

Idols of the Heart

Part 10 – Lordship 2

The idol of control.

- *Titus 2:11-12*

- **Jesus is Lord.**

- *Luke 2:10-11*

- **“Kurios” means “controller”.**

1. The partially surrendered life.

- *Luke 6:46; Proverbs 3:5-6; Luke 9:23-24*

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- *Romans 14:7-8; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; Proverbs 3:5-6; Matthew 7:21-23*

What have I not surrendered to the Lord?



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Idols of the Heart, Part 10: The Idol of Control: Lordship 2

I was sitting in my parents living room on a Sunday morning in the middle of May, my senior year of high school, getting ready for church. I had been a Christian for just over a year and no one in my house was yet a Christian.

As I was getting ready, I remember feeling dizzy – like the room or the floor was shaking. It didn't last for long, so I headed off to church. When I left church that morning, I noticed that my car had a strange film on it – like maybe there was a fire nearby or something. It wasn't until I got home that I learned that Mt. St. Helens had erupted.

That eruption caused widespread devastation, destroying over 4 billion board feet of lumber. 3.7 billion cubic yards of earth was blown off the mountain. Fifty-seven people were killed.¹ I've been told by some people in our church that were living here at the time, that they came out of church to darkness, with ash falling like snow to several inches deep. The ash cloud reached a height of 80,000 feet and eventually circled the globe.

I think before that happened, we all kind of thought we had things under control. We knew that earthquakes were happening on the mountain, but we thought the geologists had it figured out. They had been monitoring things and said they would let us know if it erupted.

That Sunday morning us modern people who thought we were so in control were reminded of the limits of human ability and the terrifying power of nature. In an instant, the entire Pacific Northwest and beyond was changed and there was nothing we could do about it.

"For many of us, that is what the world feels like now. The pandemic, cultural change, political polarization, and technological disruption have rapidly altered the world we live in at a breakneck speed. The sheer weight of change has left many of us disoriented. We've realized that we are not as in control as we thought."²

Today is the final Sunday of our summer long series called "Idols of the Heart." In the Bible, idolatry is the number one issue, making its way into every book, and it's as significant a problem today as it was then – and just as deadly to us.

I'd like to conclude our time by taking another look at...

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=damage+of+Mt+St.+Helens&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>

² Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence*, (Moody publishers, 2022), pages 19-20

The idol of control.

If you were with us two weeks ago, you remember I preached on this, but I was talking then about the idol of control that shows up in organizations – especially in churches as spiritual abuse.

Today I want us to conclude by looking at our own individual issues with this idol of control.

Psychiatrists call it the illusion of control. They say it is a mechanism we create to preserve or create self-esteem, allowing us to take credit for successes and to deny responsibility for failures. But studies show it also leads to bad decision making because it leads us to think we have control over circumstances or even over our own selves, causing us to make daring and careless decisions. This idol of the illusion of control leads us to be more susceptible to addictions, gambling, or to addiction relapses.

That's because we somehow think that we've got control of things, and that leads to all kinds of problems, because when things get out of our control (as they *all* inevitably are), it creates all kinds of stress and anxiety. Even then we hang on to this illusion that we'll somehow get things back under our control, when all we really do is create more stress trying to control things that we have no control over. But ask anyone in this room who has received a diagnosis of cancer, and they'll tell you how quickly their illusion of control disappeared.

Even if we realize we can't control circumstances, we still think that we can control ourselves. We think we'll buckle down and change that bad habit. We just need to apply more discipline, work harder, change this thing or that thing about ourselves, and we'll finally have control.

Back in the 1980's, when drug use became epidemic among young people, someone came up with a simple solution: *Just Say No*. We thought if we could just teach young people to say "No" to drugs and sex and violence, we could save lives and reshape youth culture in America.

The idea caught on with some help from First Lady Nancy Reagan. The *Just Say No* campaign blanketed America with school curriculum, TV advertisements, and celebrity endorsements. Police Departments joined the effort and developed the DARE program – how many remember that? Drug Abuse Resistance Education.

For 20 years the DARE program was a well-funded and award-winning program and could be found in almost every school system in the country and in 50-some other nations around the world. It was meant to empower young people to believe that they were in control and they could just say no to bad behaviors.

There was only one problem: it didn't work. Surveys and studies showed over and over again that it not only failed to reduce risky behaviors, but in some cases they actually increased.³

³ Bryan Wilkinson, "Just Say Yes"

<https://www.preachingtoday.com/sermons/sermons/2009/june/fruititdoesabodygood8.html>

Back in the early 2000s, I was pastoring a church in Mountain Home, Idaho. We were all shocked when the city police officer in charge of the DARE program – the police officer who spoke to kids regularly in assemblies about saying no to drugs – the DARE officer was arrested for drug use and trafficking.

A national program designed by the best and brightest to teach people self-control failed miserably. *Still* we try to control our circumstances or even our own lives, when in reality we have little or no control over anything – and the truth is, we were never meant to have control. Only God has control!

Now, if you are a student of the Bible you are going to say to me, “Wait a minute Mike – doesn’t the Bible encourage us to have self-control?” And I would say YES! Absolutely it does. But what the Bible means by self-control is different than you might think.⁴ The dictionary defines self-control as an ability of the will to prevent strong emotions or impulsive actions. Biblical self-control certainly has something to do with a measure of restraint. But it’s not the stoic, clenched-jawed, strict disciplinarian kind of religion too many of us have seen in churches. Biblical self-control is not about conforming to religious rigors or rules and regulations. Instead it has everything to do with saying “yes” to God – far more than saying “no” to behavior. The Bible says:

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live (*or say ‘yes’ to*) self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.”
(Titus 2:11-12, niv)

Here’s the key to all this: saying yes to God – self-control – does *not* mean me controlling myself. It means that my “self” – my whole person, my whole being – body soul and spirit – comes under the control of Christ. Biblical self-control means that I am an individual governed by God. My entire life – every aspect of it, whether spiritual, moral, or physical – is now subject to the sovereignty of the God through the Holy Spirit. I am now under his authority. I have surrendered or relinquished the right to run the affairs of my life and turned it over to him. It is saying yes to him and his control.

By nature we don’t like that idea – we are wary of giving up control to anyone else because it’s a matter of extreme trust, and it’s hard for us to trust. But sooner or later we have to decide if we will trust God, because this is what the entire summer series – and the entire Bible – is trying to tell us...

Jesus is Lord.⁵

Everybody say that, one, two, three: *Jesus is Lord*. In fact, 740 times in the New Testament, Jesus is referred to as Lord. Look at one of the classic Christmas verses

⁴ This portion of the message adapted from a previous message, “The Nine: Self-Control” 5/27/12

⁵ The remainder of this message is based off a previous message I preached, adapted from a sermon by Craig Groeschel, lifechurch.tv

from Luke's Gospel dealing with the birth of Christ and you'll see that at the *very first* mention of the Savior's birth He is called Lord.

In the nativity story in the Bible, in the Gospel of Luke, the shepherds were watching the flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared and said:

“Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11, niv)

At the very beginning of the story it's established that Jesus the Son of God is born, Savior of the world, Christ the Lord.

This is how we slay the idol of the illusion of control.

There's a Greek word that is often used in the Bible that we translate as “Lord,” referring to Jesus. It's the word *Kurios*. That word does not mean the knick-knacks you put in a cabinet by the same name. In Scripture the word can mean “supreme in authority”...

Kurios means controller

...it means Lord.

Now I can already imagine, for some of you the word *controller* is going to be a challenge because if Jesus is the Controller, He's got some competition – *in you*, because *you* want to be in control. (Thankfully, *I* don't have that problem at all. Except maybe when it comes to mowing the lawn. That has to be done at the right spacing with straight lines – in a different direction every week. Am I right? Where's my people?)

If you are bristling with the idea of Jesus as Lord, I promise you that you are dealing with the idol of control.

How does it show up? It shows up when you might say, “I want my day to go this way!” Or, “I've made the plan and we're sticking to it,” or it's “I want my kids to have this career.” Or, “I've already thought about it – my idea is perfect.” It's *not* perfect! So, so many of us want to be in control.

So what does it mean that Jesus is supreme in authority, the Controller, the Lord? What does it mean to make Jesus the Lord of our life?

I don't want to be picky here, but technically we don't make Jesus Lord. Do you realize that? He *already* is Lord. *We* don't make Him Lord. What *we* do is we surrender to what He already is – we surrender our lives to His Lordship. We don't make Him Lord, that's what He is. *We* surrender to *His* Lordship. We surrender to the supreme in authority. We surrender to the only One who is really in control. We surrender to the Lord.

So what I want to do in the rest of our time is talk about surrendering to the Lordship of Christ. There are two different levels of surrender that I see in

Christians. The first, if you're taking notes, is what I would call...

1. The partially surrendered life.

I'm very afraid that this is where the majority of American Christians would live. In many parts of the world where the persecution is more intense, believers are completely committed. They *have* to be. But where we live, there are so many what I would call "casual Christians," or "cultural Christians." Elon Musk has called himself a cultural Christian. That's someone who recognizes the moral and cultural values of Christianity, but not the Lordship of Christ. He got that idea from the famous atheist, Richard Dawkins. It's the partially surrendered life. It says, "I like the principles because they make my life better, but I'm still in charge."

In Luke 6:46, Jesus is talking about this very thing when he asks a powerful question:

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46, niv)

"Why are you giving me this lip service? I don't want lip service; I want *life* service! Why is it you're calling me Lord and then you do whatever you want to do?"

Unfortunately today, I believe there are so many people who would say, "You know, I believe in Jesus as Lord, but I still want to be in control. I believe Jesus is Lord, but I still want to do whatever I want to do. I believe Jesus is Lord, but I'm just not going to trust Him with everything." And so, before long we end up practically, by the way we live, taking the Bible and saying, "You know, when it comes to relationships, I know Jesus says I'm supposed to pray for those who hurt me and bless those who persecute me. I'm supposed to forgive, but after what they did to me, there's no way I'm going to forgive, just forget that!" Or we say, "Oh I know, that when it comes to my money, I'm supposed to trust God and not go crazy into debt. I'm supposed to save and be responsible. But I'm going to keep spending the way I want to. I ought to give ten percent to church. There's no way I'm going to ever do that!" And, "Oh, I know when it comes to my time and the way I live, I'm supposed to give God my time. I'll give Him my Sundays, every now and then when it's not football season, but I'm not giving Him my Friday nights and my Saturday nights! I want to party and sleep!" Or, "I know I am supposed to love and care for others and serve those who are oppressed or mistreated or the immigrant, and make room for them in my church, but I just don't have time for that, and it makes me uncomfortable!"

Listen: if I tore pages out of a Bible, you'd be offended. But many of us, we rip up God's truth everyday with the way we live or don't live. Is it more offensive to you that I would tear pages out of a book than that Christians don't do what Jesus told us to do? That we hate and judge and gossip and have pride and lie? That we steal from God by not giving? That we judge people by the way they look? Which should offend us more?

Jesus said, "Hang on, don't call me Lord and then go and just do whatever you're going to do. Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and don't do what I say?"

It's the partially surrendered life. Many of you are familiar with Proverbs 3:5-6, but I want to read it to you from the PSV. (PSV stands for the Partially Surrendered Version of the Bible):

“Trust in the Lord with some of your heart, and lean on your own understanding, in some of your ways, acknowledge him, and you can make your own paths straight.” (Proverbs 3:5-6, PSV)

Now, if you're not familiar with that verse, let me warn you, that's not a real version of the Bible! I changed it into the Partially Surrendered Version. But if you were to read the Bible by the way some of us live, that is what you would read.

Here's the deal, what you need to understand, Jesus is no part-time Lord, and He doesn't want part-time followers. When you come to Him, He asks you to give your whole life. He says:

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23, nlt)

He said in the very next verse:

“If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.” (Luke 9:24, nlt)

You give your whole life to him; you surrender it to Jesus. You come under the Lordship of Christ. He is the supreme in authority. He is the One who is the Controller, He is the Lord of all, and we come under His Lordship. We do not get to pick and choose! He's really serious: 'Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say to do?'

Let's talk about another level of surrender and that's what Jesus wants for us...

2. The fully surrendered life.

Fully surrendered – all in. Not kind of a Sunday Christian, not kind of a when it's convenient, not a God Bless America, “I'm making my way up through the middle class” Christian. But a “full-on, holding nothing back, my life does not belong to me but belongs to Jesus commitment.”

In fact, I love the way Paul phrased this in his letter to the Christians in Rome, he said:

“For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.” (Romans 14:7-8, niv)

Now, let me ask you a question, how many of you are living? How many of you are alive? If we live, who do we live for? It's to honor the Lord. The Lord, the Kurios, the Supreme in authority. If we live it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor who? The Lord. So whether we live or die, if you are a Christian, who do you belong to? Scripture says: we belong to the (Kurios) Lord. We belong to *Him*. Our life is not

our own. We surrender to His Lordship; we belong to Him.

Let me give you this example. I wear this ring. Do you know why? I'm married. It tells the world that I belong to Shelly, and she belongs to me. In fact, forty years ago, I bought her the nicest ring a 23-year-old guy could buy for cash. It's not a big rock but it's the thought that counts, okay! I was making maybe \$14,000 a year as a full-time youth pastor outside of Los Angeles. Shelly was living in New York at the time. So, I saved up. I did research, I found out what you are supposed to look for in diamonds and settings (I had to go to the library to do that – we didn't have Google back then!). I went to the jewelry district in downtown L.A., I picked out the diamond stone – half carat – and then the setting. I put them both in an envelope, signed the back, and watched them carry it to the jeweler to put it in the setting – that way they couldn't change the stone. I also made the dealer put in writing that once I bought it, I could get it appraised at three places and if any came back less than what I was paid for it, he would give me the difference. I paid a month's pay for it, and it appraised at about two month's pay. So I got that going for me. Then, I flew out to New York where Shelly was, and I gave her the ring. A year later I put it on her finger when we were married, and she put mine on my finger and we made covenants to each other.

Now let me ask you, how much money did the ring I gave Shelly cost *her*? It cost *me* a lot, how much did it cost her? The answer is, zero, right? It didn't cost her anything. But, when she *received* the gift how much did it cost her? It cost her everything at that point because that meant she was mine. She was giving everything to me.

See, at that point when we stood before God, she gave her life to me. Here's the deal, she belongs to me, she's mine. I belong to her, I'm hers. We belong to the Lord, we're His.

She is mine. She belongs to me. You try to touch her, I will kill you! You hurt her, I will hurt you. You need to understand that. She is mine. I am hers. I belong to her. We belong to each other. This ring she gave me, didn't cost me anything, she bought it for me, but when I accepted it, it cost me everything.

Here's the deal, when Jesus shed His blood and died for you, He offered the availability of a free gift to you, salvation.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.”
(Ephesians 2:8-9, niv)

Salvation cost you nothing – you didn't pay for it. But it cost Jesus everything. And when you say yes to it, it costs you everything. You no longer own the rights to your life. Does that make sense? You belong to Him. You surrender to His Lordship. Your life is no longer your own. You are no longer the controller or the lord of your life, He is.

It is concerning to me what I see so much today: this kind of casual approach to Jesus. But listen: Jesus is not just the little Lord Jesus baby in a manger; He's not just

the Lord Jesus on a cross dying for our sins in some painting. What you need to understand is *He's the soon-returning, conquering, reigning, ruling, supreme authority coming back on a white horse with a sword that has a name written on it that says He is the King of kings and He is the Lord of lords.* And He. Means. Business. Don't just say, "Lord, Lord," and then do whatever you want. He is the supreme, ruling, reigning King of the universe. Our lives, if we are Christian, do not belong to us, they belong to Him.

So with that said, the *real* version of Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6, niv)

With how much of our heart? Not with some but with *all our heart*. And it says we are to acknowledge him. In the Hebrew language, the word that's translated acknowledge is the word *yada*. This same word is also translated "to know." It's the same word that describes the intimate relationship with Adam knowing Eve. So literally it says, "in all your ways *know* Him and He will make your paths straight." Do you know what it means that he will make your paths straight? It means *you* don't. It means he has the control of your life, you don't. And it means he is so in control that the paths of your life will be straight – straighter than the lines in my yard when I mow. It means it will be the best for you.

I think the reason so many of us do not surrender some area of our life to the Lordship of Christ is because we don't know Him well enough, because if we did, we'd trust him. To know Him is to love Him, to know Him is to trust Him, so you can surrender to Him because you know He is Ever-Present, He is All-Knowing, He is All-Powerful, He is Good in every way. And not only that, He is a relational God who came to us with the name of Emmanuel to be God with us because He wanted to reveal Himself to us. That's why He sent Jesus, so we can see Him, so we can know Him, so we can relate to Him, so we could have a love-relationship with Him. It's all about relationship.

It's a whole fully committed life, because I know Him and I love Him. Shelly doesn't stay with me just because of some empty promise, but it's because of our intimate, ongoing love relationship. It's because we know each other, because we've given our lives to each other. It's not just a 39 years ago promise, it's an everyday, living, thriving relationship. It's all about relationship.

I hope that there aren't any Christians here today that are under the illusion that you've got things under control. Under the illusion that things are great for you because you joined a church years ago, or because you got dunked in a baptism service, or because you pray over your food or because you say "God bless you" when somebody sneezes. The reality is, there's a lot more to Christianity than that. The gift of eternal life may not have cost you anything, but your only reasonable response is to give your whole life to Jesus, and if you're not giving your whole life, at some point we have to ask ourselves the question, do we really know Him? Because Jesus said some of the most haunting words in all of Scripture when He said:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23, niv)

Some of us today might say, “Didn't I go to church every now and then? Didn't I put some money in the bucket a couple times? Didn't I help the lady cross the street? Wasn't I a good person? Didn't I do all of these good things, Lord, Lord?”

Jesus said: “I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you.’” In other words, “We're not in a relationship. You gave me lip service, but we didn't know each other, there's no intimacy. You called me Lord, but you didn't do what I said.”

You see, there's a really big difference between calling Jesus Lord and surrendering to His Lordship. He *is* Lord, and *we* surrender to the Lordship of Christ. He's not a part-time Lord and He doesn't want part-time followers. He gave us the free gift of eternal life, and He wants the only reasonable response: “Here's my life – whatever you want. Not my will, but your will be done. Therefore, I will take whatever I'm trying to control and surrender it to His Lordship and trust Him with all my heart and lean not on my own understanding, but in all of my ways I will know Him and He will make my paths straight.”

Invite to front:

So, here's what I want you to do, I want you to take a moment and be very open to what God might show you and ask this question very prayerfully, What area of my life am I still trying to control? What area am I unwilling to give to God?

And it could be any number of different things, but I want you to be really, really open and honest before God and put a name on whatever it is.

Maybe it's your kids, or your future, or your career, or your school or degree, or a relationship, or an addiction. I don't care if those things are good or bad – if they are drawing you away from your relationship with God and his purpose for you, I don't care how “good” they are, they are not the best for you. Lordship. Or maybe it's your attitudes about someone, or a grudge you keep nursing, or a pain you keep rehearsing. What is it? What is it that you've not surrendered to the Lordship of Christ?

I want you to be honest. What area am I not fully surrendering to God? What am I not fully surrendering to the Lordship of Christ? Because almost all of us, in one way or another, we're living a partially surrendered life. Let's slay the idol of control and be fully surrendered Christians.

Come forward and pray

Father, I pray today that you would speak to us in a way that only you can do and that there would be lives and relationships and families and marriages that are transformed because of the goodness and grace of your Son, that we would surrender to the Lordship of Jesus.

Benediction:

And now—all glory to him who alone is God, who saves us through Jesus Christ our Lord; yes, splendor and majesty, all power and authority are his from the beginning; his they are and his they evermore shall be. And he is able to keep you from slipping and falling away, and to bring you, sinless and perfect, into his glorious presence with mighty shouts of everlasting joy. Amen. (Jude 24-25, tlb)