
Dynamics of Idolatry > Seduction

Psalm 73:1-14

Dan Turner

I'm a sucker for the underdog. Whether it is on the "Road to the Final Four" or Iowa Hawkeyes playing for a Rose Bowl invitation, I'm thrilled to cheer on the underdog.

You can imagine what I was like as a 9th grader gazing at the silver screen as the rags-to-riches American Dream story of Rocky Balboa was featured. How an uneducated but good-hearted debt collector gets a shot at the world heavyweight championship had me on the edge of my seat. I leaned forward and listened intently on the night before the big fight. Rocky confides in Adrian. Though I did not see it coming as a 15 yr. old, the movie producer escorted us toward the heart of the movie. On the eve of this colossal fight out of the mouth the heart spoke. Rocky said to Adrian, **"If I just go the distance I will know that I'm not a bum"**. The crowd roars. The cheers ascend. And Rocky's idol comes tumbling out.

Tonight we continue our series on idolatry titled *Not Idle about Idols*. Last week we look at Psalm 73 to gain an overview of the moves of a man seduced by, reduced by and then brought back from idolatry. We did this to give us insight into our own hearts and grant us the means by which we can enjoy freedom from idolatry and obedience to the Lord. Tonight we pick up the second message of this series in order to do two things.

1. Identify idols
2. Replace idols (with Jesus thru repentance and faith)

To achieve this open your Bibles to Psalm 73 and listen as I read the first 14 verses.

What do you suppose Rocky's idol was? Was it money? Was it a new house? Was it the car he always wanted? Was it to wrap Adrian in designer clothes and adorn her with jewels?

These things undoubtedly were attractive and gained Rocky's attention. But I submit to you that we are not on to his chosen idol.

How about you? What is your chosen idol? To help each of us locate our idol and find forgiveness and joy in Christ, let's use Rocky's self-disclosing conditional statement.

If I just...I will know that I am...

- If I just am respected by _____ I will know that I am approved.
- If I just am called upon more I will know that I am valuable.
- If I just can get a different body/hair I will know that I am attractive.
- If I just can buy some very nice possessions I will know that I am living the life.
- If I just can receive a college degree I will know that I am worth something.
- If I just clean my home I will know that I am a good wife and mom.
- If I just can get a promotion I will know that my wife and kids admire me.
- If I just can have victory over this besetting sin I will know that I am righteous.
- If I just can "go the distance I will know that I am not a bum".

You get the picture.

Tonight we want to look at the dynamics of idolatry as it relates to seduction. We do this so that we will be keener in our locating our own idols of the heart. We want to do this so that we together will experience the joy of freedom from false gods and obedience to the One true God.

Dynamics of Idolatry – Seduction

To 1) identify your idol and 2) replace it with Jesus (thru repentance and faith) notice the dynamics of sin's seduction.

"When I saw..."

v3-11

As we pick up our text for tonight we start with v3 and the psalmist's explanation for his drift into idolatry. In v2 he mentions that he was stumbling. Then, in v3, he begins to tell the reader why and when this was so. He said that he was *envious*¹ of the arrogant. And that he became envious *when* he saw their prosperity. V4-12 then give the description of what he saw that tempted him to want what they have. (Ponder the description of the affluent)

healthy – their skin tone was wonderful / their level of energy was impressive

wealthy – their bank accounts were striking / their need to balance check books wasn't

beautiful – their ladies had glowing faces and perfect form / their men had six-packs and chiseled shoulders .

This is what the Psalmist saw. Undoubtedly, there was some truth in it. They were healthy. They were wealthy. They were beautiful. There are people we know who care less about Jesus who resemble v4-11. But this is not the problem. It is not what he saw but how he understood it that is the issue. We all make observations. But it is the interpretation of our observation that is critical. The heart takes not the first step toward an object until it judges the object to be promising.

"Behold these are the wicked"

v12

V 12 helps us to see what was happening in the heart of the Psalmist that would give rise to envy and ungodly behavior. Listen again as I read v12-14 <read>

The psalmist doubts his upbringing. He describes the wicked in v.4-11 in a way that suggests that the teaching he received as an Israelite was wrong. Moreover, the Psalmist began doubting v1 "Truly God is good to Israel". You can almost hear him questioning the book of Proverbs that says "the way of the wicked is hard". All his teachers and peers and rabbis had it wrong. It is as though the Psalmist was saying, "If Psalm 1 says the wicked perish then I would rather "laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints" (Billy Joel).

The first sign of a soul seduced to sin is wavering in doubt over God's Word (see Gen.3:1-7). As wavering in unbelief over the Bible begins opinions over everything change. Seduction weakens judgment allowing affections to sniff around like a dog in heat. As our convictions over truth wane our desires for other things strengthen. We now reinterpret our surroundings. We now assess differently. We now are ready to entertain alternative preferences and act upon these preferences. We are becoming seduced by our own desires.

"All in vain have I..."

v13-14

We now are ready to listen to the heart of the matter. V13-14 put the stethoscope on his heart allowing us to hear what he thinks...thinks about God. The phrase "All in vain have I..." demonstrates what he

¹ See Col.3:5 for biblical evidence that Ps.73 talks about idolatry. When we are envious we have lost contentment and believe that what others have we need.

believes to be true about God, himself and others. It is apparent that now he has been seduced. As his judgment began weakened and changed, his affections became enticed and entangled. He concluded in his heart that he would miss out on good things if he stayed with the Israelite upbringing and not pursue the alternative lifestyle. The Bible was losing credibility in his mind.

The fundamental reason for this in light of v12-14 has to do with a distorted view of God. At this point, please pay close attention. What would prompt the writer to say “all I vain have I kept myself pure”? Why did he conclude that it was worthless and futile to obey the Lord? What did he expect as a result of his obedience? Listen to a few other passages that may shed light on his view of God.

“Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your commands yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends”. (Lk.15:29)

“These last worked only one hour and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat”. (Matt.20:12)

Like the elder brother in Luke 15 and like the laborers in the vineyard of Matthew 20, the Psalmist functioned in a remuneration/wage system. That is, he viewed God as an employer-like and himself as an employee-like. The employer hires competent workers in order to get the job done, the job he alone cannot do. In return the employer compensates the skill and efforts of the employee with wages and benefits. These wages are what the employee works for.

Can you hear something like this echoing in v12-14? “All in vain have I obeyed You. I stay out of trouble. I read my Bible. I stopped viewing porn. I give my tithes to the church. I am kind to people at work. I don’t gossip any longer (or at least not much) and now look at me – I was just diagnosed with cancer! Or I still do not have a spouse! Or I still do not have a leadership position in my church! Or I got H1N1 and feel awful. Or I just got dumped by my boyfriend! Or I did not make the basketball team. Or I still cannot find a job. Or I still do not receive compliments”!

The thought behind this view is “if we live a good life we ought to get a good life”. If life isn’t going the way we think it should, we are demanding and angry. God is not holding up His end of the bargain. We sit down and try to renegotiate with God. But as that does not work we are seduced and begin to explore our options.

Are you beginning to see now the most basic and fundamental problem the Psalmist has? It is not his culture or the kids at school. It is not even that he has little and others have much. The problem is God-centered. His view of God is wildly distorted. And as a result, he lost contentment in the goodness of God and began drifting toward evil.

He was taught that “God is...kind, pleasant, benevolent and full of good will toward humans. He is tenderhearted and of quick sympathy. He is inclined to generously give His grace and gifts to undeserving people. His goodness says that He takes holy pleasure in the happiness of His people (a adaptation of A.W. Toser’s definition of “goodness”)”.

But according to v3, the Psalmist had lost contentment in God and was restlessly looking around for significance and satisfaction. What will make life worth living now? When will I feel alive again? What identity must I project in order to sense worth?

Summary

So to summarize the first 14 verses 7 things can be said:

1. There will always be external temptations.
2. These allurements will come through the body (i.e. v.3 “when I SAW”).
3. A soul seduced to sin is a soul wavering in doubt over God’s Word.

4. Doubting God's Word is primarily about doubting God's character.
5. As doubt over God's Word increases discontentment in God's Son increases.
6. When there is something besides Jesus Christ that the soul believes it must have in order to be happy the heart has entered the embrace of idolatry (i.e. worshipping the creation rather than the Creator – cf. Rom.1:23-25).
7. The blame-game starts. Idolaters find fault in God.

Our series does not simply want to analyze and identify idolatry. This series wants to do two things – Find heart idols & replace them with the One true God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Let's close tonight with self-examination. God cares about your struggles. The root cause is always our hearts and their sinful desires. We sin because we believe lies about God instead of believing God's word. We sin because we worship idols instead of worshipping God. When do you struggle (Think concretely such as Saturday morning, rainy days, day before payday, day after birthdays, after you heard "no", etc.)?

When do you:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become irritable? • Lie? • Get moody? • Not pay attention to your children? • Work inordinate hours to perfect your skill? • Hear yourself say "I have nothing to wear"? • Rely on or comfort yourself? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steal from your workplace? • Not care about the lost? • Break your promises? • Become disinterested in God's people? • Act harshly around your spouse? • Live selfishly? • Escape through...?
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Behind every sin and sinful emotion is a lie believed. Every time we don't trust God and his word we believe something else. Life and freedom are found by trusting and delighting in the truth about Jesus Christ found in the Bible.

What truths do you need to turn to?

<p>What lie do you believe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About what you need? • About difficulty? • About your identity? • About what is fair? • About clothes and hairstyles? • About your work? • About what God is like? • About what God likes? <p>What do your thoughts show about</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your trust in Christ? • Your love/respect for people? • Your view of yourself? 	<p>Let us affirm with affection that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christ is great so we do not have to try to control everything². • Christ is glorious so we do not have to fear people. • Christ is good so we do not have to desire other things above Him. • Christ is gracious so we do not have to prove ourselves to each other.
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² These four affirmations were adapted and developed from T. Chester's good book *You Can Change*.

