

choose, does this please God? Do I show my love for God with this decision? Then other times, as we grow and mature as Christians we make godly decisions out of a love that has grown toward God.


We love God with our souls by our desires being transformed. This takes the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and I believe probably never is completely done, but we need to look at our lives and ask ourselves the question whether my desires are holy and godly. If not, then we need to ask God to transform our desires. We can control our desires. We do not have to be slaved to them. We are not that weak. We can choose to love God with our desires.

We can love God with our strength. That is our physical actions. When I think of loving God with my strength I think about what I pursue with my time, energy, and resources. It has been said to know what or who is truly your god, you simply need to look at your calendar and bank account. The question for us is, am I pursuing God with my time? Am I making worship with others a priority? Am I finding some time for prayer? Am I making a place in my life to serve others? Am I tithing and giving sacrificially to the work of God's church? Do I love God with my strength?

Other gods...they are easy to identify and hard to let go. Some of them can truly lead us to destruction and yet maybe the greatest danger they present in our lives is not our destruction, but simply to cause us to be satisfied with less than what God has for us. Williams writes "the nature of an idol is that it looks great-irresistibly great-but it can't deliver."<sup>3</sup> Other gods can ultimately not deliver on their promises. They are full of empty promises, empty worship and dead end paths.

Are you like Jacob? You know that God is calling you to return and worship Him. You have been there before. You can remember a time in your life when God was real to you. You can remember a time when God heard your cry of distress. You are keenly aware that God has been faithful to you even in moments you have not been faithful to God. God is calling you to come back and settle there once and for all to make God your God. But before you come, you know you and your family have some gods that need to be buried and left behind. Listen

to Jacob's words to his family "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you." Let's name them, let's take them and bury them today, leave them in yesterday and serve God and God alone for all of our tomorrows.

Every family needs only one God. 

<sup>1</sup>Shirl James Hoffman "Whatever Happened to Play" (Christianity Today, February 2010) p.21.

<sup>2</sup>Leslie Williams "Seduction of the Lesser Gods" (Nashville, Tn. Word Publishing, 1997) p.11.

<sup>3</sup>Williams,p.4.



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# The Trinity Pulpit

## Every Family Needs Only One God Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Deuteronomy 5:6-11, Genesis 35:1-5

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His had been a life of risk and adventure. His had been a life of disappointment and victory. His life has been one filled with deceit. Sometimes he had been the deceiver and sometimes he had been deceived. Jacob's life story was one of God's faithfulness to one we would say did not deserve it (like any of us deserve it.) Jacob, you remember, had tricked his father Isaac into blessing him instead of the eldest son, Esau. He had not only taken Esau's blessing but also his birthright. This so angered Esau that Jacob had to spend most of his life on the run. Escaping Esau's wrath, Jacob found a place to live with his Uncle Laban where he married Laban's daughters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel and worked seven years to have the right to marry her. However, Laban pulled a fast one and substituted his eldest daughter Leah, who we are told had weak eyes or rather was not pleasing to the eye, for Rachel on their wedding night. Tricked but still in love with Rachel, Jacob worked another seven years and married her. During this time Jacob was blessed by God and gained much wealth and resources. So much that it came time for him to depart Laban's household. Jacob's household ventured out on their own and when they come face to face with Esau. However, instead of wrath there is forgiveness and Jacob and Esau find peace.

Now we find Jacob being called by God to go back to Bethel and to settle there and end his wandering ways to build an altar and worship God. This would not be the first time Jacob had been to Bethel. On his way to Laban's he had stopped at Bethel and there God had appeared to him. There at Bethel God had made a promise to him

and he had made a promise to God. Now it is time to return to Bethel. Jacob declares that they are going back to Bethel to worship the God that had appeared to him, the God that had heard his cries in times of distress and the God who had been with him wherever he had gone. It was time for Jacob to return to God and to settle there and worship and serve God.

Jacob is having one of those moments that come to us all. It is one of those moments when we take stock in life and we realize even when I have been unfaithful, God has been faithful. Even when I was running away from the consequences of my own sin, God did not run from me. When I thought God had abandoned me, God instead let me know of his presence. Jacob has come to the place where he is ready to return to God and settle there once and for all and worship.

However, before he can go there is something that has to occur. Before he can go and worship God, he has to rid his household of their foreign gods or idols. Jacob says to his household "get rid of your foreign gods." These household gods were gods which had come from either their own households or from the booty they had taken from others. These little clay figurines and idols of other material were symbols of good luck, provision and security. They carried them with them like a good luck charm or a reminder of their own ability of provision. Yet, Jacob says we must rid our household of these idols before we return to worship God. So they gave Jacob their gods and their ear rings. The ear rings could have been precious metal and would have been a temptation to reform the idols. Others believe the ear rings were actually ear rings on the formed idols. Whatever the case they are offered to Jacob and Jacob buries them under the tree in Shechem and they leave them there.

Before they went to worship the God who had appeared to him, the God who had heard his distressful cry and the God who had always been with him, they had to bury their other gods and leave them behind.

Jacob's family is a reminder that a family needs only one God.

That is the commands from Deuteronomy 5 and 6. In Deuteronomy 5 we find the 10 Commandments and a reminder that God says you shall have no other gods before me and you shall not form any god and bow down and worship it. The first of these commandments reminds us not to have any other gods before God. Now we can read that two ways and both ways are right. First, it has to do with priority. God says to us there must be nothing greater than me in your life. You cannot place another god in priority to me. This reading causes us to ponder what is first in my life. What do I desire more than anything else? Is there something I have placed as god in my life other than the God who created me? Another reading is to understand that literally it says you shall not bring another god before my face. You shall not bring another god alongside me as a rival. Many times in the Israelites experience it was not that they turned from God and denounced God and turned to another god, no just the opposite. In the Biblical story the people of God always worshiped God. They just choose to bring other gods alongside God and worship them, too. They bring other gods before God's face. God says there is only room for one God.

The second command is not to create a god or an idol and bow down to it. That is giving it the place where only God is to be found and also to worship it, which means to serve it. To serve another god is to do so in a practical way. In other words we might say we worship God, but the way we function and make decisions, or the practical aspects of living day to day is not based on our worship of God, but our service to another god or idol that we have created.

What are the gods that we need to bury and remember no more in our families? Let me mention three to you. If we look at the gods who rivaled God for the Hebrews we will find the gods we bring alongside God, as well. There are the gods of culture. In the Hebrews case this was the god Baal. Baal was a Canaanite god who was a fertility god who represented agriculture and economic success. In a very real sense this is the cultural god of provision. This god was the god that you served if you wanted to be successful, wealthy, and have your work blessed. It is the god that provides.

We too have this cultural god. It is the god we make of our work. It is the god that defines what is success and what its failure. It is the god our own effort

and abilities can become. It is the god that whispers you are self-reliant and don't need God. It is the god that shouts like a child, "I can do this myself." Baal was also the god of convenience for the Hebrews. When God's people went into the land of promise it was not empty. It was populated by others who worshipped other gods and who were successful at what they did, in regards to their work and living. The Hebrews entered the land of promise as wanderers and former slaves. They went to a land where there were successful societies who believed in another god. It became a matter of convenience to worship this other god alongside the Lord God. It was just easier to join in the worship of Baal than to have your own values and convictions. Life was just simpler to go along with the culture than to be faithful to the Lord God. Who was it hurting anyway? Maybe I can learn something? Maybe we can fit in and I can increase my own wealth, influence and standing if I just go along. The god of convenience never really goes away. Bowing down and going along with our culture is sometimes easier than having our own convictions.

They not only were tempted with Baal, the god of provision and convenience, but gods of their own making. We too are tempted with gods of our own making. Two gods that we have created in our culture today is the god that the late Adrian Rogers called me-ism or me-ology and the god of pleasure. Both have a narcissistic root. They both worship self and indulge self. Me-ology is simply the replacing of God with our self on the throne of our lives. The original sin is to desire to be God. The temptation from the Garden of Eden to now is the same. It is that little whisper in our ear that if you can be like God. The inference is that if you are like God then you will not need God. The second part of original temptation is God does not want you to be like him. God is only holding you back. When we fall prey to this temptation, just like Adam and Eve, we lose what was rightfully ours through creation, a right relationship with God. We miss the point when we decide to make ourselves God. That which we long for self-satisfaction and fulfillment becomes an empty hole that nothing can fill.

A second god of our own making is like unto this first one and it is the love of pleasure. Pleasure is something that we are certain we have right too and if it is enjoyable and feels good and makes us feel good about our selves, then surely it is right. There are many pleasures that we can point to as rivals to God, but the one that is so prevalent today is sports. Now you know that I love sports. I would rather

talk about sports than almost anything, but the truth is we have let sports become our god and we are so blind to this that we have made sports and notice the word sports idols, the emblem of all things, that are right. It is interesting that we call our sports champions idols and not heroes. Just so we have some facts about this god of our choosing, listen to these statistics from Shirl James Hoffman's article in Christianity Today entitled Whatever Happened to Play. Hoffman writes:

Americans are consuming sports on an unprecedented scale. The ancient Romans, long considered the gold standard for how sports crazed a culture could be, (do not compare to the sports fans of this century.) The Romans could squeeze 50,000 spectators into the Coliseum for gladiatorial contests—a quaint assemblage next to 107,000 seats sold regularly for the University of Michigan or Penn State Football games. In 2006 Americans spent over 17 billion on tickets to sporting contests and 90 billion on sporting goods, over double what it spent on books. Sports magazines take prime space on bookstore shelves. The granddaddy of them all *Sports Illustrated* sells as many copies in a month (13.2 million) as *To Kill a Mockingbird* has sold since its publication in 1960. A tenth of the *World Almanac* is devoted to sports, more than is allocated for business, science, and politics combined.<sup>1</sup>

Have you noticed that new architecture of stadiums whether football, basketball or baseball are more like shrines, temples and cathedrals and the architecture of many churches are like warehouses. Do you not think there is a correlation?

Not only are the gods of our culture and the gods of our creation, but there are also what Leslie Williams terms the "lesser gods." In her book by this title she describes the little way "good things" become gods in our lives. She lists things like: security, love, urgency, self-fulfillment, goodness, ease, understanding, and even worship and Christian service as these good things that can somehow little by little take away our devotion to God. They are, as she describes, like moons that reflect the real light, but we are fooled into thinking that they are lights themselves, until it is too late. Then we discover that they are really nothing but a cold, hard and empty darkness, instead of the true light. This is really about worshipping the gift and not the giver.

Williams writes "Worshiping other gods often catches us off guard, our lives slipping out of proportion before we know what's happened. How does it happen, for instance, that I come to love my job more than God? When does the need to control my children become more important than God's will for them? Why am I suddenly consumed too much by "church work" to really worship? The enemy is sneaky and persistent and delights every time we give our best to anything other than God. The heart of idolatry is really selfishness. We think we are going to get more out of our devotion to something else than our devotion to God."<sup>2</sup>

How are we to avoid carrying these foreign gods or household gods along in our lives? How do we rid ourselves from them and bury them and leave them behind? Let's look on the positive side of the commandments here in Deuteronomy. The commandments we have looked at are of the "shalt not" variety. They tell us what not to do. But the greatest commandment as Jesus called it is a commandment about what we should do. We are told to love God with all our heart, soul and strength. Now Jesus adds the term mind. Yet, the idea of the mind is in the original commandment as well. The heart was the seat of intellect for the Hebrew. The heart was not emotion. Notice that emotion is not even listed. I think that is because emotions although real can also be misleading. Just because we feel something is real, does not make it real. We can be misled by emotions which come and go. But the heart, soul and strength are the essence of who we are and what we control. The heart was the intellect, the soul represents one's true essence and sensibilities and strength encompasses one's physical action.

We are to love God with our whole self. That sounds good but what does that mean in a practical way? Let's think about the word love. We know the word love is used as a feeling, but we also know that word is a choice we make. We choose to love by our actions toward others. When I love someone I think about them. Now when we fall in love we might think about them night and day, but as we remain in love that immaturity leaves. That does not mean I don't think about the people I love. In fact, when you love someone they become part of your conscience and sub-conscience decision making. When I come to a choice I am going to make, or a decision I have to make, I either think about how that would effect the one I love, or I make the decision almost instinctively based on the love of that person. That is the way it is when we love God with our minds. There are sometimes we think before we