

GOSPEL 101
NOVEMBER 19, 2023
GOSPEL THIEVES – PART 2

REVIEW

Tim Keller: The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not “used” the gospel in and on all parts of our life... All of us, to some degree live around the truth of the gospel but do not “get” it. So the key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual re-discovery of the gospel.¹

GOSPEL THIEVES: TWO WAYS TO LIVE²

Tertullian: “Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so this doctrine of justification is ever crucified between two opposite errors.”

THIEF 1 - Moralism / Religion - we must obey in order to be saved/blessed.

THIEF 2 - Relativism / Irreligion - we are all accepted by God, and we decide what is true for us.

Case Study: Parable of Prodigal Son

Which “thief” does the younger brother resemble? The elder brother?

Which brother are you most like today?

Of the two, which one is the more spiritually dangerous position?

BOTTOM LINE - My heart is an idol factory

THIEF 3: IDOLS

Martin Luther - “The truth of the Gospel is the principal article of all Christian doctrine... Most necessary is it therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.” In other words, **the way to deeper spiritual growth is a continual focus on the Gospel** – comprehending more of its truth and discovering new implications for our lives.”

Why do we have to beat it into our heads?

1. Head – We _____. Psalm 43:5

2. Heart – Our _____. Idols: Jesus + X = Happy

¹ Excerpt from Tim Keller’s article “The Centrality of the Gospel”. Available in pdf by request. Send me an email at nperegoy@oflc.net.

² Missed last week? Shoot me an email for the handout and a deep dive on these things.

Core Idols: _____, _____, _____, _____

For My Reflection – What am I adding to Jesus to be happy?

READ GENESIS 3:1-6

1. What are the lies of the Evil One?
 - a. Doubt God's _____ ("Did God really say?" 3:1)
 - b. Minimize the _____ ("You will not surely die" 3:4)
 - c. Promise false _____ ("You will be like God, knowing good and evil")

2. True or False: Adam and Eve were sinless before they ate the fruit. (*Apple?*)

For My Reflection – How do I buy into the lies of the Evil One when I am tempted in my recurring sin?

IDOLS AND THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Martin Luther's *Large Catechism* begins with a shrewd reflection on the first commandment: "You are to have no other gods."

That is, you are to regard me alone as your God. What does this mean, and how is it to be understood? What does "to have a god" mean, or what is God?

Answer: A "god" is the term for that to which we are to look for all good and in which we are to find refuge in all need. Therefore, to have a god is nothing else than to trust and believe in that one with your whole heart. As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust are right, then your God is the true one. Conversely, where your trust is false and wrong, there you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God. **Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God.**³

HOW DO IDOLS FUNCTION LIKE "gods"?

John Calvin "The human heart is an idol _____."

Tim Keller – An idol is not a _____ desire for something bad, but an _____ desire for something good.⁴

³ See Luther's *Large Catechism*, and his commentary on the First Commandment in the section about the Ten Commandments

⁴ Keller's sermon on Galatians 4:8-20 is a fantastic deep dive on this. Available by request.

Examples:

- Money - can be a way to control your world and life (spend it to get comfort, or to save it to keep control)
- Sex – can be a way to get power over others, feel approved and loved, or experience pleasure and comfort (even within marriage)
- Work – a commandment of God, can become an idol if it’s pursued so exclusively that responsibilities to one’s family is ignored or one chooses dishonest means to move upward
- Family – an institution of God himself, can become an idol if one is so preoccupied with the well-being of one’s spouse and children at the exclusion of other responsibilities and relationships outside the family
- Being well-liked is a legitimate hope, but becomes an idol if the attachment means one never risks disapproval or compromises in order to maintain a good opinion in the eyes of others

For My Reflection – What good things am I using because I have an inordinate desire for something deeper?

WHAT ARE THE CORE IDOLS UNDERNEATH?

When You Seek ⁵	Inner Needs ⁶	Your Greatest Nightmare	Others May Feel ⁷	Problematic Responses
Power	Success Winning Influence	Humiliation Surrender Inadequacy	Used Small	Anger Weakness
Approval	Affirmation Love Relationships	Criticism Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice Withdrawing
Comfort	Freedom Pleasure	Stress Demands Hardship	Neglected	Boredom
Control	Self-discipline Standards Certainty	Obligations Surrender Uncertainty	Condemned Controlled Criticized	Worry Perfection

For My Reflection - How would I rank the core idols (power, comfort, approval, control) in order of importance to me in this season of my life?

⁵ Adapted from *Gospel in Life*, p44. I’ve added a few things to fill out the chart

⁶ These inner needs aren’t bad things, but you can tell they’re problematic because without them, you’re anxious, resentful, hurt, etc. See reflection question below about the pain you feel when you hear your slave masters calling your name.

⁷ You are probably blind to how others may feel.

HOW DO I TELL WHICH CORE IDOLS ARE MY FUNCTIONAL TRUST?

“The pain I feel (without my idol) is the sound of my slave masters calling my name”⁸

The question is not if you have idols, it’s in what particular order they matter to you.

A Few Diagnostic Questions

- o What triggers my anger?
- o What keeps me up at night?
- o Where does my mind wander when I’m idle?
- o What do my gifts of money and time effortlessly go?
- o What do I do when I’m not with others?

For My Reflection – “The pain I feel (without my idol) is the sound of my slave masters calling my name” Consider, how does the pain of my inordinate desire (anxiety, fear, anger, loss, etc.) signal an idol that is demanding that I serve it?”

OKAY, NOW WHAT?⁹ THREE WAYS TO DEAL WITH MY IDOLS

1. _____ Approach– “Your problem is that what you’re doing is wrong. Repent!”

Emphasis: _____ / Doing

This approach focuses on behavior but doesn’t go deeply enough. We must find out the why of our behavior. Why do I find I want to do the wrong things? What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them?

2. _____ Approach – “Your problem is that you aren’t experiencing that God loves you. Rejoice!”

Emphasis: _____ / Being

This approach seems to go deeper than behaviors, but also fails to go deeply enough. We must also find out the why of our feelings. Why do I have such feelings of despair, or anger or fear if this or that happens? What inordinate desires are being frustrated? What are the false promises behind them? (See Psalm 43:5)

⁸ Here again, more Keller. It’s something I’ve heard Keller say in a sermon.

⁹ Excerpts from Tim Keller’s *Gospel in Life* home study, p.43ff. The entire chapter is fantastic, and I recommend that you read it slowly for yourself if this session’s content is resonating for you. It’s available in pdf by request. Send me an email.

Telling someone else or yourself that “God loves you, so rejoice” is insufficient, because you still hold a belief that says, “Even if God loves you, (but you don’t have this particular thing that you treasure), you are still a failure.”

3. _____ Approach - Your basic problem is that you are looking to something in addition to Christ and have made it your source of true happiness. You have been worshipping an idol. Repent **and** rejoice that you may rest in the finished work of Christ for you!

For My Reflection – How does the finished work of Jesus connect to my core idols today? What do I see Him losing so that I can rest and rejoice in Him whether I have my idols on earth or not?

WRAP UP

- What am I adding to Jesus to be happy?
- How do I buy into the lies of the Evil One when I am tempted in my recurring sin?
- What good things am I using because I have an inordinate desire for something deeper?
- How would I rank the core idols (power, comfort, approval, control) in order of importance to me in this season of my life?
- How does the finished work of Jesus connect to my core idols today? What do I see Him losing so that I can rest and rejoice in Him whether I have my idols on earth or not?

QUESTIONS?

PREVIEW

Gospel Themes – Adoption