

THE LOVE OF GO AFFECTION & IDOLATRY EXODUS 32:1-35

We are jumping back into narrative in this book of Exodus. These next three chapters conclude the narrative portion of the book, even though it isn't super long, it is packed with important lessons for us to explore and understand. This portion of the return to narrative picks up from where we left off at chapter 25. Remember, Moses had come down the first time to confirm the covenant with the people, then went back up to receive the tablets of stone which would be placed in the Ark of the Covenant, since the people were going to be getting ready to construct the tabernacle.

We will study the people's response

We will study Moses and God's interaction

We will study the way in which sin is dealt with in the community

Big Idea: Our misplaced and corrupted affection and trust is the source of all sin in our lives, and is the area in which God is working to transform and find in Christ again and again.

I. Corrupted Affections

This is possibly one of the most iconic scenes in the entire Bible, and is an event which gets referenced over and over again throughout the Scriptures. This event is rich with lessons and ways for us to begin to understand our relationship with sin, and how to deal with it in light of Christ. We don't have time to get into all the myriad of lessons we can learn from this one scene, but suffice it to know that we can get a really solid picture of the gospel in this chapter.

Like anything in the gospel, it begins and ends with God. God has been the one who has blessed this nation, He has grown it into a large family which threatened even the greatest superpower nation of the time, Egypt. He protected them in Egypt, He rescued them out of Egypt, He provided for them in the wilderness despite their constant grumbling and complaining, He has entered into a covenant relationship with them, has given the laws and regulations to show how life works best and how to live happy with Him, and He has given the a way to worship Him which not only honors God, but enlivens the soul as well. He has done all of these things for them because He chose to, not because they earned or deserved it. Thus, we begin with God's sovereign election of His people. The same is true for us...

Now that the people have been waiting for a while for Moses to come back down, they have time to reflect on what they just entered into and were given to follow. And we see just how shallow their affection for Moses and God are!

Lack of trust

The people have lost trust in Moses. But not because Moses was untrustworthy, but because they only trusted what their eyes could see, and how they felt as though they were strong-armed into submission. Once the source of their reluctant following was gone, they chose to move their trust to Aaron. Bully him into doing what they wanted.

Diminished and distanced themselves from Moses. “this Moses, the man who...” this was a very pointed way to say “we didn’t ask to be led out here, but here we are and now he is no where to be seen. This is Moses’ fault, so we will move on!”

They then commanded Aaron to make them idols to worship. Instead of submitting to his leadership in their lives, they felt like they were his boss and could tell him what to do. Lack of trust in the appointed leadership of Aaron, taking the leadership back into their lives...

Love of self

Their love for their own control over their own lives is at the base of their motivation for idolatry. Just like Adam and Eve, they love themselves more than God, and this gets worked out in how they turn to idol worship. They want a god they can see and control. But it is absolutely absurd, because they know that it is nothing but a manufactured thing, however, sin confuses and corrupts our affections.

“The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line; he marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass. He shapes it into the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to dwell in a house. He cuts down cedars, or he chooses a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar and the rain nourishes it. Then it becomes fuel for a man. He takes a part of it and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Also he makes a god and worships it; he makes it an idol and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire. Over the half he eats meat; he roasts it and is satisfied. Also he warms himself and says, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire!” And the rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, and falls down to it and worships it. He prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god!” They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, “Is there not a lie in my right hand?” —Isaiah 44:12-20

Notice how hard the worker works to make this thing that is nothing! The same is true for us! We work and work and work to pursue our own idols in our life: relationships, career, money, status, stuff, etc.. and none of it ever satisfies! Why do we work so hard to pursue these things? Because our affections have been corrupted, and we have a love for self that is stronger than a love for God.

We can identify areas of idolatry in our lives easily: An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure." The true god of your heart is what your thoughts effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention. Often it is good things that God has given us which get elevated to god things.

The Israelites had no affection for God, and thus they turned their attentions to something else. Shows that we are worshipping creatures. We inherently worship, but the object of our affections and worship is what defines who we are.

We show our own love for ourselves greater than God in our sin. We look to our sin to give us what we want or feel we need instead of looking to God for that. Our affections are so corrupted that we don't even know what we need, yet we think we do.

The heart of sin stems from our affections. Persistent sins come from a place of misplaced affections, thus the way to start battling against sin is to have our affections transformed, infatuated by a greater Affection and become rightly aimed at God...

"On the tenure of "Do this and live," a spirit of fearfulness is sure to enter; and the jealousies of a legal bargain chase away all confidence from the intercourse between God and man...It is only when, as in the Gospel, acceptance is bestowed as a present, without money and without price, that the security which man feels in God is placed beyond the reach of disturbance - or, that he can repose in Him, as one friend reposes in another - or, that any liberal and generous understanding can be established betwixt them - the one party rejoicing over the other to do him good - the other finding that the truest gladness of his heart lies in the impulse of a gratitude, by which it is awakened to the charms of a new moral existence." Thomas Chalmers The Expulsive Power of a New Affection

We need the power of God, by His holy Spirit, to come into our hearts and begin to give us new affections for Christ. Only then will we be able to see those places in our lives where we are setting up idols and seeking to love ourselves over and above God.

II. Covenant Love

God's glory

Moses pleads God's mercy based on the glory of His name and how this would become used to fuel the enemies gloating and exalting over God. God's glory was at stake! The fate of God's people shows the world the power and truth of God Himself. This is what Moses is appealing to here, and why it is so effective in directing God's course a different way.

God's promises

Moses pleads mercy based on the covenant of grace with Abraham. Before this current moment, long ago, God made a covenant with Abraham which superseded this present covenant. The difference was

the difference in how the covenant's were received: Abraham's by faith in God alone, Moses in the obedience and works of the people. Moses knew that they had already broken their covenant with the LORD, so he is appealing to a previous covenant which cannot be broken as it depends upon the LORD to be fulfilled. Moses knew that God credits righteousness to those who trust in the finished work of God, Abraham being the chief and first real model of that in Genesis.

“What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” - Romans 4:1-5

Moses knew that they had failed in their good works before God, but that God would forgive based on faith in His righteousness. Thus, Moses pleads according to the promise!

We might think that this is a very audacious thing for Moses to do, but God desires to be reminded of His promises, not because He is forgetful, but because He delights in us delighting in Him through His promises. Take the promises of God to Him, asking to see them fulfilled in our lives today!

“For all the promises of God find their Yes in him.” - 2 Corinthians 1:20

Moses acts as the mediator between God and man. He claims the honor of God's name and the first covenant of grace as the basis by which His wrath is turned.

Jesus is our true and better Mediator. Moses only mediated between Israel and God, but Jesus mediates between all of mankind and God. He is the One who is the glory of God incarnated, thus truly honoring God in the face of His enemies, and He is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abraham, whose righteousness is ours to be received by faith!

III. Cleansing Conviction

Moses comes down the mountain. Important that he reiterates that it is the writing of God Himself. Joshua and Moses' interaction. Can almost hear the sadness in Moses' voice as he tells what is happening.

One lesson that we can immediately draw from this is the necessity for someone else, and outside source, to bring attention and awareness of our sin and idolatry in our lives.

Holy Spirit. Others.

Moses breaks the tablets as a symbol of them breaking the covenant with God, destroys the idol and has them drink it as a symbol of their shame and to further desecrate their false god...

Confrontation

Moses confronts Aaron. Aaron deflects and downplays the sin. Just like Adam and Eve. Aaron's expressed sin of poor leadership is actually rooted in the much deeper sin of craving the approval and pleasure of man. The fear of man was stronger than his fear of God, because he desired man's praise more than God's. Paul struggled with the same issue in his own life, and only after coming to Christ did he really begin to understand the selfish, pleasure seeking motivations which were fueling his holiness...

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ...For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" - Galatians 1:6-7,10

Paul confronts Peter about his hypocrisy! We need people in our lives who will lovingly confront us when it is appropriate. For the sake of God's glory and honor.

This pattern is consistent with our nature. Often, whatever is the presenting expression of sin is actually the fruit of a much deeper root sin that is feeding the expressed sin. Thus, something like addiction (whether to porn, alcohol, drugs, spending, etc.) is actually a symptom rather than the actual issue. To look at the actual issue one must delve deeper within our hearts, our motivations, experiences, and childhood, in order to get at the root sin. We call this the "sin beneath the sin".

Example of Mike Bedient calling me out on my selfishness, citing several prominent examples. Had to ask myself why I was acting that way. Didn't even realize how my actions were being perceived by others until I was called out....started a process of self-reflection that exposed my lack of trust in God's provision in my life, and a strong sense of love for myself over others...

Way to lovingly and effectively confront about sin: observe, overlook, offer

Cleansing

Moses demonstrates the gravity of the situation by calling the people to repentance. Some, like the Levites, repent, but many don't and suffer the judgement due to sin. This is where we see the Levitical priesthood actually ordained, in repentance and the defending of God's honor. They men would go on to be the priests who would officiate at the tabernacle. Kinda intimidating huh? This is the intensity with which we must seek to kill the sin which still besets us. We have the ultimate penalty of sin removed at the cross, but the power of sin in our lives can be persistent if we don't seek to kill it.

"Let not that man think he makes any progress in holiness who walks not over the bellies of his lusts... Let faith look on Christ in the gospel as he is set forth dying and crucified for us. Look on him under the weight of our sins, praying, bleeding, dying; bring him in that condition into your heart by faith; apply his blood so shed to your corruptions: do this daily."—John Owen

Application

“Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” - 1 Corinthians 10:6-7

“Respectable Sins” by Jerry Bridges. Get this book. Read it. It will challenge you in how you think of yourself and sin. It pierces to where we allow much more subtle sins to reign in our hearts, and how persistently destructive they can be if left unchecked.

“A little thorn may cause much suffering. A little cloud may hide the sun. Little foxes spoil the vines; and little sins do mischief to the tender heart” - Charles Spurgeon

There are at least 4 dominant sins that many of us most likely deal with (although they are by no means the only ones):

Ungodliness: not thinking, acknowledging, or thanking God, or having any real impact on our day to day lives

Anxiety/Frustration: not trusting God

Impatience/Irritability: impatience is strong annoyance, irritability is the frequency of impatience towards others

This one also probably leads to the sin of judgementalism in our current culture; being impatient with those of differing viewpoints or opinions or convictions. To winsomely deal with another person takes time, energy, patience, and lots of love/grace. It is easier to cancel, gaslight, or ignore rather than engage.

Sins of the tongue: abusive language, critical spirit, lying, gossip, slander, etc...

T.E.N. (true, edifying, necessary)

Recognize my responsibility

How do I deal with my sin as I become aware of it?

Identify specific sins

Apply the gospel

Apply appropriate Scripture

Depend on the Spirit

Cultivate prayer

Involve one or more believers

Conclusion

I know that we have covered a lot of ground, that there is a lot to unpack here, but I think that these things will be helpful for us as we continue to seek to walk in a manner worthy of Christ in this world. All of this warfare against sin and idolatry in our lives stems from our affections and trust. We need to have our affections for God stirred up again and again so that we might be enabled by the Spirit to kill sin in our lives. And the way to have our affections for God stirred up is to be daily receiving and reveling in the love of God in Christ Jesus. The love of God toward us is what causes us to be infatuated with Him and thus desire and long to live a life that is obedient and honoring to Him, for His glory and the fame of His name in the world. Let us pray.

Lord's Supper

At the table we eat and drink the convent love of God in Christ. Here we experience the mediation of Jesus on our behalf, taking on the penalty of our sin and giving us His righteous life as a gift. Here we communally declare that we are on the LORD's side and not with the world. Here we taste the affections of our heavenly father, having our affections stirred anew by the Spirit.