

My Notes:

Woe #1—Greed
Woe #2—Injustice
Woe #3—Oppressive Violence
Woe #4—Seduction

Woe #5 — Idolatry

¹⁸“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!



The Weary Cycle of Pride and Idolatry

Pride says

Idols are Created...

Functional Saviors

¹⁹Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it.

Idolatry as Foolishness/Folly

Idolatry as Harlotry

²⁰But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”



LESSONS FROM THE OLD SCHOOL

Idolatry!

Habakkuk 2:18-20 ESV

¹⁸“What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols! ¹⁹Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, Awake; to a silent stone, Arise! Can this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in it. ²⁰But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.”



Key Lessons for the Night

Idolatry is Foolish

- Habakkuk teaches us that to put our ultimate hope, trust and allegiance in things made by human hands brings no benefit to life. In fact it brings a devastating deception to us that leads us quickly away from the living God. Idolatry is the height of foolishness but it is always present in our souls luring us away from our first love.

The Reciprocal Relationship Between Pride and Idolatry

- Two of the most grievous sins of our hearts are pride and idolatry. These two are very related and work together against our relationship with Christ. Pride says to God, “I don’t need you, I can go it on my own.” It is in this position that the heart, in its design for worship and dependence, will create its own idols and trust them with our joy and happiness. Of course these idols fail us and we are left with empty lives. It is at this point that Pride or Repentance will take over. Our pride will create new idols to attempt to satisfy us apart from Jesus. Repentance leads us to the very place we desire—life and satisfaction in the goodness and greatness of God.

Idolatry, Whoring and the Grace of God

- The Scriptures describe idolatry as spiritual adultery and whoring. When we entertain idolatry we literally prostitute ourselves to other things and turn away from God himself, the great lover of our souls. In the gospel we see that God in his mercy is willing to marry whores and redeem them completely by his love and grace. All of us struggle with idols—it is God alone who can smash them for us—putting all things in a proper place under his kind and gracious rule of our lives.



The Role of Things in Our Lives

American Christians can get caught into thinking that idolatry is something that happened in the ancient past or perhaps today in far away lands. After all, the religious landscape of our lives is not littered by gold statues dedicated to the gods nor are we silly enough to believe a creation of our own hands can really helps us. Or are we? AW Tozer rightly observed something about idolatry:

Let us beware lest we in our pride accept the erroneous notion that idolatry consists only in kneeling before visible objects of adoration, and that civilized peoples are therefore free from it. The essence of idolatry is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him. It begins in the mind and may be present where no overt act of worship has taken place.¹

Additionally, a revealing passage of Scripture that sheds light on our own hearts is found in a shocking passage in Ephesians chapter 5.

*⁴Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.⁵For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or **who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.**⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.*

If we are covetous, are we idolaters? Yes. Coveting is an interesting sin found in Scripture. Before defining it I would just note that it is one of the Ten Commandments and therefore central to the moral law of God. *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's—Exodus 20:17.* Wanting stuff that other folks have is coveting—it is a movement in our hearts towards being captivated with people and things we do not have. The apostle Paul equates coveting with idolatry and nails us American folk right between the eyes. Our culture is built around consumerism and the creation of needs and wants that we must fulfill by having more and more and more. The advertising industry prays on the covetous nature of our hearts by showing us things that we don't have and how our lives are impoverished because we lack them. This builds in us until we feel we must have something—many times building up piles of debt as our badge of honor in our consumerist pursuits. So, should we all live on the ground under an oak tree possessing nothing but the clothes on our backs? Is it an evil to have things in our lives? Of course not—but if we do not examine our hearts regularly and fill them with other loves, the materialistic urge in America will sweep us into twisted idolatry which leaves our souls parched, empty and spiritually bankrupt.



There are no easy rules to give that will solve this issue for us. We must be guiding by biblical principles that we value and guarding the loves of our own hearts. I believe that if we have to sin in order to have something or if we would sin if something was taken from us, we are looking into the face of an idol. I love a quote from the ancient theologian Augustine of Hippo when reflecting on the role of things in our lives. He uses a great illustration of an engaged couple to illustrate:

*Suppose brethren, a man should make a ring for his betrothed, and she should love the ring more wholeheartedly than the betrothed who made it for her....Certainly, let her love his gift: but, if she should say, "The ring is enough. I do not want to see his face again" what would we say of her?...The pledge is given her by the betrothed just that, in his pledge, he himself may be loved. God, then, has given you all these things. **Love him who made them.**²*

All things may be received in thanksgiving and not worshipped and loved to the point of stealing our love for God. We live in a world of personal hoarding and lifestyle building which amputates generosity and treasuring Christ above all. Jesus teaches us that *where your treasure is, there is your heart also* (Matthew 6:21) and I believe far too many of us in America treasure our comfort, our security, our social status, our homes, our cars and our stuff at too high a degree. Our treasure must be Jesus, for he is the only person we can love unreservedly with no fear of idolatry. For he is God—and we can recklessly give ourselves to him. Any thing can become an idol and all things may be used for the glory of God. It is a matter of the heart that must be examined. My fear is that we far too often skip the examination and just swipe the credit card.

On Idolatry — Pluralism, Monotheism and Jesus Christ

Idolatry can be defined in a simple fashion: Idolatry is ultimate devotion, trust, or allegiance to anything that is not God, it is the worship of someone or something other than God. One of the central claims of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths is that there is but one God. The sixth chapter of the book of Deuteronomy, in what is known as the *shema*, bellows forth this truth: *⁴"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* And the *shahada*, the first pillar of Islam forthrightly states: *Ashhadu an la ilaha illa 'llah; ashhadu anna Muhammadan rasulu 'llah" : "I witness that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah.* All of the great monotheistic religions claim that there is but one creator God. From the very definition of monotheism, any other god that is not God is an idol—something falsely worshipped by human beings. In a world that wants us to believe that all religions are equally valid, or even equally true, Jesus Christ stepped on to planet earth claiming to be the incarnation of the one true God. This was divisive in Jesus' times, so much so that it got him killed. It remains divisive in our world today—as the worship of Jesus as God seems narrow to many secular minds and blasphemous to religious ones. For instance, thinking Jesus is the unique way to the Father (John 14:6; Acts 4:12) brings charges of intolerance and bigotry from the crowd which teaches all religions are valid ways to "the divine." Additionally, Muslim believers call the Christian worship of Jesus *shirk*, which is defined as *an unforgivable sin of associating anything [partners, helpers, other gods] with Allah. The Qur'an accuses Christians for their belief that Jesus is Lord and God, calling them unbelievers (kafiroon) and idolaters (mushrikoon), or those people who are committing shirk.*³ So idolatry is real and worshipping anyone other than the triune God of the Bible is called idolatry in Scripture. Yet we realize that the gospel is for all people and all idolaters. All who will come humbly by faith to lay down idols will be accepted by God. Hindus, Muslims, materialists, the greedy, the secular, the hypocrite, the church person. All the needy may come. Jesus is an open door for all that the Father draws to him and any that come he will in no way cast out (See John 6:35:51).

Self-Esteem, Pride and God-Centeredness

Pride and Idolatry are intricately related to one another in the human heart. It is pride that says to God "I do not need you, I can do it on my own." Out of this posture flows the creation of "new gods" which the person may worship. Be they the gods of religion, materialism, or self-exaltation, the heart of pride will create new objects of worship. In this short essay I want to explore the relationship between self-esteem, pride, and a God-centered view of life.

Our culture has been on a decades long crusade to increase the "self-esteem" of young people. In fact, for many years we have stated this to be one of the most important aspects of growing up, having good self-esteem. A recent study was completed by a group of scholars that attempted to take a state of the union, so to speak, of the self-esteem culture of young Americans. This study's results were recently published in an article on the Boston Globe website.⁴ In the study, Jean Twenge, author of "Generation Me: Why Today's Young Americans Are More Confident, Assertive, Entitled -- and More Miserable Than Ever Before," said we have raised a generation of self-centered young people who can "tend to lack empathy, react aggressively to criticism, and favor self-promotion over helping others."⁵ The Scriptures however have a very different view of things. We are never told to be self-oriented or to esteem ourselves more and more highly but rather to look to the interest of others.

I think we need balance in thinking about self-esteem. On one hand, we are made with built in value due to our creation in the image of God. Each one of us is a unique, wonderfully knitted, tapestry and design of God. I like the way some of my friends used to say it: "God don't make no junk." Yet the reality is the modern self-esteem movement is really a cloaked version of an old enemy—the sin of human pride. It exalts humanity and says "look at me, look how wonderful I am." This is far from the teaching of Scripture which teaches that each of us is fallen, depraved, and marred by sin. The biblical view of humanity is both lofty and lowly; it depicts man as the beautiful crown and pinnacle of God's handiwork, yet fallen and rebellious and deeply flawed. The cure for the pride that comes from making self the center of things is the gospel, the good news which places God at the center of all things.

Let's look very briefly at the god-centeredness of all things in Scripture:

- ◆ God is self-sufficient in that he needs nothing—not even you and me—The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. **Acts 17:24, 25**
- ◆ God is the creator of all things—*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:1*
- ◆ All things were made by him and for him—*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. Colossians 1:16*
- ◆ All things belong fully to God—*The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein. Psalm 24:1*
- ◆ All things have been put under the authority of Jesus, the Son of God—*For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. 1 Corinthians 15:27, 28*
- ◆ All glory, honor and power should be given to God—To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen—**Jude 25**



For our pride to be defeated we do not need to think more of ourselves, we need to see ourselves as we really are. We need to see ourselves as finite and created beings owing our existence to someone else. We do not even exist "by ourselves" but only because God wanted us to. We need to see our sin in light of the perfect law of God which exposes the sickness of our hearts. Then we need to see the utter hopelessness of saving ourselves through good works, through religion, through any sort of self created, self help, morality. As we see this we need to see that God has done everything to save us in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the wonderful story that God the Father, through the work of God the Son on an executioner's cross, applied to sinful creatures by the work of the Holy Spirit has fully saved us, bought us out of slavery to sin and death, reconciled us with God, and is currently transforming us. In doing so he forever removed self from the center of the universe so that all glory and praise and honor go to God. Not to us, not to us, but to your name be glory! (Psalm 115:1) When this happens, we can see God slay our pride in the shadow of a cross. A cross that is not a testimony to how great we are or how wonderful we are, but that God was wonderful and gracious enough to pour out love and grace upon the undeserving. And we respond in praise, in the worship of God rather than idols, and receive a joy and peace that transcends all understanding. I will close with some words that the apostle John used to end his first epistle. Words that are addressed to the humble, not the proud; some very loving and gracious words that I will echo here for me and you:

Little children, keep yourselves from idols...

Notes:

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: HaperCollins, 1961), 3-4
2. Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969) p. 326 (Tractate on the Epistle of John, 2:11) - Emphasis added.
3. See *Shirk* at the Index of Islam at <http://www.answering-islam.org/Index/index.html>
4. See David Cary, *Study finds students narcissistic – Says trend among college youths can harm society*, Associated Press, February 27, 2007 http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2007/02/27/study_finds_students_narcissistic/ - accessed April 11th 2007.