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“A Prayer for Idol Hearts”

Jeremiah 10

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Idolatry was a problem that plagued Israel throughout their history. For the Israelites, idolatry was the worship of man-made, hand-carved objects of wood and stone, instead of the true and living God. It seems primitive and senseless to us that people would actually bow down to worship inanimate objects, but the truth is you don't have to carve, pray to, or worship something for it to be an idol. Anything that compromises our devotion to God or competes with our affection for God is potentially an idol. An idol is not always something bad itself; it can be a regular thing that becomes an ultimate thing in our lives which we serve with our time, energy, and money. Are there idols in your life that you have elevated to a position above God? Are there things, people, or practices that have stolen your heart and rob God of the glory he is due?

Historical Background

1. The Golden Calf Debacle
 - a. God freed the Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt.
 - b. Not long after they entered the Sinai Peninsula, the people were encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai.
 - c. Moses was on Mt. Sinai meeting with God for 40 days and 40 nights, during which time God gave him the Ten Commandments.
 - d. **Exodus 32:1-4** - *“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ ”*

- e. Pastor Gary said: “[The reason they chose a golden calf was] because of the culture they had just left. The bull god was the most sacred animal among all the Egyptians, and they worshiped the bull god, Apis, more than any other animal in Egypt. [When] the heart is inclined to worship and [the heart] doesn’t move God-ward, [the heart] moves laterally. [We often] worship things that our culture is influencing us to worship. [And this is what happened to the Israelites, they chose] golden calves because that’s what they [had seen] in Egypt. ... [Our] innate need to worship... combined with the influence of the culture around us, leads to idolatry.”
2. The people in Jeremiah’s day followed the same idolatrous model as their forefathers, but Jeremiah spoke the word of the Lord, which clearly stated his directive.
 - a. **Jeremiah 10:1-2** - *“Hear what the LORD says to you, O house of Israel. This is what the LORD says: ‘Do not learn the ways of the nations...’ ”*
 3. The people in Jeremiah’s day worshiped two idols: Molech, the god of the Ammonites, and Baal, the god of the Canaanites.
 - a. **Jeremiah 10:3-4** - *“For the customs of the peoples are worthless; they cut a tree out of the forest, and a craftsman shapes it with his chisel. They adorn it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so it will not totter.”*
 - i. Pastor Gary commented on the idea that some people believe these verses teach that Christmas trees are forbidden.¹
 1. A craftsman would cut down a tree and debranch it, before chiseling and carving it into something like a totem pole.
 2. A craftsman would overlay the tree with silver and gold to make it shiny and beautiful.
 3. Pastor Gary said: “This has nothing to do with Christmas! ... God created evergreen trees, they aren’t to be worshiped, but they certainly aren’t to be looked at [as] some kind of an idol.”
 - a. **Isaiah 60:13** - *“... the pine, the fir and the cypress... adorn the place of my sanctuary...”*
 - b. Green and red, the colors of Christmas, are symbolic of everlasting life and the blood of Christ.
 - c. The candy cane was created to be a reminder of the purity of Christ, wrapped in the blood of Christ.
 4. Pastor Gary said: “It’s easy for us to read [what Jeremiah had to say about idols] and think [about how] primitive and foolish and senseless [these people were] and then to think that we are all smarter than they [were]. [We think that] we would never... carve an image and bow down to it. ... You don’t have to carve something,

¹ <https://answersingenesis.org/holidays/christmas/4-misconceptions-about-christmas/>

pray to it or bow down it, for [it] to be an idol. An idol can be a person, [thing, possession, habit, [or] ambition. Idols come in various forms and types. Anything that compromises our devotion to the Lord has the potential of being an idol. Anything that competes with our affection for the Lord has the potential of being an idol. Beware of what you serve more than God. ... Idolatry in its simplest definition is basically misplaced worth. ... We were all created in the image and likeness of God to have fellowship and relationship with him, and thus, when we worship him with our lips and we worship him with our lives, we are ascribing to God worth and value and honor that only he is due. But when sin enters the equation, our sinful hearts then begin to turn our affection away from the Lord and onto other things and other people and other practices.”

- a. **Jeremiah 10:14** - *“Everyone is senseless and without knowledge; every goldsmith is shamed by his idols. His images are a fraud; they have no breath in them.”*
- b. **Exodus 20:3-4** - *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.”*
 - i. It’s possible to have idols of the heart; things for which we have a devotion that places the idol above God’s position and place.
- c. **1 John 5:21** - *“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.”*

5. Pastor Gary said: “[Idols] are not always bad in and of themselves. Oftentimes idols are regular things that become ultimate things in our lives... which we end up worshiping with our time, energy, and money. ... Everything in life has the potential to either complement our walk with God or compromise our walk with God. [Anything] that is elevated above God either by devotion or our affection has become an idol.”

- a. “... the human mind is... a perpetual forge of idols.” - John Calvin ²

Jeremiah's Prayer

6. My Life Is Not My Own

- a. **Jeremiah 10:23-24** - *“I know, O LORD, that a man's life is not his own...”*
- b. Jeremiah knew experientially that he belonged to God and that he wasn’t autonomous.
- c. Pastor Gary said: “We esteem self-made people... [but we really need] to be people who recognize that we don’t belong to ourselves, we belong to the Lord. We are not our own. [If] he is really lord of our lives, then we should commit our lives to his lordship and live our lives in such a way that everything about our lives is devoted unto him. ... The Bible calls us to be people who are sold-out to the Lord, and surrendered to him, [not] being

² <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.iii.xii.html>

duplicitous...”

- d. **Romans 12:1** - *“... I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”*
- e. **1 Corinthians 6:19b-20** - *“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*
- f. **Romans 14:8** - *“If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”*

7. Direct Me

- a. **Jeremiah 10:23** - *“... it is not for man to direct his steps...”*
- b. **Psalms 119:133** - *“Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.”*
- c. **Jonah 2:8** - *“Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”*

8. Correct Me

- a. **Jeremiah 10:24** - *“Correct me, LORD, but only with justice – not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.”*
- b. Most Bible scholars believe that Jeremiah was about 17 to 20 years old when God called him to be a prophet.
- c. Jeremiah didn’t ask God to correct others; he asked God to correct him, because he understood his need.
- d. **Hebrews 12:11** - *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*
- e. **Proverbs 3:11-12** - *“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Read **Jeremiah 10:1-10, 23-24** to provide a foundation for your Bible study time.
2. Read and discuss **Exodus 32:1-4** and talk about Pastor Gary’s outline and remarks about the influence of culture. (See #1 above)
3. Why does people so easily reject God’s instruction? (See #2 above)
4. Read and discuss **Jeremiah 10:1-4**. (See #2 and # 3 above)

5. Spend time reading [Jeremiah 10:14](#), [Exodus 20:3-4](#), and [1 John 5:21](#), and talking about Pastor Gary's remarks concerning idols of the hand and idols of the heart. (See #4 above)
6. How have things that aren't bad in and of themselves become an idol in your life? (See #5 above)
7. In who or in what have you tried to find satisfaction for your life?
8. Share examples of idols in your life that you elevated to a position above God.
9. Share examples of things, people, or practices that stole your heart and robbed God of the glory due him.
10. Review Jeremiah's prayer as outlined by Pastor Gary. (See #7 through #9 above)
11. Read and discuss [Romans 12:1, 14:9](#), and [1 Corinthians 6:19b-20](#). (See #7c through #7e above)
12. How has the Holy Spirit helped you recognize that your life is not your own?
13. Read and discuss [Psalm 119:133](#) and [Jonah 2:8](#). (See #8 b and #8c above)
14. How has the Holy Spirit redirected and directed your life since you came to faith in Christ?
15. Read and discuss [Hebrews 12:11](#) and [Proverbs 3:11-12](#). (See #9d and #9e above)
16. How has the Holy Spirit corrected you since you came to faith in Christ?
17. Close your time in prayer as the Holy Spirit leads.

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).