

Our Worship Problem



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By **J.D. GREER**

Sin starts as a worship problem. We give non-God things God-like weight in our hearts.

Eric Geiger, reflecting on the work of the Christian counselor David Powlison, groups **our primary idols into four basic categories, calling them “root” idols:**

Approval: We want to be accepted by others, so we become a slave to the opinions of others. We live by their

praise and die by their criticism. We make ourselves into whatever others want us to be, to earn their love and respect.

Power: We love the feeling of superiority, so we pursue those things we believe give it to us, be that money, good looks, status, popularity, or positions of influence. We're willing to do whatever it takes to get them. We become prone to ruthlessness, dishonesty, and a tendency to treat people like pawns.

Control: In order to feel safe, we need things to go according to our plan. So **we attempt to dominate the people and circumstances around us**. We worry constantly. If others don't do what we want them to do, we become irritable and angry. If things don't happen according to our timetable, we become impatient, angry, even abusive.

Pleasure: We worship sensual pleasures — sexual pleasures, creature comforts, good food, a life of leisure, or alcohol or drugs, for example — so we organize our lives around pursuit of them. If we have to break God's laws to get them, so be it. We fear boredom. Worshiping pleasure often leads to irresponsibility, laziness, and compulsive behavior.

Until God uproots those idols — until he becomes the one whose approval we seek, whose power we trust in, whose control we depend on, and whose pleasure we live for, any changes we make to our behavior are superficial and short-lived. Think of it as like trying to bend a four-foot metal beam. Pushing as hard as you can on either end, you might bend it a little, but it would stay bent only while you maintained the pressure. It would get tiring. Put too much pressure on the beam and it will break.

Trying to conform our sinful hearts to God's commands yields the same results. The hard, brittle metal of our hearts just won't bend toward God's laws, so we inwardly seethe, resenting God for being such a ruthless

taskmaster, or we give up, concluding that we are just not cut out for the Christian life.

Take a blowtorch to that beam, however, and you can bend it into whatever shape you want. **The gospel is the blowtorch that melts our hearts so that they can be “conformed” to the image of Christ.** God is not just after obedience, he’s after a whole new kind of obedience: an obedience that grows out of desire — an obedience in which we seek God because we crave God and pursue righteousness because we delight in it.

Until we change what we crave — what we worship — we’ll never be able to truly stop sinning. We may conform our behavior for a while, but our hearts will pull the other direction. As Paul Tripp says, “If we worshiped our way into sin, we have to worship our way out.”

The only power that can change what we worship, at the heart level, is the gospel. That’s why Paul says that the gospel, and the gospel alone, is “the power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16). **The gospel does what no law, no matter how perfect or winsomely presented, can do — it changes us.**

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