

Friday, November 5, 2021

## Idolatry

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### Intro

- Greeting
- Announcements
  - Belief Class after service at 1230
  - Prayer Meeting at 7pm
- This morning we will be dealing with a pretty familiar passage known as the Shema, or the Greatest Commandment. The Shema is still a prayer that Orthodox Jews pray each morning and night and it is named for the first word in chapter 6:4 “Hear.”
  - *Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (ESV): Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*
- What the Shema is dealing with is the issue of Idolatry. The Lord is One, the Lord Alone, He is the one that deserves total and complete devotion, heart, soul and mind.
  - This morning we will be dealing with the issue of Idolatry. When we usually think of Idolatry we tend to think about carvings and statues and native peoples bowing down to them but it is so much more than that.
    - Tim Keller says this in his book Counterfeit Gods
- “We think 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. 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

what only God can give. A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving “face” and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry. When your meaning in life is to fix someone else’s life, we may call it “codependency” but it is really idolatry. An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.” There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*” Counterfeit Gods by Timothy Keller

- An idol most often is a good thing that becomes a God thing. This morning I want to address not just what idolatry is, but also how to uproot it in our hearts. In order to bring it home to our context I want to address two issues that appear in the next couple of chapters that are quite timely for us: politics and money
  - Let’s Pray and then we can dive in

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## - Greatest Commandment

- Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 6 verse 1
- *Deuteronomy 6:1–25 (ESV): Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it, 2 that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. 3 Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they*

*shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

- Again, like I've said a bunch of times, it is essential to remember that all of these commandments come in the context of grace. Rescue and redemption come before response and requirement. This is the pathway to life and joy and the only proper response to a loving God. It is God who saves us, God who changes hard hearts into hearts that can receive his word, God who makes us want to follow his way, our response is to be obedience yet that obedience is the pathway to joy. Moses says in verse 1-3 that obedience and the fear of God go directly together.
  - This fear is not terror but rather reverence and awe that expresses itself in obedience. Because we have been loved, this love changes us and we love in return. Jesus says in the Gospels "If you love me you will keep my commandments and my commandments are not burdensome." The apostle John speaks on this command in his letter in
    - *1 John 2:3–6 (ESV): And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*
- What does love and the fear of God look like? It looks like the shema. In Hebrew and Greek, love is not just an emotion but rather emotion expressing itself in action. The heart in Hebrew thought was the center of the person or will. To love the LORD your God with all your heart is not to have warm and fuzzy feelings for God but for him to be the most important thing in your existence. The soul in Hebrew thought is everything that makes you you, and might has to do with action. this type of love the opposite of Keller's definition of idolatry. Is He so central to your life that the loss of lesser things don't shake you? Does your passion, your emotional and financial resources flow naturally toward the expansion of God's kingdom? Have you taught your kids about this God? Are you still pouring effort in to discipleship even if your kids are grown or you don't have biological children?
  - Have you ever noticed how easily people talk about the things that they are passionate about? Sports, movies, their kids, their job, being vegan, CrossFit, people gladly and easily talk about their passions. They wear it on their clothes, they spend their money on it, they bring others into enjoyment of it. We all know this person. And if you don't know this person, chances are you ARE this person.

- Let's Look at the rest of this chapter
- *Deuteronomy 6:10–25 (ESV): And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, 11 and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, 12 then take care lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 13 It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you— 15 for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.*
- God WILL bring the Israelites into the land he promised to the patriarchs but with this new land comes a host of problems that we will deal with in the next two chapters, politics, money, possessions, yet before any of these take possession of their hearts, they would first forget where they came from and what God did for them. Idols are good things that become ultimate things. Money is a good thing meant to be stewarded well and received with thanksgiving, but it also can give us a false sense of control and power and can easily reach godlike status in our lives. The Israelites are about to receive a land, possessions, and wealth from God's hand and it would be so easy for these things to go to their heads. How easy is it to forget God when things are going well? When we are financially secure? When we are living paycheck to paycheck, when the bills are piling up, we fling ourselves on the cross and trust that we will be taken care of. But when things are going smoothly we forget. Before they would worship the gods of other nations, they would first forget. And the same is true with us.
- *16 “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah. 17 You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. 18 And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers 19 by thrusting out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has promised. 20 “When your son asks you in time to come, ‘What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the Lord our God has commanded you?’ 21 then you shall say to your son, ‘We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. 22 And the Lord showed signs and*

wonders, great and grievous, against Egypt and against Pharaoh and all his household, before our eyes. 23 And he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in and give us the land that he swore to give to our fathers. 24 And the Lord commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are this day. 25 And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us.'

- How do they remember their history and stay secure in the present? They basically preach the gospel to their own hearts and their own families. They once were slaves, but God set them free. He cares for their daily needs and promises a future that they cannot imagine. He commands obedience but this obedience doesn't earn them righteousness because they can't obey perfectly, rather, it shows their faith and worship of God.
  - The same is true of us. Once you forget what God has saved you from, you begin to take credit of where you currently are. Once this happens, idolatry is the next step. You begin to trust in created things to give you what only God can give you. If you just have x amount of money you will be satisfied. If you just get this job. If you just have this many kids. If you can finally get married you will be complete. If your political party gets or remains in office you will be safe and feel in control again. All of these are good things but once we forget what God has done for us in Christ in the gospel, these good things very easily becomes god things and no created thing can bear the weight godhood.
- Let's move on to the next couple chapters and see how practical this is for us today.

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## - Politics and Money

- *Deuteronomy 7:1–5 (ESV): When the Lord your God brings you into the land that you are entering to take possession of it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you, 2 and when the Lord your God gives them over to you, and you defeat them, then you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and show no mercy to them. 3 You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, 4 for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. 5 But thus shall you deal with them:*

*you shall break down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and chop down their Asherim and burn their carved images with fire.*

- What God was doing here goes all the way back to what he promised to Abraham hundreds of years prior in the book of
  - *Genesis 15:12–16 (ESV): As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13 Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14 But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15 As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16 And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.*
  - God would use his people to bring judgment on the sin of the people in the land of Canaan, but it was not time and it wouldn't be time for hundreds of years, why? Because it says their iniquity was not yet complete. They had not gone past the point of no return, repentance was still possible and God takes not delight in the death of the wicked but desires that all might come to repentance.
- Fast forward 440 years and things have gotten out of control, just like they did when God flooded the earth. And so the time had come for God to use the Israelites to be a tool of judgment in his hand, yet this whole time they were to remember that they were not any better than these nations.
  - No covenants or political agreements, no intermarriage for alliances, no idols or high places left standing, everything had to be dealt with because Israel was just as easily seduced away from the one true God like anyone else. If this wasn't clear, God says something crazy next.
- *Deuteronomy 7:6–26 (ESV): God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them. He will not be slack with*

*one who hates him. He will repay him to his face. 11 You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today....*

- God set his love on Israel not because they were great, in fact they were the smallest nation out there, he set his love on them because he chose to love them and swore an oath to the patriarchs that he would continue to love them in spite of their rebellion and stubbornness. He reminds them of his steadfast love, that he WILL take care of them regardless of circumstance and that their obedience in these matters will bring them into the joy that he has set before them. But oh how easy do we forget. How easy does the idols of political power creep into our hearts. Skip to verse as 12-16 are repeated elsewhere....
- *17 "If you say in your heart, 'These nations are greater than I. How can I dispossess them?' 18 you shall not be afraid of them but you shall remember what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt, 19 the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched arm, by which the Lord your God brought you out. So will the Lord your God do to all the peoples of whom you are afraid. 20 Moreover, the Lord your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed. 21 You shall not be in dread of them, for the Lord your God is in your midst, a great and awesome God. 22 The Lord your God will clear away these nations before you little by little. You may not make an end of them at once, lest the wild beasts grow too numerous for you. 23 But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed. 24 And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed them. 25 The carved images of their gods you shall burn with fire. You shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them or take it for yourselves, lest you be ensnared by it, for it is an abomination to the Lord your God. 26 And you shall not bring an abominable thing into your house and become devoted to destruction like it. You shall utterly detest and abhor it, for it is devoted to destruction*
- God's commands are clear: He is in charge and from him come any sort of victory that they would experience in this new land. In fact, he alone is God and therefore he is the Supreme God of these other nations as well. Salvation would come through the line of Abraham and the Israelites were to be a blessing and priests to every other nation. They were called, loved, and cared for out of all the other nations so that they could then save all the other nations. But to do this they had to be different.

- They would not be like other nations who grew through political marriages or syncretistic worship of neighboring gods. They were set apart for something greater. But they forgot this and idolatry took the place of God. When we read their history we can easily point out their political idolatry. Then wanted to be like everyone else. They wanted a king like the other nations. They wanted gods who could be manipulated and controlled like the other nations. So that is what they got and with that comes all of the judgement that god promised to any other nation. Dealing with these nations the way God commanded was more than military action, it was an issue of worship and idolatry.
- But to find and root out political idolatry in our hearts is much much more difficult. Look what Keller says in Counterfeit Gods about this:
  - “When love of one’s people becomes an absolute, it turns into racism. When love of equality turns into a supreme thing, it can result in hatred and violence toward anyone who has led a privilege life. It is the settled tendency of human societies to turn good political causes into counterfeit gods.... We can look upon our political leaders as “messiahs,” our political polices as saving doctrine, and turn our political activism into a kind of religion.”
  - God was dealing with exactly this in how the Israelites were to deal with the Canaanite nations. Had they obeyed how they should, they would’ve accomplished their ultimate purpose of being priests and bringing blessing to the world. Ultimately, through Christ this did happen, but He had some stern words to say to those who trusted in their race or their nation for salvation.
  - This is a hard thing to diagnose in ourselves because engagement in politics is a good and necessary thing. But when it becomes an ultimate thing it becomes an idol. Keller continues:
    - “One of the sings that an object is functioning as an idol is that fear becomes one of the chief characteristics of life. When we center our lives on the idol, we become dependent on it. If our counterfeit go is threatened in any way, our response is complete panic. We do not say, “what a shame, how difficult,” but rather “this is the end! There is no hope!”
    - Doesn’t this describe our current political climate? Every 4-8 years in the US a certain percentage of the populace respond in an extreme way and talk openly about leaving the country. They are agitated and

fearful. They have put a hope in their political leaders and politics that was once reserved for God and the work of the Gospel. Keller says:

- “When their political leaders are out of power, they experience a death. They believe that if *their* policies and people are not in power, everything will fall apart. They refuse to admit how much agreement they actually have with the other party and instead focus on the points of disagreement. The points of contention overshadow everything else, and a poisonous environment is created.”
    - Isn't this exactly what we are seeing right now? A huge stimulus deal was voted on and 13 republicans voted for it so now they are going to be tried and executed for corroborating with the enemy. Keller says this is another sign of idolatry.
  - “Another sign of idolatry in our politics is that opponents are not considered to be simply mistake but to be evil.... The increasing political polarization and bitterness we see in U.S politics today is a sign that we have made political activism into a form of religion.”
- Do you see how dangerous this is? When we forget what God had done for us, when we forget what the ultimate solution is and therefore what the actual enemy is, we instead identify something besides sin as the main problem in the world and something beside God as the main remedy. What this does is demonize something that is not completely bad and make an idol out of something that cannot be the ultimate good.
    - In Israel God was reminding his people that he was king and that he was the one who raises nations up and brings nations down. He is the one responsible for the governing of the world and he alone handles this job perfectly. But they were tempted to doubt him at his word and instead went against his commands. And do the same, which is why it is so essential for us to remember the gospel.
  - We don't have a lot of time left so as we close up let's take a look at one more potential idol that faced Israel and still faces us on a daily basis: Money.

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## - Money

- *Deuteronomy 8:11–20 (ESV): Take care lest you forget the Lord your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, 12 lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live*

*in them, 13 and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. 17 Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.' 18 You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. 19 And if you forget the Lord your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. 20 Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God.*

- They were being reminded where their wealth came from. Not from their hands, nor from their power, but everything they had was a gift of grace. Why was this such a big deal? Money fools us into a false sense of security and greed hides itself from its victim. It is very easy to see greed in other people, it is hard to notice it in our own hearts. We compare ourselves to others in our same social economic bracket and there will always be those who are more wealthy so we justify ourselves saying, I don't have their life and don't spend as much as they do. As a result, most Americans think of themselves as middle class and only 2 percent consider themselves upper class. But the rest of the world is not fooled. When people visit here from other parts of the globe, they are staggered to see the level of materialist comfort that the majority of Americans have come to view as a necessity.
- God was reminding Israel that every good thing they had was a gift that HE gave them because greed is an invisible enemy that easily makes money, possessions, and security an idol.
  - There is so much more we could talk about here but we have run out of time and I want to deal with uprooting these idols before we leave.
- We are worshippers and the human heart is a factory of idols. We cannot uproot the idols in our hearts by trying harder. An idol cannot be removed, it has to be expelled. An idol can only be removed by the expulsive power of a greater affection.
  - So how do you discern your idols? Keller says this: Try first your imagination. What do you dream about? What do you do when you are alone? What occupies your mind when there is nothing else to think about? One or two daydreams is not

idolatry, ask rather what do you habitually think about to get joy and comfort in the privacy of your heart? Another way is to pay attention to how you spend your money. Your money flows effortlessly toward your hearts greatest love. In fact, the mark of an idol is that you spend too much money on it and have to exercise self control with it constantly. A third way to discern idols works best for those who have professed faith in god. You may be trying very hard to believe and obey God. However, what is your real, daily functional savior? What are you really living for, what is your real—not your professed- good? A good way to discern this is how you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes. A final test works for everyone. Look at your most uncontrollable emotions. If you are angry ask, “Is there something here too important to me, something i must have at all costs?” Do the same with strong fear or despair or guilt? Ask yourself, “Am I so scared, because something gin my life is being threaten that I think is a necessity when it is not?” Do i feel that i must have this in order to feel valuable and significant?

- Idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, it is a setting of the whole heart on something besides God. This cannot be fixed by trying hard, or by using more willpower to live differently. Turning from idolatry is what Paul described in Colossians as setting your mind on the things above. It means appreciating, rejoicing, and resting in what Jesus has done for you.
  - Idols have to be expelled through a new greater affection. Jesus must become more beautiful to your imagination, more attractive to your heart, than your idol. This is what will replace your counterfeit gods. If you uproot the idol and fail to “plant” the love of Christ in its place, the idol will grow back.
  - Remember, Idols are almost always good things so we don’t want to stop loving our family or our job, we want to love Christ so much more that we are not enslaved by these other good things. We want to rejoice in Christ, to treasure him, to asses his value to us, to reflect on his beauty and importance in our live until our hearts rest in him and taste the sweetness of his love for us.
- Is Christ’s gospel sweet to you? Do you treasure his love more than money? Have you seen the goodness of his kingdom to the point where the movements of politics in your life do not destroy you? He who had everything gave up everything for those who are prone to worship nothing. May we be a church that roots out idols by the expulsive power of the gospel.