

A Light in the Valley

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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Lesser Discussed Sins: Idolatry and Covetousness

by: Justin Brewer

In the first two articles in our series, we looked at the inability and the impractical nature of requiring Christians to address every single sin in every instance where they address a single sin; in many instances, different sins may overlap and therefore it is impossible for a Christian to explicitly cover every nuance of every sin every single time they speak about sin. Failing to address every nuance, however, is not a tacit approval of those sins/nuances. Additionally, we looked at the sin of lewdness and how it has farther reaching implications than we might initially believe.

To continue our series of Lesser Discussed Sins, we will now turn our attention to two sins that are intimately tied together: idolatry and covetousness. In our Bible classes and sermon periods, we frequently discuss the topic of idolatry by its connection to the children of Israel in the Old Testament; it is clear

that idolatry had a profoundly negative impact on Israel (read the prophecies of destruction in the books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, as well as the events in captivity in the book of Daniel, for example). There is no denying that idolatry had a strong grasp on the people of Israel, too often including the kings (2 Kings 21:1-18; 1 Kings 18). Studies of idolatry and how it impacted God's people in the Old Testament is a worthwhile and necessary topic, but how often do we treat idolatry as though it were a thing of the past? As though we are too enlightened to fall prey to such fallible ideologies? Are we wiser than the people of Israel?

While there are cultures in the world that still openly practice idolatry, the actual act of idolatry in this sense is not so prevalent within the United States today (although an argument could be made that some pray to idols like statues of Mary or the cross, but that is be-

yond the scope of this particular article). If we do not physically bow down before an idol such as Molech or Baal, does that mean that idolatry does not exist in some form within our own culture? Does it mean that we no longer have to be worried about idolatry unless we work to convert someone from a culture that does bow down to such gods?

As we found with our study of the sin of lewdness, there are multiple applications of the principles encompassed within the overall term. As defined by Merriam-Webster, idolatry is the “worship of a physical object as a god” and the “immoderate attachment or devotion to something”. Therefore, there are two definitions (that overlap) to consider: idols such as Baal, Asherah, and Molech, and an attachment or devotion to something other than God (has a higher priority than God).

From the Scriptures, we know that God viewed the devotion of His people to Him as being of the utmost importance; in Exodus 20:3 God told the Israelites that they were to have no other gods before Him (note: this doesn't mean that they

could have other gods just so long as God was at the top, but rather that they were not to even bring other gods before the face of the true God) and in Exodus 23:13 the Israelites were told not to even speak of other gods. Through numerous Old Testament examples, we see that God often exerted His own power and authority over these false gods; the example of Dagon in 1 Samuel 5:1-7 and Baal in 1 Kings 18:26-29, 35-40 stand out awesomely (in the true sense of the word) in our minds. Through His servants, God frequently broke down and destroyed false gods; King Josiah in 2 Kings 23 stands as a wonderful example of a servant who destroyed idols in service to the true God. Are we as diligent as Josiah or Elijah? Back in 2001, people all over the world (including some Christians) were enraged by the actions of the Taliban when they began the destruction of some ancient Buddha statues; these idols were considered to be masterpieces. Why were Christians an-

**Therefore put to death
your members which are
on the earth: fornication,
uncleanness, passion, evil
desire, and covetousness,
which is idolatry.**

(Colossians 3:5)

gered by the destruction of idols? That is exactly what Josiah did in his service to God and it was what God commanded [although it is not asserted that the Taliban is/was acting on the command of God] (Deuteronomy 7:25-26). While we cannot necessarily go into the homes of others and physically destroy their idols (we are not a physical kingdom, nor are we commanded to do so), we are to actively destroy the influence of such idolatry where applicable rather than being enraged when idols are destroyed.

Physical idols fit well with both parts of the definition previously discussed, but where does that leave the Christian living in the modern world? Does the term only apply to idols such as Buddha or Baal? According to the definition, there are additional applications that we can and, in fact, need to make in our own lives. Remember that the second half of the definition is “immoderate attachment or devotion to something,” so idolatry can be anything that takes the place of God, is placed in higher priority than God, or on which we fixate to the detriment of godliness. What does the Bible classify as being idolatry? Covetousness (Colossians 3:5), materialism (Matthew 19:16-22), the created (Romans 1:25), people (1 Corinthians 1:10-17), the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 3:1-5), and the like. Christians today need to stop and ask themselves what takes the place of God in their life; while we may not fall down before Baal or Asherah, we have other forms of idolatry that can creep into our lives unawares.

For example, intellectualism, education, and extracurricular activities may be a form of idolatry when misused (remember that the definition is “immoderate attachment or devotion to something” so while there are some things that are not necessarily sinful in and of themselves, the misuse of such makes them sins). Too often, children are sacrificed on the altar of “success” by neglecting their spiritual welfare so that they can be the kid with the best grades, go to the best schools, be captain of the football team, etc. In such cases, parents generally make 100% certain that their kid is at school every day and at every school function, but lack any such devotion to assemblies, Bible studies, and interactions with Christians. In instances such as this, these activities have taken the place of God to the spiritual detriment of the participants.

Likewise, we spend our time working for the most expensive cars, clothes, houses, technologies, and anything else that causes us to feel important and more successful than our neighbors and peers. We often worship the almighty dollar and we are never satisfied with the amount of money that we have been blessed with. If

our friends, family, or neighbors are able to acquire something that we cannot, we covet what they have (remember the idea of covetousness in Colossians 3:5).

Idolatry takes the created and places it in the most prominent role in our lives; it is either greater than or equal to God (although if we make something equal to God, then it is arguably greater than Him in reality). There is an innate foolishness present in idolatry; if our idol is money, who created it? If we worship an actual idol such as Baal, who created it? Man creates both (Isaiah 44:13-20); what can an idol do of its own volition? Remember that Dagon could not even set itself upright. We too often (even Christians) worship the created (Romans 1:18-32) and pat ourselves on the back for how progressive and how wise we are; therefore, we believe in evolution where everything is corruptible as we are and our society becomes more and more wicked (2 Kings 21:9). In an effort to get rid of the true God, we plague our own societies; we profess to be wiser, more enlightened, more evolved, and even more compassionate than God, but our ideologies simply harm us. Like the Israelites, we throw away the blessings of God in favor of wickedness and humanistic ideas (reference Jeremiah and 2 Peter 2:18-22).

In this life, what will we be willing to exchange our souls for? Money? Fame? Education? Athletic abilities? Cars? Houses? Baal? There is a notable difference between idols such as Baal and Asherah and some of these listed things; cars, houses, education, etc. are not necessarily wrong or sinful when kept in their proper place, but they become wrong (idolatry) when we place our faith and devotion in them rather than God. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asked for “what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” Are these temporary treasures on earth worth losing an eternity with God? Should we exchange the souls of our children so that they might have earthly success? Again, in Matthew 6:19-21, Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Is our faith in the things of this world? Are we more concerned with this world than we are the world to come?

The best conclusion we can have is this: “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind’” (Matthew 22:37).

Coming Out of Babylon

by: David Maxson

Then I heard another voice from heaven saying,
“Come out of her, my people,
lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;
for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.”
Revelation 18:4-5

I've been reading a book by a professional marriage counselor, something I've honestly never done before. Though there have been some good things in it, there has also been some advice that has been downright disturbing. This professional advises some things (which I refuse to mention in this devotion!) which go directly against biblical commands and principles.

This shouldn't surprise me. I should know that since we are called to a much higher standard of love and commitment in Christ there ought to be a big contrast. Our thinking has been challenged and transformed by the cross of Christ. Our thinking in Christ should run counter to worldly thinking.

This experience has reminded me of the danger of books written by men. While there are some things I can learn from the accumulated wisdom of men, there is always a danger in it. While human beings can learn some things by simple observation of the way the world works, there are other truths that are hidden from their eyes because they reject the Source of all wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:2-3). For that reason, I should read human authors with a degree of caution, always balancing and critiquing what I read from God's Word.

Coming out of Babylon is not something we do physically. (Indeed, it is impossible to do so!) Let us not forget that the battle is for the mind, and it is our mind that we must protect with all vigilance (Prov 4:23).

Father, fill us with your wisdom and protect us from the deceptive philosophies that dominate and permeate this age.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

The Thoughts of God

by: Doy Moyer

Isaiah 55 gives us great insight into the way that God's word can supply the power to restore. Consider the principles we find here:

The thirsty (those who desire) recognize their need (they have no money), yet have the ability to act (come) and are motivated to do what is right (buy without cost). He says, "come to the waters," and buy "wine and milk." Not only does God supply what we need, but gives an abundance of that which nourishes, strengthens, and sustains. These are the spiritual blessings we share. "Buy without money" is a paradox. The price of what God gives us is purchased, but not with our money. Actually, He purchased us, not with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Contrast that with spending time and resources on that which does not matter (vs. 2). Through Christ, we are given the bread of life (John 6). Why waste our time and resources on that which ultimately does not feed us, sustain us, or nourish us spiritually? Instead we ought to "Listen carefully... Delight yourself..." (vs. 2). These are fundamental attitudes of the righteous (see Psalm 1; 119:14, 111). All of this is done "that you may live" (vs. 3). This is the simple message of the Gospel.

The blessing of life is "according to the faithful mercies shown to David." Paul used this passage to reference the resurrection of Jesus as fulfillment (Acts 13:34). Just as surely as God blessed David, made a covenant with him, and brought about its fulfillment through the resurrected Messiah who now sits on David's throne, so we participate in this glorious kingdom and share in that resurrection promise. God gave His word. It was sure. His word is faithful because it flows from His nature. Further, the promise God gave to David extended beyond Israel (vs. 5). It was a covenant with far-reaching implications, reaching finally to all nations, who, upon seeing its value and price, will run to the Lord to buy it without money.

Therefore, "seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near" (vs. 6). The process of restoration requires us to seek God according to His word. The power of God's word will always be there, but if we don't seek God through it, then we will never benefit by it.

Verse 7 contrasts our ways with God's. "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts" is to be contrasted with God's ways and thoughts. This

shows a basic distinction in authority and power. What authority does a man's ways and thoughts have? God says to forsake those so that you can listen to Him and partake of His ways and thoughts. "From heaven or men" is still the question to ask (Matt. 21:23-27). Shall we take God's thoughts or man's thoughts? Yours or His?

The distinction between men's thoughts and God's thoughts is especially seen in the concept of forgiveness. Note the progression from vs. 7 to vs. 8. "He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts..." We may have our own ideas of mercy, grace, pardon, and forgiveness, but God's ways are what matter. True forgiveness can only come through listening to God's thoughts on the matter.

The only way to know God's thoughts is through the revelation of His mind (1 Cor 2:10-13). We cannot know the thoughts of God unless He has revealed those thoughts to us. This is the point of the word of God – a revelation of His ways and thoughts. We must never presume to know what God thinks!

We cannot even begin to comprehend the power and magnitude of God's thoughts. We think we have so much figured out, yet we know virtually nothing. We cannot imagine what God is able to do and think (Eph. 3:20). We must not put Him in a box, try to limit His power and knowledge, or minimize the authority of His Word!

"He will abundantly pardon" (vs. 7) on His terms, not ours. This fact helps us appreciate His grace. That He has communicated anything to us is amazing, let alone given us an opportunity to be restored to Him through the death of His Son. If this doesn't motivate us to seek Him, what will?

God's word accomplishes exactly what God intends (vs. 11). People reject God's message, yet that is not a failure of the message, but of the hearts of those who so reject it. We may not always understand how or why God's plans are fulfilled, but we leave that up to God and simply trust Him for the results.

May God bless us as we seek to know and understand His will through His revealed word.

New Reading Plan...

Please notice that there is a new reading plan schedule for 2018. As has been our practice, we will be reading a segment of scripture multiple times throughout the year. In 2018, we will plan to read the Minor Prophets every quarter, reading through that section of scripture four times by the end of the year!

Daily Bible Reading

January 2018

January 1	Hosea 1:1-2:1	January 17	Joel 1:1-12
January 2	Hosea 2:2-23	January 18	Joel 1:13-20
January 3	Hosea 3	January 19	Joel 2:1-11
January 4	Hosea 4	January 22	Joel 2:12-32
January 5	Hosea 5	January 23	Joel 3
January 8	Hosea 6-7	January 24	Amos 1:1-2:3
January 9	Hosea 8	January 25	Amos 2:4-16
January 10	Hosea 9	January 26	Amos 3:1-4:5
January 11	Hosea 10	January 29	Amos 4:6-13
January 12	Hosea 11-12	January 30	Amos 5
January 15	Hosea 13	January 31	Amos 6
January 16	Hosea 14		

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