

Vertical Realities

by Pastor Marvin R. Barham

Matthew 22:37-38 *Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with **all thy heart**, and with **all thy soul**, and with **all thy mind**. This is the first and **great commandment**.*

Paul Tripp states, "There is a vertical, Godward dimension, to every horizontal, interpersonal action."

In Matthew Jesus takes the opportunity to point out first, that it is not just one of the commandments of God but it is the **greatest commandment**. If one has not resolved to obey this command they will not obey anything else God commands; it is the motivation for which any obedience is exercised. The mind justifies the heart. **What the heart really wants, the mind finds a way; the mind finds a way to circumvent conviction and a means to rationally justify the desired action, choice, or attitude.** The greatest command then is to give God all the heart (*desires, affections, ambitions, and motivation*); give Him all your soul (*emotions, attitudes, and self-will*); and give Him your entire mind (*thoughts, ideas, and choices*). To give Him all is to reserve nothing that reflects self or the influence of any other, or it is thus considered an idol. The ultimate question then becomes: **Who rules our heart?**

If our hearts are not ruled by God alone we will miss divine opportunities. Instead, we see every situation from a self-centered vantage point as a moment of frustration, inconvenience, struggle, or another chaotic event. Instead of ever seeing answers from God, each life issue or moment raises another question or demand of God in our hearts and minds. We cannot see anything from a vertical reality. Instead, the reality of every issue, situation, circumstance or incident is one of another **horizontal dysfunction** or **what we want in our heart as normality**. Somewhere in our heart and mind we have a desire and expectation of how everything should be and go according to our fleshly desire. We have a personal expectation of how everyone and everything must go and respond to us for it to be a good or normal day. We cannot see that anything which contradicts our day's expectation is a God-given opportunity to deal with an idol in our heart that is not surrendered to the rule of God and Kingdom living. Every horizontal challenge in your life is an opportunity for vertical reality of a supernatural God. **Anything that inhibits that vertical relationship reality is a horizontal idol.**

Why? Because of idols in our heart. And no one can recognize them better than God Himself. And He emphatically will address them over and over above all else. Because until they are dealt with He can do nothing else in your life or through you, because you are living in contradiction to the greatest commandment regardless of how many other commandments you are walking in.

Ezekiel 14:1-5 *1Then came certain of the elders of Israel unto me, and sat before me. 2And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 3Son of man, these men **have set up their idols in their heart**, and put the **stumblingblock of their iniquity before their face** (justification of mind for sinful desires): should I be enquired of at all by them? 4Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Every man of the house of Israel that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumblingblock of his iniquity before his face, and **cometh to the prophet**; I the LORD will **answer him that cometh according to the multitude of his idols**; 5That I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because **they are all estranged from me through their idols**.*

"The principle revealed here is the principle of **inescapable influence**. **What controls my heart controls my life**" And what controls my life other than God is all God wants to deal with.

Webster defines civilized as being a **society characterized by refinement or restraint**. By Webster's definition we have become a much *uncivilized society*. We seek to utilize God-given liberty as a means to remove any restraint of unified and transcendent morality. Everywhere you can find where **American Idols Destroy Society**. The church of 21st Century Western Civilization has become a harbor for idols of our own.

Idol of Comfort: Somewhere in our hearts we all **desire for life to be like a vacation resort where your needs come first, nothing is required of you, and you are the one that is always being served**; a place where we live with a daily sense of entitlement. God has given the church, everyone in it, and everything about it for my benefit and I have the right to consume it. Let each consume or get his or her own, I just want my share of the joy, peace, respect, appreciation, and spiritual bliss due me.¹

Idol of Respect: Everyone wants to be respected but **when you live with a sense of entitlement you fail to return or give the respect to others of which you demand of others**. We believe that because of either who we are, what we have done, or for whatever reason, we are due a measure of respect that if not met, will lead our hearts to the table of resentment. We tend to interpret things of others with some sense of disrespect towards us when in fact it is not there at all. Instead of seeing other's discouragements, fears, or insecurities we take it as a personal offense. We may even go as far to say, "Who cares about their issues, what about mine?" And this becomes the focus of our worship and a complete lack of spiritual maturity.¹

Idol of Appreciation: "It is about time that I receive some credit where credit is due me." **Here the real object and motivation of any service rendered is revealed**. Did we really do anything for God or somewhere in our heart was there a little idol wanting some recognition of its own? Here we must ask, honestly to God and ourselves, "Why am I doing what I am doing? Who am I serving?" If the answer is that you do nothing for no one but yourself or you serve no one but yourself then you have the answer already. There is a big ole idol of self sitting on the altar of your heart.¹

Idol of Success: Disappointment in your expectation of measurable success and progress reveals an idol when it begins to affect our soul and effective service to God. **When we begin to take ownership we have taken rule away from the real ruler and it begins to affect our obedience. We thus begin to lose our identity in God and His purpose**. We begin to need others to be what we think they should be for us instead of being what God wants us to be for them. Instead of being able to be there for others, fight or grieve for them we spend more time fighting our own frustrations and depressions and grieving for ourselves.¹

Idol of Control: Too often we want to maintain control so as to ensure our desired expectations or outcomes reflect our desires and personal agenda. Self-control is one's inner ability to exert one's own will. The problem comes when our will is either exerted over another's, transgresses God's law or completely disregards the will of God in our lives. **The only success in the Kingdom of God is when we have relinquished all control to God**. It is one thing to lose control to your emotions such as stress, fear, or anxiety and a completely different thing to lose control to God. To lose control to God is to become totally dependent on Him which is exactly the goal. It is **our independence that becomes an idol of control**. God seeks a mature people who are completely reliant upon Him with **proper connectedness to the Christian community**. The goal is to be able to be used by God as an ever-maturing vessel with God-control through the principles of the Word leading us to exercise wisdom in ever widening opportunities. The goal is to be conformed to the image of Christ. It is not an issue of my tastes, opinions and habits but being molded into and modeling His.

Maybe the idols in your heart are of a much more practical nature, such as simply something you desire so much that it has influenced your attitude towards God or others in a negative way, because your spoiled flesh did not get what it wanted, when and how it wanted it. Maybe it was something God may have even spoken to you in the past but you have allowed it to become an idol. Maybe it is hope deferred and you cling to your feelings of victimization, resentment, or depression for a negative sense of security because it is a familiar soul tie. Whatever it is, **if it is negatively affecting the effectiveness of your worship and service to God, it is then ruling your heart and it is an idol. Whatever in this horizontal reality we call real life is interfering with our vertical reality of right relationship and righteousness of heart with God, it is an idol and cannot remain or we walk in disobedience to the greatest command – to love Him with all. God will not cohabit with anything else in your heart, soul, and mind. He does not want to live in a duplex with other objects of your worship, affection, or priority. It wants supreme precedence over anything and everything in your life.**

Romans 1:17- 25 *17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.*

Before this year's end, ask God to reveal the idols that remain in your heart. Let Him take control and remove them that He may speak to you in this year about His plans and purposes for your life. Ask yourself, "Where I have broken the greatest commandment", and repent before Him. Choose to confront your idols so that God does not have to continue to speak to you about them and can speak to you about His plans and future for you, your family and the gifts and calling on your life.