

How to Wreck Your Life

making life all about
the things that will destroy you

“Make it All About You”

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Ephesians 4:17-24

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

20 That, however, is not the way of life you learned 21 when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. 22 You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; 23 to be made new in the attitude of your minds; 24 and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Introduction

Images. We are surrounded by images. This past August Facebook announced that its users were uploading more than 300 million picture every day. Yup, nearly one picture for everyone in this country every day. Chances are there is a picture of you on Facebook.

Facebook has skyrocketed in popularity because of our ability to upload images, tag our friends, and share them with the world. It says something about how our culture views images. We are visually oriented, and the images we create of ourselves begin to paint a picture of how we want the world to see us.

If we dig a little deeper into our visually oriented culture, we begin to discover that many of our day to day actions are driven by a desire to cultivate a positive image of us that we project to the world. These images highlight the best of us - our good looks, our smarts, our savvy insights, or hard work. They also hide the worst in us - whether it be a blemish on our skin or in our character. We end up pretending and performing to deceive the world around us into loving us.

In other words, behind the scenes of our lives, we are working really hard to get people to love and admire us. We give ourselves daily to the task of creating false images of ourselves, cultivated to win the world's approval.

This is idol worship. Although we may not make images of calves out of gold, or statues out of ivory and stone, we nonetheless create idols out of ourselves for the world to worship.

At the root of this image cultivation is the idol of control that we explored last week. We want to control how the world sees and thinks of us. But it is predominantly about our sinful desire to worship something other than God - namely ourselves.

This morning we're going to look at the idol of the images we create of ourselves. We're going to ask three questions: - why is this an idol, how does it wreck our lives, and what can we do about it.

What is The Idol of Self?

So why are these false images we create of ourselves idols? Take a look at the first verse of our passage:

17 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking.

Now if you were a Jew or Christian in Paul's day, you would know that when he talks about the futility of the Gentile thinking, you know he is talking about their inclination to worship idols.

There's a passage in Romans that helps clarify.

Romans 1:21-23

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

So these images that Paul is talking about are idols. The core functionality of idolatry is that an image of something else is being worship - whether it be a statue, or icon, literally a painting or carving of some being. These images often reflected the ideals of beauty and human form of the day. They were images of power, strength, wealth, beauty, or fertility. Remember, idols can be anything you love more than God.

Now take a look at verse 18 and 19 to see how this works out for the Gentiles:

18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, and they are full of greed.

Paul says the condition of the Gentile's minds - their understanding - and the condition of their hearts - which had become hardened - caused them to become dead to feeling. Where we read "lost all sensitivity" - in the Greek it means "to be filled with a heavy sense of loss or deprivation." In other words, they were deprived of sensation or fulfillment. When we lose our sense of feeling and we are numb, we are never satisfied because we simply long to just feel.

Do you get it?

As a result, the Gentiles were trying to fill their lives with anything. It says they gave themselves over to sensuality, which is acting in a way that goes way beyond the normal boundaries of society. They worshiped idols of beauty, strength, and fertility because they thought these things would bring them fulfillment. They thought they could receive and feel love through these things.

Practically, these are very places we turn and try to find fulfillment in our own lives. As we try to create images of and for us, we make ourselves out to be more beautiful, stronger, and smarter than we really are, because we think these are the things that will bring us fulfillment. We think people will love us if we portray these qualities.

How Does it Wreck our Life?

So how does it wreck our lives?

We begin to look for love and acceptance in all the wrong places. We work harder so that people will value us. We make ourselves more beautiful so people will be attracted to us. We strive to be perfect so that people will think we've got our stuff together.

We create this vortex around us that vacuums up all the love, praise, and affirmation we can possibly find.

The other night I was with some friends and I thought someone said: "Dave, I really like your shoes!" And so I quickly responded: "thanks!" only to turn around and realize they were totally talking to someone else.

It reveals in me my desire to find fulfillment in the words of others.

The reality is that we will never experience fulfillment in the images we create for ourselves. We all work to maintain the images we project out to the world, because deep down we believe that no one would ever love the real us.

It becomes an endless pursuit of happiness. Our lust for acceptance and worth is so great because the love we do receive doesn't feel real. It never satisfies because we know people don't love the real us.

Are you aware of this experience in your life? Do you recognize the disappointment you experience in your relationships because you realize people only love the false you - the mask you wear? How do you handle that disappointment? Do you pretend to be humble, shrugging away the praise of others so as to not draw attention to the false self you project? Or do you perform harder next time out of fear of being exposed?

That's just the beginning. Many of us turn to addictions to soothe our disappointment. We become dysfunctional in our relationships with others because we go to measures to try and experience real love. Eventually this disappointment drives us to all sorts of extreme actions - we give into sensuality ourselves because the love we receive from the world never feels real.

Our desire to experience love leaves us feeling further and further away from the people who really want to love us.

Let me give you an example. Family Man clip.

What does Jack want? He wants to feel good about himself. He wants to not feel disappointment. He thinks that an expensive suit makes him feel better. He doesn't want the world to know he wakes up in dog slime, takes out the trash, runs the kids around, and sells tires for a living.

He's willing to go to extreme measures to project a false image of himself to the world - because he thinks he'll feel better. Where does it get him? It drives him away from his family - the people who love him. Yet that love isn't enough for Jack because he thinks he's unlovely, and that a suit will make him lovely.

Are you beginning to see how this wrecks our lives?

Not only do we become estranged from the world around us, we become estranged from God. Idol worship causes us to be separated from God. The moment we substitute worship of the Creator for worship of the created - ourselves - we alienate ourselves from God.

Colossians 1:21 says: *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.*

This alienation leads to death - because life is only found in relationship with God. Look again at verse 18, it says the Gentiles *became separated from the life of God...*

Friends, creating these false images of ourselves wrecks our lives because of how it alienates us from the world around us and alienates us from our true source of life - God our heavenly Father.

When we substitute worship of God for worship of ourselves, we separate ourselves from the very one who gives us life.

What Can We Do About It?

Lets turn back to our scripture for this morning, verse 20.

20 *That, however, is not the way of life you learned* **21** *when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.* **22** *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires;* **23** *to be made new in the attitude of your minds;* **24** *and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Friends, we are called to put off the false images we project to the world because that is not where we'll find love and acceptance. Look at v. 22 - it says the old self, the false images we create of ourselves are corrupted by deceitful desires. We think we will find love, but in fact, our desire for love deceives us. As I mentioned earlier, the images we project to the world will never bring us true acceptance and love because we know people don't love and accept the real us.

Would you agree with me that true love is to be fully known and still be loved.

But there is someone who does love us for who we really are. Its Jesus. He loves us for who we truly are because he knows us for who we truly are, in all our darkness and sin and deceitful ways.

Friends, the message of the Gospel is that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* While we were unlovely, Christ's death made us lovely. While we were not enough, Christ's death was enough.

We are invited to put on a new image - one formed in and through faith in Jesus Christ. In baptism we buried our old selves alongside Christ, and in his resurrection, we too are raised to new life. The new self is one that reflects the life of Jesus.

In your sidebar we read from 2 Corinthians: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

Now how does this practically work out? How exactly do we put on our new selves?

By living out the true life that Christ calls us to live. If we read the rest of Ephesians 4 we get a pretty good picture of what this should look like:

***2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

***25** Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. **26** "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. **28** Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.*

***29** Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. **30** And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. **32** Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

Let me also share a personal example.

Every month a few of us go over to Our Lady of Hope to visit with Alzheimer's patients. I'll tell you, they are a group of people that are very hard to love - you can't even have a real conversation with many of them. They're withering away on the outside and the inside.

We go because we of the love we experience through Jesus. That while we were unlovely, he loved us. Out of our own experience, we believe God gravitates towards the unlovely. Therefore, we go and love the unlovely people because we know Jesus loves them.

This is part of the transformative work we believe God is doing here in the West End. He is calling all of us to put off the old selves - the idol worship of ourselves - and calling us to put on the new selves - the new creation formed in the image of the Creator, boldly following the ways of Jesus.

Here we will find life. We will find acceptance. We will find love.