

# THREE IDOLS THAT THREATEN MISSIONS

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Westerville Bible Church • September 25, 2016

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Every disciple of Jesus Christ must obey His commission to make disciples of all the nations. However, just because we submit to Jesus' universal and absolute authority does not mean obeying the Great Commission is without difficulty. Our indwelling sin principle fights against any submission to Jesus' authority. The world around us, which constantly rebels against God's authority, opposes our obedience. Of course, the devil, the sworn enemy of God, fights any attempt to obey God, seeking instead to destroy God's creation.

Missions then finds itself opposed by at least three idols, along the same lines as John describes "all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). For every disciple of Jesus, missions—obedience to Jesus' Great Commission—is opposed by the idol of comfort, the idol of stuff, and the idol of others.

## **The idol of comfort elevates our desire to pursue and protect our comfort over our responsibility to obey Jesus' commands.**

When Jesus began to teach his disciples that he had come to suffer and give his life, Peter rebuked Jesus. But Jesus reminded Peter that he was thinking from a purely human perspective, not God's perspective. Instead of avoiding death at all costs, Jesus reminded his followers that following him means giving up our life. Following Jesus Christ demands that his disciples forfeit their lives to Him (Mark 8:34–38), because protecting your physical life brings no eternal gain (v. 35), protecting your earthly means is a waste of time and energy (v. 36), your eternal soul is priceless (v. 37), and a refusal to follow Jesus *completely* is a refusal to follow at all (v. 38).

*Jesus Christ demands that we forfeit our lives to Him for the advance of the gospel.*

Jesus does not call us to the comfortable life (Luke 9:57–62). He calls us to the life of a soldier (2 Tim 2:3–4). Pursuing Jesus Christ is guaranteed to bring opposition (2 Tim 3:12).

- We may not have as much money as we might like.
- We may not be able to live at the same standard to which we are accustomed.
- We may not enjoy the same conveniences, entertainment, or comforts.
- We may have to endure the discomfort of living as outsiders or foreigners.

However, we follow Christ for the "joy set before us" (Heb 12:1–2), to know him and make him known (Phil 3:10), to spend and be spent (2 Cor 12:15) for the One who became poor for our sake (2 Cor 8:9).

## **The idol of stuff elevates our desire to pursue, acquire, and protect material things over our responsibility to obey Jesus' commands.**

God promises to care for our needs (Matt 6:19–33). What we treasure up and value ought to be heavenly, not earthly (vv. 19–21). We cannot become enslaved to money, because we cannot

serve both God and “stuff” (v. 24). While we may be tempted to think we cannot be enslaved to money if we don’t have much of it, Jesus launches into a discussion about worry.

- Life itself is a gift from God (v. 25). Despite our concern, we cannot wish our lives to last longer or shorter than what God allows.
- Just as God breathes life into his creation, so he provides food for it as well—both birds and human beings (v. 26).
- Worry does nothing to lengthen your life or to provide for your needs (v. 27).
- God decks the flowers in splendor every day, and yet we worry about his provision for us (vv. 28–30)? It simply will not do to worry about daily necessities, because God already knows we need them (vv. 31–32).
- Our responsibility is to do what is right before God, and allow him to take care of our daily needs (v. 33).

*Jesus Christ calls us to follow Him, not pursue stuff (Matt 19:16–30).*

Money and material goods cannot be pursued with the same zeal with which God commands us to pursue him. He calls us to suffer joyfully the plundering of our property (Heb 10:34). Following Christ means that we spend and are spent for others (2 Cor 12:15).

### **The idol of others elevates our relationships with others over our responsibility to obey Jesus’ commands.**

Jesus’ claim to all authority in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18) places everyone in one of two groups: either they humbly acknowledge his lordship, or they rebel against it (Matt 10:34–36). There simply is no middle ground, no room to “agree to disagree.” This is why Jesus said that his coming brings a sword and not peace (v. 34). This division between the followers and the enemies of Jesus Christ cuts between friends, brothers and sisters, parents and children, even husbands and wives.

*Jesus Christ demands our highest loyalty (Matt 10:37–39).*

Jesus is not willing to “split time” with the others in our lives. Just as Jesus said the greatest command was to love the Lord your God with *all* your heart and with *all* your soul and with *all* your mind (Matt 22:37), so he commands his followers to love him with *all* their heart, soul, and mind. No one may take the place of highest allegiance that belongs only to Jesus Christ. We may be called to choose Jesus Christ over our love for and loyalty to other people:

- We may have to live through a spiritual separation from family members and friends who refuse to submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ.
- We may have to leave behind friends who cannot understand why we sacrifice our comfort and our stuff to obey Jesus’ command.
- We may have to endure an emotional separation from family members who disagree with our decision to obey Jesus’ command.
- We may be separated physically from family members or loved ones in order to obey Jesus’ command.