

Idol – 6

What is one? – How to identify – How to guard our hearts

Acts 17:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city.

- What is an idol?
 - Simply it is something that we feel will complete our life and bring us *real* happiness
- We love them – We trust them – We obey them

1 John 2:15 (NLT)

¹⁵ Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you.

- The Idol of Love – The lives of Jacob and Leah
- The Idol of Money (*Greed*)
- The Idol of Success
- Political Idolatry and the idol of Power

Idolatry causes us to become spiritually blind

Psalms 135:15–18 (NLT)

¹⁵ The idols of the nations are merely things of silver and gold, shaped by human hands. ¹⁶ They have mouths but cannot speak, and eyes but cannot see. ¹⁷ They have ears but cannot hear, and mouths but cannot breathe. ¹⁸ And those who make idols are just like them, as are all who trust in them.

The Idol of Religion

We can fall into self justification

- You feel the “rightness” of your views make you superior to others
- You become a person who is bent on pointing out the faults of others
- You show contempt for those who oppose you

Proverbs 21:24 (NLT)

²⁴ Mockers are proud and haughty; they act with boundless arrogance.

Sometimes we elevate spiritual gifts, natural gifts and ministry success to a place above the fruits of the Spirit that the Lord desires to work in each of us

John 15:5 (NLT)

⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

Galatians 5:22–25 (NLT)

²² But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things! ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. ²⁵ Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.

We can also make an idol out of living a moral life

- Seeking to control God by our moral performance
- Because we have lived moral lives we feel that God, *and the people we meet*, owe us respect and support
- The best we can hope for is lip service

Matthew 15:8, 9 (NLT)

⁸ ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹ Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.’*”

- When we live this way we put trust in ourselves
- Sometimes we put our nation in the place of God
- This can cause us to be conceded or proud
- We start to feel that God is for us and will destroy those that don’t agree with us
- God wants us to reach out and love our enemies

I believe in large our nation has abandoned God as our hope because religious communities are filled with false gods and a “*holier than thou*” attitude

The story of Jonah

Jonah 1:1–2 (NLT)

The LORD gave this message to Jonah son of Amittai:

² “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are.”

Jonah prophetically called King Jeroboam to expand the military and extend the borders of the nation

– 2 Kings 14:25

Both Amos and Hosea were against the corruption of king Jeroboam yet Jonah seems to embrace the nation's leaders having a favorable message rather than judgment

- Nineveh was their enemy
- They were the most powerful city in the world
- Jonah would have been surprised that God wanted him to preach to them to save them from destruction
- He would have felt as if their destruction would be beneficial to expanding the kingdom of Israel
- He would have considered this patriotic treason

Jonah 1:3 (NLT)

³ But Jonah got up and went in the opposite direction to get away from the LORD. He went down to the port of Joppa, where he found a ship leaving for Tarshish. He bought a ticket and went on board, hoping to escape from the LORD by sailing to Tarshish.

- Jonah does the very opposite of what God asked him to do
- He would have been afraid of failure
- A lone Hebrew among their largest enemy
- At least a mockery, at most death
- Fear of success as well
- They were a cruel and violent empire
- If God didn't destroy them they would continue to be a threat

Jonah had a personal idol

- He wanted success more than obedience to God
- Shaped by a cultural, political idol he put the nation's interests and his success ahead of God

He also had a religious idol

- Self righteousness
- He felt superior to the wicked pagan Ninevites
- It led him to rebel against God

Idolatry will cause us to turn our back on the God we once loved because we have allowed them to the place of Him

Jonah 1:4–6 (NLT)

⁴ But the LORD hurled a powerful wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship apart. ⁵ Fearing for their lives, the desperate sailors shouted to their gods for help and threw the cargo overboard to lighten the ship. But all this time Jonah was sound asleep down in the hold. ⁶ So the captain went down after him. “How can you sleep at a time like this?” he shouted. “Get up and pray to your god! Maybe he will pay attention to us and spare our lives.”

- The soldiers in the boat sensed the violence of the storm
- They cast lots to see who brought this upon them
- The lot fell on Jonah

Jonah 1:10–12 (NLT)

¹⁰ The sailors were terrified when they heard this, for he had already told them he was running away from the LORD. “Oh, why did you do it?” they groaned. ¹¹ And since the storm was getting worse all the time, they asked him, “What should we do to you to stop this storm?” ¹² “Throw me into the sea,” Jonah said, “and it will become calm again. I know that this terrible storm is all my fault.”

Afraid for their lives the men throw Jonah over

- God provides a fish for him
- It is his provision and protection
- It gave him a chance to recover and repent
- Do you feel cut off?
- Do you feel isolated?
- You know you've been disobedient to God
- Repent and recover – get back on track!

Jonah 1:17-2:1, 4, 8-10 (NLT)

¹⁷ *Now the LORD had arranged for a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

¹ *Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from inside the fish.

⁴ Then I said, 'O LORD, you have driven me from your presence. Yet I will look once more toward your holy Temple.'

⁸ Those who worship false gods turn their backs on all God's mercies. ⁹ But I will offer sacrifices to you with songs of praise, and I will fulfill all my vows. For my salvation comes from the LORD alone." ¹⁰ Then the LORD ordered the fish to spit Jonah out onto the beach.

Those who “obey or worship false gods or empty idols”
Forsake God's mercies – *Chesedh* – God's Covenantal Love

- His redeeming unconditional grace
- Jonah had a revelation that God's grace is for everyone
- Including those we may despise

Luke 6:35 (NLT)

³⁵ “Love your enemies! Do good to them. Lend to them without expecting to be repaid. Then your reward from heaven will be very great, and you will truly be acting as children of the Most High, for he is kind to those who are unthankful and wicked.

Clinging to idols will block the grace of God from working in our life – Idolatry spiritually blinds us

- It is natural for us to see our own culture or class as superior to another’s
- The gospel goes way beyond our *natural* instincts

Paul confronting Peter

Galatians 2:14 (NLT)

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, “Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions?”

- We are all saved by grace
- None of us is superior
- It’s not a bunch of rules
- Grace is Grace

Jonah 3:1–5, 10 (NLT)

Then the LORD spoke to Jonah a second time: ² “Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh, and deliver the message I have given you.” ³ This time Jonah obeyed the LORD’s command and went to Nineveh, a city so large that it took three days to see it all.*

⁴ On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: “Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!”

⁵ The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and from the greatest to the least, they declared a fast and put on burlap to show their sorrow.

¹⁰ When God saw what they had done and how they had put a stop to their evil ways, he changed his mind and did not carry out the destruction he had threatened.

- Jonah preaches
- The city responds
- They begin to repent

Jonah 3:9 (NLT)

⁹ Who can tell? Perhaps even yet God will change his mind and hold back his fierce anger from destroying us.”

- The city turns from their evil ways
- God had mercy on them
- He refrained from punishing them
- His will is to save not punish

John 3:17 (NLT)

¹⁷ God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

You would expect Jonah to rejoice because his mission is successful – but that is not what happens

Jonah 4:1 (NLT)

This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry.

Jonah 4:2–3 (NLT)

² So he complained to the LORD about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, LORD? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. ³ Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.”

- He says, I knew that you were merciful
- I knew I couldn’t trust you – “just kill me now”
- His idol is revealed
- Even though he had a revelation of God’s love for everyone, deep inside he hoped God would let them have it
- He truly believed he was superior
– “*holier than thou*”

Its one thing to believe the Gospel with our minds, it’s another to believe it in our hearts

- Only then will it affect everything we think, feel and do

When an idol grips our heart

- We have a false sense of success and failure
- We have a false sense of happiness or sadness
- It redefines the definition of reality

An idol will cause us to call good evil and evil good

Jonah 4:4–9 (NLT)

⁴ The LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry about this?” ⁵ Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city. ⁶ And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah’s head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant. ⁷ But God also arranged for a worm! The next morning at dawn the worm ate through the stem of the plant so that it withered away. ⁸ And as the sun grew hot, God arranged for a scorching east wind to blow on Jonah. The sun beat down on his head until he grew faint and wished to die. “Death is certainly better than living like this!” he exclaimed. ⁹ Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry because the plant died?” “Yes,” Jonah retorted, “even angry enough to die!”

- Idolatry causes us to believe that if I don’t achieve “X” then my life won’t be valid
- If I have lost or failed “Y” I can never be happy or forgiven again
- Idolatry distorts our feelings
- When our idols are threatened it leads to fear and anxiety

What is an idol? *Review*

Simply – it is something that we feel will complete our life and bring us *real* happiness

- It’s the thing that you feel you must have to be successful or for your life to have meaning
- It’s the thing that you could not live without

Jonah 4:10–11 (NLT)

¹⁰ Then the LORD said, “You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came quickly and died quickly. ¹¹ But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness,* not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?”

- God loves in a way that we can not
- He wants us to love like He does
- Idolatry and self-absorption will keep us from doing so

What a strange ending

We don’t see Jonah’s response because that’s not the point
The question is – what will you do?

Ezekiel 36:25, 26 (NLT)

²⁵ “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols.

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.*