

We Are What We Worship – Transformed Through Worship

11/5/18 – Pastor Randy

You have all heard the expression, “You are what you eat”. How many of you, like me, hate that saying? This doesn’t mean that if you eat pork you will become a pig, or if you eat beef you become a cow, although if you eat too much you might fit those descriptions. Dr. David Katz expressed it this way:

“...our bodies are made from the nutrients we extract from foods without resembling those foods. The nutritional content of what we eat determines the composition of our cell membranes, bone marrow, blood, and hormones. Consider that the average adult loses roughly 300 billion cells to old age every day and must replace them. Our bodies are literally manufactured out of the food we consume.” (NBC.com 7/25/10)

As important as diet and nutrition are to our overall physical and mental health, there is an even more critical issue I want to talk to you about over the next few weeks. That issue is not what we eat, but what, or who, we worship.

The title of this series of messages is “You are what you worship”. The physical condition of your body is extremely important and the way we care for our bodies is itself a spiritual issue, but the spiritual condition of our souls is even more critical. The spiritual condition of your heart is dependent on the purity of your worship because we are what we worship.

Psalm 115:1-13

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness! Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

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O Israel, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord! He is their help and their shield.

The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.

This description of idols as the creation of human hands which possess eyes and ears that don't work is repeated in four other places in the Bible. Three other instances in the OT and two in the NT. (Deut. 4:28; Psalm 135:15-18, Daniel 5:23, Revelation 9:20) The indictment on idol worshippers, that they will become just like the idols they worship, is repeated explicitly in Psalm 135.

However, there are an abundance of passages that imply that idol worshippers become blind, deaf and dumb just like their idols. Greg Beale writes, *"If we looked up "ears and eyes" in a concordance, what would we find? That wherever Israel is addressed as those "who have eyes but cannot see and who have ears but cannot hear or such like language they are being convicted and reprimanded for being idol worshippers!"*. (*We Become What We Worship* pg. 49)

Idolatry was a very prominent practice in the cultures that surrounded God's people in both the OT and the NT. As a result, a consistent theme running throughout the old and new testaments is the condemnation of idolatry.

Listen to the following quotes from Brian Rosner, the author of Greed as Idolatry

"In the Bible there is no more serious charge than that of idolatry."

"The Israelites were not simply to avoid idolatry; the language of prohibition could hardly be more emotive and urgent; they are to 'utterly detest and abhor' the heathen gods (Dt. 7:25f)."

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“It is not just that idolatry was one vice among many of which the heathen were guilty, rather, idolatry is a defining feature of the heathen, whose way of life is characterized inevitably by this sin. 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5, read in conjunction with 1:9, is an early Pauline witness to this conviction.”

“Just as keeping the first commandment was expected to lead to obedience to all the commandments, so idolatry was thought to lead to other sins.

Greg Beale concluded that Israel’s idolatry was the essential sin representing the Israel’s disobedience”. (We Become What We Worship pg. 38)

But how does this relate to us as Christians today? It’s good to know that God condemns idolatry but why is that even an issue for us? We are not tempted to worship idols? Idolatry is not a prominent feature of our culture so what’s the worry?

Idolatry is not limited to the worship of statues crafted by human hands. We can commit the sin of idolatry without utilizing physical idols. Ezekiel 14:3 idols of the heart. In Colossians 2 Paul equates greed with idolatry

If we want to understand God’s condemnation of the sin of idolatry we need to explore what it was that idolaters did with their idols and what God compares idolatry to.

What does God compare idolatry to?

In the OT idolatry is frequently portrayed as an act of “spiritual adultery”. That term derives from the notion that God’s intention is to serve as a husband to His people. When God wanted to express the severity of turning away from worshipping Him to worshipping idols and the impotent gods of the foreign nations around Israel, he called it adultery. Idolatry as “spiritual adultery” is at the very core of mankind’s sinful nature. Idolatry is about unfaithfulness to God; to treat something or someone else as if they are God.

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In what ways did the idolaters treat their idols as if they were God?

1. Esteem/Revere – I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. Isaiah 42:8

What we esteem and revere is evident by what we praise. When we worship God we pursue His glory. Our joy is to see God praised and honored by both the words and works of people. Idolatry takes place when we praise something or someone more than God.

In Thomas Friedman's book, *The World is Flat*, he described a conversation he had with a Chinese American Microsoft employee who had accompanied Bill Gates on trips to China. This Chinese American told him how popular Bill Gates is among the young people in China. He said, "students hang from the rafters and scalp tickets to hear him speak." Reflecting on what he heard, Tom wrote, "In China today, Bill Gates is Britney Spears. In America today, Britney Spears is Britney Spears - *and that is our problem.*" (See Pg. 365) There is a lot of truth to what Tom Friedman said, but our problem isn't that we worship people whose contributions are trivial and superficial, rather than those who produce something significant for the common good. Our problem is not that we worship entertainers rather than engineers. Our real problem is our failure to make God our supreme object of worship. What, or rather who we worship, is so vital, because we become what we worship. What we esteem, adore, and honor, revere, will shape us into its image. We don't impact what we worship, what we worship impacts us! There is an imitation that flows from admiration.

2. Trust in/depend upon – Idolatry takes place when we trust in something or someone more than God.

"They are turned back and utterly put to shame, who trust in carved idols, who say to metal images, "You are our gods." Isaiah 42:17

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Who do we pray to when in need? You say, I don't pray to anyone but God. Then let me put it this way: Who do we "call upon" when we are in need? What, or who we look to for our ultimate security or what we place before God has become and "idol of the heart".

3. Service/Loving Devotion - Idolatry takes place when we turn our hearts in loving devotion to serve and submit to anything or anyone above God.

"Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the Lord our God to go and serve the gods of those nations."
- Deut. 29:18

"For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God..."

- 1 Thess. 1:9

When Jesus demanded that His followers owed Him their primary and absolute allegiance He was essentially making a claim to deity. That is what God deserves!

Here is the good news! Although our worship has been misdirected leaving us spiritually blind and deaf, Jesus has come to open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He has come to bring back to life.

In the words of Greg Beale, "What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration." That means that even though we have all been ruined by the sin of worshipping other things and people as though they were god, Jesus has come to redeem and restore.

The concept of idolatry – man forming gods with his own hands from his own imagination – lays behind so much of what we read in the bible without us even realizing it. The prophets spoke of God as the potter who fashions us with His hands as a rebuke of idolatry. Idolatry is the work of man trying to

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recreate God in his own image or replace God with his own imagination. But God promised through Jeremiah that he would take the clay that had become marred and distorted and disabled and refashion it into something beautiful, purposeful, God-honoring, and very good.

Isaiah's prophecy begins with God's judgment on Israel for their idolatry and his prophecy ends with the prediction that God will restore his people as they repent of their idolatry. Isaiah promised that God through His Messiah would reconcile his image-bearers back to himself in Christ and bring them to life so they could once again see and hear God in all of His glory!

Idolatry ruins us by forming us into the dead, vain, empty image of the idol. When someone is reconciled to God through faith in Christ, God begins a new work of reforming and reshaping us into the glorious, beautiful image of our creator.

There are parallels between Romans 8:29 & 12:1,2 that point to God's redemptive purpose to conform (formed with) us to the image of Christ as he transforms (formed away from) the idolatry of the world.

As we worship:

As we express admiration, adoration, and appreciation through praise;

As we express our trust in him and dependence upon him through prayer;

As we express our loving devotion to him through our obedient service to His will;

The Holy Spirit will conform us, shape us, into the very image of Christ.

WE WILL BECOME LIKE THE ONE WE WORSHIP AS WE WORSHIP HIM!

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