

The Gospel Project Session 19

Rebellion Against the Redeemer

Theological Theme: Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God.

What is idolatry? Idolatry is putting something or someone in the place of God. Anything you look to for what only Christ can give you—joy, security, peace, meaning, significance, identity, salvation, and so on—becomes an idol. Many don't believe idolatry is a problem because they only associate idolatry with shrines, temples, and carved images. But heart idolatry exists everywhere. Common idols include: money, sex, a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, beauty, brains, success and ambition.

What are some reasons why our hearts rush to the making of idols?

In what ways can our view of God get distorted by idolatry?

Voices from the Church

"Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible...There can be no believing communities without an unswerving eye to the detection and destruction of idols." ¹

—Os Guinness and John Seel

1. Idol-worshippers distort _____ worship (Ex. 32:1-6).

1 When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt—we don't know what has happened to him!"

2 Then Aaron replied to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took the gold from their hands, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf.

Then they said, "Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!"

5 When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; then he made an announcement: "There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow." 6 Early the next morning they arose, offered burnt offerings, and presented fellowship offerings. The people sat down to eat and drink, then got up to play.

This distorted worship shows us the importance of knowing God for who He truly is and not how we imagine Him to be. Worship is built on a right perception of God revealed through Scripture. A. W. Tozer said, "The essence of idolatry is to entertain thoughts that are unworthy of Him." ²

Why is it important that our opinions about God match up with the reality of God's

revelation of Himself?

What are common “graven images” in our lives or thoughts today?

Like Israel, we will also fall if we distrust the purposes of God. The people said they didn’t know what happened to Moses. But they knew where he was. They simply didn’t trust God’s purposes. Notice the reason for their idol-making. They grew frustrated with Moses’ extended absence. Instead of trusting in God’s purposes, they moved on without Him.

The same is true for us. God hasn’t given us a script, but He says, “I will be with you. Trust Me. Trust in My timing. My purposes are good and best.” Perhaps you find yourself in a wilderness, and you want out of it. If so, trust in God’s goodness and wait for Him.

How can we as believers help each other turn to God in faith during difficult times instead of to idols?

Voices from Church History

“Anything you love more, fear more, serve more, or value more than God is your idol.”³
–Adrian Rogers (1931-2005)

2. Idol-worshippers _____ God’s condemnation (Ex. 32:7-10).

7 The LORD spoke to Moses: “Go down at once! For your people you brought up from the land of Egypt have acted corruptly. 8 They have quickly turned from the way I commanded them; they have made for themselves an image of a calf. They have bowed down to it, sacrificed to it, and said, ‘Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’” 9 The LORD also said to Moses: “I have seen this people, and they are indeed a stiff-necked people. 10 Now leave Me alone, so that My anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.”

Any created thing can be an object of idolatry. Usually, the better something is, the more people will idolize it. People live in bondage to sexual sin, in part, because the human body is an amazing creation. But we must not take “good things” and turn them into “god things.” If we do, we will end up in a life of total bondage and corruption.

Two results of idol worship stand out in this story. First, consider the *moral corruption* that results. Wrong worship leads to a corrupt life (32:6-7; see also Rom. 1:18-32). The word “corruptly” appears in verse 7. In verse 6, notice that “the people sat down to eat and drink, then got up to play.” Some point out that this description has sexual overtones. This shouldn’t surprise us. When you worship the wrong god, you are capable of all types of sin.

What are some choices we make that come from a wrong view of God?

The second result of idolatry illustrated here is *imitation*. We become like what we worship. This point is clearly illustrated in Exodus 32:7-10 (see also Ps. 115:4-8). They became dumb and spiritually lifeless like the idol. They became corrupt and nasty like cattle. Psalm 106 says that they exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats

grass (v. 20).

Voices from Church History

“Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.”⁴

–Augustine (354-430)

3. Idol-worshippers need a _____ (Ex. 32:11-14).

11 But Moses interceded with the LORD his God: “LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people You brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and a strong hand?

12 Why should the Egyptians say, ‘He brought them out with an evil intent to kill them in the mountains and wipe them off the face of the earth’? Turn from Your great anger and relent concerning this disaster planned for Your people. 13 Remember Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel—You swore to them by Your very self and declared, ‘I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of the sky and will give your offspring all this land that I have promised, and they will inherit it forever.’” 14 So the LORD relented concerning the disaster He said He would bring on His people.

In verse 10, God said, “Now leave Me alone, so that My anger can burn against them and I can destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation.” God was pushing Moses toward intercession. God could have destroyed the people in a second. But instead, He challenged Moses to get involved, basically saying, “Here is what I will do unless you intervene.”⁵

What do we learn about prayer from Moses’ example? We learn primarily that as sinners, we need a mediator, and we have the ultimate one in Jesus (see 1 Tim. 2:5)! Jesus, the mediator greater than Moses, turned away the wrath of God from us through His intervention (1 John 2:1-2). Without Jesus’ work, we would all be justly condemned and consumed. Praise God for the God-man, Jesus Christ, who rescues idolaters like us!

Why did Moses think God should have mercy on the people?

What does this tell us about God’s motivation for His glory?

This story teaches us that we must also plead to God for others. *First, we should appeal to God’s character and faithfulness in prayer.* Notice how Moses appealed to the following:

- God’s power—Why would God nullify His power? (Ex. 32:11)
- God’s past investment and reputation—Why would God want the enemy to delight in seeing God’s people crushed? (Ex. 32:12)
- God’s covenant faithfulness—Why would God go back on His promises? (Ex. 32:13)

Second, we must seek the will of God, not our own selfish desires, in prayer. Moses didn’t ask for personal glory here. God said that He would start all over with *Moses*, “I will make you into a great nation” (Ex. 32:10, emphasis added). This could have been flattering, but

Moses cared more about the people fulfilling God's purposes of making them into a great nation. We too should pray in line with God's will, that is, making disciples of all nations, not desiring our own fame.

Third, we must believe that God answers prayer! This account in Exodus 32 is one of the best examples of how God responds to prayer. Those who have a high view of God's sovereignty often struggle with prayer. But remember, God isn't a math equation. He isn't some abstraction. God is personal, and He responds to prayer!

How would you describe the way you divide your time in prayer?

How much time do you devote to praying for other people? What are those prayers like?

Voices from Church History

"Let our prayer be that God may advance His work, not for our glory—not for our sake—but for the sake of His beloved Son whom He hath sent." ⁶

-D. L. Moody (1837-1899)