

Samech | Beware Casual Idolatry is Deadly

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 119, what a beautiful song. Music is such a gift from God. Try not to get sappy or sentimental. I want to speak in real practical terms here.

Music is such a wonderful gift from God. It seems to take a truth of God's word and bypass so many things in your mind and heart that are distracting you.

And it finds a way to just plant a flag right on your heart when everything else might have been distracting you. And so it's a real blessing in a church service or in a worship service to have the ability to be served by other people singing.

Or to get to stand up. Has anybody else stood up today and just yelled out, my heart has found its treasure? You know, you probably didn't say that any time today until you came in here and we sung that together.

But you were standing up and you were yelling out or singing out. Sounds like yelling for some of us. Sounds like singing for others. But you just said it. And it just felt good. It just really feels good.

[0 : 5 8] And to be able to communicate that. And so in Psalm chapter number 119, as you get there to verse 113, I want to talk about idolatry for a moment.

The passage speaks about it. I've got to see several different countries. And I always joke with Stephanie, if we're meeting new people and she's trying to brag on me, she'll say, my husband can juggle.

And I just think, babe, I've been to like 20 countries. Like, I've done some things, all right? But she always tells them, my husband can juggle. She's awful proud of that. All right? And so one of the places that I approve it, Kyle says, Sunday night, Orange Sunday, I will juggle oranges in the foyer.

Okay? I'll be here for that. I was in this program for a kid's ministry called Neighborhood Bible Time. And they set a date. And they said if you have to be able to juggle to eat dinner that night.

So there's like 50 of us lined up in a line. And you have to juggle to get in. And so you'll learn to juggle when somebody says something like that. And how did we get here, Stephanie?

[2 : 0 2] What have we done? All right. And so talking about idolatry, going to India and getting to see it firsthand, reading about it, seeing big idols so big you could walk into, little ones on the side, everywhere.

Psalms is made out of many different things. And saw that idolatry was simply just an outward display of an internal desire or craving. They knew that it was just wood.

That's not the argument. They know. They're not arguing with you that this is made out of concrete or wood. But they would say that it's an expression or it's a manifestation of a God that would give them that something that they want.

And so in seeing that, I make a very obvious statement to all of you in here. But I realize that India is no more idolatrous than America. But it was just more outwardly manifested.

But the same procedure takes place here in America, just done differently. But they're not any more given the idolatry than we are, except those of us that have been saved from the idolatry by being captivated and captured by something far greater.

[3 : 06] 1 Corinthians 10, verse 7 says, Neither be you idolaters as were some of them as it is written. And then so it's going to talk about idolaters and it's going to give you a description of some people in idolatry.

And the next statement is shocking to me. It says, The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. In this portion here in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul is referencing something that happens back in Exodus.

If you're going through the Bible for your first time reading through it, find somebody and people to help you because you're just going to find that it gets better and better, gooder and gooder, right?

As you read through the Bible, I mean, it's just going to pop, all right? When you get to 1 Corinthians, if you've seen what you can see available in Exodus. Travis and I spoke about this the other day. Some of the most rewarding Bible reading we've done, reading through a Bible, was when we read it.

Also read a Bible knowledge commentary alongside of it. I mean, just something with a bunch of cross-references to help us. So that we weren't missing out on some great references that are being made by not knowing what was going on.

[4 : 15] Like one says, I wouldn't know how to play football. I would have picked that up. I would have known that you would want an egg-shaped ball and not a circle ball. And so you wouldn't want to miss it. So here in 1 Corinthians, it's referencing Exodus.

And this is what it says. It says, Same statement in Exodus there.

Little background. Moses is meeting with God on the mountain. The meeting ran longer than people expected. They get bored and they get disinterested. So what the people do is they call the youth pastor.

No, they call Aaron. And they say in Exodus 31, Where did Moses go?

He is gone. Which is understandable. He's been gone a long time. They're like, hey, let's find another Moses. He's gone. But no, that's not what they say. They say, we need another God.

[5 : 24] Moses has been gone so long. Why don't you make us another God that could lead us here? And so idolatry that was born out of just pure having to wait.

Impatience. Boredom, possibly. Just in the fact that they did not want to wait any longer. Side note here. Parents, maybe one of the best things that we can do for our children is teach them to be bored but to be obedient.

Because if they have to be entertained and they believe that is an inalienable right. In our car, they believe that entertainment is an inalienable right. I have the right to be always entertained.

Like, no, you can be bored like we were bored when we were your age. And we looked out the window. And that's where Thatcher would say, well, you had dinosaurs you could look at. I'm like, no, we didn't. All right? And so you could be bored.

And so the question is, it's simple as it is, but we're simple people as humans. Like, the most attractive temptation for us is simply this. I'm bored and I'm not going to be able to move past this in a way that I want to, receiving from my God.

[6 : 31] Then we turn to something else and that becomes idolatry. And you don't have to build it with your hands. It's just a craving in your heart that is going to be met by some illegitimate source, which is not going to be found in God.

And so that's idolatry. Colossians 3, 5 and 6. Listen how it describes it. It's not talking about concrete or bamboo or anything like that. It says, Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil computes, oh, wow.

All right? And covetousness, which is idolatry. For which things sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.

So the descriptions here of idolatry are heart issues, uncleanness and fornication and words that I can't say, and inordinate affections, covetousness.

They're all matters of the heart. So what is an idol? Simply, it is a thing that is loved or a person more than God. You can take something that's evil and make it an idol, or you can take something that's good and make it an idol.

[7 : 37] Nothing is off the potential for becoming an idol in your life. It starts as a craving, a wanting, something to enjoy, to be satisfied by, and something you'll treasure more than God.

And that's the description. But very at the end, what does it say the result is? It's the wrath of God. God will not allow idols to stand. You find in the Old Testament, you see, that's given there.

Follow all throughout the story of the Bible, all throughout history. Idols will not stand. He will be the only Lord. And so any idol that you're worshiping, you should expect that it would only be destroyed and bring destruction.

And so we all come out of idolatry. We should have not just people from a part of the world that would worship and bow down, but 1 Thessalonians 1, 9 and 10, For they themselves show of us what manner of entering, if we had unto you, how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

Without that Jesus that was sung about, that we ought to go and tell the world, that he's going to be gone for a little while, if we would not have loved him, we would have never been able to turn from the idols of this world.

[8 : 49] There's nothing outside of Jesus that could cause you to turn away. Because what would happen? All you would do is turn from one idol to another. That's all there would be to love. And so if you find God to be boring or negligible, and we just must put other things in place that really satisfy us more than he does, then we not only offend him, but we destroy ourselves.

Having a conversation before church, something I'm very grateful for in kids' ministry with Greg and all of those, Whitney and them, is that they don't think that the Bible needs anything to be enough for kids, right?

Now we can teach the Bible, and if we don't get in the Bible's way, it's enough to capture kids' attention and to change their life. And so we don't have to have all the other things to do that, that become a distraction.

But all of the world is like a kid's ministry that's filled with distractions, right? We could fault a kid's ministry that thinks that they have to take the Word of God and prop it up with lesser things.

But all of the world does the same thing to us as adults. So verse number 13, I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love.

[10 : 03] We should not be ambivalent against God's Word or our sins. We should not be apathetic. We should not be neutral on it. We ought to have a red-hot love for the things of God, and we should have a deep hatred for vain things.

We should not be in the middle. Hate and love are words that are reserved for things that are real. You know, they have to be real to you. If they're not real, then you can't have real strong emotion towards it.

You can't have real strong thought or belief. A step further, it only has to be real, but it's got to be personal in your life. Affect your life. The stronger it affects your life, the more you'd be able to love it, or the more you'd be able to hate it.

I'm sure there's some great injustices, large injustices, that are taking place around this world. I don't know about it. It doesn't seem real to me. I've never seen it. I've never experienced it.

You hear a testimony, and you hear how that's affecting somebody. Then you can have a hatred for something that can grow. But until it becomes real towards you, and it becomes personal towards you, you can't have the depth of love or hatred that you should.

[11 : 11] So simply here, God is very real, so we can love Him very much. Idolatry is very real, so you can hate it very much.

Hate vain things, but thy law do I love. Reading biographies is helpful, because what you see is that a person, maybe at the same age as you, if you're reading about it, I remember reading about Jim Elliot in college and thinking, I have never prayed in my life.

I have never, like I'm reading what he's writing, and I'm just thinking, we are not the same person, okay? There's much more depth here at your age than what's going on in my life right now. And that challenged me.

And reading biographies can do that for you, to see somebody else's walk with the Lord. It can be like having a good friend that you hear their testimony. Katie said when she was in Chile, she saw some friends of hers, and they had grown in their walk with the Lord, and it really challenged and helped her.

A biography can be like sitting down with a good friend. Henry Martin, who dies in 1805, so in the late 1800s, he becomes a chaplain with the British East India Company, which is the way a lot of people find their way into India.

[12 : 21] There was no going from England into India without some type of agreement with the British East India Company. He becomes a chaplain on the voyage. He happened to be present at the British conquest of the colony on January the 8th, 1806.

He tends to dying soldiers after that time. In his journal, he writes this. So convicting. It says, In praying this evening, I had such near and terrific views of God's judgment upon sinners in hell that my flesh trembled for fear of them, and I flew trembling to Jesus Christ as if the flame were taking hold of me.

O Christ, save me, or I perish. What was so convicting to me was it just wasn't a game. It just wasn't a thing to do. God was very much real to him.

The reality of heaven and hell and sinners going there, it caused him in fear to tremble. And that's quite convicting to me.

And idolatry becomes more ever-present in our lives when God becomes less and less present in our lives.

[13 : 34] So Henry Martin is speaking in a way that just challenges me. I pray that it challenges you as well. Idolatry is a sin that we all do contend with.

You may not think of it because you never built the statues down to them, but it's certainly real. So vain thoughts. A double-mindedness. Knowing the use of a word in a sentence can help you, right?

That's what you do. You ask for the... If somebody gives you a word, a spelling bee, you'd say, can you use that in a sentence? You can tell where it comes from. But knowing it in a story is even greater. So two stories just go real quickly to help you think about double-mindedness.

You have Elijah there on the mount, and he says, How long halt you between two opinions? If the Lord be God, then follow Him. But if they'll then be followed, then follow Him.

And the people answered Him not a word. You need to make a decision. Don't be double-minded. Don't have vain talk. Don't have empty talking. Make a decision. Joshua's final address, he says in Joshua 24, 14, Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him with sincerity and in truth.

[14 : 38] And put away the gods of your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. If He is the Lord, then worship Him solely, sincerely with all of your heart and all truth, and put away everything else.

And then that's when he goes on to say, But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. It doesn't just stay in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, a double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways, right?

Or in James 4, 8, the same solution to it. Draw nigh unto God and He will draw nigh unto you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Drawing nigh unto God.

This double-mindedness. It doesn't stay in the Old Testament. It doesn't even stay in the New Testament. It has made itself to us even today to be a real temptation. So we need to have a wholehearted devotion towards Him.

The battlefield of this sin is the battlefield of our hearts. It's the battlefield of our desires. In a conversation this week, I asked the friend how they were doing in a specific area if there was victory.

[15 : 40] And they said, I'm genuinely doing well. Well, I heard them say, I'm generally doing well. And I thought, well, that just will not do, all right? That is not an encouraging answer.

So how's that going? It's generally okay. Like, no, we got to do better than that, all right? But they said genuinely, I don't only have a hard time saying words, I have a hard time hearing words, all right? And so we don't want to be genuinely okay.

We want to be decided on a matter, a wholehearted devotion. On Sunday in Luke 19, Lord willing, we'll see that Jesus was zealous for His house, an expression from the book of John.

And so these passages have come together for me this week. This is a devotion, a wholehearted devotion for the things of God. And you will need a place to run.

Verse 14, Thou art my hiding place and my shield, I hope in thy word. And so idolatry is always works by a lie. That's always the introduction. And so where is the best place to hide from a lie?

[16 : 45] I'm going to give you a chance to answer this one here, okay? Where is the best place to hide from a lie? In the truth. Good job. That's you again, ain't it? All right, Grant? And you answered earlier, not Stephen. I should have known, all right?

Grant, two for two the night. All right? 5,000 whatever points, okay, for Grant over here. And so the best place to hide from a lie is in the truth. Many times we look in the wrong places to hide.

Adam and Eve, where do they hide? They ignore the reality. We're just going to stay here, try to dress up, and see if he notices, all right? That was not a good plan. David hid on the balcony from comfort.

He was getting away from the war, and he goes, and he makes life soft for him, Peter hid from his words by denying his allegiance to Christ. And meeting a God-given desire without God always leads to idolatry.

And there's always a lie that says, hey, come over here. But the truth says, no, I'll hide in you. And then verse 15, depart from me, depart from me, evildoers, for I will keep the commandments of my God.

[17 : 44] Friends will either help fight with us or against us in our fight against idolatry. A friend is either going to help you fight against it in your life, or it's going to fight, or it's not going to help you.

This is a question. Tinsley's not in here, right? She's in a wand of the night. Tinsley in here? All right, good deal. All right. This is a question I think I may ask some young gentleman who comes to date or marry my daughter someday.

All right? Don't bring this up to her, okay, guys? She won't like this. The question I would like to ask them is, will you help encourage her to find her happiness in God? Will you help her find her happiness in God?

Jonathan, will you help her find her happiness in God? Because if you don't help them find their happiness in God, we're preaching now, aren't we? All right? And then no matter what they say, this will be my response.

Depart from me, you evildoer, for I will keep all the commandments of thy God. Or I would say that's the only two options you have. Be not deceived. Evil communication corrupts good manners.

[18 : 50] Be not deceived. Do not be foolish to think that your friendships don't matter. Don't be deceived in this manner. You can't ever say this, oh, they are harmless.

Oh, it is harmless. It is either going to be helpful for you or it is going to be harmful for you. But harmless, meaning that it doesn't have the potential for harm, is never the case.

A friendship cannot ever be harmless in the fact that it can't have the potential to be harmful to you. It's either going to be somebody that's going to help you find your happiness in God or it's going to be somebody that distracts from that.

As a teenager, I was really perplexed about this, all right? It was like, how are you telling me I'm supposed to reach the lost but you're also telling me not to be friends with people that are sinners. It doesn't seem to make any sense.

Which one are you saying? A little bit of maturity after that, you realize that is just not really a real problem in this world because darkness has no fellowship with light. And so you can reach out to people and want to hug them and run after them.

[19 : 51] But if you're talking about Jesus, those people who love darkness and who do not want to respond to the gospel will never develop that friendship that you want to have. Some of you feel that.

You have family members that you love but they don't love the truth and so you just would not say that their friendship with you is as close as somebody else in this room who just loves the truth. There's no bonding element in a friendship for believers unless the other person wants to help you love the Lord.

And so lastly here, verse 18 and 19, Thou hast trodden down all of them that err from thy statutes for their deceit is falsehood. Thou puttest away all the wicked on earth like dross. Therefore I love thy testimonies.

Don't be fearful as fear as a motivator. Take a good look at the devastation of idolatry. Don't be afraid that let fear be a motivator. People have shared their testimony with me and they said, you know I was young and I was afraid of going to hell and then they act like they're sorry for that.

Being afraid of hell is a great wake-up call to the reality of Jesus. Right? It may seem like a fairy tale. It may just seem like a story until you realize one day, oh there is a real place that I could potentially go to which means that there is a real Jesus that died for me.

[21 : 04] Fear, it can be a wonderful motivator. God has allowed the order of the world so that misery follows sin. And so when you see destruction, you say, God help me stay away from that. God, I want to not fall into the deceit of falsehood.

I want to put these wicked things away from me. I love your testimony. And so every time someone takes a step of sinning, they're deliberately closing their eyes to the connection between their sin and the destruction that's coming to them.

One of the hardest things that I've ever had to do mentally was to jump off a perfectly good bridge in South Africa. Okay? And Brother John didn't even pretend. He wasn't even going to go out on the bridge when we went with the teenagers some years ago because it's just a horrible thing to do to your brain, right?

How many of you have done it in here? All right? I think Katie did it right after she did it and Brandon did it again. Emily, I'm sure she did it like every Saturday in South Africa, okay? But you're telling yourself, this is okay.

But your buddy's like, no, it's not. But you're like, but it's gonna be okay. They just did it and they didn't get hurt. I mean, it's a great parable for sin, isn't it? Like, everybody else is doing it, but it may not work out for me the same way that it worked out for them.

[22 : 14] And so you're having to convince your body to believe something that your brain doesn't really believe is true. I wish sinning was that challenging, right? I wish that I had to fight myself in that same way.

But every time someone takes a step of sinning, they're deliberately closing their eyes to the connection for them. And I know we're getting close to time, but I don't want to leave you with that. I want to make sure I get a...

The full thought here is, it's not sufficient. Be fearful of the destruction of sin, but it alone is not as compelling as loving something. A desire for sin is stronger.

Here's why isn't it sufficient. First of all, a desire for sin can be stronger than your fear of consequences. You can say, I know what the consequences are, but I'm still going to do that.

The story of my second son. All right. Is that I know what the consequences are, but my desire to do that is greater. Secondly here, is I believe that I will be an exemption to the rule and it will be different for me.

[23 : 12] That's what we tell ourselves. So why will fear not be enough to keep you from idolatry is because, one, your desire can be greater, and then two, you believe that you'll get out of it.

So the ultimate protection of the heart from idolatry is found in a proper fear of the Lord. My flesh, verse 120, trembleth for fear of thee, and I'm afraid of thy judgments. My proper loving fear for him is greater than all of my desires and all of my fears of other things.

Because the desire for wrong things is going to attract me to sin, or fear for something is going to cause me to run into sin. But a proper fear of him is greater. And fear and love are not in contradiction.

Deuteronomy 10, 12, The Lord thy God require thee, but the fear of the Lord thy God, the walk in his ways, and to love him and to serve the Lord. The Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards, when he preaches, it's a fearful thing to fall in the hands of a living God.

David Du Bois said in here the other day, so much of teaching the Bible is simply reminding people that it is true. So much of reading the Bible and studying the Bible is the constant wake-up call to say, this is true.

[24 : 21] That's why Henry Martin, the missionary, when he was praying and reading, he felt the real presence of God in his life because he believed that it was true, which leads us to be ultimately dependent upon him.

Uphold me according unto thy word that I may live and let me not be ashamed of my hope. Hope thou me up, hold thou me up and I shall be safe and I will have respect in thy statutes continually.

And the fight against that idolatry must ultimately depend upon God himself, upon God's own promise and upon God's word. And so we see the Father's heart towards us as loving.

It will feed the flame of love for him to know that he is there for us, ready to hold us up and that we can be safe in him and we can live and not be ashamed of that hope.

And so the opening story, we saw the distraction from entertainment. And then later in that chapter, 1 Corinthians 10, we see three more warnings, the idolatry of sexual sins, of impatience, and complaining.

[25 : 20] And it ends with this in 1 Corinthians 10, 14, that portion. It says, Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. And that's what I want to leave you with tonight.

Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. Christians who love the Lord and his word cannot be comfortable in a world of double-minded and deceitful people who have no intention of following God's way.

And idols don't do a good job at hiding. And so you came here tonight to worship the Lord. You came here tonight to hear from God's word. And the things and the concerns and the opportunities that have been fighting for your attention tonight has been a demonstration to you of their jealousy towards God.

Idols don't do a good job hiding. It's true to say that our God is a jealous God and is rightful to be a jealous God. But the idols in our lives, they're also jealous. They just don't have any rights to us.

They're not creator and they're not Lord. But all those things. And so you know what it is that is drawing in your life and what those things that must be. And so in a world with less and less private or a personal altar, I believe it's very important to you that you create one so that you can put idols to death and you can destroy them.

[26 : 37] So I want to encourage you to do that. I want to encourage you to recognize the cravings in your life, the desires that you'd have in your life that are not being met in a way that is honoring to the Lord. And I want you to say tonight, that is an idol and that's idolatry and I hate it.

But my love for the Lord is great and I love Him. Let's take a moment. Somebody wouldn't mind playing the piano. I'll give you a moment to pray there in your seat and then I'll pray through this psalm together.

But would you make your place in the seat or here at this altar into an altar? Would you go to the Lord today, bring to Him those things that you know are the cravings, the fears that you have in your life that you're so tempted to not take the helm and recognize them for what they are and ask them to put them to death for you.