

## Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character

### The Sin of Claiming To Belong To Our Lord Jesus While Continuing to Pursue Idolatry

We know that there are many who truly want our Father's relational priorities restored in their own lives. But along with that longing is a common sin that for many hinders His priorities from becoming reality: **idolatry**. Idolatry is an extreme love or reverence for something or someone which should be reserved only for God Himself.

People often think of idolatry in terms of venerating a visual image, or committing spiritual adultery by elevating an entity alongside their devotion to Jesus. But at its core, embracing an idol begins with a depth of commitment in your heart to *any* focus or individual that surpasses your love for God.

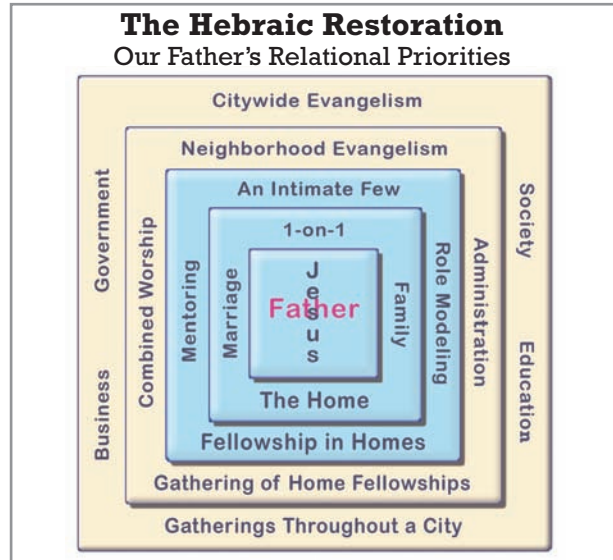
Let's look at an example of idolatry you perhaps haven't considered:

#### God's command

*“Love the Lord your God with **all your heart** [all your ‘inner person’, your conscience] and with **all your soul** [all your will and determination and emotions] and with **all your strength** [all the physical ability you possess] and with **all your mind**’ [all your understanding and intellect]; and, ‘Love your neighbor **as yourself**’ [with the care and concern you give to your own well-being]” (Luke 10:27).*

#### Idolatry

*“Anyone who **loves his father or mother more than Me** is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter **more than Me** is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not **take his cross and follow Me** is not worthy of Me” (Matthew 10:37,38).*



That sounds pretty extreme, doesn't it? Especially since our familial devotion involves experiencing through our physical senses, our emotions, and our energies for people we know. Yet God's requirement for those who belong to Him in Christ calls for a *love for Him* that far surpasses devotion toward anyone else, even our closest kin.

But know this: such love for God *can't* abide in you apart from the transforming power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In other words, *wholeheartedness* in your relationship with God comes only after you're regenerated—made new through spiritual rebirth. His presence within you deepens and matures the *love that sets our Lord apart* from all other loves and causes love for anyone else to pale in comparison.

Any form of idolatry is offensive to our Lord because it displaces Him from the absolute devotion due Him as God and Creator of all things. An idol lodges itself in your heart because of *what it represents* to you in your values. Even idolatry that's practiced unintentionally through ignorance is precipitating dire *intergenerational consequences* within many Christian families today. In fact,

few are aware that the relational tensions they may be experiencing with their relatives, and even in their own home, may be a result of idols they're entertaining.

How many Baby Boomers dedicated their working lives toward the goal of a secure and satisfying retirement? Yet achieving this outcome all too often meant abdicating their biblical responsibilities to their families. So many of their offspring grew up feeling relationally neglected, even unwanted. While these children may have been given adequate material provision, their inner need for ongoing *emotional investment* was sorely lacking.

Boomer parents who role modeled greed through dogged pursuit of material gain have sadly discovered their adult children are all the more consumed with chasing after things of this world (Luke 12:15). This misplaced focus on worldly security and future ability to turn accumulated wealth into pleasure fulfillment has blatantly influenced succeeding generations to pursue the "American Dream."

Look at the ever-increasing rise in behavioral problems in this generation's children. Overwhelmed by the time and effort exacted by their quest for material gain, swamped parents have little *patient consistency* their kids so desperately need to develop boundaries and self-control. So the rebellion which erupts from every child's uncontrolled sin nature manifests itself through talking back, pouting, self-will, defiance, insolence, and tragically, even mass murder.

A recent study revealed that 1 in 5 children today have behavioral problems. Pouring more resources into public education certainly has not proven to be an answer. Nor is stricter gun control, even with the latest school tragedy. Restoring the *loving security and responsive training* God intends for each child must begin with each family choosing to establish the relational priorities our heav-

enly Father calls for throughout His Word. Then He can once again bless marriages and families that produce godly generations.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Baby Boomers and those who have preceded them in retirement have sown the seeds of destruction in this nation! The fall of the United States as a country once admired worldwide for its honor and selfless commitment happened in their lifetime as they gave way to lust for self-gratification at any cost. The idol of greed has set the stage for national devastation. (See Proverbs 11:28, 13:9.)

### **Idolatry Begins With Failing to Uphold Our Father's Relational Priorities**

After our Father revealed the Hebraic foundations He wanted to be restored to His people, He showed us the diagram on page 1 to illustrate His relational priorities for all who love and serve Him. The intensity of your commitment to follow Jesus as Lord of your life begins with your love-based obedience to your heavenly Father through the Spirit of Christ in you. Next in priority is your love for your spouse and children, if God has blessed you with such. The next relational priority is your extended spiritual family.

When we use the term "**relational priority**" we're referring to the greater devotion, time commitment, and preference given first to God and then to those relationships that are closer to the center of the diagram. Keep in mind that with this priority framework you're not rejecting those further out in the diagram. Rather, you're affirming the ones who have a greater right to your sacrificial love than others less relationally connected to you. No human being can maintain the same depth of loving commitment to all people. Therefore you must intentionally discern how to use

the time and energy you do have according to the significance God gives each relationship according to His Word.

So many marriages and families suffer because too few adults purposefully reflect on *who* and on *what* comprise their most important priorities. Nor do they weigh the cost and personal sacrifice entailed in reflecting their loving commitment to God or to the people they should cherish most. As a result, too many children within Christian families are continuing to be sacrificed to the idols their parent(s) embrace and worship.

*“They are restored now, and not long ago; you have not heard of them before today. So you cannot say, ‘Yes, I knew of them!’”* (Isaiah 48:7).

Since these relational priorities are only now being restored to His people by our heavenly Father, you most likely weren't raised with them being role modeled for you by your own parents. So please consider these questions and the impact previous generations had on you:

- While you were growing up, were there frequent discussions in your home which reflected your parents' desire to become more like Jesus and fulfill His purposes for their lives and yours?
- Did you sense that raising you and your siblings to be a “*godly generation*” was high on their list of priorities?
- What were the main topics of conversation when your family ate together?

---

---

---

- As an adult seeking to follow our Lord Jesus, how willing are you to place our Father and His Son at the center of all your priorities?

Years ago Larry Burkett, the founder of Christian Financial Concepts, shared a personal testimony that made us look deeply at our own walk with Jesus. Before his bout with cancer Larry believed that God was number one in his life. But afterward, when he decided to be honest with himself, he admitted that God had really been no higher than number four to him. That realization alone convicted his heart, and he spent the rest of his years living with new priorities.

When Mike was counseling church leaders a few decades ago, one congregation in particular suffered a lot of relational tension. After a series of meetings with the leadership he asked them, "Who's the focus of your worship here?" Pausing a moment, one of the elders replied, "We worship our pastor's teachings because that's what *he* worships." The other men nodded remorsefully. They'd uncovered the idolatry that was the source of their ongoing strain, an idol that stimulated their intellect but brought them no conviction in Christ. A short while later they dismissed the pastor because he saw no need to change and wouldn't repent.

***“No servant can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money”***  
(Luke 16:13).

Like the congregation plagued by tension, so many homes as well as intergenerational family relationships are afflicted by various idols. One of the most common reasons we've seen for the central three relational priorities of the Restoration Diagram not being restored in families is the idol of "**business.**" Business

not only includes where you work; it's also where you experience a sense of accomplishment and personal prestige.

You'll notice in our Father's priorities that *business* is on the outer ring, the least important level. But within so many Christian homes today family relationships revolve around business as the top priority:

The pursuit of money and what it can buy, and even the esteem given to one or both parents by others because of their particular occupation or position.

Business represents only the means by which your Father has chosen to provide for you. But when your work becomes more important to you in time and focus than your marriage covenant (which is supposed to represent His covenant with you in the spiritual realm) or your children (which He intends to be raised as a godly generation), then your job has become your idol. You're coveting the same goals and values which drive those without Christ. And what does God command regarding *any* idol in your life? ***"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry"*** (Colossians 3:5). Is it any wonder Paul warns us to ***"flee from idolatry"*** (1Corinthians 10:14) and ***"keep yourselves from idols"*** (1John 5:21)?

There are serious consequences to living in idolatry. The most noticeable is the epidemic number of children growing up in "Christian" homes who distrust their parents. Readily perceiving the hypocrisy of their parents' idolatry and the unkept promises of meaningful time together, they know how far down the line they fall from the priority our Father would have their parents hold them. Children are on the second level of our Father's pri-

orities, yet so many are treated like they're on the *sixth* level by parents who are busy pursuing their own goals and interests—and there is no sixth level!

Too often children overhear their mother speaking ill of their father, especially if the dad has made his job or other activities a higher priority than his wife and kids. When a husband's business or other idols deprive his wife of the time and affection she feels she has a right to, she may undermine him behind his back because she's not sensing his love. If you're a husband, beware: ***"Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: ...an unloved woman who is married"*** (Proverbs 30:21,23).

Intergenerational interference can add to family unrest. A woman's own mother may fan her discontent and stir up agitation between the couple. This exchange of slander further produces distrust in the child(ren), especially toward their father as their mom discredits him or complains about him. And through the choices he makes to put his job and/or other pursuits ahead of his wife and kids, his idolatry wreaks havoc in his own home. What God intends to be a refuge for the family instead is a battle zone.

***"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"*** (Isaiah 59:2).

Many Christian parents who entertain idolatrous goals in their lives ask God for guidance but don't hear any response or direction from His Spirit. Until they forsake any form of idolatry in their lives which keeps His priorities from being enacted, He'll wait. Flee any idols you do have, and guard yourself from allowing any others to take root.

Then His answer will come as He inclines His ear to you (Psalms 34:15).

We mentioned in a recent e-mail that Will Durant, in his book, *“The Life of Greece,”* writes about the late stages of decay that took place in ancient Greek society. One of the indicators of national decline was this: **“Motherhood was devalued and children viewed as inconvenient.”** We’ve often cited the work of Carle Zimmerman, who describes the *atomistic* stage of society in which the United States now finds itself. This is the final phase before a culture is completely destroyed from within. Some of the signs of the atomistic stage:

- Public disrespect for parents, parenthood, and authority in general rises.
- Feminist movements abound as women lose their inclination for childbearing and child nurturing.
- Daycare facilities replace intimate parenting as mothers are no longer motivated or encouraged to raise their own children in the security of the home.
- Young people are increasingly disrespectful of their parents and others in authority.

Many parents today find themselves (perhaps unconsciously) viewing their children as **“inconvenient conceptions.”** We’re not referring to babies conceived out of wedlock, but rather children whose parents felt either “obligated” to bear a child or who had romanticized the whole idea. In either case, *raising a godly generation* was never their purpose or intent for producing offspring. They intentionally limited the number of children so that they could continue to enjoy a comfortable lifestyle without being overly inconvenienced. But this sign of a *decaying society* evidences parents whose personal goals and values outweigh their responsibility to God or to

prioritizing the children they’ve birthed.

We encounter so many parents today who are unwilling to sacrificially love their child(ren) enough to make the hard choices involved in casting off idols they’ve cherished. Their lifestyle, their use of time either at work or at home, their focus on self-interest rather than intentionally training their children to see God at work in and through the parents as a role model—all of these testify that the kids are more of an inconvenience than a blessing.

But our Lord Jesus Himself speaks to those parents who are role-modeling idolatry for their children:

*“And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck”* (Mark 9:42).

***“See to it that you do not refuse Him Who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused Him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from Him who warns us from heaven?”*** (Hebrews 12:25).

God's warnings are threaded throughout both testaments against making the pursuit of wealth and the comfort and ease it produces any priority at all in your life. Relationships are damaged when greed and self-gratification reign. You displace with your own desires the devotion He deserves from you, and the commitment those in your household need.

God’s Word is *“a double-edged sword; it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12). Please, prayerfully read the following verses and judge your own motives:

Luke 16:13; 12:15-31; James 4:4; 1 Timothy 6:10; 1 John 2:15-17. Check them out.

Perhaps you're living comfortably and have no dependence on God for your provision. You may be harboring idolatry the way two men did in the accounts in Mark 10:17-23 and Luke 16:19-31.

### In Conclusion

Idolatry in any form causes far more tension in families than most parents are aware of. Baby Boomers in particular have created much relational tension with succeeding generations in their zeal for material gain and security. Idolatry in parents is a heavy contributor to behavioral problems with children, especially if either of the parents have made their career (business) more important than our Father's priorities. Remember this axiom:

**A person who doesn't feel the loving affection and commitment they deserve will find ways to get attention, good or bad.**

Ask your family and/or others who are close to you to help you with this:

1. Cut out the relational layers below and arrange them according to what you think are the priorities of the household you were raised in as a child.

• How did the priorities that were role modeled for you influence your life as an adult?

2. Arrange the diagrams again according to your current priorities. Your spouse and children may better discern what your true priorities are because their lives revolve around the choices you've made. They know how you spend most of your time and emotional output because they get what's left over from you, especially if they're *not* your highest priority after your Lord.

• What changes will you make in your own life now that you see your misplaced priorities?

If you don't think your own sin of idolatry is that big an issue, then consider it from your eternal vantage point:

• *“But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, **the idolaters** and all liars—their place will be in the **fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death**”* (Revelation 21:8).

• *“**Outside** are the dogs, the sorcerers, the sexually immoral, the murderers, **the idolaters** and everyone who loves and practices a lie”* (Revelation 22:15).

Are you still willing to let your idols rule your life?

**Cut out and arrange these according to your own relational priorities. Write in your own sources of idolatry, i.e. addictions, sports, TV, hobbies, and have your family or those close to you evaluate your responses.**

