Word of Truth Catechism – Q34

Lesson 29: Wednesday, April 26, 2023

Sam Jones

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q34. What is the sin of idolatry?**

Idolatry is worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God, our Creator.

Good evening church!

Ok, I am going to give you the benefit of the doubt since it has been several months since I taught. As a reminder, I am going to say good evening, and in a loud and resounding voice, you are going to say good evening back to me.

Good evening!

Excellent, my name is Sam Jones, I am a member here at Disciples Church and serve in various roles, including the tech team and as part of the youth teaching team. This midweek teaching year I was given the opportunity to write and teach three lessons. The lesson I am teaching tonight is the third lesson and I am excited to share it with you. The question-and-answer tonight is something that we all deal with on a daily basis. It is something that if we don’t understand and do business with, can lead to sin and a search for joy where joy cannot be found. Listen to this passage from Isaiah. It will set the tone for the lesson tonight.

**Isaiah 42:5-9**

**5Thus says God, the LORD,**

**who created the heavens and stretched them out,**

**who spread out the earth and what comes from it,**

**who gives breath to the people on it**

**and spirit to those who walk in it:**

**6“I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness;**

**I will take you by the hand and keep you;**

**I will give you as a covenant for the people,**

**a light for the nations,**

**7to open the eyes that are blind,**

**to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,**

**from the prison those who sit in darkness.**

**8I am the LORD; that is my name;**

**my glory I give to no other,**

**nor my praise to carved idols.**

**9Behold, the former things have come to pass,**

**and new things I now declare;**

**before they spring forth**

**I tell you of them.”**

Let’s pray and then we will dive in.

Heavenly Father, we come to you humbly and thank you for this day, we thank you for this time and place that you have given us to gather and study the truth that you have revealed to us in your living word. Father, I pray that I will speak clearly and truthfully tonight. That the contents of the lesson would be fruitful, encouraging, and convicting. Father, I pray that your will be done here at Disciples Church.

It is because of Christ that we pray.

Amen

Tonight’s question is:

Word of Truth Catechism – **Q34. What is the sin of idolatry?**

**Answer - Idolatry is worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God, our Creator.**

If you were to take a poll of the average person on the street or possibly even of the average Christian, about what the term Idolatry brings to mind, what do you think the answers would be?

Would it be an archaic scene of people bowing down to a carved or cast statue of some kind?

Maybe the person being asked would break that word idolatry down to its root word, idol. Now what does that bring to mind? What is an idol?

Is it a statue?

Is it a person I look up to? Like I idolize that person for something they have achieved or an ability they display. This happens a lot with sports figures and entertainers.

There is also a somewhat popular television show where singers compete to become the next “American Idol”.

These are just some of the more common ways we think about idols, but not necessarily the most common ways we worship idols. When we speak of idolatry, it means worshiping something other than God. That is the simple definition. To worship something or place something ahead of, or in the place of God. Webster’s Dictionary of 1828 says that “An idol is anything which usurps the place of God in the hearts of his rational creatures.”

**Jonah 2:8**

**8Those who pay regard to vain idols**

**forsake their hope of steadfast love.**

**Exodus 20:3**

**3“You shall have no other gods before me.”**

Let me read the question and answer again:

**Q34. What is the sin of idolatry?**

**Answer - Idolatry is worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God, our Creator.**

The answer says that idolatry is worshiping something other than God, our Creator. This infers that we should be worshiping God, because He is our Creator.

This brings us to what is known as the creator-creature distinction.

The creator-creature distinction helps us have a right view of our position compared to the position of God.

God is the creator, and we, as created being are creatures, more specifically we are His creatures.

Let me define some terms to help shed light on this.

Creator:

**CREATOR**, noun

1. The being or person that creates.
2. The thing that creates, produces, or causes.

Creature:

**CREATURE**, noun

1. That which is created; every being besides the Creator, or everything not self-existent. The sun, moon and stars; the earth, animals, plants, light, darkness, air, water, etc., are the creatures of God.
2. A dependent; a person who is subject to the will or influence of another.

**Genesis 1:1-2**

**1In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.**

**Genesis 1:26-27**

**26Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**

**27So God created man in his own image,**

**in the image of God, he created him;**

**male and female he created them.**

As Christians, we know that God is the Creator of all things and we are His created beings or His creatures. The creature owes its very existence to its creator. The creature looks to the creator for a purpose, to tell the creature why it exists. The creature might say to its creator “Why did you make me?” The answer to this question is pivotal, it informs our thoughts and actions, and it tells us who we are and how we are to live. The answer to the question is that we were created to worship our creator. The creature worships the creator, and our creator is a jealous God who does not allow worship of anything other than Himself.

Hear God’s law in the opening of Exodus chapter 20.

**Exodus 20:1-6**

**1And God spoke all these words, saying,**

**2“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**

**3“You shall have no other gods before me.**

**4“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

These first two commandments were repeated many times to the Israelites as they wandered in the desert. Moses reminds them before they enter the promised land yet again.

**Deuteronomy 4:15-24**

**15“Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. 19And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. 20But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day. 21Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance. 22For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land. 23Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.**

We see that God is very particular about whom we worship when we review passages like these. We see that God gives specific commandments about who we are to worship. But why?

**WOTC Q45. Why does God give the first commandment: You shall have no other gods before me?**

**A – So we will worship only God. He is the one true God.**

**WOTC Q46. Why does God give the second commandment: You shall not make for yourself and idol?**

**A – So we will serve, worship, and glorify God and nothing else.**

So far, we have seen that God is our creator and we are His created beings or His creatures. As created beings, we owe our existence to the creator, to God. We have also seen that God expects us to worship Him alone, we shall have no other gods before Him. An interesting point to the reading of this commandment comes from the meaning of the word before. When we read, you shall have no other god before me, it is easy to read that as referring to precedent or order. Meaning you shall not have a little g god in line ahead of God the creator of everything. An alternate reading would be to read before as “placed in front of” or “arrayed in the sight of”. Meaning you shall not array any of your little g gods in front of me, I Am the only God, nothing can change that, so do not give credit to your little g gods in my presence. I think this adds weight to the understanding of “having gods before me”. It keeps God in His rightful place no matter what. It also helps us see the insignificance of idols no matter what. God is unchanging, He is immutable, and He does not cease being God because our eyes and hearts have strayed to created things. Our sin does not have power over God.

I find this encouraging because regardless of how I get distracted from God and His truths, He is still God, He is still in control. Despite how out of control I feel (and by the way, we are all out of control) He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

Now that we have established who man is in relationship to God and that as created beings we owe God our worship, let’s spend some time unpacking what worship is.

I will start by defining worship, and once again I turned to the Webster’s Dictionary of 1828.

Worship:

**WORSHIP**, noun (Luke 14:10)

1. Excellence of character; dignity; worth; worthiness.
2. Chiefly and eminently, the act of paying divine honors to the Supreme Being; or the reverence and homage paid to him in religious exercises, consisting in adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving and the like.

**WORSHIP**, verb transitive (Exodus 34:14)

**1.** To adore; to pay divine honors to; to reverence with supreme respect and veneration.

**WORSHIP**, verb intransitive (John 4:20)

**1.** To perform acts of adoration.

So, worship is paying divine honors to the Supreme Being by adoring, honoring, revering, or venerating. This can be accomplished through confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and the like. The reason worship is due to the Supreme Being is due to His excellence of character, dignity, and worth.

In a word His worthiness. Worthiness means the quality or state of deserving.

Unbelievers often get hung up on the false notion that God is an ego-maniac to demand our worship or to be jealous for worship. The reason that God is worthy of our worship is that everything in the universe owes its existence to Him. If there was anything other than God that was more worthy than Him, He would not be God. And if God did not tell us the truth about how He is the greatest thing we could ever devote our affection to, He would not be loving.

God, the one true God is deserving of our worship due to His worth, His worthiness. His excellence of character, His dignity, His attributes, but chiefly He deserves our worship because He is God. He created us and therefore is our source of what is true. God commands us to worship only Him in the first and second commandments and throughout scripture. We will hear this teaching in greater detail when Questions 45 and 46 are taught so I will not go into greater detail here.

An interesting tidbit, when I was preparing this lesson, I did a keyword search of the Bible for the word deserve. I found that the overwhelming occurrence of the word deserve in the Bible has to do with those that deserve death. I found this interesting because I was looking for examples of why God deserves our worship, but instead found many reasons I deserve death. This made me slow down in my study and revisit the beauty of the Gospel, the beauty of Christ paying the debt I could not pay, and then doing business with how quickly I get distracted from this Gospel beauty and as a result stray from worshiping God only.

Suffice it to say that God is to be our sole target of worship. We have an awesome example of how this is to be lived out in Deuteronomy.

**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

**4“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

When we read this passage, it tells us that the act of worshiping God is to be a part of our entire lives. We are to love God with all our hearts, souls, and might. We are to teach our children to do the same. We are to do this when we are at home, when we are away from home, we are to do this when we go to bed, and when we wake up. That pretty much covers all times and all places, right? So, we are to worship God at all times and in all places.

Ok, we are going to shift gears now. We have focused on who God is and His worthiness for worship. Now we will shift from the first and last part of the answer to question 34, to the middle part of the answer. Namely worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God.

Let me re-read the question and answer:

Word of Truth Catechism – **Q34. What is the sin of idolatry?**

**Answer - Idolatry is worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God, our Creator.**

I will define each term as we go and unpack them in turn.

**I am going to start with a quote from C.S Lewis**

**He said it so well in “The weight of Glory!”**

**“…it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”**

The first term we come to in the answer is hope.

Hope:

**HOPE**, noun

1. A desire of some good, accompanied with at least a slight expectation of obtaining it, or a belief that it is obtainable. hope differs from wish and desire in this, that it implies some expectation of obtaining the good desired, or the possibility of possessing it. hope therefore always gives pleasure or joy; whereas wish and desire may produce or be accompanied with pain and anxiety.

To hope is to desire good with the expectation of obtaining it. So, we must ask ourselves what are we hoping for. What thing or person are you desiring to bring good into your life? It’s a little bit of a loaded question since we are studying idolatry tonight. This could be a long list depending on how long you spend thinking about it. There are many things in life we consider good. For instance:

Family

Friends

Food

Health

And I’ll throw a tough one in the mix.

Wealth.

All these things are good gifts from God.

**James 1:17**

**17Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.**

The issue is when we lose sight of the source of the good gifts and then put the gifts in place of the source of the gifts, God Himself. When we look to family or friends to give us the relationship that can only come from knowing God, or we look to food or health to define who we are (identity), or when the pursuit of money becomes primary. We are then placing the good gifts where only God can be.

This is the sin of idolatry.

I have found that defining the Greek word translated as “evil desire” to be helpful when talking about this kind of sin and how a good gift can become sinful or idolatrous.

**Epithumia =** Is both an evil desire and an over desire- an excessive desire.

The evil in the desire is not necessarily the thing itself. When it comes to idolatry, the evil is in the disproportionate value we give to the desire, desiring it too much. Desiring it in a way that we should only desire God.

So, desire for a good gift from God can become sinful when we over-desire it. When we experience this “epithumia”. When we do this, we are now hoping in the gift rather than God.

**Jonah 2:8**

**8Those who pay regard to vain idols**

**forsake their hope of steadfast love.**

Moving along in our catechism answer tonight, after hope comes identity.

Identity:

**IDEN'TITY**, noun

Sameness.

Identity means sameness, it means I am the same as something or someone.

I must admit that when I looked up the definition of identity, I didn’t think I would find the word, sameness. I thought it would say something like “a mark”, “a trait”, or “uniqueness”. But the more I meditated on the word identity and the definition of sameness, the more I came to understand how identity really works. You see, I thought identity was what made us unique from one another, like our name, or our ethnic heritage. But the reality is that we find our identity in what we are the same as. It is an external function more than an internal function.

Let me explain.

When I say that I identify with something, am I saying that I agree or disagree with that thing? I am saying I am in agreement with it or that it resounds with me. Another way to say it is when I look at my desire, then I look at the objects I desire, they are the same, there is sameness.

Here is another way to look at identity or sameness and our desire for it as humans. Whom do you tend to gravitate toward when making friends? Is it someone that has the same interests as you, maybe acts in a similar way to you, or listens to the same music as you? If you are a sports fan, do you identify with a person that is a fan of an opposing team or a person that is a fan of the same team as you? How do we represent which team we like? We wear their gear, right? A hat, a jersey, something to say which team we are identifying ourselves with. This is the external functioning of identity; we show the world what our identity is by what we are the same as.

Identity is not uniqueness, it is sameness.

**Idolatry is the honoring of things as ultimate that are not ultimate, and which, therefore, reshape us after their own image. (Ask Pastor John Interview)**

So, what are you the same as? What are you showing the world that your identity is by being the same as that thing or person? This sameness isn’t just what you wear, but how you act, how you parent, how you deal with stress, or how you make your money. Most importantly, how you worship your God.

The beauty of the Gospel is that our identity is Christ, which is also our source of unity. We are told to be in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Philippians 2:1-2**

**1So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.**

It is only in our sin that we think our way is better than the Lord’s way. We tell ourselves that we are reasonable creatures that know what is best for us. But listen to the warning against this kind of thinking found in Isaiah.

**Isaiah 55:6-9**

**6“Seek the LORD while he may be found;**

**call upon him while he is near;**

**7let the wicked forsake his way,**

**and the unrighteous man his thoughts;**

**let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,**

**and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

**8For my thoughts are not your thoughts,**

**neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.**

**9For as the heavens are higher than the earth,**

**so are my ways higher than your ways**

**and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

After identity comes significance.

Significance:

**SIGNIF'ICANCE**, noun

To define significance, I looked at the root word signify, which is defined as:

To mean; to have or contain a certain sense.

Or

To have importance; moment; weight; consequence.

When I give something significance in my life, I am giving it meaning, I am giving it importance, or weight, and this means that it will have consequence in my life.

Let’s reinsert this into our catechism question and answer by itself.

Word of Truth Catechism – **Q34. What is the sin of idolatry?**

**Answer - Idolatry is worshiping or finding significance in anything other than God, our Creator.**

So, where do we find our significance in life, or what are we giving significance to?

What has weight or importance to me? What consequence is this having in my life?

I am going to use myself as an example for an illustration of what consequences giving an over amount of significance to something can have.

Late in 2016, I came to Disciples Church after a long hiatus from religion. God quickly took over and I was saved and baptized shortly after I started attending. I entered discipleship and began to learn and grow in my faith. Now fast forward a couple of years, it is now 2019 and I am getting ready to start writing lessons to teach in youth as part of my continued growth in ministry. I am doing well at work and as far as I can tell it was going to be smooth sailing. Then in April 2019 I started to have bouts of dizziness and serious brain fog. In short order, I was missing work and completely wrapped up in trying to find out what was happening to me medically. I had so much blood work done over the next couple of years that I am surprised I didn’t run out. I went through just about every kind of workup you can think of, neurological, and cardiovascular, I even had sinus surgery because the doctors thought this was causing my symptoms. None of it worked, none of it fixed my symptoms, and as time drew on and I placed ultimate significance on getting better, I pulled further away from discipleship, serving, and even regular church attendance. Not to mention the chaos this caused in my family and home life. You see, my finding an answer, and ultimately a cure was what mattered most to me, it is what had meaning or weight in my life. And the consequence was that I lost sight of the only thing that really matters. My relationship with God and the beauty of the Gospel.

So, you may be thinking that since I am standing here in front of you tonight that I finally found the answer to my medical woes and that everything worked out ok. Well, that isn’t the case, the reality is that I had a collapsed disc in my neck that has since been replaced with a piece of titanium. But that was just the physical ailment, not the mental or spiritual ailment. The real reason I am here today is God wasn’t done with me, because He is faithful where I was not, and with the help of many faithful brothers, that didn’t give up on me, I was able to go through counseling and re-enter discipleship. Through these means God re-oriented me to what has true significance, namely him.

Church, what are you placing too much significance on or in? How are you allowing something in your life to have too much weight? Is that why you feel weighed down?

Hear Christ’s encouragement for you.

**Matthew 11:28-30**

**28Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”**

Now let’s move to the next term in the answer:

Purpose:

**PUR'POSE**, noun

That which a person sets before himself as an object to be reached or accomplished; the end or aim to which the view is directed in any plan, measure, or exertion.

That which a person sets before himself to be accomplished, the aim of a plan, the reason for exertion.

I recently had a phone conversation with a man I am close with. I have known this man for a long time, and he recently found out that he is going to be a father. This is a joyous thing, a new child is coming into the world, and to a man that did not think that he would have children. This is a man whom I have had religious and theological conversations with, but we don’t see eye to eye. When I asked him if he and his wife were excited about the coming birth, he told me that it would give him purpose again in life.

I don’t think this is an uncommon feeling for parents. The child gives purpose to the life of the parent. There is an object to plan for, a new generation to exert yourself in service to. Think of all the milestones we celebrate in our children, we start by announcing the gender of the child before they are born, and we have a party for that. After they are born, we share their first steps and their first words. With the convenience of social media, we share just about everything our children do with each other, and generally receive praise from our loved ones for the things that our children do or say.

We find much joy in celebrating our children, and rightfully so, they are a good gift from God. In fact, at creation, we were commanded to have children.

**Genesis 1:28**

**28And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

**Pslam 127:3**

**3Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD,**

**the fruit of the womb a reward.**

It is plain from scripture that children are a good gift from God and in the opening chapter of the Bible God commands man to “be fruitful and multiply”. With this in view, is it possible for children to become a source of sinful idolatry?

The answer is yes!

This is why I did not celebrate when I was told that a child would bring purpose into the life of the father. It is because the purpose you find in a child cannot take the place of the purpose God has for you, and that is to worship Him, not the gift He has given you. So how does this play out? Let me speak to the parents in the room for a minute, if you allow your children to be the most important source of purpose in your family then you will neglect your spouse. In your desire to make the next generation successful, you will set an example in your marriage that does not honor the purpose of marriage. And what is the purpose of marriage? I know we all know the answer to this being that Josh spent three lessons teaching it recently. The purpose of marriage is to put on display the relationship between Christ and the church. If your children take the place of this, then when your children are out of the house you may not have a healthy relationship with your spouse. And your children will not have the right view of marriage. Idolatry can pass from one generation to the next by the examples that are set in the home.

So, as Christians, we must look to Christ for our purpose. There is a verse that we like to quote a lot:

**Romans 8:28**

**28And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**

The verse said called according to **His** purpose, not called according to our purpose or desire. So, as Christians what is the purpose that we are given in Christ?

**Matthew 28:18-20**

**18And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”**

As a Christian, your purpose is what God tells you it is. Just before Christ ascended into heaven, He gave the purpose of His church to the disciples. That purpose is to spread the Gospel to all nations and to make disciples. Not just evangelize and move on to the next person or group but make disciples. This means an intentional walking with and demonstrating how to live as a Christian. This is what we are committed to here at Disciples Church. That is why we are called Disciples Church.

Ok, let’s move to the final term in the answer.

Security:

**SECU'RITY**, noun

Protection; effectual defense or safety from danger of any kind.

Freedom from fear or apprehension; confidence of safety.

Anything given or deposited to secure the payment of a debt, or the performance of a contract.

Security is a term that is used expansively in our current cultural and world context. There are security systems for your house. There are many people that have cameras on their doorbells to be able to see who comes and goes from their homes. We have a standing military that helps secure our borders and is used throughout the world to secure the interests of the nation. We have a security team here at the church to keep watch while we meet. In fact, there are men serving tonight in this capacity.

We have all this security to create confidence in safety or freedom from fear or apprehension of danger. All the examples I have given so far have to do with physical security, meaning protection from physical harm from another person or thing.

But for this term of security, I want to focus on another kind of security that we can easily allow to become an idol. And that is the security of financial wealth.

In our current Western culture, it is hard to find a more pervasive idol than money. I say current culture as if this is something new when we know from scripture that this is nothing new. However, we are more consumer-driven today than maybe anytime in the past. This is largely due to the ability for products to be made and shipped faster than in time in history, this being the supply side of the equation. But this is drive even more so due to the other side of the equation, demand. The devices that each of us has in our pocket right now give us the ability to be constantly bombarded with advertisements for stuff that will fulfill our lives, right? A new house, a new car, new clothing, what’s the latest trend, you don’t have to go far to find out and be part of it. And what fuels all of this? Money.

I understand that I am painting a very one-sided picture here, but we are talking about idolatry. We have already talked about how identity can become idolatry. The mechanism for much of this finding identity or sameness is money.

The danger is finding your peace in having the new thing or having a certain balance in the savings account. We are called to steward our money according to God’s standards, not the world’s. This is such a pervasive issue that it is spoken about over and over in scripture.

**Matthew 6:24**

**“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.**

**Hebrews 13:5**

**Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”**

So, we have established that money can be made into an idol, let’s up the ante and throw another item we struggle with into the pot of security.

Time.

The phrase goes “Time is money”. We have a limited amount of time to make money, and unfortunately, in most careers the more time you spend at work, the more money you will make. This quickly degenerates into a life of serving work for the sake of money. The excuse we tell ourselves is that the money we make by sacrificing our time to work will pay for our loved ones to have a better life.

But let me ask the parents in the room with grown children. What do your kids remember more, the shiny present you bought them for Christmas in 1995 or the time you sat down with them and talked out a serious issue?

This is an area that hits close to home for me. I am currently the Assistant General Manager of a railroad. I don’t know if that means much to you, but what it meant for me and my career path was that I spent many, many, many hours at work. And I did it well, and I supported my family, and my daughter had better toys than I did growing up, went to better schools, and had nicer clothes. But you know what she didn’t have, a present father. That has changed to a large degree by the grace of God, and it continues to change through discipleship.

The lesson here is, if you find your security in the money you make, you will be disappointed. If you exchange the one commodity that you can’t get back and spend too much time at work in pursuit of money, or status. Then you will not be present to do the work the Lord has for you in your family and beyond.

Listen to the warnings that are given to us in the epistle of James.

**James 4:13-17**

**13Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— 14yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. 15Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.” 16As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. 17So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

**James 5:1-6**

**1Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. 2Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. 3Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. 4Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.**

So, how do we do battle with all this idolatry that surrounds us each day?

The answer is the anthesis of the answer to tonight’s question.

**Idolatry is worshiping or finding hope, identity, significance, purpose, or security in anything other than God, our Creator.**

Instead of worshiping or finding hope in anything other than God, our Creator, we worship only God. We look to God for our hope, identity, significance, purpose, and security.

We make time every day to dig into our Bibles and use what we learn to fan the flames of our faith. I know that this has been said over and over from this stage, but that is because it is true. If you wish to have strong faith, then you must feed it with the living word of God.

You must also be present in the body of Christ, His church. We are not solitary creatures; it is not how we were designed. We are designed for community, and we are commanded to be subject to our shepherds. This is the design of the good God.

This is how you battle idolatry in your life, not on your own, but with the help of God and your brothers and sisters around you.

Amen!

In closing, I have a song that I find helpful to listen to when I am struggling with re-occurring sin or idolatry.

It is the song “Sirens” from the group Gray Havens. The lyrics speak of the call of sin on our hearts but the truth that Christ is better.

**Hold on my heart  
You once were full and sang of grace  
Hold on**

**One taste of the sound  
From the sirens in the water  
And I'm thinking I should get out  
The sharpest sword and suit of armor  
So I can be ready to strike  
But I pause, one more time  
One last taste of the sound  
Then I'll cut these sirens down  
But as they sang, I forgot  
They were death, so I brought them my heart  
To be filled, and I followed them**

**No trace could I find  
Of any joy the sirens promised  
They had found a way with a lie  
To turn what's good and should be wanted  
Into what is highest above all desires and loves  
Til my heart would obey  
Whatever it wants whatever it takes  
To feel alive and set free  
Only bound to the sea  
Where the sirens are leading me on**

**Hold on  
Hold on, my heart  
You once were full and sang of grace  
Hold on  
Hold on, my heart  
You've tasted joy that's more than this**

Pray with me:

Father God, you are our creator and we know that all good gifts come from you. We know that we are lost apart from you and thank you for the grace you showed us in sending Jesus to pay the debt we could not by dying in our place. Father, I pray for everyone here as they go to their groups or head out from the church back into our community. Lord may our conversations be fruitful, sin be brought into the light, repented of, and a new path taken. Father, we love you!

It is because of Christ that we pray.

Amen.