

The gods We Worship

“Part 4: Defeating the Idols”

Colossians 3:1-5

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 19, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Colossians 3.
- To be human is to worship. We are wired to worship. Cats meow. Dogs bark. Fish swim. And humans worship. As Bob Dylan sings, ***“you’re gonna have to serve somebody, yes, You’re gonna have to serve somebody. Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord. But you’re gonna have to serve somebody.”***
 - Since God made us, the Bible says, we were made to worship God. But as we have seen over the past few weeks, the human race has turned away from worshipping God to worship the good things God created. The Bible calls this idolatry.
- An idol is whatever you give your heart’s allegiance and loyalty to apart from God. I quoted from one author a few weeks ago who said an idol ***“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...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.”***¹
 - We make idols when we take good things like money, relationships, achievement, or sex and make them into ultimate things.
- To become a Christian is to turn away from the idols, to turn back to God, and to receive Christ’s forgiveness for worshipping these false gods instead of our Creator.
 - Christians are then called to make war on the idols in their lives. You can see the call to war in verse 5: ***“put to death . . . covetousness, which is idolatry.”*** So the big question is, how do we do that? How can we put these idols to death and so be free of their enslaving power?
- We have already begun answering that over the past few weeks. First, we need to identify the idols in our lives. To defeat an enemy you need to know who your enemy is. Second, we need to expose the idols. You greatly weaken the power of an idol when you really start to see how it cannot deliver on its promises.
 - So identify your idols. Then expose your idols. And now finally today, I want to show you how to defeat your idols. In this passage we discover a principle – this principle is the ultimate weapon to defeating your idols.
 - I will spend most of our time just developing and going deep into this principle and then I will end with some practical tips on implementing it in your life.

FIGHT FIRE WITH FIRE!

- Before I state this principle, let me remind you again why we worship idols. We worship idols because our hearts are captivated by their promises of pleasure.
 - For instance, the idol of alcohol promises that if you party hard and get wasted you will be happy. People get enslaved to alcoholism because they believe the promise of pleasure that it will provide. The idol of money promises that if you cheat on your taxes or cheat others to make a bit more then you will be happy. The idol of beauty promises

¹ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, xvii, xviii.

that if you give everything to making yourself look good then you will be happy. We worship idols because our hearts are captivated by their promises of pleasure.

- So how do you defeat the power of idols in your life? Here is the principle:
(SHOW SLIDE 2) Fight fire with fire! Defeat the inferior pleasures of idolatry with the superior pleasures of Christ.

- Let's develop that. Paul outlines this principle in verses 1-2. **READ 1-2** - *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*
 - And what are these earthly things that we are often tempted to give our hearts and lives to? Look at verse 5. **READ 5** - *Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*
- So do you see it? Our hearts and minds are easily captivated by the things of the earth – to sexual pleasures of all kinds, to great craving for more possessions as the means to happiness. That's verse 5. But Paul says we are to put these things to death? How? By focusing our hearts and minds on something higher, on something more captivating, which he calls “the things that are above.”
 - So you see, you can weaken an idol's power in your life when you expose it – when you preach to yourself that although this thing can bring some pleasure, it cannot ultimately satisfy you. But listen, this will not ultimately defeat the idols in your heart.
 - The key to defeating them is this positive command to set your heart and mind on Christ and all the things he has given you. As Jesus captivates your soul more and more you will find your heart yearning for more of him, seeking after him, and the idols will lose their appeal. Fight fire with fire.

A CASE SCENARIO FOR DEFEATING IDOLS

- Let's develop this with a case scenario. I will develop it around three fundamental truths that are underneath the principle. You can use this for defeating any idols but let's develop the case scenario around the first thing Paul mentions in verse 5, which is sexual immorality.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** Fundamental truth #1 - no one worships an idol because they are forced to. So take this example of sex. Sex is a good thing but we make it an idol when we lust – that is when we crave sexually what God has forbidden.
 - But no one lusts out of a sense of obligation or duty. No forces you yearn after the man who gives you more attention than your husband. No one forces you to go to those webpages that you shouldn't. No one forces you to let your eyes linger on that woman who just walked by. When we lust we do so freely and willingly. We lust because we want to, not because we are made to.
 - But why as Christians would we so willingly do something that we say we do not believe we should do?
- **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** Fundamental truth #2 – We willingly give ourselves to idols because our affections are captivated by their promises of pleasure. ‘Affection’ is an old English word that refers to your deepest thoughts, desires, and imagination. Idols promise to make us happy. That is the source of their power. Why do people cheat on their spouse or look at pornography? Because their affections have been captivated by the idol's promises of pleasure.
 - So once again we see that our problem is our desires. The question then is, “How do you change your desires?” Paul gives the answer in this passage and it is the principle we have been talking about.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** Fundamental truth #3 – The only way to defeat an idol is replace the heart’s affection for it with something more appealing. The only way to kill a desire is to replace it with a greater desire. An idol gets defeated when the heart becomes so captivated by who God is that it releases its grip on the idol. That is how our desires work. Think about how this works with other desires you have.
 - When I am scanning a menu for instance and I see a cheeseburger I find desire awakened in me. If nothing else comes into my heart, that desire will move through to action and I will. The only way to change the action is to change the desire. The only way this can happen is if a greater desire of pleasure comes into my heart. So I may think about my desire to lose a few pounds. If the desire for health is stronger it will defeat the desire for a cheeseburger and I will choose a salad. Or I may see the 8oz. peppercorn steak. Suddenly that old desire for a cheeseburger is defeated. It is completely expelled by a new desire for a peppercorn steak.
 - You see, the only way you can defeat a desire in the human heart is when you can replace that desire with something more alluring, more captivating, or more compelling. Defeat the inferior pleasures of idolatry with the superior pleasures of Christ.

THE POWER OF SUPERIOR PLEASURES

- Let me put everything we have said so far together in a fictional story about a man named Edward who dearly loved his wife Elizabeth. He lived in the most beautiful valley in the most scenic country in the world. But Edward had a serious problem; he loved food so much that he had become drastically overweight. His health and very life were in serious jeopardy. His family and friends were concerned and knew the time had come for drastic measures. In order to save his life, his wife and brothers knocked Edward out and imprisoned him outside of town in a one-room house they had built.
 - When he woke up he looked around the room and saw every delicious food he could possibly imagine. The smell of it caused his mouth to water and before he even considered where he was, he began to feast. It was then he heard the voice of his wife at the door of the room, ***“Honey, this food will keep coming every single day, but I will not. My love, I will wait for you at our house. Come to me.”***
- Now this room was like any other in that it had a few windows and a door. There were no locks and no bars that kept him imprisoned. But the door was narrow, less than a foot wide. Because of his size Edward could not squeeze through it. In that moment he was faced with two conflicting desires: gorge himself on food or deny himself all but a small amount in order to lose weight and regain all the pleasures of a free man.
 - As much as Edward desired food, he desired his wife, family, and freedom *more*. Some time later a skinny man was seen running towards town, shouting for joy and yelling ***“Elizabeth! Elizabeth!”***
 - You see the principle: The old desire for the pleasure of food that had enslaved him was defeated by the superior desire of enjoying the pleasures of his family. He fought fire with fire. Food promised pleasure but he defeated that desire with the greater pleasure of being with his wife and family.

THE EXPLOSIVE POWER OF GODWARD AFFECTIONS

- This is what Paul is getting at. Before he talks about behaviours in verse 5 he talks about our hearts in verses 1-4 because our heart’s desires will lead our actions. The way you defeat the

idols of your heart is not by exercising great willpower. The idols are defeated when you set your mind on how glorious God is, how much greater his promises are, how much more satisfying He is.

- Elyse Fitzpatrick writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** *“All other gods and their faint promises will pale when compared with the greatness and glory of the Lord. A heart that is crammed with thoughts of God’s beauty, kindness, holiness, majesty, greatness, and glory has no room for feeble counterfeits and will inevitably burst forth with fervent praises.”*²
 - Greg Dutcher writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** *“Being enamored with Christ is the best offensive weapon against idolatry.”*³
- Isn’t that what Romans 1 says? *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed...”* How is your life transformed? *“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*
 - Isn’t that exactly what Paul is doing in verses 1-4? He is seeking to fill our minds with the glory of who God is, what he has done for us in Christ, and what he will do for us.
- He says, *“Christian, just as God raised Jesus from the dead, he has raised you. Your old life is dead. Now your life is hidden with Christ in God.”* And then he speaks of the future pleasures and glory that are coming to you in verse 4. **READ 4** - *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*
 - You see what he is doing? Paul is saying, *“Christian, there is a future glory awaiting you that is so glorious. A day is coming when you will experience pleasure beyond your wildest imagination. Fix your minds and hearts on all these glorious things because they will enable you to put to death all the pathetic promises of pleasure that the idols make.”*
- This is the power of the gospel. This is why we say our vision is to be a church that is renewing our community through the gospel. Only the gospel has the power to defeat the idols that are destroying us.
 - Gospel means good news. It is the best news you can ever hear because in it you hear that God has done amazing things for you through Jesus Christ. You and I deserve nothing but judgement and yet, in Jesus, we get everything. A new life. A great future hope.
 - Let’s work this out with a few more practical examples of defeating idols.
- Paul mentions covetousness. Covetousness is when your heart yearns to get more wealth or possessions and is not content. How do you defeat this idol? Fight fire with fire.
 - Expose the false promises of the covetousness and fill your heart with the promises Jesus makes. Preach to yourself saying, *“Covetousness, you promise that if I serve you and devote my life to getting more and more stuff then I will be happy. But you lie because the wealthiest people are not the happiest people. Not only that, you have no idea the wealth that I possess. The Bible says that I am a child of God and therefore an heir of God. God promises that one day Jesus will inherit the universe and he will share it with me. The Bible says I am blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms. I am rich. I am wealthy. And unlike the wealth you promise which rusts, fades, and gets stolen, my wealth is imperishable and kept in heaven.”*

² Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart*, 202.

³ Greg Dutcher, *You are the Treasure that I seek – but there’s a lot of cool stuff out there Lord*, 97.

- When your heart is captivated by all the wealth you have in Jesus you don't have to obsess about getting earthly wealth that never can truly bring contentment.
- Another big idol in our culture is a party lifestyle. The promise is obvious: if you party hard, get wasted, smoke pot, then you will be happy. But the promises are lies. Have you heard the song entitled, "Chandelier" by the woman named Sia? On the one hand the song celebrates the party girl who drinks all night. She drinks and sings, *"I'm gonna swing from the chandleir. I'm gonna live like tomorrow doesn't exist."* Yet, it is also a melancholic song. She wakes up in the morning singing, *"Sun is up, I'm a mess. Gotta get out now, gotta run from this. Here comes the shame, here comes the shame."*
 - So when this idol makes promises to you the way to defeat it is to expose its promises of pleasure for the lies they are. And then fight fire with fire. God says, *"You want a party? I will give you a party. A day is coming when my Son will return for his bride. On that day I will throw a party, the likes of which have never been seen in the history of the universe. It will be a wedding banquet of cosmic proportions. Many will come to join the feast. And you will drink from the river of my delights for all eternity."* Do you see it? When your heart is captivated by the great party to come, the parties of this earth lose their appeal. Fight fire with fire.
 - Do you see what we are doing here then? It is very simple: expose the promises of the idols for the shallow promises that they are. And then set your mind on the far superior promises of pleasures that God makes.

PRACTICALITIES FOR DEVELOPING THIS MENTALITY

- So that is how you defeat the idols. Fight fire with fire. Defeat the inferior promises of pleasure that the idols make with the superior promises of pleasure that God makes in Jesus.
 - Set your mind on things above. Set your hearts on things above. Let's wrap this up now by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** some practical tips for setting your heart on the things above.
- Let me make two general comments and then give five specific practices.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** General comment #1 – Recognize that this is a process that will last a lifetime. The word 'to set' means a continual and sustained effort. Don't be discouraged when you don't get it right the first time.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** General comment #2 – This is a fight. The gods will not go down without a fight. Expect that battling the idols will be a lifelong war. Expect it to be hard. John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace* said *"If I may speak of my own experience, I find that to keep my eye simply on Christ, as my peace and life, is by far the hardest part of my calling."*⁴
 - So many days I wake up and my heart seems to care very little about Jesus. *"Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love."*
 - So we pray with Solomon *"May he turn our hearts to him, to walk in all his ways and to keep the commands, decrees and regulations."*⁵
- I wish I there were three easy steps to do this but it does not work that way. To set your heart and mind on Jesus and be captivated by all that He is for us involves a lifetime commitment of spending time with Him, seeking Him, worshipping him, and following Him.
 - Let me give five specific practices to guide you.

⁴ Cited in Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, 176-177.

⁵ I Kings 8:57.

- **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** First, fill your life with scripture.
 - Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Listen to teaching and preaching. Fill your life with scripture because that is where you get to know Jesus. When you learn that because Jesus rose from the dead you are fully accepted by God it dethrones the idol that enslaves you to the approval of others.
 - When you learn that because Jesus rose from the dead you are rich beyond belief it liberates you from greed and gives you the freedom to be generous. Fill your life with scripture.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** Second, fill your life with songs of worship.
 - Worship songs take truth and through the power of music ignite it in our affections. They lift up our hearts to taste the glory of God. As we sang,
 - *“Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature,
O thou of God and man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, Thee will I honor,
thou, my soul’s glory, joy, and crown.”*
 - Fill your life with songs of worship.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** Third, fill your life with thoughts of the future.
 - The risen Jesus is going to return one day. Filling your life with all that is going to happen as a result of that will radically change you. It puts everything in this life into perspective and strengthens you for the war.
 - Oh what pleasure. Oh what joy that day will bring: *“When with the ransomed in glory his face at last I shall see, twill be my joy through the ages to sing of his love for me. How marvelous, how wonderful, is my Saviour’s love for me.”*
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Fourth, fill your life with good Christian books.
 - Read books that exalt Jesus and capture your affections with the majesty, glory, and beauty of God. As Jesus captures your affections the spell of idolatry will be broken.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** Fifth, fill your life with Christian community.
 - We are all largely blind to our own idols. We need others. We need them to help us see clearly. We need them to point us to Christ for our eyes often fall away from him. We need to hear the preaching of the word. We need to sing together.
 - This is also why we are sharpening our church around community groups. The Sunday morning gathering is hugely important but the life on life relationship is critical. This is where we encourage each other in the war, where we pray for each other, where we serve with each other. Join a Community Group.
- What will enable you to defeat the idols? Tasting and seeing that the Lord is good. You will be filled with joy. It is the joy of the Lord that is our strength.
 - *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

PRAYER

- Pray with me a prayer from Anselm, the 11th century scholar.
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** *“O Lord our God, grant us grace to desire Thee with our whole heart; that, so desiring, we may seek, and seeking find Thee; and so finding Thee may love Thee; and loving Thee, may hate those sins from which Thou has redeemed us.”*