
Identifying the idols of a mother's heart: fixing our eyes on Christ
"You shall have no other gods before me." Exodus 20:3

"What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you only what God can give." – Keller, "Counterfeit Gods" p. xvii

"We think that idols are bad things, but that is almost never the case. The greater the good, the more likely we are to expect that it can satisfy our deepest needs and hopes. Anything can serve as a counterfeit god, especially the very best things in life." – Keller, "Counterfeit Gods" p. xvii

- I. Review from two weeks ago: surface vs. deep idols.
 - Surface = fun, money, youth, holidays, productivity, education, body image, children, internet, relationships, sleep, homes ...
 - Deep = autonomy, comfort, security, control, reputation ...

These good things can become idols when they shift from being simply good things to ultimate things.

- II. Our children and idols -- in what ways do these intersect?

- III. Scripture study in small groups:

1. Peace? Power? Loving well through Godly discipline.

We can fall off the edge in either direction -- leniency vs. oppression.

 - i. Read 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 27-29 and 1 Samuel 3:11-13. How did Eli, a godly man (a priest, no less!) slip into making the "peace" of his household an idol?
 - ii. Read Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4. How can we go to the other extreme in exercising our God-given authority as parents?
 - iii. How do we hit the mark? By following God's example in discipline. Read Hebrews 12:5-11. What do we learn about godly discipline? What fruit can we expect it to bear? How can these truths help us combat the temptation toward the idols of peace and power in parenting?

2. Renown? Rebuke? Resting in the sovereignty of God.
We certainly want the best for our children, but are we willing to submit to God's purposes and plan for them above our own?
- i. Read Matthew 20:20-28. We don't fully know the reason behind the mother's request. What do you note about Jesus' response? The response of the other disciples?
 - ii. Read Mark 8:31-33. While not an example of parenting, per se, how does Peter respond to hard truth about one he loves?

The strength of Jesus' response is striking. Granting Peter's desires would work against God's plan of salvation, which was difficult to see from where he stood. How is his response different than Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:36-39)?

- iii. Mary – a mother who submits her control to God from the outset. Read Luke 1:26-38 and 2:25-35. In addition to these passages, Mary is visited by the shepherds after Jesus' birth (Luke 2:16-20) and at age 12, loses him for a few days in Jerusalem as he remains behind at the temple (Luke 2:41-50). After experiencing each of these events, we are told that, "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." (Luke 2:19&51).

How do we see Mary responding to hard news? Take a moment to try to appreciate how utterly undone her world had been.

How can we learn from her response and trust in God's sovereignty over the life of her son?

IV. Idols are things that we love, trust, and worship.

"...how can I tell if I'm worshiping the blessings that I desire or God? ... If you are willing to sin to obtain your goal or if you sin when you don't get what you want, then your desire has taken God's place and you're functioning as idolater." – Fitzpatrick, "Idols of the Heart" p. 25

"The gospel asks, 'What is operating in the place of Jesus Christ as your real, functional salvation and Savior?'" – Keller, "Counterfeit Gods" p. 174

V. So you've identified an idol – now what?

If the prohibition of the command is “you shall have no other gods before me,” then the flip-side of the command (remember our two-sided rule from two weeks ago?) is this:

“You shall have me as your God.”

That is a hugely significant, full, personal invitation and command. What can you hear in this that is a challenge? An encouragement? How can we throw off our idols and be filled instead with Christ?

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” – Colossians 3:1-5

Repenting and willpower alone is not enough – we need to be captivated by a greater love, and rest in the greater truth and joy of our righteousness *in Christ*.

“Rejoicing and repentance must go together. Repentance without rejoicing will lead to despair. Rejoicing without repentance is shallow and will only provide passing inspiration instead of deep change... When we repent out of fear of consequences, we are not really sorry for the sin, but for ourselves... In fear-based repentance we don't learn to hate the sin for itself, and it doesn't lose its attractive power... But when we rejoice over God's sacrificial, suffering love for us – seeing what it cost him to save us from sin – we learn to hate the sin for what it is. We see what the sin cost God... Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves. Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin... Rejoicing is a way of praising God until the heart is sweetened and rested, and until it relaxes its grip on anything else it thinks that it needs.” – Keller, “Counterfeit Gods” p. 172, 173

“If you look at the world, you'll be distressed. If you look within, you'll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you'll be at rest.” – Corrie ten Boom

“We should ask God to increase our hope when it is small, awaken it when it is dormant, confirm it when it is weak, and raise it up when it is overthrown.” – John Calvin

VI. **Take home:** As you go to prayer, consider our “bonus” sheet for a few minutes. Ask God to be revealing the idols that compete for your heart's affection, and rejoice that we have been invited to have Him as our God!

May we be growing in genuine worship of Jesus, and may our children also be drawn to this truth. Amen.

Books:

“Written In Stone” – Philip Ryken
 “Counterfeit Gods” – Tim Keller
 “Idols of the Heart” – Elyse Fitzpatrick