

Unmasking the Idols in Our Lives

We're continuing our look at the cause of the unhealthy fears and anxiety which, far too often, are a very real part of our day to day lives. From the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-34 I've pointed out that the cause of our anxiety is misplaced trust. In my last article we began to look at Jesus' teaching that, "No one can serve two masters..." Either Jesus is our Master or we can be a slave to any number of other masters or idols, i.e., possessions or people that we place our ultimate trust in. God gives his children much to enjoy but he is our Master and his will must be the priority in all that we say and do. We must give him our first and our best not the "leftovers" of our lives.

A preacher once told a story of a farmer who had a cow that had given birth to twin calves, one red and one white. When he discovered his good fortune, he told his wife that he wanted to dedicate one of the calves to the Lord. He said to his wife, "We'll bring them up together, and when the time comes, we'll sell one and keep the proceeds and we'll sell the other one and give the proceeds to the Lord's work in our church." When his wife asked him which calf, the red one or the white one, he was dedicating to the Lord he said, "We don't need to worry about that now. We'll treat them both in the same way and when the time comes we'll sell them and distribute the money just as I said."

All went along smoothly at first. The calves grew together and seemed healthy. A few months later, though, the man came back from tending the cows looking miserable and unhappy. When his wife inquired as to what was wrong he responded, "I've got some bad news. The Lord's calf is dead." She said, "But you hadn't decided which one was the Lord's calf," to which he responded, "Oh yes, I always thought that the Lord's calf was the white one and now the white one has died." This illustration may make us chuckle at first, but it points to a truth that Christians often fall prey to. We often find ourselves giving Jesus the "dead calf" of our lives; the leftovers of our time, talents and treasures instead of the first and best. This will happen when we're trying to serve two Masters. We cannot truly serve the Lord Jesus as a pattern of life and be continually upset, depressed, fearful and angry at the things that come into our lives. Is there a way in which we can identify our idols; the things that cause unhealthy fears?

Christian pastor and author, Timothy Keller, teaches that one way in which we can find the idols of our hearts is by looking at the bottom of our most painful emotions. He writes, "If you're angry, ask, 'Is there something here too important for me, something that I must have at all costs?' Do the same thing with strong fear or despair and guilt. Ask yourself, 'Am I so scared because something in my life is being threatened that I think is a necessity when it's not?' ...If you're overworking, driving yourself into the ground with frantic activity, ask yourself, 'Do I feel that I must have this thing to be fulfilled and significant?' When you ask questions like that; when you 'pull your emotions up by the roots' as it were, you will often find your idols clinging to them."

This is exactly the point. We can become slaves to the idols of our hearts. Anything that we believe that we must absolutely have to be happy, fulfilled and secure in our lives, apart from God, can be identified as an idol. Nothing, neither our family nor our earthly, material

possessions, can be put in a priority position before God. If Jesus is our Master he must be the one whom we're seeking to serve.

Martin Luther once wrote, “[W]e must learn what it means to serve God, namely, to serve him in accordance with his word and command, doing what he has commanded and leaving undone what God has forbidden. When you do that, your heart can rest securely before God; you can do everything with joy, and your work or service will not be burdensome and difficult for you. Instead your heart will be filled with joy, for it knows that it is a true service to God and pleases God in heaven.”

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