

Idolatry: Slavery and Freedom

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, the first time I got up here, I had this thing on upside down, and now I don't. But my sermon turned out to be a thousand words longer, so figuring things out.
- It's a real blessing to have our brothers and sisters from Grace Church on 99 with us here today. We enjoy the opportunity to fellowship and worship together whenever that's possible.
- And here's another one, so it's wonderful. And let me now open in prayer and ask for the Spirit's guidance upon me and help.
- Lord, thank you for this opportunity to worship here in your church together, Lord. And you ask us to preach your word, and so we try to do that faithfully and well.
- And I ask your help now, Lord, accordingly, and that I wouldn't utter a word that is displeasing to you or that is inaccurate or is from a haughty heart.
- [1 : 0 7] Pray your blessings on this time together. Pray for soft hearts to receive the truth of your word. In your name, amen. Amen. All right.
- Today's sermon is on idolatry, slavery, and freedom. And my first and prior sermon to this was a life of worship.
- And the only reason why I'm speaking to that is it dovetails with today's sermon. And so a life of worship sought to establish four things. One was we are created to worship.
- Secondly, worshiping the one true God changes us for the better. Thirdly, worshiping idols and false gods changes us for the worse. And fourthly, the church serves as a primary mechanism for meaningful worship in the Christian life.
- So how it dovetails to today's is I'm going to focus primarily on point number three around idolatry. In this sermon, I'm going to seek to establish, one, that idolatry represents violation of God's commandments.
- [2 : 1 2] Two, that idols of the heart are included in God's definition of idolatry. And three, that freedom from idolatry slavery is achievable through the one true God and his gospel.
- I'm going to repeat those again because there's a few note takers among you. One, idolatry represents violation of God's commandments. Two, idols of the heart are included in God's definition of idolatry.
- And three, that freedom from idolatry slavery is achievable through the one true God and his gospel. So point number one, idolatry represents violation of God's commandments.
- A natural starting point to understanding what idolatry is and how it affects our lives is by going to the very beginning of God's creation story. What God created us for. God's purpose for mankind is riddled throughout the Bible.
- But to have some brilliant minds extract that biblical meaning and define it concisely is abundantly useful. The Westminster Catechism reflects that work when it identifies the chief end or primary purpose of man to be that we glorify God and enjoy him forever.

[3 : 19] The Westminster Catechism is saying that biblically, anything in our lives that interferes with our glorification of God and associated enjoyment of him is necessarily a violation of his intent for us.

God's ten commandments were issued to Moses on Mount Sinai. They were inscribed by God himself on stone tablets and therefore known as the law.

It is by this law that we know we stand condemned and in need of a savior. It is recognition of this need that represents the first part of the gospel understanding.

BK spoke a short time ago about a couple of God's attributes. Namely, his perfect love and his perfect justice. God is indeed abounding in steadfast love.

He is perfectly loving. That said, we as people sometimes superimpose our understanding of his love over other perfect attributes, like his justice. An example BK used and that we routinely use in youth group is, imagine that someone else, someone has done something terrible to someone you love.

[4 : 25] You're both standing in the courtroom. And rather than administering justice on the perpetrator, the judge speaks to the several good works he has done over the course of his life in order to justify his release.

Not only would we quickly realize this injustice, but we would be outraged. His law commandments are critical to understanding the gospel message itself and are to be viewed as a primary way of understanding him.

Listen to his wording as God addresses idolatry through his first two commandments. The first commandment states in Exodus 20 verse 3, you shall have no other gods before me.

His second commandment is different, yet relatable to his first. Please turn with me to Exodus 32 verses 1 to 10. Exodus 32 verses 1 to 10.

It states, When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, Up, make us gods who shall go before us.

[5 : 31] As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him. So Aaron said to them, Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.

So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf.

And they said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, Tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord.

And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. And the Lord said to Moses, Go down for your people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.

They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it. And said, These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

[6 : 39] And the Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. And now therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them, and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.

In this particular case, In this particular case, God was going to destroy his people.

He just rescued for worshipping false idols, as an indication of how seriously he takes idolatry. Throughout the Old Testament, God consistently places his people under judgment for violation of the First and Second Commandments.

The Second Commandment, in Exodus 20, verses 4 to 6, says, You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers, on the children, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[7 : 56] Both of these commandments, the first and the second, speak to the need for God to reign sovereign in our lives, with absolutely no substitutes or augmentations. He is to be king, and we are to be dependent.

On idolatry, John Thorne from Ligonier Ministries argues that we worship false gods for two main reasons. The first is that it is easier than faith. We worship what we can see, taste, touch, measure, control, and we realize more immediate gratification.

Items that come to my mind when I think of immediate gratification from idolatry pertain to feelings of accomplishment, pleasure, and control. When personal gratification becomes an indicator of what is true for us, we are now vulnerable to the many false teachers who orient themselves accordingly.

Worship God, and you will realize gratification of various types, like wealth, health, and prosperity. Using the same name as the one true God does not mean that one is actually worshipping him, but could rather be a false idol that is absent of God's true attributes and characteristics.

Know the one true God through his word, not through emotional experiences and or gratification. John Thorne's first reason to worship false gods is because it is easier than faith.

[9 : 11] His second reason for why we, as people, are prone to worshipping false gods is that we want to be autonomous rather than accountable. Admitting to being a creation means admitting he has authority over us and we are responsible to him for what we have become.

We don't naturally like being accountable or under authority, just like Satan's challenge to Eve and their related fall into temptation. Whether we are saved or not, if the Bible is right, we are accountable to him and judged accordingly.

We are either saved by grace through faith by the work of Jesus Christ or not saved with associated eternal punishment to satisfy God's justice. Building this last point a little further, our flesh and nature is inclined towards idolatry.

The spirit, not us, is the one who keeps us from doing what we are inclined towards. Idolatry is listed with the works of the flesh in Galatians 5, 19-21.

Now the works of the flesh are evident. Sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.

[10 : 23] I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. On graven images, particularly to God's second commandment, John Piper states, one of the problems with idols is that they contradict the transcendent nature of God as creator.

Any representation of God made with human hands leads to the misunderstanding of God's transcendence. It gives the impression, if not the direct assertion, that God is somehow in our power.

We can carve him or paint him or put him in our pocket or on our shelf or carry him on a cart. The Old Testament is riddled with examples of idols in the form of graven images. Per the golden calf.

I want to round out this section of the sermon with a brief link between historical and geographically specific idolatry in the Western world. Sometimes I think we need to give ourselves a shake in terms of what this looks like to us in our lives over here.

Other parts of the world, it's right in your face. I'll start by giving you two common, not limited to by any stretch, examples of graven image idols in the Bible, Baal and Asherah.

[11 : 32] These two were gods represented through graven image who demanded sexual perversion and child sacrifice. These Israelites were constantly entangled with these false gods in the Old Testament, always introduced through alignment with the world and foreign nations.

Here in the Western world, we often think ourselves immune or distanced from spiritual warfare and overt idol worship. As a result, we are often deceived in thinking that our idolatry is less.

When we look at a couple of key aspects to Baal and Asherah worship, those being sexual perversion and child sacrifice, what do we make of the incredible normalization of sexuality in the modern Western world?

What do we now easily view and look at in our everyday lives that would have historically been condemned by Christ followers embedded in the teaching of the word? What do we now accept watching on our TV shows and social media?

In terms of child sacrifice, what about the topic of abortion that is now so incredibly normalized that we don't even talk about it much anymore? Are we really that far off where idolatry was in the case of Baal and Asherah?

[12 : 35] What about yoga? Yoga is rooted in Eastern mysticism, which is aligned with pantheism, which is the belief that gods are everywhere and in everything. Let's not be deceived, false gods are born out of our evil hearts and Satan's schemes.

I get that we often use the term yoga synonymously with stretching, but don't be deceived about its roots and core beliefs. Let's do stretching, not yoga. A point of reference would be to see how an East Indian Christian would react to a Christian group saying, we're going out for a yoga session.

A point in my sermon on a life of worship spoke to the fact that we were made or created to worship. Regardless of one's religious beliefs, everyone is worshiping something. God commands that we worship him and him alone.

The Christian life is marked with God's removal of idols in our lives through the process of progressive sanctification. As BK has taught, we were saved on conversion and are being saved as Jesus intercedes for us and as God changes us to be more like him over the course of our lives.

As present as ever, with associated graven images and present as ever, idolatry with associated graven images is prevalent throughout all of the world.

[13 : 51] However, the primary ones to watch for in the Christian life are those of the heart. 1 John 5.21 says, as the very last, 1 John 5.21 is the very last verse of John's letter says, little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Idolatry clearly represents a violation of God's commandments. Point number two. Idols of the heart are included in God's definition of idolatry.

When considering the earlier point that we engage in idolatry because it is easier than faith or because we want to be autonomous rather than accountable, there is a clear linkage between worshiping false gods because they support the worship of self.

John Piper defines an idol as, anything that we come to rely on for some blessing or help or guidance in the place of wholehearted reliance on the true and living God.

If we come to crave, love, depend upon, and trust for a blessing, people's praise to enhance our self-exaltation or money or power or sex or family or productivity or anything else besides God himself for the greatest blessing, help, guidance, and satisfaction, then in essence, we are doing what idolatry has always done.

[15 : 08] 1 John 2 verses 15 to 16 says, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life is not from the Father but is from the Word.

Joe Thorne states, idolatry tends to work itself in one of two ways. We deify or make a God of creation while defying the creator or we exalt ourselves while excluding our God.

The former is when we trust in what has been made to somehow define and deliver us while the latter is when we take the posture of the devil who wanted to be God himself. In either of these two cases, idolatry is about ourselves.

Matthew 6.21 says, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. One particular verse that stabs my heart is the following. Matthew 10.37-38 says, that whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me and whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

These are serious words. How quickly do we place even our own families ahead of God? As Bronson says, sin is sin, so idolatry is idolatry, regardless of how we might justify it as small or understandable.

[16 : 35] John Piper says, the foremost image of man that threatens to replace God is the image we see in the mirror. We are lovers of self-exaltation, which threatens continually our love of God-exaltation.

I spoke a few minutes ago to pantheism, which is an ancient yet highly relevant and visible form of idol worship today. C.S. Lewis wrote, there are two possible answers to the religious search, either Hinduism or Christianity, which are ultimate contradictory forms of religion.

Pantheism, or Hinduism, is a very spiritual belief that God is in everything. Peter Jones from Ligonier Ministry states, in general terms, pantheism is the root of all non-biblical religions, which worship creation rather than creator.

The futurist pantheists speak of a journey toward oneness carried along by a global spirit and believe nothing will stop them from building a new humanity based on oneness, which will include the gender blur of the rising generation, which refuses to be confined to biblical moral distinctions.

However, there is an iron fist in this velvet, all-tolerant glove, and I think almost all of us recognize this iron fist. A religious non-negotiable.

[17 : 50] All the variations of pagan pantheism which claim to be non-dogmatic, whether Hinduism, Gnosticism, Mysticism, interfaith, or the spiritual homosexual agenda, hold to an implacable dogma of pantheistic unity.

Pantheists claim that theirs is the true religion. And in today's social agendas, all seems to be about peace and tolerance until you identify your Christian beliefs.

And guess what? The peace and tolerance quickly disappears. And that's what this is saying. Pantheism is as real today as it ever was in ultimately using idols to worship self. This represents the spiritual-religious intersection with modern social agendas.

Do not be deceived. What we are seeing today is representative of the same old idolatry that mankind has embraced from the garden. Per Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 1.9, there is nothing new under the sun.

I'm hoping at this point in the sermon that a couple main themes are arising. Per the first point, idolatry is clearly a violation of God's commands. Secondly, idolatry ultimately boils down to a worship of self under a variety of modes.

[19 : 02] This is clearly a heart issue. It's important to clarify that becoming Christian does not immediately remove all idolatry from our hearts, just as it does not automatically remove something like selflessness.

In Mark 12, verse 31, Jesus identifies the second most important command, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I'm not sure many of us would confidently raise our hands and say we have this one nailed, but many would raise hands and say that with thanks to the Spirit, we are much closer today than we were five to ten years ago.

This is the blessing of progressive sanctification. I want to quickly address the tension between our responsibility and God's grace in growing us through sanctification. We are not to presume upon God's grace.

In other words, because God is good and kind and loving and full of grace, a foolish man might justify himself by saying, I'm okay to walk out in the middle of this busy highway because God will save me if he wants to.

Indeed, God does anything he likes per Psalm 115.3. However, there is a clear tension between our responsibility and accountability and his grace. We are to follow his word and not presume upon his grace to justify our foolishness and sin.

[20 : 13] When being tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus says in Luke 4.12, you shall not put the Lord your God to the test. We are indeed to seek out and slay our idols.

Our brothers and sisters in Christ, as part of his church, play a pivotal role in this. Idols of the heart are clearly included in God's definition of idolatry. Being a greeter is one of the best jobs in this church, and I'm not a highly social person, but those seeking to serve should be hunting down my job and trying to take me out and move into that role.

You get to know everyone. And Odette said this morning, Chris, you have good news to share. And I said, we sure do, and that's why we're here. We're going to talk about the good news. But sometimes putting ourselves in the proper place just makes that good news shine that much more brightly.

And so point number three is freedom from idolatry slavery is achievable through the one true God and his gospel. Idolatry, while it sounds like it should represent freedom through autonomy and lack of accountability, is sometimes disguised by a graven image like a chubby, grinning little statue like Buddha.

We are ultimately enslaved to the cruel master of self. The minute we are placing something or someone ahead of God, we are in the trap of idolatry. Worshiping ourselves runs contrary to how God created us and alienates us from the one true God.

[21 : 41] Whether you look at Sodom and Gomorrah or Noah's time historically or today's increasingly evil society, it is clear that idolatry enslaves us rather than frees us. John Thorne says, the core reason for worshiping idols is that we are not gripped with the glory of God seen through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, whose death brought our redemption and whose resurrection secured our lives.

A primary truth I have already spoken to is that idolatry started at the fall and will endure to the end. It is only through Jesus Christ that we are freed and put in our proper places as creations worshiping the creator.

Revelation 9.20 says, the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood which cannot see or hear or walk.

Idolatry is spoken of throughout Revelation. It is here to stay until God completes his plan. Once we are brought to the place where we realize our fallenness and associated need, Jesus Christ can free us from the idol of self through the price he paid for us on the cross.

The perfect judge demands justice and forgiveness is available if we repent. And to be clear, repentance is two things. One is saying sorry but the other is turning from our sin actively.

[23 : 05] Live our lives for him rather than ourselves. What an amazing gift someone paying for our penalty. A final word is to know who your God is from his word rather than of your own interpretation or wishful thinking.

Do not construct a false God in your mind. Worship him and no one or nothing else. Freedom from idolatry slavery is indeed achievable through the one true God and his gospel.

Let's pray. Lord, thank you for today. Indeed, thank you for the freedom that you do offer us, Lord. We don't understand all the tensions between our accountability, your sovereignty, and how your gospel works through there beautifully and perfectly but we don't need to, Lord.

We have your word, we trust in what it says, and we know that for those of us who are saved, our lives have been changed through your mighty work in us. Thank you for that freedom, Lord.

I pray for this next week, Lord, that as we potentially examine ourselves for idols, Lord, that we would ask your spirit for help and release from them, Lord, and that you would erase any amount of self-deceit that we hold in our hearts around what is an idol and what is not, Lord, but that we would pursue you fervently in your name.

[24 : 31] Amen. Amen. Amen.