

Intro: PARTICIPATION – union, a share in a mutual mission, purpose, quest – “Fellow” meant one who belongs by “laying down a stake in an endeavor”

1. What is an Idol?

- a. An idol is anything that we *depend upon* for joy, happiness, fulfillment, and blessing
 - i. Participate = *koinonia* – to have a share in something, united in purpose, “fellowship”
 1. The difference between eating meat sacrificed to idols, which was purchased in the marketplace, and eating at an idol’s feast is the issue of *sharing in its purpose*
- b. Idols are NOT necessarily a physical object
 - i. Ezekiel 14:3, “Idols in their hearts” – idols are *affective*
 - ii. Am I participating in some endeavor that I believe will deliver Reputation, Approval, Beauty, Comfort, Immediate Pleasure?
- c. If it is something we feel that we *must have* in order to be OK, it is an idol

2. How Is Idolatry a Participation With Demons?

- a. We know that idols are nothings, powerless pretenders
 - i. 1 Cor 10:19-20; cf. 8:4, Isaiah 40:20; 41:6-7, 22-24
- b. Paradoxically, idols are all about gaining power
 - i. Idols are negotiated with to gain power in war, etc.
 1. Naaman brings loads of money to Elishah to buy his god’s power (2 Kings 5:6-7)
- c. An idol is used to invite a *compromise of dependence* with promises that imitate God’s
 - i. Set up *beside* God, or in addition to Him, not in complete exchange of Him
 1. “Did God really say?” – “Don’t you want knowledge?”
 - ii. The temptation, then, is to join in a purpose that is not God’s, but Satan’s, by seeking what God has shown to be found only in Him
- d. Idols are tempting to set up because we want to *negotiate control* (power) over our own lives
 - i. We want what these idols promise us, so we enter into negotiations with them, willing to compromise the exclusive glory that belongs only to God
 1. An idol makes us think, “It’s not that big of a deal” when it is participating in treachery towards God
 - ii. We compromise because we believe that *sharing* in an idol’s system will *functionally* deliver us from our problems
 1. They promise “knowledge” if we will eat the fruit...we eat...knowledge slays us
 2. EXAMPLE: Idol of People’s Approval
 - a. “If I never contradict people or tell them that they are wrong, then I am a Good Friend and people will be happy with me, and I will be OK.”
 - b. “If I upset others, then I am not a Good Friend and am shamed, not OK.”
 - i. So I get angry when people don’t notice my efforts or appreciate me!
 - ii. Or, I get anxious and depressed because my efforts weren’t impressive enough
 - iii. So I lie and remain silent when friends do evil, so that don’t disapprove of me.
 3. Every sin comes from the root sin of idolatry in our hearts
 - a. We think that *we must have something to make us acceptable and righteous* besides Jesus
 - iii. Paul makes it clear, however, that participating in an idol’s system (eating, sharing) is actually sharing the purpose of demons, which is to rob God of glory and destroy man.
- e. Negotiating with Idols is in contrast with God, who saves us by grace
 - i. Idols are manipulated and negotiated with by *performance* and *sacrifices*
 1. They never operate by grace: you either perform and *feel* accepted, or you fail to perform are rejected; idols cannot save you and they will never forgive you
 - a. “If I obey and perform, then I am accepted.”

2. This is why we swing back and forth in our life, because our tossing between success and failure of our idols (those things that define our acceptability and righteousness) makes us bounce from boasting to depression
 - a. Both success and failure with an idol is about getting power (sometimes you attain it, sometimes you don't, but the system is the same: works-righteousness, power, and control)
- ii. God can only be responded to by repentance – a loss of power
 1. Jesus' performance and sacrifice makes us righteous by faith
 2. We lose *our power* and simply receive by faith the performance and sacrifice of Jesus in our place
 - a. "I am accepted in Jesus, so I obey"
 - b. His glory and His righteousness is my salvation
 - c. His reputation becomes my delight as I progressively comprehend the gospel

3. How Does an Idol Compromise Our Worship?

- a. Demons deceive us into thinking that by sharing with idols, we achieve their promised blessing
 - i. Futility of Mind (Romans 1:20-23)
 1. Every life is distorted by a "foundational lie about reality"
 2. We functionally think, feel, and behave as if our idol can give us significance
 3. Idols spin out false belief systems of demands and promises, sacrifices and salvation
 4. No idol can possibly deliver on this, but we live in denial of it
 5. Our hearts operate like this:
 - a. "If I can just achieve _____, then my life will have meaning and joy."
 - b. "Since I have lost or failed _____, my life will never have meaning or joy."
 - ii. Darkness of our Hearts (Romans 1:20-23)
 1. Emotional confusion and frustration
 - a. We are designed to worship God and to find our meaning and joy in an unhindered worship relationship with Him
 - b. Our idols never deliver and so we get frustrated as they don't satisfy, leading to depression, anxiety, boredom, despair
 2. Oddly, we never blame the futility or evil of the idol, we blame God or others
- b. Demons are always intending to enslave you through idolatry
 - i. Whatever we feel that we "must" have, outside of God Himself, will rule us.
 1. Since we have to have it, our minds and emotions will be controlled by how we relate, or are kept from, achieving our idol's demands and blessing
 2. **ANGER:** If somebody or something gets in the way of *my mission*, I get angry.
 3. **FEAR:** If I fail to live up to, or perform well enough, to achieve for my idol, I feel fearful and depressed, anxious and worthless.
 - ii. Whatever we see as the "*functional ultimate good*" in our lives is what we offer ourselves to.
 1. Whatever becomes the "bottom line" of my significance and happiness, that which defines and validates everything else, it is this that *we will be driven* to do. *We have to have it* to be happy and *we must obey its laws* to be righteous
 2. As such, *we can grant lordship to idols and become controlled by them*, which is why Paul says that we cannot eat at two tables, i.e. you cannot serve two Masters.
 - a. Devote to one and despise the other – they have priority relationship to you and only one will be the "most trusted" – the functional lord.
 - b. This is how the eating of choice meats enslaved them – it became the "must have" to achieve happiness, their brothers be damned
 - iii. These anxious pursuit of our idol's righteousness, leads to the surface sins that we usually think of when we think of sin (lying, stealing, rage, unkindness, murder, etc.)
 1. We really do these surface sins because we believe that we must attain our idol's demands in order to receive the blessing (comfort, security, joy, etc.)

4. How Do We Avoid Compromising With Idols?

a. Learn to Identify Them as the Root Problems of Our Hearts

i. Look at repeated, excessive, uncontrollable emotions and thoughts

1. If you are angry

a. “Is there something too important to me? Something that I am telling myself that I have to have? Do I feel like something is being blocked from me that I think I don’t have in Christ Jesus that I *need*?”

2. If you are fearful or badly worried

a. “Is there something that is too important to me? Something that I am telling myself that I have to have? Am I scared because something is being threatened that I think I don’t have in Christ Jesus that I *need*?”

3. If you are despondent or hating yourself:

a. “Is there something too important to me? Something that I am telling myself that I have to have to be acceptable? Am I despondent because I have lost or failed at something that I think is a necessity when it is not?”

ii. Recognize what we are *participating* in to grant us blessing – what’s the point of participating?

1. These may be good things

2. But when they become *ultimate* things, they become idolatrous

a. EXAMPLE: Am I willing to move to another country if a certain person is elected president?

b. If I answer “yes”, then what have I been “participating” in to deliver my country? What is the *purpose* and *hope* of political rallies? Do I share it?

c. But when Jesus is my ultimate, and His gospel is my ultimate boast, then my purpose is not the election of a leader, and my hope is fixed upon God *alone*.

b. Bring the Power of the Truth of the Gospel to Bear Upon Them

i. Idols operate by negotiating your performance, and fear, anger, anxiety, and pride come from our performance, either because we have lived up to our idol/righteousness (pride, anger), or we have failed our idol/righteousness (fear, anxiety, despair)

ii. The gospel is the good news of grace!!!

1. Jesus has performed it all and given us His righteous and perfect record (passive righteousness) – *no idol will do that!*

2. Jesus has given His life in exchange for ours (atonement), His death paid for our failures – *no idol will do that!*

3. We give up power, we cease performance-driven righteousness, we humbly receive His work for us and entrust our blessing to Him *alone*, and this results in God’s glory alone (v31)

iii. You must flee from the one sin under it all – the particular *idolatry*

1. The Gospel: “Your problem is that you are looking to something other than Jesus for your happiness. Repent and rejoice!”

a. This confronts the person with the sin underneath the sins and behind the bad feelings. Our problem is that we have shared with idols and are trusting something other than Jesus to bring us acceptance and joy.

b. We have become enslaved “under law”

2. Paul tells us that sin’s bondage is broken when we come out from “under the law” – when we start placing our hope for deliverance upon Jesus’ performance (we believe the Gospel *functionally and particularly*)

a. Only when we realize and seize the truth in our hearts that we have the righteousness of Jesus *by faith* is the power of the idol broken in our lives

b. Romans 6:14

3. You will only be living “under grace” and free from the *functional control* of idols to the degree that you have both repented of your idols and rested and rejoiced in the saving work and love of Jesus Christ.

Summary:

1 Samuel 5:1-4 When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. ³ And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

Idolatry is always the reason that we ever do or feel anything wrong. So the secret to walking in holiness is to identify the idols of the heart and then bring the full power of the gospel to bear on them. Like the example of the idol of Dagon, God will knock them down, and we will set them up again in our faithlessness and unbelief. But He will knock them down again, this time taking some pieces off, and as we behold the gospel of grace to our hearts, these idols will crumble piece by piece and you will feel again the overpowering joy of freedom in the living and reigning Jesus Christ, who has authority over all things.

It is in the loss of power – repentance of our idols, and in our dependence upon Jesus’ performance and love for us – faith, that we find the power to be weak AND to be free. If you want to be free from the tyranny of your idols, turn to Jesus Christ in weakness and let His life stand for yours, at the cross and in the presence of the Father.

Right now think of your own heart: Where do I find myself anxious and fearful time and time again? In those moments, what am I thinking that I must have to be happy, significant, fulfilled, to have meaning in my life? Where do I find myself getting angry a lot? What am I believing that I must have that somebody is keeping me from? What is that thing I am blocked from that I feel will give me meaning? Now, let’s apply the gospel.

Jesus says: “My grace is sufficient for you. My power is perfected in weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Read Colossians 2:9-15; 3:1-4

So, repent and rejoice! Let us boast in our weakness, with freedom to repent boldly, for Jesus is our complete Redeemer yesterday, today, and forever. Your Husband is your Maker and Your Savior whose love is a compassionate forgiving love that transcends your greatest thoughts. He has done it all, and He alone is worthy of our allegiance, our dependence, and our highest love in worship.