

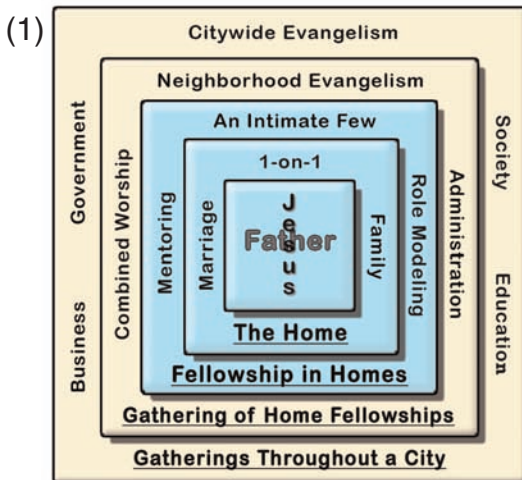
Repentance Leads To Christ-like Character The Inverted Priorities of Idolatry and Worldliness

(August 29, 2013)

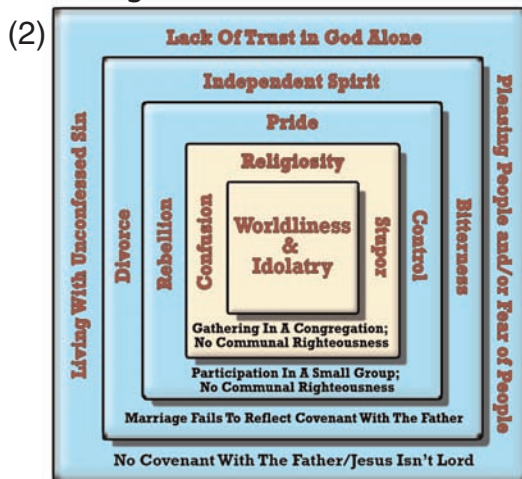
Inverted Priorities Produce Relational Tension

Because contemporary Christendom is structured around activities such as church services and Bible studies, the **relational intensity and sequence of priorities** our Father calls for are often skewed, if not inverted. The center of Diagram (1) reveals the sequence of relational intensity and priorities that begin with the Father and our Lord Jesus by His Spirit in us. Both love and humility are needed for His priorities to be a *way of life*.

Our Fathers Relational Priorities



Strongholds & Inverted Priorities



There are severe consequences for inverted priorities!

In Diagram (2) the least priorities such as job, political involvement, education, and other pursuits receive your highest focus. When these take precedence, Biblical priorities are pushed aside and *inverted*. When your life is controlled by idolatry and worldliness, in essence you're telling God, **"Bless what I'm doing so I can be happy."**

Many years ago, after a bout with cancer a noted Christian teacher confessed that *before* his cancer he thought God was #1 in his life. But *after* his cancer he admitted with regret that God had really been #4. In other words, his business (ministry) came before pressing into the relationship our Father and Lord Jesus wanted with him through the Spirit. He sadly admitted that during the years in which his priorities were skewed, tension plagued both his family *and* ministry.

"For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness like the evil of idolatry" (1Samuel 15:23a).

Witchcraft seeks control over something that's *outside* the will of God. At its root is rebellious defiance! The idolatry of stubbornness places your own desires and interests *above* doing God's will. Both of these motives underlie the idolatry and worldliness that dominate so many Christians today. From the viewpoint of those who have yet to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, *there's no difference* between them and Christians in goals and values!

In the 20+ years we've been teaching about strongholds, the spirits of deceit and bitterness predominate. But the ones which have most rapidly overtaken so many among the churchd are **idolatry** and **worldliness**. The various symptoms

produced by these strongholds are:

Worldly values, frustration, hopelessness, greed, selfishness and self-absorption, financial problems, wrong goals and decisions, living a lie, apathetic, pleasure in wickedness, syncretistic (creating your own “religion”).

Idolatry and worldliness make the *values* of this demonically-controlled world such as position, prestige, material goods and finances more important than humble, loving service to the Lord Who created the universe and has far higher worth than anything the world can offer. Whenever idolatry and worldliness gain a foothold in a person, he or she receives no guidance from the Spirit of Christ. Those other “voices of influence” drown out the Spirit’s input, and rationalization, confusion, religiosity, and a host of other symptoms swirl around the mind. These individuals may appear “Christian” on the outside, but inside they’re living a lie.

In this pleasure-bent, self-consumed society many deceived Christians have succumbed to worldliness and idolatry—and see nothing wrong with it! Overcome with a thirst for earthly security and some measure of ease from their frantic daily grind, they doggedly ex-haust themselves and drain their emotions dry, leaving nothing for their family.

Tragically their children exercise power over their parents, demanding as their right the gadgets, clothes and whatever else their peers have. The kids become idols themselves, and the parents are enslaved to pursuing the money that feeds the idolatry. The Bible warns repeatedly against this misplaced focus: *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs”* (1 Timothy 6:10).

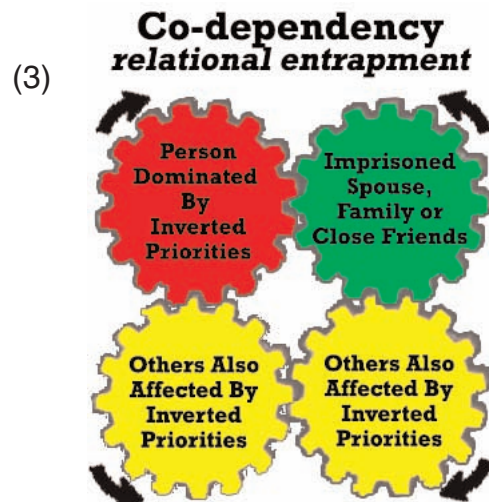
- There’s witchcraft in the single-minded pursuit of money, a sense that it doesn’t matter what happens around me because *I’m in control* of my own life. *I don’t need* to rely on God. (See Isaiah 9:10.)
- There’s idolatry when people use their money to meet wants rather than needs, and allow others in authentic need to suffer. (See Luke 16:19-31.)

Imprisoned By The Inverted Priorities Of Others

Defying our Father’s will and priorities comes with a price—your health, your peace and/or your relationship with others. When your priorities are inverted you create apprehension for others that’s similar to the prison of co-dependency. You “dominate” others through your inverted priorities, and you’re blinded to the emotional toll your idolatry and worldliness exact on them. Only when it’s too late to save their marriage do many recognize the cost of their evil pursuit.

Some personal anecdotes may bring to light what we’re discussing here.

Soon after we returned from Israel with the Hebraic foundations we moved to Atlanta, GA. One of the first couples we met



lived in a mansion with an Olympic-size swimming pool in the backyard. Their marriage was barely holding on by a thread when they asked for our help, since their idolatry and worldliness had siphoned off any love for each other.

We then met a man who owned an advertising agency which was in the process of going under. He took me [Mike] to see a horse ranch he'd purchased out in the country. As we drove through the subdivision in which 12 other ranch properties surrounded his, he pointed out that every couple living there had been divorced. His own wife had recently filed for divorce. But he didn't see any connection.

During that period I served as a consultant with an internationally recognized ministry that helped Christian businessmen. The ministry mentored business owners to overcome their business problems by applying workable solutions. Armed with the Restoration Priority Diagram, I showed them that "Business" was on the *outer ring* of our Father's priorities. Because of my own prior experience with business owners I proposed a plan for them to consider:

"When our Lord can't reach a business owner's heart concerning His priorities of our Father and Jesus and then the Home, He'll allow the owner to experience business problems in order to get his attention. Instead of trying to fix his business, why don't you ask if he's having marriage problems and then help him restore the greater priority, his relationship with his wife?"

For several months the ministry surveyed the married business owners they were working with. They discovered that **every man** who had business problems also had serious marriage problems as well. Yet when they tried to help him with his marital situation, they encountered great resistance. They found it was easier to help someone with his

business because that's where his ego got stroked. But to help him love his wife as God would have him love her took more humility than many of these owners were willing to extend. Finally, in order to keep their own financial support coming in, the ministry gave up on helping men with their marriages and returned solely to repairing businesses.

Idolatry And Worldliness Hurt Marriages and Mess Up Children

The ego problem applies to more than just business owners. **Whatever idolatry or worldliness that strokes a man's ego provides him the recognition he hungers for. But that worldly pursuit will be the competition that wars against the humility he needs in His relationship with Jesus as His Lord and with his wife and children.** This one factor, *humility*, is the reason that far more men than women resist the Hebraic foundations. And the failure of husbands to humble themselves as servant/leaders and embrace our Father's relational priorities is why so many wives are out in the world pursuing careers to fulfill their own ego needs.

If your spouse is withholding the affection you long for, take it as a clear indicator that you've made yourself your own idol to which he or she won't bow. Since you worship yourself, you're condemning yourself to loneliness.

Marital unrest isn't the only consequence of worldly pursuit. Children suffer as well, especially in areas of character development which you are unable or unwilling to role model. How can you recognize character deficit in your kids? One way is to ask yourself this. Do you purchase favor with your children while you pursue idolatry and worldliness?

Jesus warned about leading children astray: *“Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin”* (Luke 17:1,2). Parents who pursue idolatry and worldliness often buy off their child(ren) with *things* rather than spending daily time in meaningful conversation and activities. The tragic result is that they train their children to sin.

- They give in to their child’s wants, especially when he or she manipulates them through guilt, whining, negotiation, or tears.
- They fail to correct the child(ren) according to God’s Word. Instead, they get angry, yell, beg or threaten—to no avail of course.
- They pander to the child’s “self-esteem” so the child sees him/herself as the center of their world expecting every want to be met.

The end result is that the parents find themselves pleading with and cajoling their child(ren) at every turn. That constant wheedling has trained the child to see him/herself on par with the parents, so obedience has to be purchased. Not being held to godly standards of responsibility, the child is seduced into the same pattern of idolatry and worldliness as the parents. Since the parents haven’t shown themselves to be trustworthy in the child’s eyes, the child knows he/she can manipulate them and wear them down. And tragically that framework will become a source of far greater grief as childhood merges into adolescence.

Not having learned to fully trust their parents, these children will find it impossible to trust their heavenly Father. Only if He meets their perceived needs and desires will they offer even token allegiance.

Fleeing Idolatry and Worldliness

If idolatry and worldliness control you, you must *“come to your senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken you captive to do his will”* (2Timothy 2:26). The sooner you face that you’re doing the will of Satan, the sooner you can flee that snare. First, remove the foothold(s) the demons have in you (Ephesians 4:27). Your freedom comes only through the Spirit’s power and your pursuit of Jesus’ Lordship in your life. Only through Him comes the humility to put Him and your family far above everything else you believe is important.

Like the monkey who’s found himself trapped by the banana in the jar (diagram 4), you need to *let go* of idolatry and worldliness if you’re ever going to be free. What’s important to you?

- Does your life reflect the Lordship of Jesus in the choices you’ve made?
- Does your heart bear His burden for the lost and hurting, especially for your children?

If you can’t answer “Yes!”, you’ve made yourself an enemy of God in your vain pursuit (James 4:4). And if you have children, you need a millstone tied around your neck and tossed into the sea. Your life-choices have been despicable in our Father’s sight. Don’t keep living a lie!

Inverted Priorities

(4)

