

“Escaping Idols” – 1 Cor 10:1-14; 11:1

Opening: Isn't it awesome to get a break from this world and just treasure Christ with God's family?! One of my favorite memories of this church is worshipping with you 6 years ago this August – Lori and I (and 3 kids) had just moved from NC we were trying to support a family and pay for seminary on hourly wages – temptations were strong, stress was high - life was pretty challenging. I would sit here...couldn't sing...tears would pour down my face as I listened to worshippers treasuring Jesus – to me there is no better sound! And it is so good to hear it again today!

Lori and I (and now, 6 kids) were blessed to spend some time this past July in our 'mother-land' of beautiful NC. And as some of you have noticed, I came back about 6 pounds heavier – the temptations were just too strong for my low-carb diet – I am a sucker for southern cooking ... and I ate a lot of it. I shot an AK-47, for the first time – which was a blast...no pun intended! We saw family, swam a ton, and spent some rich time enjoying the landscape.

Image: (picture on the screen) Just recently, I learned something that's quite interesting about NC – never knew this before. Wilmington is a town on the coast and within a 90 mile radius, you'll find a swampy pine savanna – it's actually the only place on the planet where Venus fly-traps are native! Day by day the following scenario occurs. *A hungry fly darts through the pines. Drawn by what seems like the scent of nectar from a flowerlike patch of scarlet on the ground. The fly lands on the fleshy pad of a ruddy leaf. It takes a sip of the sweet liquid oozing from the leaf, brushing a leg against one tiny hair on its surface, then another. Suddenly the fly's world has walls around it. The two sides of the leaf are closing against each other. The spines along its edges interlock like the teeth of a jaw trap. As the fly struggles to escape, the trap squeezes shut. Now, instead of offering sweet nectar, the leaf unleashes enzymes that eat away at the fly's innards, gradually turning them into goo.*

Need: What a fatal attraction! Isn't it interesting that in the natural world there exists a reminder to all of us of the reality of our own fatal attractions. For me, in NC, I was reminded of one of mine - it was a combination of those country breakfast's, that southern fried chicken, the succulent Boston Butt; and not to mention the Eastern NC BBQ! Food, money, sex, control, sports, achievement,

success, alcohol, new homes, new cars – anything can be a fatal attraction in our life! We each know the power of temptation – none of us are immune, are we? **We all find ourselves between two worlds – one, attracting us to life, and the other, attracting us to ruin.** I believe that we each want to resist our fatal attractions at all cost – that’s why you’re here. You’re looking for hope.

Subject: Today, we’re going to unveil that hope as we answer the question, “How do we live a gospel-centered life in the midst of luring desires? All who seek to live a gospel-centered life will be tempted! But, how do we prevail? I believe we can all prevail over our temptations with God’ help!

Text: In our text today, Paul instructs the Corinthians how to prevail in their devotion to the gospel despite their own temptations.

Preview: Today, we’ll answer the question, “how do we live a gospel-centered life in the midst of luring desires”, by identifying our problem, uncovering God’s solution and applying His solution to our lives.

I. **(Problem) Idols compete with the gospel for our heart’s sole devotion.**
(v. 1-11)

Two weeks ago, Gary taught from 1 Cor 9 that the essence of the Christian life is to live gospel-centered ... that we do all things for the sake of the gospel. Just like in our solar system, all planets and stars revolve around the sun, so also in our lives, God intends for all things to revolve around the gospel! As we recall from last week, Dr. Moyer reminded us so clearly that although the Bible is 66 books, the gospel – at it’s core – is 10 words, “Christ died for my sin and rose from the dead”. And so, the God-Man, Jesus, is to be the CENTER of our world! *But, if we’re honest with ourselves - the gospel-centered life is extremely hard to live! As a matter of fact, I think it is humanly impossible.* Here’s why...because many of the good things that should be **orbiting** the center are actually competing for the God-spot – the center point. When good-things become god-things we have an idol! Idols are those things that we love, trust, and obey more than we love, trust and obey Christ – anything can be an idol. Idols are fatal attractions! We turn to our idols for peace, rest and satisfaction, rather than God. Idols become more fundamental to our happiness, our meaning in life, and our identity, than God.

Illustrate: For years, I have struggled with an **achievement idol** – it is my fatal attraction. Unfortunately, I’ve hurt people close to me because of it. I have believed that my significance and identity was found in the things I accomplished

or achieved. (*use levity*) So, actually, as you can imagine, the church has been a really great place for me – I have been able to hide out a ton with that idol. I mean, think about it, who's going to tell the guy working hard to get things done to stop working hard to get things done! But, I thank God for people, like many of you, who remind me of the gospel – that because of the CROSS, I have been made right with God, by absolutely no achievement of my own – and so I don't have to achieve in order to feel significant. I am significant because Jesus' love displayed on the cross says 'Thad you are significant, by no merit of your own, but by my love for you'. Now, I can achieve for the glory of God! Our problem is that idols compete with the gospel for our heart's sole devotion.

(TEXT) Paul wanted the Corinthians to get this because they were rather flippant about idolatry and the church was suffering because of it (Ch3). Please turn with me to 1 Cor. 10, and let's start reading at verse 1 (READ through v. 6). Israel had every opportunity in the world to be gospel-centered people. God was all over them. And yet, instead of being deeply satisfied in God, they still craved the 'stuff' of Egypt. Did you notice what Paul called these cravings? "Evil" (v. 1-6). WE CRAVE EVIL THINGS when we make good things god-things. Anything besides God that occupies our heart's devotion is an evil craving. Now, I know this is a hard one to swallow, because most of us don't consider ourselves as evil. We're pretty good, aren't we?!. We educate our kids, we clothe them, feed them, bathe them. We work hard to pay for stuff we want. We're nice to our neighbors. And on Sunday's we come to church and cheer for the Cowboys. And in Dallas, that makes us good people! Now, that may be true...but, hear the Word of God, if we crave good things as god-things – God calls that an evil thing.

TEXT: Let's keep reading (read vs. 7-11) God is serious about our idols, isn't He? Look what Israel did. Time and time again, God wasn't enough for them - they chose NOT to be satisfied with God – His grace, His presence, His provision (food and water), and in being HIS people. Instead, they chose to be satisfied with the party of a golden calf, pagan sexual activity, Egypt's cuisine, and in becoming their OWN people! They suffered dearly for it. Idols are fatal attractions. Just like Israel, we tend to jump from one idol to another. *Calvin said, "Man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."* We jump from one idol to another because we don't view Jesus as enough - as truly sufficient – as all-satisfying.

Illustrate: (the car) I have to admit, Tuesday morning I struggled to see Jesus as truly enough. I was driving in to work and my car just stops running. The radiator blew out, the engine was overheating, the thermometer was gone – it just

stopped. Hundreds of dollars to fix. I was so frustrated. We had saved some money and were going to put the kids in fall sports, and other things we wanted to do. And there went the money (snap) ... just like that – gone! To be honest, I was so frustrated at God that this happened. My thought was, “God, REALLY, couldn’t you have caused this car to not break down so we could have used that money for what we wanted!” And it hit me...as I sat there all morning in the lobby of the repair shop, preparing THIS SERMON, that I wanted THINGS more than I wanted GOD. You see, I had totally ignored His grace – I had exactly what I needed to pay for it and it broke down right in front of a shop, so I was able to coast right in. I thought to myself later that day, “I am just like Israel...although God’s grace was all over me, I craved ‘stuff’ more than HIM”. The reality of my own evil cravings slapped me right in the face, again.

Transition: As we’ve just seen, our problem in living a gospel-centered life is that Idols compete with the gospel for our heart’s sole devotion. And yet, God provides our solution - despite our wandering hearts, God provides the way of escape!

II. **(Solution) Despite our wandering hearts, God provides the way of escape. (v. 12-13)**

TEXT: Let’s read verses 12 and 13...Temptation invades all our lives! The good news is that God doesn’t abandon us in our temptations – He faithfully provides us the way of escape so that we might prevail and live a gospel-centered life. This is an amazing statement of His grace...even when we are being tempted to follow false saviors, He remains our True and Faithful Savior in our moment of need. Now, the fact that God provides the way of escape implies several truths that I want to highlight. **If God provides the way escape...**

...then He is **NOT the source** of my temptation. Many people are confused about this – God doesn’t tempt. Temptation is the result of our own hearts’ selfish desires. God is a good God who promises to help us escape!

...then He does **NOT merely pull me** out of temptation. **I am responsible** to apply His escape plan to each situation!

...then He does **NOT offer multiple ways to escape**. There is one way out. (being a simple guy from NC, I couldn’t be more thrilled – I only need to know one thing!) Notice, God provides **THE** WAY OF ESCAPE (in the Greek, this is a definite article). Paul believes that God provides all of us in every temptation 1 plan of

escape! This is another misconception. Many times the “way of escape” is explained like this: “it is a sudden knock on your door just as you are tempted to click on that website that you shouldn’t be going to”. It’s as if some think “the way of escape” is a coincidental alignment of circumstances that help me get out of the temptation I am encountering at that very moment. Now, I’m not saying God may not be in those things. But, I am saying that this is not what Paul had in mind when he talks about “the way of escape”.

So, what is “the way of escape”? It’s right here in the passage. Let’s go back and read verses 1-5. Israel was offered the way of escape time and time again ... it was God Himself and His redemptive grace (the gospel)! It was God’s deliverance through Moses; God’s sustaining grace through Christ ... the manna and the water.

Illustrate: *The clearest way for me to illustrate the ‘way of escape’ is with the story of the bronze serpent (Numbers 21).* Paul mentions it in verse 9. The Israelites started worshipping Baal and engaged in pagan sexual activity. God sent serpents as a consequence, but, He also provided the “way of escape”! God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a tall pole. And he instructed the people that if they were bitten, they were to look to this elevated serpent and they would be healed. All who looked to the serpent were saved. In John 3, Jesus points to this story as a foreshadow of the CROSS – his own death. As Moses lifted the serpent, so also Jesus was lifted up so that all who look to Him may be saved! ***Jesus crucified*** – the gospel - is the way of escape. He is sufficient for every need and temptation we experience! JESUS IS ENOUGH!

Transition: So far, we’ve seen that our problem in living a gospel-centered life is that idols compete with the gospel for our heart’s sole devotion. And yet, despite our wandering hearts, God provides Himself as the way of escape. Now, how do we apply the way of escape to our lives so that we prevail as gospel-centered people?

III. (Application) Escape idolatry by treasuring Jesus. (v. 14; 11:1)

TEXT: Let’s Read vs. 14 (and 11:1) Paul is essentially saying...**’on the one hand, stop following idols, and simultaneously, on the other hand, treasure Jesus and follow Him with me’.** *Gospel-centered people escape idolatry by treasure Christ above all things.* The key to keeping ourselves from idols is to repent of these idols and turn to worship Jesus alone as our greatest joy, our highest treasure and

only God. This is what Israel didn't do – they simply didn't treasure Christ above other things. *In Philippians, Paul said, "I count all things loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ"*. The more you and I see Jesus in all of His worth, the less we look to our hobbies, our careers, or our sense of control to find meaning, joy and happiness. The cross is infinitely more valuable to our every need than any other good thing we may turn to! *Gospel-centered people treasure Christ above all things.*

Illustrate: (Vann Deas) My great-uncle Vann Deas treasured Christ. My first memories of Vann, however, centered around his man-toys. Vann was a successful business man and was able to travel the world. I loved his antique Sting-Ray. We sailed on his Yacht. But, these aren't the most vivid memories that I now have of Vann. Several years before Vann died, he got rid of some toys (to which I was really bummed by), began tutoring kids at a local school, got very involved in ministry at his church and I can remember countless conversations with Vann that were filled with emotional reflections on Jesus. At some point, Vann began to deeply treasure Christ above all other treasures. He saw the crucified Jesus as incomparably glorious. Vann's final years were his best years. He was a gospel-centered man **because** He treasured Jesus above all things!

I believe that each one of us can live a gospel-centered life, despite our luring desires and wandering hearts! Those who live a gospel-centered life escape idolatry by treasuring Jesus above all things!

In just a few minutes, we have a chance to treasure Christ through communion. But, before we do, I want to walk us through a simple process we can use to escape idols and treasure Christ – it's the 4 R's (write)

Recognize – see and name your idols. What are the idols that compete with the gospel for your heart's devotion? Look at your **daydreams** – what do you enjoy imagining? What are your fondest dreams? Look at your **nightmares** – what do you fear most? What, if you lost it, would make life not worth living? What would be your 'living hell'? Look at your **spending habits** – how do you spend your money? Our money flows effortlessly after our heart's greatest love. Look at your most **unyielding emotions** – what makes you uncontrollably angry, anxious, or despondent? Just like a fisherman knows to look for fish where the water is roiling, so our idols are located at the bottom of our most painful emotions.

Repent – confess to Jesus your false gods and turn from pursuing them as your god. Just as Israel was to turn and look upon the snake on a stick for their escape, so we are called to turn and look upon the crucified God-Man, Jesus Christ, for our escape!

Replace – treasure Jesus as your only Savior and Lord. Renounce the power of your idol and claim the absolute and sufficient power of Christ's...his death, burial and resurrection! Consider all things loss in comparison to the surpassing value of knowing Christ!

Rejoice – through Jesus, we exchange our idols for the real God. We experience transforming grace, enabling us to worship as God created us to.

REVIEW: As we've seen today, we can prevail over luring desires! But, it isn't easy because idols compete with the gospel for our heart's sole devotion. Yet, God is faithful and provides Jesus as our escape. When we treasure Jesus, we escape idolatry and live gospel-centered lives. **PRAYER**

CHALLENGE: Now, I invite you to come to the table and remember the cross! The cross is where we start treasuring Christ. Jesus ordained the Lord's Supper as form of worship in order that we would be reminded as often as we gather to treasure Christ above all things! **In chapter 11:23-26 Paul captures this for the church (Read).** Let's treasure the crucified Christ together. Take the cup, representing His blood. And take the bread, representing His body. And remember that He is our way of escape!

Pass the cup and bread - Pray

... Song ...