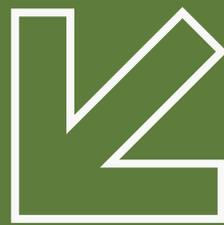
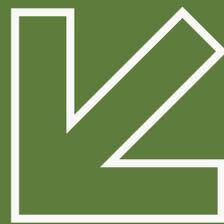


Week 4

The Problem with Idols of the Heart



The Problem with Idols of the Heart

Week 4

The essential dynamic of change in the heart of the Christian runs on a cycle of repentance and faith. Repentance is unmasking the idols of the heart; that is, the motivations for action from an identity other than Christ and then taking them to the Cross. Faith is trusting in the forgiveness of Christ and understanding both the depth of our sin and the worth of Christ's sacrifice.

"All of life is repentance." Martin Luther (Thesis #1 of the 95 Theses nailed to the door of the Roman Catholic church in Wittenberg, Germany)

Day One: Removing Idols from the Heart

Go to the Living FDFD website, Week Four, to listen to the audio resources for this day.

MESSAGE OUTLINE:

Repentance has three parts to it.

1. It is first the realization that we have placed our "functional" trust in something or someone other than God—something that cannot deliver on its promise to give our life meaning and satisfaction.
2. The second part of repentance is the practice of redirecting our trust away from false gods/idols of the heart and then placing it in God.
3. The final step in repentance is receiving the kindness of God expressed to us through His forgiveness.

This third part is important for us to understand or we can slip into "moralism." Moralism is the belief that we need to be good enough to qualify for God's kindness. In other words, it is up to us to get our act together and get back into God's good graces. Moralism is the practice of going to Mt. Sinai (the Law—try harder) instead of to Mt. Calvary (God's grace—believe better).

This can be illustrated by what Jesus said to Simon the Pharisee. Simon had looked down on the woman that had anointed Jesus' head with oil, wept on and kissed His feet, then wiped His feet with her hair. Jesus pointed out that she loved much because she knew she needed forgiveness and had received it (Mt. Calvary). This, Jesus pointed out, was just the opposite of what Simon did. He tried to justify himself (Mt. Sinai). (Luke 7:36-50)

This means that "repentance isn't just for the bad times—it is for all times." It is for whenever we discover we have trusted poorly—that we have looked to something in the creation to replace the creator as having first place in our affections.

One mistake we make in regards to repentance is that we focus on our sin and on what a terrible person we are. God would rather have us focus on Him and His goodness to us displayed in the death of Christ.

We need to constantly preach the gospel to ourselves:

Part One: We are far more depraved and wicked than we ever could have imagined.

Part Two: We are far more loved, accepted and forgiven in Christ than we ever could have hoped.

Ask yourself: "Have I placed my trust, my hopes and dreams, and my loyalty and allegiance in anyone or anything other than Christ?" If so, it's time to repent and believe better.

NOTES:

SCRIPTURE:

Colossians 3:5-11 NIV | *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

OBSERVATION:

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

Day Two: Understanding Idols

When God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, top on His list of "DON'Ts" was...

"You shall have no other gods before me." Naturally, we want to know what God meant by "other gods" (**Exodus 20:3 NIV**). He goes on to tell us in verses 4-5:

*You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. **You shall not bow down to them or worship them...***

An IDOL is anything that is more important to you than God. It is anything that captures the affections of your heart that should be invested in a relationship with God. It is anything that you hope will give you what only God can give.

our deepest longings, needs, and hopes. So anything can serve as an idol or counterfeit god, especially the best things in life.

Those words highlighted in verse five make it clear that anything that takes the place of God as ULTIMATE, or as the object of our PRIMARY allegiance, or as a COUNTERFEIT god, can be an idol. Unfortunately, it is the good things in life, like marriage, money, sex, children, and success that are the prime candidates for idol status. In fact, the greater the good, the more likely we are to expect these "idols" to satisfy

Question: What is an IDOL?

Answer: An IDOL is anything that is more important to you than God. It is anything that captures the affections of your heart that should instead be invested in a relationship with God. It is anything that you hope will give you what only God can give. An idol is something that is so essential to your life that if you were to lose it, it would make life worthless (for instance, money, a child, a job etc). An idol is something other than God that you look to in order to give your life meaning and purpose. It is whatever you have substituted for God in order to gain significance and security. (For a deeper dive, go to the Appendix and take the Idolatry Detector Test)

It is important to understand why God gave the command to 1) worship Him supremely, and 2) worship no other gods/ idols. What motivates these commands is His "jealousy." In **Exodus 20:5 NIV**, He tells us, *"for I, the Lord your God, am a **jealous** God."* An understanding of what He meant by "jealous" will give us a clue as to why God is so intent on us keeping these first two commands.

God is not "jealous" like we are. He doesn't grind over us having something He doesn't. His jealousy is more like the kind of jealousy we have for the affections and trust of our children. We want them to trust us, not the drug dealer that hangs out at school. We want our daughter to trust us, not the sweet talking guy who is three years older than her. We know we have our children's best interest at heart, and we know that those other voices and influences in their lives do not. Maybe a better translation of the word is "zealous."

God is intensely committed to His glory and our good.

Therefore, this command to worship God exclusively is a gift to us. This is true since the worshiping of other gods will only result in our experiencing less freedom, less satisfaction, and less of what will give us joy.

What are some examples of "idols" that are commonly pursued as an alternative to the pursuit of God? What makes each of these idols attractive is the fact that they promise us "relief" or "rescue" from a life of fear and insecurity.

Let's take money for instance. It promises to make you SOMEBODY... that you will finally be able to fit into the "club" of people who are thought to be smart and ambitious. It falsely promises that if you have enough money you will never fear again. Therefore, it promises insulation from tough times and circumstantial insecurity.

What about success or popularity as an idol? These promise some of the same things as the idol of money... the sense of having "made it." These false idols are an appealing substitute for God because of their immediate boost to our ego.

When we seek and prefer idols instead of God, it is often motivated by the very short-lived desire for the approval of others. In these misguided pursuits, we will find out that we are only as "popular" or "successful" as our last accomplishment. Again, this is why a person who chooses to bow down and worship an idol instead of God. Instead of curing our fear and insecurities, the pursuit of idols only makes them worse.

SCRIPTURE:

Exodus 20:3-5 NIV | *You shall have no other gods before me. 4 You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, **am a jealous God**, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me...*

OBSERVATION:

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

Day Three: Why We Are so Enticed by Idols of the Heart?

As you might recall, Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden against God's authority. They rebelled against His right to tell them what to do—what is right and what is wrong. We call this "God's Moral Authority." The immediate consequence of this rebellion was a break in the relationship between them and God. They had violated God's TRUST. Now, in a sense, they were on their own, deciding for themselves what would make them happy and fulfilled.

Immediately both of them experienced something they had never experienced before: fear, insecurity, and guilt. They were "naked"—not just physically but emotionally as well. Since then, all of mankind has struggled with the consequences of possessing a sin nature. We are SELF-CONSCIOUS, SELF-ABSORBED, SELF-CENTERED, and just plain SELFISH. Because all of us share this sin nature, we all naturally think we know what is best for us, what will fulfill us. Our first inclination is never the idea that God will fulfill and satisfy our deepest longings. So we naturally look to IDOLS—things like MONEY, SEX, and POWER/CONTROL to give us what only God can.

The problem is not that money, sex, and power are bad things. The problem is with us—we OVER DESIRE these things. There is a Greek word that is consistently used to identify our PROBLEM.

It is the word *epithumia*. It means to "over-desire" something that is good. Look at how the Apostle Paul uses this word over and over to describe our natural tendency to look to IDOLS of the HEART to give us what only God can give.

*"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify **the desires of the flesh**" (Romans 13:14 NIV).*

*"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify **the desires of the flesh**" (Galatians 5:16 NIV).*

*"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its **passions and desires**." (Galatians 5:24 NIV).*

"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." (Ephesians 2:3 NIV).

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires" (Ephesians 4:22 NIV).

We NATURALLY desire that which we think will help us conquer our FEARS and INSECURITIES. That is at the heart of why we pursue counterfeit gods and false "saviors." As sinners in need of a savior, we are attracted to "deceitful desires." When we "over desire" other things rather than God, we are hoping that we can overcome our fears and insecurities without bending the knee to God. This is a form of "self-salvation." Unfortunately, the result of this pursuit is disillusionment, more fears, more insecurity, and a life plagued with true moral guilt.

What IDOL of the heart do you tend to over desire? Why do you think that is? What does it falsely promise to give you that only God can give? (Reminder: see Appendix for the Idolatry Detector Test)

SCRIPTURE:

1 John 5:21 NIV | *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*

OBSERVATION:

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

Day Four: Why Secular Salvation Always Ends in Frustration

The Secular Story of Reality:

Creation didn't happen. The cosmos is a happy accident. We are not accountable to any one or anything beyond ourselves. Life meaning and purpose come from within, not from some other entity. Every person is free to choose their own path because their bodies belong to them.

The Garden represents our "Inner Child" and a time when we were innocent, happy, fulfilled, and vulnerable. The Garden can be the world that we have always wanted, even if it is not real. It's our idealized world. It's a world filled with cool people, cool things, and cool experiences. It requires nothing from us. We aren't responsible for, or to anyone.

The Fall is when our "Inner Child" or "sense of self" was wounded. It is represented by anything that we feel has hurt us or oppressed us. This can be the responsibilities of adulthood (a job, a relationship, the

burden of living consistently within the framework of a particular worldview). In this version of the Fall, SIN is anything that happens to us that we don't like. The Fall is seen as oppression from outside forces of culture, government, or anyone else in authority or power. SIN has made us all VICTIMS.

... when we are in charge, when we are free to design our perfect existence, when we think that this world is ALL ABOUT ME, we will never find the joy that Christ promised.

Rescue/Salvation comes from organizing my life in such a way that I can get as much happiness as possible. It means finding the right place to live, the right people to hang out with, the right job, and the right circumstances in which my Inner Child is never challenged or upset.

Why the Secular Story of Reality Fails:

First, self-salvation is hard to AFFORD. Buying the life that we think will make us happy can break the bank.

Second, the PEOPLE we thought would make us happy also thought that WE WOULD MAKE THEM HAPPY. And so now we are both disappointed with each other on a continuing basis.

Third, we are never quite sure that we have found the RIGHT PLACE to live, or the RIGHT PEOPLE to hang with, or the RIGHT JOB. And because we're aware that our youth won't last forever, we are filled with anxiety, wondering if we should stick with our current place, friend, or job or move on. After all, there might be a better OPTION someplace else. And because we are continuously anxious, we are never completely happy and fulfilled. We are haunted by the thought that we might be settling for something that isn't ultimate and amazing.

Idol Worship and the Secular Salvation Paradigm

The problem with idol worship is that it feeds the Secular Salvation Paradigm. And because it feeds this paradigm, it has the same PROBLEM: no rest and no joy. Likely the biggest driver of seeking "salvation/happiness" in something other than God is that it gives us a sense of CONTROL. But when we are in charge, when we are free to design our perfect existence, when we think that this world is ALL ABOUT ME, we will never find the joy that Christ promised.

Music artist Drake put it well when he

... the pathway to joy is to GIVE OUR LIFE AWAY as an expression of LOVE for others. On the other hand, the pathway to misery, anxiety, frustration, and broken relationships is to be self-centered.

said, "There was a point where I felt like I needed to keep the company of a different woman every night. I was trying to fill a void. But in those moments after sex, I'd know it wasn't working. Those quiet moments are the realest moments a man will ever have in his life. The next day I'd convince myself to do it again. But during that time, I knew it wasn't working."

Allow me to remind you what Jesus said to His disciples in **John 15:9-11 NIV**: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

In this statement of Jesus, we see that the pathway to joy is to GIVE OUR LIFE AWAY as an expression of LOVE for others. On the other hand, the pathway to misery, anxiety, frustration, and broken relationships is to be self-centered. We know that we are self-centered because we try to USE OTHERS to make us happy. When we use others instead of loving them, we are rebelling against God's authority and right to tell us what to do. We are commanded by God to do what we see Jesus do (love), instead of doing what comes naturally (following the "desires of your former ignorance" [1 Peter 1:14 CSB]). What we see here in Jesus' conversation with His disciples is that submission to the COMMAND of Christ to love others as He has loved us is the only pathway to JOY.

SCRIPTURE:

John 15:9-11 NIV | As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Romans 14:17 NIV | For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

OBSERVATION:

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:
