them? Would they say, oh no, he is coming home or she is coming home in a few minutes?

The war is going to begin soon. Or can't they just wait for you to be at home? But remember, whoever you are at home will be seen and will be reflected in your children.

Laban's parenting is evidently a lack of parenting. Laban's lack of care, Laban's lack of kindness to his children made them want to go away from him.

His attachment to pagan practices made them love it as well. Be careful who you are within the home. So, Jacob and his family go away and interestingly as you see the word there that is described to say, Jacob and his family and all his possession left deceiving Laban is the same word in the Hebrew that is used in verse 19 for Rachel stealing the statues.

So, it goes like this in verse 19, Rachel stole the household God and Jacob stole the heart or deceived Laban by going away, by fleeing.

[25:15] So, we have a lot of deception going on in this story. So, they embark on that journey to go towards Canaan and someone would have estimated that it's a 360 miles journey which would have taken him around 40 days.

And which leads us to our second point. not only have we exposed Laban's parenting, we are going to expose Laban's pursuit starting in verse 22. Actually, after verse 22.

So, what was Laban truly after as he goes after Jacob? So, you could see there three days later, Laban hears about Jacob's departure and what does he do?

He immediately gathers some men and go after Jacob. This shows that he was not in the best of mood. Right? He was not saying, oh well, they're gone, that's sad, bye.

No, he's going after them. And he took those men with him probably because he wanted to coerce Jacob back. He took some strong men with him so that he could pull Jacob back.

[26:19] And so Laban catches Jacob after seven days walk because Jacob with all of his herd and his whole family was moving slower.

So he took the three days advance that Jacob had. So there we could see that he's preparing to meet with Jacob there at Gilead. But before that meeting happens something important happens as well.

Laban has a meeting with God himself. So God comes in verse 24. God came to Laban. And here we see another sovereign intervention of God for the sake we saw that previously he has in different occasions appeared to Noah he has appeared to Abraham he has appeared to Isaac let's not forget as well that he has appeared to Hagar in Genesis chapter 16 as well to demonstrate and to show that he is sovereignly in control over all things and here he appears to Laban even though Laban is not really a devout believer but God for the Laban saying look there in verse 24 be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad literally what it means is do not speak to him from good to bad from good to bad basically what the Lord is saying be careful not to use one of your trickery again to trick

Jacob back into your country you kind of enticing him using those good words those things that the beginning but turn sour at the end do not use one of them on Jacob God wants Jacob in Canaan and make sure that Laban does not interfere with that plan he says to Laban do not use enticement and do not use intimidation do not do not play good cop bad cop you know do not try both techniques to bring Jacob back to you let him go so it meet with Jacob and so he warns Laban do not use one of your trickery again to bring him home so here we have the meeting in verse 26 and we see how Laban confronts Jacob and what he what that meeting reveals of his true heart pursuit he starts off in verse 26 by accusing Jacob of deceiving him look there in verse 26 what have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword in verse 27 he repeats it why did you flee secretly and deceive me

Laban calls him a deceiver what does he say he claims that he would have feasted with Jacob he would have organized like a big farewell party and then he goes into the affectionate grandfather mode it is that moment where if it was a Hollywood movie the music would change it would go into violins you know we take out the violins you know I just wanted to kiss my grandchildren goodbye I wanted to give a last hug to little Simeon I wanted to give a kiss to little Reuben I wanted to pet one last time baby Joseph and now you've taken all of them away from me without telling me poor Laban right no wrong I hope you don't feel for him because he's lying here he calls Jacob a deceiver which has some truth in it because we know from the life of Jacob that he is quite good in deceiving right he has deceived his own dad he deceived his brother he deceived

[30:01] Laban by running away by fleeing without letting Laban know but calling someone a deceiver from Mr. Deception himself is kind deception and so as an aside here just as we talk about Jacob know one thing your sin will always find you your sin will always find you Jacob deceived his brother as we mentioned and deceived his father and now he is himself being deceived by Laban his sin caught up with him but Laban is a pretender he acts like someone who cares but the only person that he really cares and sin nurtures selfishness the more selfish you are the more you want to stick with that selfishness and so he says there note there as well sorry at the end of verse 27 what does he say he says if you have stayed I would have put on that big party

I might have sent you away with joy and with songs and with timbrel and with lyre a farewell party 120 years ago what did she go with in sorry I don't remember the reference but I think it's Genesis chapter 24 verse 60 and it says there that when she left she left with blessings and prayer right but now instead of blessings of prayer he wants to put on a party which is another indication of Laban's apostasy as Calvin puts it this is a sign that religion had very much decayed in the family and they had lost their seriousness it's another sign of what is really going on in the house of Laban and secondly when the soft approach doesn't work look there in verse 29 he turns around right no more hug he kiss he kiss he grandfather in verse 29 what does he say it is in my power to do you harm so he says if the soft approach doesn't work

I'm going to use what I got I'm going to try to use my power but then he remembers but your God told me that I couldn't I can't threaten you I can't harm you Dr.

John MacArthur would always say time and truth go hand in hand give it enough time truth will come out just after he pretended to be that soft grandfather truth came out saying that he has the

power to harm Jacob but because of God he doesn't really have that power what is really what is Laban really after he is after power and control he is after power and control he understood that he had something special going on with Jacob and he doesn't care about the means to get it back he wants it back he just wants the goods please go back let's read again that sentence there in Genesis chapter 30 verse 27 so that's after the 14 years and before the six more years he says if now it pleases you stay with me I have divined that the Lord has blessed me on your account now this is a statement that we might read over very quickly but it is an amazing statement what he's saying here is that I have found out through practicing divination I have found out by using sorcery that God is blessing me through you amazing sentence he used the pagan practice that would later be clearly forbidden by God in Leviticus 19 26 same word to see that God is the one who gives him the blessings and all he can see is the blessing not the source of that blessing this is really what Romans 1 25 talks about he's exchanged the truth of God for a lie and he chose to worship in his heart the creature the goods that he gets rather than the creator this is emphasized by his sentence if you go back to [34 : 24] Genesis 31 in verse 30 in verse 30 look at what he says there now you have indeed gone away because you long greatly for your father's house but why did you steal my gods this is incredible think about it the God of the universe appeared to him telling him not to harm Jacob God spoke to him and what does he remember of that conversation nothing much just that God told him not to harm Jacob but what is he after immediately his own gods the word that he uses there in verse 30 is the word Elohim is the same word that is used in verse 29 to say the God of your father has appeared to me now give me back my gods even though your God has appeared to me he's not my God I want my gods back your God has talked to me my God still matters more to me that's what he's saying here this is incredible he knows that

God exists but God matters to him only as much as God could help him to get what he wants it is the same reason why he wants his teraphim back because he wants those material blessings still Laban is one of those whose real God is himself he just wants to please himself one commentator says Laban throughout this section is a good illustration of the man who has fallen away from the true God still knows him feels impelled to heed his word but otherwise has put God on the same level with heathen deities and lives a life such as a renegade might live Laban does not pursue God he is after what God can get him as Lewis Johnson says as well on this section we have a lot of people like that in our churches they attend church on Sunday morning they acknowledge that there is a

God they say they believe in God but their lives reflect an idolatry that is directly contradictory to the other things they profess friends may that not be you this morning may there be no Laban in you this morning when the Bible speaks you hear God speak you hear him speak through the preaching of his word every Sunday morning and other days of the week here are you immediately afterwards going back to your household gods are you going back to those idols of your heart Calvin says that the human heart is like a cauldron constantly constantly bubbling forth idols idols does not have to be those little statues they could be things like these comfort loving pleasure seeking sport hobbies power control entertainment food education people your wife your kids your friends success all of those things could be idols of the heart all of them are sinful if you make them the primary pursuit of your heart

Laban valued his comfort and possessions more than his own family he valued his comfort and possessions more than God do you he valued his little household gods and what they represented of his family traditions more than God do you the thing that you habitually fervently consistently committedly pursue is what you truly worship if what you most naturally talk about when people bump you a little is something other than God that's your idol what gets you excited worship is about worth ship where do you place your worth ship what do you find worth in your true identity is revealed by who you are at home and what your life pursuit is who you are at home and what your life pursuit is turn with me to

Joshua chapter 24 and we'll close with this passage Joshua chapter 24 verse 14 and 15 Joshua chapter 24 starting in verse 14 now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and truth and put away the gods which your father served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord choose for yourself today whom you will serve whether the gods which your father served which were beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord look down in verse 23

now therefore put away the foreign gods which are in your midst and incline your hearts to the [39 : 57] Lord the God of Israel the story of Laban reminds us of the danger of not getting rid of the idols in our midst the idols of our past and the idols of our present culture God doesn't want to share our hearts with anyone else he he he wants exclusive worship so I am pleading with you today do not be like Laban if there is a Laban in you it will be exposed time and truth go hand in hand and one day it will be too late you will stand before Christ and the choice you have made or failed to make will be evident to all and will have eternal consequences you will not be God forsake those idols and run to God for forgiveness he offers forgiveness in Christ and in Christ you will be truly secured he can truly satisfied and he can give you a new heart that will free you from the bondage of sin and those idols that are on your heart at the moment come to Christ make him your savior and your only Lord Amen