

Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the Spread of God's Word
An Exclusive Message for an Idolatrous Culture

Acts 19:21-41

Grace Fellowship Church, Pastor Brad Bigney, March 8, 2020

"The human heart is a perpetual factory of idols."

-John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*

I. The Idolatry of Our Hearts and the Good News of the Gospel Stand in Direct Opposition to Each Other

Acts 19:26 "...this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands."

The Gospel is more than just coming to Jesus and making Him Lord. The exclusivity of the Gospel requires that you turn away from everything that you were worshipping.

I Thessalonians 1:7, 9 "...you became examples to all...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God."

If there's anything other than God that is functionally more critical to you for your happiness, identity, hope, and purpose in life—*that* is your "god"—regardless of what you say with your lips.

Idolatry is not just building your life around bad things. It's taking even good things and trying to make them ultimate things, that you hope will do for you what they were never designed to do.

Romans 1:21-23, 25-26 "Because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator...for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature"

Idolatry wreaks havoc on our relationships in two very different ways: Your relationship with other people starts to heat up and your relationship with God starts to cool down.

II. What We Think Can Give Us Security and Joy Only Leads to Further Anxiety and Fear

Acts 19:28 "...they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!'"

The subject of idolatry is surrounded by intense emotions because idolatry has to do with what you prize, treasure, worship, and build your life around.

“Paying careful attention to emotions that grow to near neurotic proportions is one of the most effective ways to identify our specific idols...The main questions to ask ourselves in light of such intense feelings are: ‘What do I think I have to have in life beyond Jesus and what he chooses to give me? Has something or someone become too important to me?’ When anger gets out of control, ask yourself: ‘What am I being blocked from having that I believe is a necessity but really isn't?’”

-Scotty Smith, *The Reign of Grace*

Psalm 139:23-24 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

A. What Happens When Your Work Becomes Idolatrous?

“Inevitably, when I left my job, it devastated me. I couldn’t just rally and move on. I didn’t know how to value who I was versus what I did. What I did was who I was.”

-Erin Callan, “Is There Life After Work?” *New York Times*, March 9, 2013.

Her work had swallowed up her identity and left her feeling lost and reeling in the wake of her emotional confusion. She thought work would be her servant and help her get what she wanted, but it became her god and it consumed her.

B. What Happens When Your Children Become Idols?

The fact that they are a good gift doesn’t make the destruction of turning your children into idols any less horrific.

“Joanna’s children became her new identity. They gave her meaning and purpose, and they really did give her hope and joy. The problem was that they were not sent by God to do any of that...Although Joanna was just as faithful in her personal devotions and public worship, God was no longer at the center of who she was.”

-Paul David Tripp, *Lost in the Middle*

Even though children are a good gift, God never intended for them to be trophies on the mantel of your identity and self-worth as a person!

C. What Happens When Romantic Relationships Become Idolatrous?

“No human relationship can bear the burden of godhood...However much we may idealize and idolize him, he inevitably reflects earthly decay and imperfection...After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to the position of God? We want redemption - nothing less. We want to be rid of our faults, our feeling of nothingness. Needless to say, human partners cannot do this...Redemption can only come from outside the individual, from beyond.”

-Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*

The answer to the problem of our idolatrous hearts is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

III. A Greater Love for Jesus is the Only Hope for Keeping Lesser Loves in Their Proper Place

Remember the beauty and wonder of a Savior who died for us and did for us everything that is necessary to rescue us from the cesspool and confusion of our own sinful hearts!

You don't just *start with* Jesus on this path called Christianity...you have to *stay with* Jesus...because your sinful heart will try to lead you to other places.

Hebrews 12:2 "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith..."