

Colossians 3:1-5

1 April 2014

“Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. ⁵Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

Idolatry – anything we set our mind/heart/desire/hope/etc. on above God. The first commandment is that God is to be the number one thing in our lives. I read a quote recently. It was posted on someone’s Facebook page:

“I’d rather die deceived by dreams than give my heart to home and trade and never live.”
Farid Attar

This quote is the exact opposite of what the whole of the Bible teaches. To live a life deceived by dreams is to live a life chasing idols. When we chase idols, there are only three possibilities. Either we get the idol, we chase the idol our entire lives but never quite get there, or we reach a point where the idol is permanently beyond our reach and we will never get it. All three have lousy consequences.

If we get the idol, we soon realize it did not deliver as promised. We ask, “Is this all there is?” It is never enough, it never satisfies.....it is the most empty, lonely, gut wrenching aloneness we will ever feel when we achieve our idolatrous dreams. We learn the veracity of the quote that “It is lonely at the top”. It indeed is. I have been there more than once and it is the loneliest, most empty place on the planet. It actually hurts on the inside. Romans 1 talks about this when it says “God gives them over to their desires” and they spiral down even further each time. Ouch. Ecclesiastes also hits on this when it states “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and striving after the wind”. When we achieve our “ultimate dreams” it is never a good thing if they are idols. We often become monsters if we stay there. Just look at the lives of the stars and the ultra rich. There are plenty of examples to study. Many commit suicide. Michael Jackson, Curt Cobain, Judy Garland to name a few.

If we reach a point where the idol is no longer a possibility, we become depressed and life loses its meaning. Eventually we realize we will never play in the NFL, never get that promotion, never be loved the way we want to be, never have the home we dream of owning, never end poverty, never save our son or spouse from himself, etc. The thing we have been living for so long is now unattainable, and now our life seems like it is not even worth living. We don’t know what to do. We become lost, adrift with no purpose, no direction, no reason to

even get out of bed in the morning. This often leads to depression, when our idol becomes permanently beyond our reach.

If we live our entire lives and yet do not attain our idol, we live out the old adage, “Life is a bitch, then you die”. This is where most of us are. Working, pursuing, sacrificing family, health, relationships, anything it takes to achieve our dreams, to get our idol, whatever it may be. But it is always out of reach, beckoning us on with the promise of fame, glory, riches, happiness, meaning, whatever. We are on the treadmill year after grueling year, being worn down, trying everything we can think of to attain that one thing that we believe will make us happy. But we never get it. Like chasing a butterfly in the woods, it is always just beyond our reach. We can see it, but we cannot have it. We are angry all the time, blowing up in traffic and yelling at the other drivers. We are frustrated continually, never content, always reaching for that one thing but never able to hold on to it. Like a bed that is too short, we are never comfortable for very long and we are unable to rest, unable to enjoy our life. Constant dissatisfaction is what we find here.

I have personally experienced all three of these scenarios more than once. They are dead ends and lead only to slavery, addiction, disappointment, anger, depression, sadness, and all of the other negative emotions and experiences you can think of. But there is a better way.

There is a fourth possibility, namely to keep our hopes and dreams in perspective of eternity – to not have idols but to put God first. To have our minds set on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We may want that new mandolin, those awesome speakers, that flat screen TV, that AR-15 with a suppressor and night vision scope to hunt coyotes in the front yard with...or perhaps we want children, a promotion, more money, a nicer car, a bigger home, to be smarter, to look better, to be noticed, to be loved, to have a spouse, more sex, fame, popularity, status.....or maybe we want to feed the hungry children of the world, or end abortion, or end war, or help the underprivileged children in our city succeed in life, to be more righteous, to be more godly.....an idol can be anything, even good things. But these things are not idols in and of themselves. They become idols when we set our minds on them, when we set our hope in them, when we expect from them the satisfaction that only God can provide. When anything other than God becomes an ultimate thing in our life it is an idol. But if God is our ultimate thing, if He is our main hope, the thing we have set our minds on, we become able to keep our desires in perspective and they do not own us. They do not drive us anymore. They cease to be idols. We are set free from their tyranny. Then say we get those awesome speakers, we can enjoy them now, they will not disappoint. But if we don't get them or have to sell them, it is no great loss either, for our world does not depend on them anymore, for God is our god. We enjoyed them while we had them, and now we enjoy life without them. They are not an idol.

And what of Farid Attar's quote....is it better to live a life deceived by our idolatrous dreams than to live for home and trade? I think not. The life deceived by dreams leads to the three options above. Sure, it may be fun at first, the affair may be great in the beginning. So is

heroin. But in the end it brings death and disappointment, slavery and addiction, it wrecks our life, destroys all of our relationships, steals our very life from us. Dreams that are set on anything this earth has to offer ultimately disappoint, and they often make us vulnerable to being hustled and manipulated, causing us to make bad decisions, to do things we would never do otherwise, to compromise our integrity, to think we are above of the rules, to justify the means with the end, and so on. We become so obsessed with fulfilling our dream we often reach the point that we will do anything to see it through. We lose our soul. We don't own it, it owns us. We become slaves to our dreams, our idols, our ultimate things, when they are things of this world. (perhaps this is because satan is the master of this world currently?) Then in the end we are disappointed because we got it and it did not deliver, or it is no longer an option and life is not worth living, or we are constantly pursuing it but it is just out of reach and it is driving us crazy. None of these are desirable outcomes.

We recently watched the movie American Hustle. I was prepared for the worst. But it turned out to be a movie about the dangers of idolatry. The entire movie was about how everyone's idol made them vulnerable to being used, manipulated, tricked, robbed, set up and ultimately hustled. It was a great illustration of many of the different things we turn into idols, and how those idols drive us to ruin. Everyone in the movie lost basically. Even the main character lost the friendship of the mayor, which he never got over for the rest of his life. A life that has idols is a life that is pretty much doomed.

So perhaps that is why God started the 10 Commandments with this....No other Gods....No idols. It is for us that He gives this command, not for Him. The first commandment is given to us for our own good. It is given to us as the key to freedom, the key to life, real life, real joy, real peace, etc. He gave us this commandment so that we can be free from idols and truly live our lives, doing whatever it is we find to do while we are here on this earth, enjoying it fully in the light of eternity. But more on that later. There is another verse I read recently that ties into this train of thought:

“Where there is no vision, the people perish, but happy is he who keeps the law”
Proverbs 29:18

So I realized that I have set aside all of my dreams over the years, my “vision” so to speak, but I did not perish. I have lived a modern version of the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life” basically, setting aside my hopes and dreams for “home and trade”. But I did not perish, my shoulders are not hunched over, I am not like the ox on the treadmill as Farid Attar worries will happen to him. Why is that, I wondered. How have I escaped this demise while living for “home and trade”? How is it that I have had a life without chasing idols, without the “deception of dreams”? Then I realized it is because I set my hope on Him, on Christ, on knowing Him. He is my vision, my hope, my dream, my ultimate thing. And so He has protected me all these years from losing hope when earthly desires come and go, when things work out differently than expected, when things have not gone as I had hoped they would, when potentially ultimate things are permanently taken off the table unfulfilled, when potentially ultimate things remain

just out of reach, or when I have achieved potentially ultimate things. This is the key to truly living life, to set our minds on Him. To make Christ our ultimate thing. To live Colossians 3 is to “love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind”. This mindset frees us from the tyranny of our circumstances and idols and their ability to control us, to control how we feel, to manipulate us into making bad decisions, to drive us, to addict us, to enslave us, to ruin us, etc. If knowing God is our vision, then we will not perish, ever. (Jesus even said that we will not perish or die in John.) Having God as our vision, as our dream, as our ultimate thing is another way to understand the first commandment. The proverb goes on to say “happy is he who keeps the law”. So keeping God’s law brings happiness to our life. Having no other gods makes us happier. I can attest to this that this is true.

As an aside - If we set aside the traditional dreams, hopes, visions, etc. for life, giving up the “deceptive dreams” that we think “make a life”, how then are we to live? Certainly God is to be our main thing. Our mind is to be set on the things above per Colossians 3. But what else? How are we to go about the day to day business of life? Three things – faith, good works, and blessing. God wants faith, and we are to be men and women of faith. God wants us to do good works. And God wants us to be a blessing. So whatever we put our hand to in this life, whether we are talking about “home or trade”, we should be certain that it increases these three things in our lives and the lives of others. These three things are the answers to the three great questions we all ask ourselves:

1. What does God Want? ([Click here for the answer](#))
2. What does God want me to do? ([Click here for the answer](#))
3. What does God want me to be? ([Click here for the answer](#))

But there is a fourth question, and God also provides a definite answer to it like He does the other three. Eldredge alluded to it in his book, and noted that it is the target of many of the devil’s schemes against us. The question is:

What does God want me to have?

Does He want me to have an awesome car? A certain job? The perfect spouse? Successful children? What does the Bible say that God wants us to have? And what is the devil trying to take away from us constantly? The answer can be found in John:

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.
(John 15:11)

Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.
(John 16:24)

But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

(John 17:13)

Joy. His joy. The full and complete joy of God. It is a joy not dependent on circumstances, but dependent on God. And we get this joy by keeping his commandments. Particularly by keeping the first commandment. Many have said that in order to break any of the commandments we must first break the first commandment. It is the foundation for the other nine. It has also been said that the entire bible is primarily about the rejection of idols. In our quest for joy, for happiness, we try everything imaginable only to find that “it is Leah in the morning” to quote Tim Keller, referencing the story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. God gives us the key, the secret to contentment, to happiness, to true joy. It is to have no other Gods besides Him. This appears to be the only way to everlasting, permanent, unchangeable joy.

Finally, Colossians 3 finishes the thought in verse 4 with the glory we all long for. Ultimately, we have idols because we believe they will bring us the glory we were made for and desire. But it is a trick, they do not deliver. Only God does. And here He tells us that “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” We will be revealed with Him, “in glory”. We will share in His glory. We finally get our parade. We get the promotion. We get the Lamborghini so to speak. Whatever it is we have made into idols, ultimately we are looking to our idol to give us this glory, and here we learn that the true way to get this glory is to set our minds on Him. We don’t really want the Lamborghini, we want the glory that owning it will bring us. Here we are told that we will get glory beyond what we can imagine, the glory of the Son of God, when He is revealed. This is somewhat amazing to think about.

So Colossians 3 is basically a restatement of the first commandment, with a promise to share in Christ’s glory when He is revealed.

Wow! 16 years of camping out on a verse finally pays off. I am so psyched. Praise God!