Idols from the Heart

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1 Kings 11:1-4

<u>Sermon Series:</u>
Seven Greatest Virtues and Vices: Lust and Chastity

It's been quite a summer for men behaving badly.

The 7 Deadly Sins were compiled by Pope Gregory in 590 AD. He distilled these 7 killer sins from a 4th century compilation of evil thoughts assembled by Egyptian monks. He called these sins deadly because they are lethal to the human soul. As the sign indicates, they will also take you to places where you don't want to go. They were later counterbalanced by seven contrasting lively virtues.

We began this series by examining the deadly vice of pride and its corresponding virtue, humility. Presently, we are focusing on the deadly sin of lust. If ever there was a killer sin, lust qualifies. How many influential people have been brought low by lust? Chastity serves as its counterbalancing virtue. I know, chastity sounds so old-fashioned, but perhaps in this sexually reckless age, we could use some good ol' fashioned restraint.

It's been quite a summer for men behaving badly. We were inundated with the news that New York Congressman Anthony Weiner has been texting lewd pictures to various women around the country. Former North Carolina Senator John Edwards has been indicted for allegedly covering up an affair using campaign funds. Then the story leaked that California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger had fathered a child with his family's former housekeeper.

Dudes, what were you thinking? Precisely that; they weren't thinking. After all, hormones don't have brains. The men named join a long list of famous people gone wild.

It confounds me why people who seemingly have it all act so recklessly. Although they seem to have it all, still they want more.

King Solomon seemingly had it all. He was king over Israel, following his father King David to the throne, the greatest monarch the Old Testament has ever known. He built one of the marvels of the ancient world, the temple of Jerusalem. He was enormously wealthy. His annual income amounted to 25 tons of gold. His fleet of ships was second to none. He was legendary for his wisdom. There are thousands of Biblical proverbs attributed to Solomon. We read in 1 Kings that Solomon had 700 princesses and 300 concubines. You've got to be kidding! I'm trying to imagine 1,000 wives. It boggles the mind. Some of you are hard pressed to sustain one marriage partner, let alone a thousand.

Idols are counterfeit gods.

King Solomon had it all: wealth, fame, fortune, power, wisdom, romance. Yet he still had to have more. Stan spoke about lust last Sunday as unbridled passion. Lust acts like an unbridled horse that cannot be contained. Lust is never content with what it has. It must always have more.

Our Scripture lesson opens with the words, "King Solomon loved many foreign women…" (1 Kings 11:1). Maybe it should read that he lusted after many foreign women. His appetite for women was ravenous.

We're told, in verse 2, that "Solomon clung to these [foreign women] in love" (11:2). Solomon clung to what they worshipped and valued.

Verse 2 contains God's warning: "You shall not enter into marriage with them…for they will surely incline your heart to follow their gods" (11:2). But that's exactly what happens. Their gods become Solomon's gods.

The root cause of lust is something called idolatry. When I was a kid growing up in Sunday school, stories of people bowing down to golden calves made absolutely no sense to me. I couldn't understand the attraction. Idolatry seemed so strange and long ago.

When some of you hear the word idol, *American Idol* comes to mind. *American Idol* is preparing for its 11th season this fall. Who will be crowned the next American idol? I can hardly wait to find out!

Idolatry is a central Biblical word. The first two commandments warn about having no other gods or making for ourselves any graven images.

Idolatry begins in the heart. Idolatry works from the inside out. Sexual promiscuity and full-blown addiction begin as affairs of the heart. Manhattan pastor Tim Keller, whose church is composed primarily of under-35ers, writes, "Instead of telling them they are wrong because they are sleeping with their boyfriends or girlfriends, I tell them they are sinning because they are looking to their careers or romances to save them."

God warned Solomon in verse 2, "They will surely incline your heart to follow their gods." Sure enough, we read in verse 3 that "his wives turned away his heart," and in verse 4, "his wives turned away his heart after their gods."

John Calvin wrote in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* "The human heart is a factory of idols. Every one of us is…an expert at inventing idols." The heart is a proverbial factory for idols. Everyone is addicted to something.

Idols are counterfeit gods. An idol is anything we seek, apart from Jesus, to make us happy, satisfied and fulfilled. Idols are much like sea water. The more we drink, the thirstier

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we become. Only Jesus is capable of supplying living water to quench our thirst.

There are untold idols in our day: alcohol, sex, food, job, children, marriage, romance, pleasure, appearance, success, status and popularity. The list is endless.

There is nothing on this list that is bad all by itself. We tend in the church to think of sin as something bad. Sin is not necessarily doing bad things. Sin is promoting good things into places of ultimate importance. Idolatry makes good things into ultimate things. Idolatry looks to food to comfort us. It looks to sex to satisfy us. It drools after money to make us feel secure.

But money cannot save us. Sex cannot save us. Food cannot save us. It sounds so obvious, but how do you explain our zeal in pursuing such things? We must relinquish our idols and cling to the One who can truly save us.

We play in our minds the "if only" game. If only I had "x" amount of money, then I would be satisfied. If only I could meet Mr. Right or Ms. Right, then I would be happy. If only I could get that certain job, then I would be content. If only I can convince certain people to like me and respect me, then my life will be validated.

Let me bring this sermon down to a more personal level. What are the idols of your heart? What has captured your affections?

David Powlison poses in his book, *Seeing with New Eyes*, 11 questions to ask ourselves in unmasking potential idols. These questions are available on our website (www.viennapres.org/idols). Since we don't have the time to talk about all 11 of them, I've reduced his list to four questions.

1. What preoccupies my thinking? What do I daydream about? What do I enjoy imagining? What do I habitually think about in the privacy of my own heart?

2. What do I do to cope? What are my release values? What do I do to feel better? What do I use to comfort myself when things get difficult?

3. What do I worry or fear most? What gives me nightmares? What do I need to feel safe and secure?

4. What is my hope for the future? What do I trust to make me happy and satisfied?

As you ask yourselves these questions, perhaps an idol is coming into view. If you are drawing a blank, stick with it. Something will surface. Everybody is addicted to something.

Once we have identified an idol, we can take the next logical step to dethrone it. What other than Jesus Christ has taken title to my heart?

I have long admired the genius of the AA 12-step

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recovery plan. Someday, I'd like to preach a series of sermons on these 12 steps and invite everyone to go through these dozen steps in our walk with Christ. The first step admits that we are powerless over something. The second step believes in a Power greater than ourselves to restore us to sanity. The third step turns our will and lives over to the care of God. God as our Higher Power has the capacity to deliver us from our idol-making. Jesus Christ can set us free.

I know, it sounds so simple. Yet, some of these idols have burrowed deep into the human heart. They're not going to come out except through persistent coaxing and relentless effort. Be patient. It takes time. Some of us will need to work at eradicating these idols every day for the rest of our lives. God's deliverance sometimes comes slowly over time.

What I am talking about is not simply a matter of willpower. Let's suppose for a moment your idol is a preoccupation with how you look. Your idol is wrapped up with appearances. You won't make much progress by straining by the force of your will never to think about your appearance again. In fact, the more you try to block it out, the more you think about it. We often make this mistake in the church, of reducing the Christian life to a proscribed list of behaviors we can eliminate by a sheer force of will. Remember, we are powerless over our idols. That's why we're asking God through Jesus Christ to deliver us. We are asking God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Share the idol you're attempting to eradicate with a trusted, spiritually-mature friend. Stan talked last Sunday about an accountability partner who knows our struggles, can offer us encouragement and hold our feet to the fire.

We urge you to take in alternative, life-giving inputs and messages. This is why we urge you to read and meditate on Scripture. We want to shift our center of gravity away from the same wretched reruns that play in our heads and begin to think God's thoughts.

You can walk out of here this morning and mutter something under your breath about this being a nice sermon if, indeed, you believe as much. Or you can use this sermon to stick a flag in the sand and declare today you are finally ready and willing to do whatever it takes to dismantle the idols of your hearts.