

**Gospel-Centered Counseling and Discipleship**  
**CPC 2015 Shepherd Leader Training**

**Part 1: Gospel-centered “Idol-hunting”**

**1. Identifying the Sin beneath the sin**

1. **The expulsive power of a new affection** - "It is seldom that any of our [bad habits or flaws] disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning... or by the force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed may be dispossessed — and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection in the mind. It is thus that the boy ceases at length to be a slave of his appetite, but it is because a [more ‘mature’] taste has brought it into subordination. The youth ceases to idolize [sensual] pleasure, but it is because the idol of wealth has... gotten the ascendancy. Even the love of money can cease to have mastery over the heart because it is drawn into the whirl of [ideology and politics] and he is now lorded over by a love of power [and moral superiority]. But there is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object is conquered —but its desire to have some object... is unconquerable... **The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one...** It is only... when admitted into the number of God’s children, through faith in Jesus Christ, that the spirit of adoption is poured out on us —it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, and the only way that deliverance is possible." – Thomas Chalmers

1. God and His Grace need to become bigger!

2. **Always at the same time breaking the First Commandment** - “All those who do not at all times... trust in His favor, grace and good-will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [First] Commandment, and practice real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commands... For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing back of them... If we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false [savior]” – Martin Luther

**2. Identifying the Slavery and Self-Deception that results (Rom. 1.18-25)**

1. “Whatever controls us is our lord. The person who seeks power is controlled by power. The person who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our lives.” – Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker*
2. “At the base of every one of our life choices, our emotional structure, and our personality is a false belief system centered on some idol, something besides God that we think can give us the life and joy that only God can give... Thus every idol leads us to create a delusional field, spinning out a whole set of false definitions of success and failure and happiness and sadness and worth. Our hearts operate off of deep false beliefs such as, ‘If I can just achieve \_\_\_\_\_, then my life will be valid’ or ‘Since I have lost or failed \_\_\_\_\_, now I can never be happy or forgiven.’” – Keller

**3. Identifying the Idol**

1. **Ask questions** such as:
  1. What is my greatest horror?
  2. What, if I lose it, would deprive me of a desire to even live?

3. What do I need in order to accept myself?
2. **"That most basic question which God poses to each human heart:** 'Has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?' Questions... bring some of people's idol systems to the surface. To who or what do you look for life-sustaining stability, security and acceptance? What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success? These questions or similar ones tease out whether we serve God or idols, whether we look for salvation from Christ or from false saviors. [This bears] on the immediate motivation of my behavior, thoughts, feelings. In the Bible's conceptualization, the motivation question is the lordship question: Who or what "rules my behavior, the Lord or an idol?" – David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and Vanity Fair"
3. **Functional Idols** – "When a finite value has been elevated to centrality and imagined as a final source of meaning, then one has chosen... a god... One has a "god" when a finite value is... viewed as that without which one cannot receive life joyfully. **Anxiety** becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose my god is sex or my physical health or the Democratic Party. If I experience any of these under genuine threat, then I feel myself shaken to the depths. **Guilt** becomes neurotically intensified to the degree that I have idolized finite values... Suppose I value my ability to teach and communicate clearly... then if I [fail in teaching well] I am stricken with neurotic guilt. **Bitterness** becomes neurotically intensified when someone or something stands between me and [something that is my ultimate value.] To the extent to which limited values are exalted to idolatries... [when any of those values are lost], **boredom** becomes pathological and compulsive... My subjectively experienced boredom may then become infinitely projected toward the whole cosmos... This picture of the self is called despair. The milder forms are disappointment, disillusionment, cynicism." – T.C. Oden
4. **Real-life situations - consider what questions would help you disciple them to get to deeper issues**
  1. Christian married couple - wife struggles with bitterness, but it has lasted so long doesn't know how to express it; husband struggles with shame, but never feels heard by his wife, so he too is shut off
  2. Student struggles with body-image, despite the world telling her her body is perfect
  3. Student-athlete gets season-ending injury
  4. Man - in every relationship he has - always avoids conflict. He is known as the peacemaker at home, work and church, but is growing more and more reserved and bitter.
  5. A woman can't stop considering how much better her marriage would be if her husband was better-looking, more fit, and more social. She knows that adultery and divorce are wrong, but can't stop dreaming about it.
  6. A well-educated recent graduate has been stuck in a dead-end job for two years now. Future is bleak, and the motivation continues to wane. All his friends have moved elsewhere, pursuing lucrative and exciting positions.

### **Practical Example**

Imagine a Christian person who says: "I have become very depressed since I lost my job. I feel like a failure."

- Friend A says: "Your whole problem is a lack of faith! Christians shouldn't be depressed! You should repent and be more thankful."
- Friend B says: "Your whole problem is that you don't see how much God loves you! You need to think about your value to him."

**Friend A: The "Moralizing" Approach** - A typical approach to personal problems among orthodox and conservative Christians can best be called the "moralizing" approach.

- Basically, this approach says to the troubled person: "Your problem is that you are doing wrong. Repent!"
- Of course, this may be part of the problem but this approach doesn't go deep enough. It focuses on behavior, but we must find out the why of our behavior.
  - o Why do I find I want to do the wrong things?
  - o What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so?
  - o What are the idols and false beliefs behind them?
- To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) to "repent and change behavior" is insufficient, because the lack of self-control is coming from a belief that says even if you live up to moral standards, but you don't have this, then you are still a failure.
- You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

**Friend B: The "Self-Esteem" Approach** - A typical approach to personal problems in society today (and in the church) can best be called the "self-esteem" approach.

- Basically this approach says to the troubled person: "Your problem is that you don't see how good and valuable you are. Rejoice!"
- Of course, this may be part of the problem but this approach also fails to go deep enough. It focuses on feelings but we must find out the why of our feelings.
  - o Why do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens?
  - o What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated?
  - o What are the idols and false beliefs behind them?
- To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) "God loves you — rejoice!" is insufficient, because the unhappiness is coming from a belief that says even if God loves you, but you don't have this, then you are still a failure.
- You must replace this belief through repentance for the one sin under it all — your particular idolatry.

### **The "Gospel" Approach**

- Basic Analysis: "Your problem is that you are looking to something besides Christ for your happiness. Repent and rejoice!"
- This confronts a person with the real sin under the sins and behind the bad feelings. Our problem is that we have given ourselves over to idols.
  - Every idol-system is a way of our-works-salvation, and thus it keeps us "under the law."
  - Paul tells us that the bondage of sin is broken when we come out from under the law — when we begin to believe the gospel of Christ's-work-salvation.
  - Only when we realize in a new way that we are righteous in Christ is the idol's power over us broken.
- "Sin shall not be your master for you are not under law, but under grace" (Rom.6:14). You will only be "under grace" and free from the controlling effects of idols to the degree that you have both repented for your idols, and rested and rejoiced in the saving work and love of Christ instead.

## **Part 2: Gospel-Centered Approach to Issues**

### ***See Keller's "The Centrality of the Gospel"***

The gospel is neither religion nor irreligion, since both are just different strategies of self-salvation. Here are some ways to think through key issues according to the true gospel.

#### **Examples on how to think through the table:**

##### **Suffering**

- The religious believe God owes them a happy life, since the whole point of living a good life is to put God in their debt. So when the religious suffer, they must either feel mad at God ("I've been living right — and this is what I get??") or mad at themselves ("I must have not been living right") or both at once!
  - On the other hand, the irreligious do absolutely everything to avoid suffering. They see no use for it at all. Its presence renders life meaningless.
- But the cross shows us that we had a suffering God. The gospel on the one hand takes away our surprise and pique over suffering. We see him suffering without complaint for us.
- So we know that we deserve to be eternally lost but by mercy we will never get what we deserve. This eliminates self-pity.
  - On the other hand, we know God could not be punishing us for our sin since Jesus paid for our sins, and God cannot receive two payments. This means that whatever suffering we are receiving is not retribution, but instruction.
- If you face suffering with a clear grasp of justification by grace alone, your joy in that grace will deepen, but if you face suffering with a mindset of justification by works, the suffering will break you, not make you. "He suffered not that we might not suffer, but that in our suffering we could become like him."

##### **Relationships**

- The religious often use relationships to convince themselves they are worthy or in need.
  - On the other hand, the irreligious often reduce love to a negotiated partnership for mutual benefit. You only relate as long as it is not costing you anything.
  - So the choice (without the gospel) is to selfishly use others or to selfishly let yourself be used by others!
- But in Christ we see a man who unconditionally sacrificed for us out of love for us not need for us.
  - When we get both the emotional-humility ("I'm so sinful he had to die for me") and the emotional-wealth ("I was so loved he was glad to die for me"), we are moved to humbly serve others, but not out of inappropriate need.
  - We do sacrifice and commit, but not out of a need to convince ourselves or others we are acceptable. So we can love the person enough to confront, yet stay with the person when it does not benefit us.

ISSUE	“Religious” moralist	“Irreligious” hedonist	Gospel
<b>Suffering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deserved or Unfair</li> <li>- Anger (toward God or others)</li> <li>- Burden</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Undeserved, so flee!</li> <li>- Inconsistent consumer of ppl/things</li> <li>- Self-absorbed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not surprised, no self-pity, not divine punishment</li> <li>- share in Christ</li> </ul>
<b>Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- used to show worth</li> <li>- burden if not self-edifying</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- negotiated contract</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- humble service, sacrifice, and commitment</li> </ul>
<b>- with non-believers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Superior, condescending evangelism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evangelism is unnecessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- fearless, yet humble</li> <li>- hopeful despite depth of sin, not pushy</li> </ul>
<b>- with enemies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ignore/hate, assume superiority, seek revenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- ignore/hate, avoid any engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- truth in love, despite meeting opposition</li> </ul>
<b>Money</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- good gauge for justice and their worth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- less focused on responsibility, more open to wealth sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not tied too firmly to it, yet aware that God can use it for good</li> </ul>
<b>The Poor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assumes their responsibility, so is reluctant to help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- assumes they're the victim, so seeks to change social structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- humble solidarity and support</li> </ul>
<b>Love &amp; Marriage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Blame-game or co-dependency, both out of works-righteousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feelings-based</li> <li>- Consumer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unconditional love</li> <li>- Naked and unashamed</li> </ul>
<b>Work</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- source of their worth OR irrelevant to God's mission which is individuals' salvation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- source of identity</li> <li>- must be their passion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not the source of their identity</li> <li>- fits into God's creation</li> </ul>
<b>Holiness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- impatient, focused on individual behavior and actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- focuses on social justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- patient, yet believe in miraculous change</li> </ul>
<b>Sex</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dirty, dangerous, worse than other sins</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- natural, free to follow urge as its felt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- in a relationship that reflects its unconditional self-giving nature</li> <li>- not prudish because God created it, but respectful</li> </ul>
<b>Family</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enslaved to their expectations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unconcerned about any loyalty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- neither too dependent or too uncaring</li> </ul>
<b>Other Races/Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Imperialist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relativizing all truths</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Critical of all, even our own; yet not morally superior to any</li> </ul>
<b>Depression (non-clinical)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repent and Change!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- You're better than you think, accept yourself!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Repent and rejoice!</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “man up” and control yourself, or else!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Express yourself!</li> <li>- inordinate loves and desires</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Grace-motivated, free pursuit of holiness</li> <li>- right ordering of what we love</li> </ul>

ISSUE	“Religious” moralist	“Irreligious” hedonist	Gospel
<b>Guilt</b>	- Can't forgive others or selves	- forget or deny it	- freed from it by Christ
<b>Motivation</b>	- fear and prideful self-justification	- build self-esteem, image, personal salvation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- freed from fear and self-interest</li> <li>- obey and love God for God's sake</li> <li>- love others for their sake</li> </ul>
<b>Self-image</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achiever-based</li> <li>- always comparing yourself to others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- however you want to make it</li> <li>- or dependent upon people's opinion and how much pleasure you can find</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- sealed in Christ</li> <li>- free from anxiety and worry, to look outward rather than inward</li> </ul>
<b>Truth-telling</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- harsh, objective, regardless of the receiver</li> <li>- self-justifying</li> </ul>	- flimsy, relative, not dependable in their words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- truth in love</li> <li>- based on covenantal relationship</li> <li>- edifying to the other</li> <li>- not simply self-justifying</li> </ul>
<b>Repentance</b>	- repentance itself becomes the reason why they deserve justice or mercy	- simply personal catharsis, with no objective offense	- hates sin itself, yet repents not out of despair but out of grace