

Idols of the Heart

Part 9

Ezekiel 28:12-17; Isaiah 14:12-15

The idol of music.

- **Worship of musicians.**

- **Reduce worship to only music.**

We worship with our lives.

- *Romans 12:1-2*

- **Offer**

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 - *Romans 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:12-13, 19-20; Mark 12:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Matthew 16:25*

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 - *Hebrews 10:10, 18, 13:15; Colossians 3:17*

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Idols of the Heart, Part 9: Lordship, part one

Author Kyle Idleman writes this: "See if you can imagine this one: People arrive hours early for church. On Sunday mornings, they don't just set a backup alarm clock to make sure they wake up in time; they set a backup for the backup. They arrange their schedules to make sure they don't miss gathering for worship. Throughout the week they talk about what happened on the previous Sunday as excitement builds for the upcoming church service.

There are all-day talk shows on the radio devoted to reviewing last week's service and breaking down the next one. There's even a TV show called "ChurchCenter" that runs highlight clips of church activities that have happened across the nation that day.

When Sunday comes, the members start loading up their trucks, SUVs, and sedans hours before the service starts.

"Hurry," says Dad frantically. "We're behind again."

"It's 6 am" says Mom. "Church doesn't start for five hours."

"Last time we left at this time, we had to park three miles from the sanctuary and sit in the nosebleed seats. Someday, I really want to sit in the front row. But you have to camp out on the church lawn to have any chance of that."

The roads are really congested on the way to church, no matter how early you leave. At church, there are vehicles parked as far as the eye can see, and folks are out tailgating. Some have elaborate spreads prepared, breaking out portable grills and lawn chairs in the church parking lot. Some have televisions so they can stream the updates from other worship services while they wait for their own.

It's nice weather, not that it matters. Even in the dead of winter, they'll be out here in the same numbers. The masses begin filing into the sanctuary, cheering with great passion and excitement.

Once the service starts, the people are all on their feet – not that they ever sit down. Of course, a bunch of young guys are in the front row. They've probably been here since Friday night. They have no shirts, and each one has a letter on his chest. Together they spell, "GIVE TITHE." Apparently, the rumor has gotten out that the pastor is indeed going to teach on biblical stewardship and worshiping God with our money. Everyone is *pumped* for the giving sermon. It's one of the highlights of the year.

After several hours, people start looking at their watches. Everyone is thinking the same thing: “I hope the sermon goes into overtime!”

I’m sure you’re picking up on my not-so-subtle point. That scenario seems beyond crazy to us, but if you take out church and put in football, then it seems perfectly sane.”¹

Today we are looking at the Spirit-led function of worship, and the idol that Satan has substituted in its place. Of course, *any* idol is a cheap substitute for the worship of God – sports, money – all the things we’ve been talking about this summer. But when it comes to worship, the enemy of our souls has not only given a substitute, but in the process has tricked us into reducing what worship really is supposed to be.

Let me explain, and to do that, I have to give a bit of Satan’s backstory. Before he was the enemy of our souls, he was one of God’s highest-ranking angels, in charge of worship around the throne. Back then, his name was Lucifer – that’s the Latin word for “Morning Star” and “Son of the Dawn.”

In the Bible, we get two glimpses into the biblical world of pre-history, one from the prophet Ezekiel, and the other from the prophet Isaiah. Let me show you those:

‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: *(this is describing Satan back when he was Lucifer)* “You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God...Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned.

So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor.

So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings.
(Ezekiel 28:12-17, niv)

As is often the case with prophets, God is speaking to Ezekiel’s present-day situation (in this case, the king of Tyre), but at the same time this is telling us something bigger – in this case, Lucifer’s sin, rebellion, and its consequences.

The prophet Isaiah shares this in more detail:

¹ Kyle Idleman, “Gods at War,” pg 113-114

How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! (*That's the English translation, but in the Latin translation, that's where the name Lucifer comes from*) You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to the heavens; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the realm of the dead, to the depths of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15, niv)

Those passages tell us that Satan was a guardian of the throne of God – which is in the heavenlies – and what is it that constantly happens around the throne? Worship. So we don't know for sure that Satan was *the* angel that actually *led* the worship, but he *was* responsible for making sure the worship happened. But he began to take pride in his own beauty – beauty which God had made – and began wanting that worship for himself. We're told in Revelation 12:4 that he managed to convince a third of the angels to join his rebellion. He was jealous of God and wanted everyone worshipping him instead, so God cast him and those angels down out of heaven. After he was cast down, the Bible gives him many names like Beelzebub, Belial, Devil, Serpent, or Satan, which means "Adversary," or "Accuser."

The next time we see Satan is in the book of Genesis in the Garden as the serpent. Satan saw the pinnacle of God's creation, which is humans who are made "a little lower than the angels" according to Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7. Satan saw humans, made in the image of God, the objects of God's love, and knew he had his mission – to do everything he could to keep us separated from God because of sin. Satan knows he can't defeat God, so the next best thing is to hurt God through making God's children suffer and be separated from God because of sin.

I remember when our boys were babies, and we had to take them in to get their inoculations. When the doctor stuck the needle in their little arm, they screamed and cried, and it hurt ME so much! That was my first taste of seeing my children struggle and suffer. It literally hurts me more than it does them. Satan knows that if he hurts us, it hurts God. Everything in him is directed at keeping you from God, because he hates God, and God loves you with everything he has.

Why the Satanic history lesson? A couple reasons: First, it gives context to *who* is actually driving this business of idol worship and why it is such a huge topic in the Bible. Satan has it fairly easy; all he has to do is get you to worship *anything* besides God. Satan doesn't care if you are worshipping Satan himself or not, because if you worship anything less than God, he wins. You basically *are* worshipping Satan if you worship anything besides God. He thinks *he* should be God, so he gives you sinful substitutes to worship you away from God and toward himself.

The second reason I'm telling you this is because of Satan's previous occupation of guarding and overseeing worship: he is especially intent on diminishing or destroying OUR worship of God.

He does that especially through...

The idol of music.

I remember when I first started out in youth ministry, there was a guy by the name of Bill Gothard who was going around doing conferences telling parents how they were supposed to control their children. If you remember my message from last week and you know anything about Gothard, you know why that was a bad thing. I thought it was ironic that he considered himself the expert on parenting, but he was never married and had no children. If you ever watched the demise of the so-called reality show, “19 kids and counting,” and the documentary called “Shiny Happy People,” you know about Bill Gothard.

Anyway, one of the things Gothard adamantly taught was that all music of any kind – everything except hymns – was from the devil. Rock music especially was of the devil. He said that the use of drums came from the jungles of Africa where they worshiped Satan. I’ll let you make a determination about the racism in that. But according to him, even contemporary Christian music was Satanic because of the drums.

So before we get any further, please hear me say this: music is a powerful thing. It can be used for good or bad. It can express the soul, or it can manipulate the soul. It can be used for beautiful, poetic, and spiritual expressions, or it can be used for base, sinful, and even evil expressions.

I’m not a music theologian, but I was a youth pastor during the waning years of Gothard’s influence on Christians, and I did a lengthy, reasoned study on music and how it can impact youth, so that I could teach them to choose what they listen to wisely, if they wanted Christ to be first in their life.

So you are not going to hear me say that only church music is good and everything else is sinful. Much of the music outside of church is beautiful expressions of the experiences of the soul. So having said that, and given the origins of our ultimate adversary, you can understand why music is a significant weapon in his arsenal against you.

When it comes to music, let me give you the advice that we share in the Church of the Nazarene “Covenant of Christian Conduct” that I mentioned last week: “whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over mind, that thing for you is sin”²

So I’m telling you, use the Word of God, listen to the Spirit of God, and get the wise counsel of those that you know live Christlike lives, so you can make wise decisions about what music you listen and sing to. Okay? My point is that you *must* do this if you are a Christian, because this is a weapon of the enemy that you may not even realize is having an effect on your spiritual life.

But you can see easily how the enemy has turned music into an idol to worship by looking at our...

² Church of the Nazarene Manual, 2017-2021, para. 29.1

- Worship of musicians.

Just look at the idols of current music that we worship. Look at their concerts that fill arenas, and stand back objectively to watch how the people behave when their idol comes on stage, or sings certain songs, or says certain things. My goodness, for 23 years now we've had a hit television show that takes obscure people with talent who compete for the promise that they will be the next American --- what? --- *idol*.

So one of the things that Satan has done has substituted humans for God as our object of worship and he's used music to do it.

But Satan has done more with music than that; because of how much of our culture involves music, Satan has been able to...

- Reduce worship to only music.

Because of how we view music in our culture – especially in the culture of Christian music – I'm afraid we equate worship with *only* music. We've got our own Christian music idols and concerts, and we've incorporated their songs into our Sunday worship. And that's not a bad thing – IF the songs are theologically and biblically sound and they call our attention to God and not ourselves. By the way, that's our criteria in selecting songs for worship here. We don't choose songs just because they are topping the Christian music charts.

I recall years ago sitting in on a seminar on preaching, being taught by a denominational leader. He was a pastor, a district superintendent, and a college professor. He sat on general boards for the denomination. So I was shocked to hear him say that the entire Sunday morning service is about the sermon. He said that the singing, the offering, the prayer –he called all those “the preliminaries” that needed to get out of the way for the sermon. With all due respect, I think he was wrong. You see, the ENTIRE service is worship. The singing, the praying, the giving, the announcements, the sermon – all of it is to help us worship God. So on Tuesday of each week we have a worship planning meeting, where we've prayed about how the Lord wants to shape us as individuals and as a church, and then we plan the entire service to achieve that end. And as we focus on God and his Word, he does his work in us. When we come together on Sundays, WE ARE NOT THE AUDIENCE. GOD IS.

Here's why that's important: what happens in here on Sundays is to draw us as his people together around him, to recall what God has been doing in our lives and praise him for it or seek him in it, to retell how he has saved us through his Son Jesus Christ, and to allow him to work in us what he wants to, so that we can leave here and live out the Gospel through the week with our words and our actions – to live holy lives.

That's because...

We worship with our lives.

There is a powerful word from the book of Romans in the Bible that summarizes what all of the Bible is saying. This is what it says:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—*this is your true and proper worship*. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”
(Romans 12:1-2, niv)

I want you to notice that in that passage, Paul writes, “This is your true and proper worship,” and that it is “good and pleasing” to God. That’s an indicator that we are being told what the heart of true and proper worship is about. So let’s take some time and see if we can understand this passage in a way that will change our relationship with God and will change our worship.

We ought to...

- Offer

God something in worship; and that “something” is ourselves. *We must understand that worship is going to take a full and complete commitment to Christ; it is an offering of our whole selves.* Paul makes this point by first talking about presenting ourselves to God. The word “present” means to give once, totally and completely, and then to continue to give. The “offering” of yourself means a complete surrender to God and then an ongoing surrender of yourself to God as you continue to follow Jesus.

When you first receive salvation and enter into this new relationship with God as your Father, you choose to accept what Christ did for you on the cross and the forgiveness he offers you. But what Paul is talking about here is *after you are saved*, you are responding to all of God’s love for you, and out of love and gratitude to him you are offering yourself to him. First Jesus gave himself for you and you accepted that, now you are offering yourself to him. You are doing it as a response, an expression of pure love *in view of God’s mercy*, which you have already experienced at salvation. We are to make this commitment of our lives as an act of worship.

That offering is our...

- Bodies

When the Bible tells us here to offer our bodies, this is not metaphorical; we are meant to take it literally. In chapter 6 of Romans, we were told:

“Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to

life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness.” (Romans 6:13, niv)

When it says to no longer offer our bodies as instruments of wickedness, or in other words for sinful actions – that was meant literally; that we should not take action with our bodies to carry out sinful behaviors. Right? Well now, here in chapter 12, the term “bodies” is meant literally as well. God literally desires to be Lord of your life – of what you do with your body, of what you do with your physical existence and actions. Worship is offering ALL of you to him.

In the church in Corinth in the Bible, there was an attitude going around that said that since we have been saved and all our sins are forgiven, now we can do whatever we want. There was a belief back then – that is still around today – it doesn’t matter what you do with your body; you can do whatever you want! Besides, “God will forgive you anyway,” was their thinking. But that is *wrong* thinking! And the Bible says this:

“‘I have the right to do anything,’ you say—but not everything is beneficial. ‘I have the right to do anything’—but I will not be mastered by anything. You say, ‘Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.’ The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” (1 Corinthians 6:12-13, niv)

Then, later in that chapter, it says this:

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, niv)

The word for “bodies” is the physical body, not some metaphorical meaning.

After God saves you, you worship him with ALL of you. He didn’t just save your spirit, or just your soul, or just your mind. God’s salvation reaches EVERY part of your life – mind, soul, and body and strength – which is how much you and I are commanded to love God according to Jesus himself:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30, niv)

The work that God does in your life is a total, complete work that encompasses everything you are. God’s saving isn’t just a spiritual metaphor; it is an entire-life-thing: body, soul, and spirit:

“May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, niv)

You and I are to offer ourselves – *everything* we are – as an offering to God as a grateful response in worship to everything he has given for us; the life of his One and Only Son on the cross.

But here's the amazing thing: when we offer our very bodies – everything we are and do – to God in worship, God gives us back all kinds of abundant life. Jesus said:

“All who want to save their lives will lose them. But all who lose their lives because of me will find them.” (Matthew 16:25, ceb)

You and I should be greatly encouraged to know that we are not just destined to keep repeating the same sin over and over again. Instead, knowing how much God loves us and all he's done for us, we offer to God our entire lives – lock, stock, and barrel – and then we *keep* offering ourselves to God continuously – and we find that we will have the power, by the presence of Christ in our lives through the Holy Spirit – to live the free-from-sin life we've always wanted to live, that we were created in the first place to live, that we really long to be able to live.

Now, when we offer our bodies to God, it's not meant to be literally a physical suicide; instead, you offer to God a...

- Living sacrifice.

We are to continually give our entire selves to God, as, what Paul calls, “living sacrifices.” To understand that, you first need to know that there were two main types of offerings when the Jews worshipped at the Temple. One type of offering was the kind that led to reconciliation. In other words, you did something wrong, you sinned, and so you had to pay for it. To atone for that sin, you had to sacrifice a bull or a lamb or a dove or some grain or perfume or whatever had to be sacrificed—had to be given up—to pay for that sin (there were different sacrifices for different sins), and therefore the offering of that sacrifice would allow the relationship with God to be reconciled. That's the first type of sacrifice. Got it?

The second kind of sacrifice happened *after* the first sacrifice, and the second one was to celebrate—to celebrate the restoration of the relationship with God, or to celebrate some great thing that God had done. Do you follow that? So here's why that's significant to this passage: Jesus Christ has *already* made the first kind of sacrifice for us! We don't have to make that one if we've accepted his. That's why the Bible says:

“For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time.” (Hebrews 10:10, nlt)

And again:

“When sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.” (Hebrews 10:18, nlt)

So since Jesus is the *first* sacrifice for the sin we've committed, Paul is now telling us to make ourselves the second sacrifice in response. We don't have to pay for our sins; we simply accept the sacrifice of Jesus that he paid in our place – we don't have to make that sacrifice. Got it? So what's left then is the second sacrifice: the sacrifice of celebration, or praise, or *worship*. And *that's* what our lives are to be. That's why the Bible says:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.” (Hebrews 13:15, nlt)

So our lives are to be lived as a constant sacrifice of worship to God through Jesus Christ as a loving response to what he’s done for us, and our lives should declare that worship! Remember, we are told to present our *bodies*, which means that our entire beings – whatever we do with this body we live in – our entire lives should be worship to God. Everything we do all the time everywhere we go is to be done as praise to Jesus. That’s why the Bible says:

“Everything you do or say, then, should be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, as you give thanks through him to God the Father.” (Colossians 3:17, gnb)

Remember that Paul says that giving our entire lives (as a way to praise God) is “your true and proper worship.” Do you understand what that means? It means that your worship style has *nothing* to do with music; it has *everything* to do with your life-style. You worship God with your LIFE, not just with your song. In fact, the song-style means nothing without your lifestyle, and your lifestyle gives meaning to the song-style. That’s why it’s so dangerous to make worship about the idol of *songs* and their *style*—about singing and even the style of the music. I get it – we all have different preferences about the style of worship music we like – some like hymns, some like choruses, some like it in English, others in Spanish. But *when we make worship about our music preferences, we think we are the audience, and we are NOT – God is!* What he’s looking for is a unified expression of our praise to him. It’s *all* music to his ears if it comes from a lifestyle of worship. GOD says that worship is about life-style, not song style; worship is how we live our lives for him.

Do you want Sunday worship to be a powerful experience? Then don’t depend on any of our great worship leaders or singers or musicians or me for that. Don’t expect that – not if you aren’t living a life of worship. If you want Sunday worship to be a powerful experience, then spend Monday-through-Saturday offering your body as a living sacrifice of worship to God. *Then* come here so that together all of us can offer ourselves in unified song, in prayer, and in giving. *That* will make *this* supernatural.

Prayer