
Becoming Christlike – Learning How from Old Testament Kings and Prophets

Session 5 – Idolatry – Old and New

Two sessions ago we looked at the anger of God and saw that it is really an expression of God's enormous love for his people as they tie his hands from blessing them.

Last session was titled "No Secrets" where we considered that we should be completely transparent with God, humble, and open to shining the light of God's Word into our thoughts and intentions so that we can align ourselves with His Word and grow.

In this session we will look at idolatry because so much of God's anger in the Old Testament is provoked by the idolatry of the Children of Israel.

As a "lead-in" to that... Arizona and the southwest have been experiencing severe drought and heat. The fact that Saguaro cacti are losing limbs and falling over has made national news. In Rio and Tonto Verde alone there have been 15 fallen cacti in the last two weeks. According to the extended forecast many more are slated to fall.

Deuteronomy 28 (when laying out the curses of disobedience) speaks of sinfulness and idolatry causing drought and severe heat. Of course, the media has jumped on this and declared it the result of climate change. Was climate change or idolatry the cause back in 1500 B.C.? It makes one wonder if this might be the cause here in the southwest!?

Deuteronomy 28:22

22 The Lord will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation **and fiery heat, and with drought^a** and with blight and with mildew.

Also, in Jeremiah

Jeremiah 17: 5-8

5 Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength,^a whose heart turns away from the Lord.

6 He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

7 "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord.

8 He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Physically we are experiencing heat and drought. We are living in the "heat" of a culture trying to wither Christians. Christians who rely on God continue to bear fruit regardless of these conditions surrounding them. He will not be anxious in the year of drought.

We all see the "heat" in our culture and the continual bombardment of things to distract us away from the things of God.

- Transgender movement is creating a great amount of division. Wreaking havoc. Causing people to resign from positions in sports, garnering headlines.
- Biden's open border policy is intentionally trying to destroy U.S. cities.

- The Devil's plan is to divide and destroy our country.
- Global ad dollars are being controlled by the World Economic Forum to control the content of ads to in turn control what people are thinking.

This is the "heat" of the environment we live in on a daily basis.

We see the destruction of the laws of the land. Loss and destruction of liberty, attack on gender, sex, sexuality, the family, marriage, parental consent, rules, common sense, authority. Everything is under attack.

We live in an idolatrous culture, but we believers can still believe God, worship him and still produce fruit.

The Colson Center lists these phrases we hear every day. They are boldly declared and unquestionably embraced. They tickle our ears and offer the illusion of freedom and fulfillment but...THEY ARE LIES!

- Live your truth. **We are supposed to live God's truth.**
- Put yourself first. **No! We are supposed to put God first.**
- You are enough. **No! We are not enough. God is enough.**
- It's all about love. **They don't define it as godly love, it's an emotion a feel-good love.**

These are all false! See red letters above.

I mentioned the camp in Ohio where they are teaching from Jeremiah and Ezekiel and pointing out the rampant idolatry in Israel and these prophets were making a last ditch effort to wake them up, but their idolatry led to the destruction of Jerusalem and their exiles.

One God, One Lord, One Spirit is at work in different ministries simultaneously with the same message to the body of Christ. (This should not surprise us really.)

Many Christians today think of idolatry only in the Old Testament as large or small figurines. We need to be aware of modern-day idols so we can root them out of our own lives.

Habbakuk 2:18-20

18 "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!

19 Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

20 But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him."

There is no profit in idols! Idolatry is anything else that replaces God in our lives. Portending to give what only He can provide: security, prosperity, purpose, significance, identity.

To avoid idolatry, we need to attach ourselves to God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength **and look to Him only in all situations.**

For example, Michael had to come to terms with the fact that running was an idol in his life for a period of time. He derived his identity, sense of worth, and accomplishment from running. His whole life revolved around running.

What idols do people have today? An idol can be money, power, career, hobby, appearance. It can be anything that you rely upon to give you what only God can truly give.

Recommended Reading on Modern Day Idolatry

Book: *Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart* November 27, 2018 by [Kyle Idleman](#) (Author)

[Book Description: Join pastor and bestselling author Kyle Idleman as he illustrates a clear path away from the heartache of our twenty-first-century idolatry and back to the heart of God--enabling us to be completely committed followers of Jesus.

What do Netflix, our desire for the corner office, and that perfect picture we just posted on Instagram have to do with each other? None of these things are wrong in and of themselves. But when we begin to allow entertainment, success, or social media to control us, we miss out on the joy of God's rule in our hearts.

In *Gods at War*, Idleman helps every believer recognize that there are false gods at war within each of us, and they battle for the place of glory and control in our lives.

According to Idleman, idolatry isn't an issue; it is **the issue**. And he reveals which false gods we are allowing on the throne of our lives by asking insightful questions, including:

- What do you sacrifice for?
- What makes you mad?
- What do you worry about?
- Whose applause do you long for?

We're all wired for worship, but we often end up valuing and honoring the idols of money, sex, food, romance, success, and many others that keep us from the intimate relationship with God that we desire.

In this updated and expanded edition of *Gods at War*, Idleman adds a new introduction as well as new content about the battle many of us face with technology, whether we are tempted to send just one more text, stay online when our bodies need rest, or put email before in-person relationships, teaching us how to seek God with our whole heart instead.]

Idolatry is the number one issue in the Bible. It is one of only four sins with the death penalty attached to it. What do I sacrifice for, or pursue? Family, wanting to be accepted, pleasing friends can all be idols.

Book: *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone*, Revised and Updated January 29, 2016 by [Elyse M. Fitzpatrick](#) (Author)

[Book Description: Do you feel discouraged, even defeated, in your battle against habitual sin? Are you dismayed or surprised by the situations that bring out your fear, anger, or distress? Elyse Fitzpatrick delves into the heart of the problem: deep down, we're all idol-worshippers who put our loves, desires, and expectations in God's place and then suffer the consequences of our misplaced affections. Yet God loves his people and can use even our

messy lives and struggles for his glory. Fitzpatrick shows us how to better search and know our hearts, long for our gracious Savior, and resist and crush our false gods. Includes questions for further thought. Revised edition.]

Do I love God with all my heart or are there other gods vying for my heart? Does God get my undivided passion?

“Just to be safe” the Children of Israel brought in other gods of the nations around them. They worshipped the true God but did this as well...just to be safe. God says, “No! You serve me and me alone!” He is a jealous God, jealous for our undivided hearts.

Book: *Sex & Money: Pleasures that Leave You Empty and Grace that Satisfies* by Paul David Tripp

[Book Description: Pleasure. We live in a world obsessed with finding it, passionate to enjoy it, and desperate to maintain it. Chief among such pleasures are sex and money--two pleasures unrivaled in their power to captivate our attention, demand our worship, and drive us to hide or to despair.

You don't have to look far to see that we are in big trouble in both areas. Many of us see the battle. We feel the strain of the war. And we are eager for freedom in a world gone mad.

Seasoned counselor and pastor Paul David Tripp pulls back the curtain on the lies that surround us and on the distortions we often overlook. As Tripp thoughtfully exposes the insanity of our culture, he also wisely speaks to our own tendencies to fall prey to sexual and financial idolatry.

Sex and Money ultimately directs us to God's Word and the liberating power of the gospel, offering real-world advice, and giving us the guidance we need to find true joy and enduring satisfaction. Look for the companion DVDs and audio teaching, available at paultrippministries.org]

Sex and Money – neither can deliver on the promise that we think they are making. They eat away at the human community. They have the perverse power to master your heart. Each is more dangerous than we think.

Idolatry is a trick. It is a deception. It lures you in. Sex and money give you a buzz of being in control but progressively change you to their control. Each gives you a sense of well-being but can't satisfy your heart. Both seduce you with the prospect of contentment, but both leave you empty and craving more. They sell you the lie that physical pleasure is the path to peace. Only Christ can give you true peace.

Book: *God and Your Stuff: The Vital Link Between Your Possessions and Your Soul* – March 15, 2002 by [Martyn Smith](#) (Author), [Wesley Willmer](#) (Author)

[Book Description: Explore the biblical foundation for the crucial connection between our eternal souls and our earthly possessions. Learn how our use of possessions is a good barometer of our character, and how our giving practices develop our faith and shape us into the stewards God intended us to be.]

Our money and our stuff are important to God. So much so that 17 of the 38 Parables Jesus taught are about possessions. Possessions are mentioned 2172 times in scripture. 3x more than love, 7x more than prayer, 8x more than belief, about 15% of God's Word deals with possessions.

Sex, Money, Possessions are all important topics in scripture.

Dedicated Christians understand the importance of laying up treasure in heaven instead of on earth. Why do many Christians adopt the opposite attitude and lay up treasure on earth? Money attempts to imitate God pretending to meet every need. Money is perfectly set-up to be the idol in people's lives.)

Book: *Christian View of Money* by Mark Vincent

He gives 7 reasons why money is godlike:

1. It outlives you
2. It's circle of influence is greater
3. It's mysterious
4. It lives among the things we are tempted to worship
5. It mimics everything promised in the New Jerusalem
6. It is an instrument you wield
7. Everything can be economized

The more wealth replaces God in our lives the less we have need for Him.

C.S. Lewis, "Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels he is finding his place in it; while really it is finding its place in him."

Idolatry in the New Testament

So that we don't think idolatry with idols of wood and stone is only in the Old Testament we will look at Colossians.

When you read the gospels and the epistles the word "idolatry" does not show up as much. Why not? Because when Christ was speaking to the Jews, he knew they knew the Old Testament, they knew about the fall of Jerusalem and the exiles being the result of idolatry.

Colossians 3:5-8

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:^b sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, **and covetousness, which is idolatry.** **6** On account of these the wrath of God is coming.^c **7** In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. **8** But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

I want = covetousness = idolatry Covetousness is simply "I WANT", I want these certain things because of what I think they will give me.

Psalm 115:2-8

2 Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?”

3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands.

5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see.

6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell.

7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.

8 **Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.**

Idolatry dulls us to seeing and understanding God, his Word, his purposes and how we are supposed to live. It blinds us. We need to identify our idols and root them out.

That phrase “people will see but not see, hear but not understand” comes up repeatedly. Why? Because when people are given over to idolatry this is the result!

Here is a warning to those in Corinth:

I Corinthians 10:6-12

6 Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

7 Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”

Isn't that what many live for today? Eat, drink, play, be comfortable, have pleasures, travel, entertainment, music. It is not worshipping and serving God. It is worshipping and serving the self. What do I need to do to satisfy myself and make me happy? Not that the things are bad in themselves but what is the heart behind engaging in them?

8 We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. **9** We must not put Christ^c to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, **10** nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. **11** Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. **12** **Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.**

They were numbed and dull and thought they were standing. Do I participate and have idols in my life? This was the case concerning the Children of Israel in the time period preceding their exile. They thought they were fine.

Ezekiel 14:3-8

1 Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. **2** And the word of the Lord came to me: **3** “Son of man, **these men have taken their idols into their hearts**, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces. Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? **4** Therefore speak to them and say to them, thus says the Lord God: **Any one of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols,**

When you have a lot of idols in front of your face it obscures your view of God.

5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all **estranged from me through their idols.**

6 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, thus says the Lord God: **Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations**

7 For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, taking his idols into his heart and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, **I the Lord will answer him myself.**

8 **And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord.**

This was written while Ezekiel was in Babylon with the Children of Israel during the captivity. Idols will numb and dull us.

Consequences:

Jerusalem was destroyed

Temple was destroyed

People were exiled

“Then you will know that I am the Lord”

This is Joshua at the end of his life...

Joshua 24:14-16

14 “Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. **15** And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods,

Not us...we would never do this!

Joshua 24:17-23

17 for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. **18** And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

19 But Joshua said to the people, “You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. **20** If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods,

Just as people today serve God but have all these other attachments.

then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good.” [21](#) And the people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the Lord.” [22](#) Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” [23](#) He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel.”

Not us Joshua! Of course we will serve God. Joshua tells them OKAY if you are serious put away the foreign Gods.

Notice the occurrence of “worship” and “serve” together.

Worship = worth ship, what do we grant worth to? Look at my life – who am I serving, what do I invest my time and my money in?

Am I serving myself? Or am I serving God?

This can be very unsettling; it can be angering. What is Michael really saying?

I want to root out idols and serve only God. Think of the commandments Christ gave! Christ said to take up our cross and follow Him. Forsake all and follow Him.

It is a good idea to read through all of Jeremiah and Ezekiel to see what God was trying to get across to the Children of Israel.

Ezekiel 5:13,15

[13](#) “Thus shall my anger spend itself, and I will vent my fury upon them and satisfy myself. **And they shall know that I am the Lord—that I have spoken in my jealousy—when I spend my fury upon them.**

Think of a spouse whose partner has been unfaithful and the jealousy they feel. That spouse belongs to them, and their infidelity is heart-breaking. We belong to God. We break his heart by replacing Him with idols.

[14](#) Moreover, I will make you a desolation and an object of reproach among the nations all around you and in the sight of all who pass by. [15](#) You shall be^d a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the Lord; I have spoken—

God is emotional about this!

Ezekiel 6:9,10

[9](#) then those of you who escape will remember me among the nations where they are carried captive, **how I have been broken over their whoring heart that has departed from me and over their eyes that go whoring after their idols.**

When they finally recognize this...here is how they will feel:

And they will be loathsome in their own sight for the evils that they have committed, for all their abominations. [10](#) **And they shall know that I am the Lord.** I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them.”

God is saying that he has been heartbroken over their infidelity and whoring after other gods.

We love God. Christ is our savior. We have eternity to spend with God, the Lord Jesus Christ and fellow believers.

We don't want to cause heartbreak for God by pursuing idols. We want to be pleasing to God. We want our lives to be a delight to Him. We want to live holy lives and to pursue Him.

I encourage you to do some further study of idolatry to see the depth of it in the Old Testament. All the wrath and anger of God that was generated by this...who was that placed upon in our stead? It was all absorbed by Christ on the cross.

Read Isaiah 53 and think of the gratitude we should have towards God and towards Christ for what they did to save us from this.

Isaiah 53

1 Who has believed what he has heard from us?^a
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He was despised and rejected^b by men,
a man of sorrows^c and acquainted with^d grief;^e
and as one from whom men hide their faces^f
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,

stricken for the transgression of my people?

9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;^g
when his soul makes^h an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

11 Out of the anguish of his soul he shall seeⁱ and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,ⁱ
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,^k
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.