

The Idol of Approval: Further Reflection and Discussion material

Introduction:

Last week's sermon discussed how our temperament and/or past experiences may influence the strength of our preferences for others' approval. For example, the personality factor of "agreeableness" relates to a continuum of preferences for thinking and behaving that at one end (low agreeableness) involves looking down on others, competitive, antagonistic, egocentric, and sceptical. At the other end of the continuum (i.e., high agreeableness) it involves being kind, sympathetic, submissive, considerate, cooperative, compliant, warm, and always believing the best in others.

Do you identify with any temperament tendencies, or experiences in your past, that have shaped your desire for others' approval?

When is desiring the approval of others not ok?

Approval isn't a bad thing. To be affirmed for who we are and what we're doing is a natural and positive desire of the human heart. But John Calvin said, "The evil in our desire typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much." When do you think a desire for the approval for others is either not good, or even (to use Calvin's word) evil?

Review the two healing accounts of the man paralysed for 38 years in John 5:1-16, 39-44, and the man born blind in John 9:1-38. What similarities and differences do you notice from these two accounts? Note especially the order and location of events, as well as how people react to one another and Jesus. *(It may be easiest to use the two readings set out side by side at the end of this document – see page 4)*

Similarities between John 5 and John 9	Differences between John 5 and John 9

What can we learn from the man in John 9 in terms of how to conquer the idol of others' approval?

Live from your identity, not for it.

It is important to make a distinction between identity and image. Identity is something given and fundamental to the way you see yourself. Image is something you create that is more concerned with the way you want others to see you. The big temptation in relation to the idol of approval, is to live life focused on creating an image that others will accept rather than living life from our identity.

Those who have been reconciled with God through Jesus have something better than an image - we have an identity in Christ that nothing and no one can touch. You don't have to be a "someone" when you already are a "someone".

The Apostle Paul was a man of conviction shaped by his identity that enabled him to resist the idol of approval. **Read Galatians 1:1-10** (noting especially verse 10!).

What are the statements of Paul's identity from this passage that drive his ability to be liberated from the idol of others' approval?

Which of these liberates you to live *from* your identity of approval in Christ, rather than live *for* others' approval?

What additional statements concerning your identity in Christ are especially meaningful for you? (See handout below "*Who I am in Christ*" – page 3)

For Application

Select one truth concerning your identity in Christ that you find particularly powerful. Write out the associated bible verse, try to commit it to memory and carry it around with you as a constant reminder throughout the day.

Who I am in Christ

*Taken from Victory over the Darkness by Neil Anderson
(Regal Books: Ventura, California; 1990)*

- I am the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13)
- I am the light of the world (Matthew 5:14)
- I am a child of God (John 1:12)
- I am part of the true vine, a channel of Christ's life (John 15:1,5)
- I am Christ's friend (John 15:15)
- I am chosen and appointed by Christ to bear His fruit (John 15:16)
- I am a slave of righteousness (Romans 6:18)
- I am a son (child with inheritance privileges) of God; God is my Father (Rm 8:14,15; Gal 3:26; 4:6)
- I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing His inheritance with Him (Romans 8:17)
- I am a temple—a dwelling place—of God. His Spirit and life dwells in me (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19)
- I am united to the Lord and am one with Him (1 Corinthians 6:17)
- I am a member of Christ's Body (1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 5:30)
- I am a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- I am reconciled to God and am a minister of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18,19)
- I am a son (child with inheritance privileges) of God and one in Christ (Galatians 3:26,28)
- I am a saint (Ephesians 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2)
- I am God's workmanship—His handiwork—born anew in Christ to do His work (Ephesians 2:10)
- I am a fellow citizen with the rest of God's family (Ephesians 2:19)
- I am a prisoner of Christ (Ephesians 3:1; 4:1)
- I am righteous and holy (Ephesians 4:24)
- I am a citizen of heaven, seated in heaven with Christ right now (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6)
- I am hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)
- I am chosen of God, holy and dearly loved (Colossians 3:12, 1 Thessalonians 1:4)
- I am a child of light and not of darkness (1 Thessalonians 5:5)
- I am a holy partaker of a heavenly calling (Hebrews 3:1)
- I am a partaker of Christ; I share in His life (Hebrews 3:14)
- I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5)
- I am a member of a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession (1 Peter 2:9,10)
- I am a child of God and I will resemble Christ when He returns (1 John 3:1,2)
- I am born of God and the evil one, the devil, cannot touch me (1 John 5:18)
- I am *not* the great "I am" (Exodus 3:14, John 8:24,28,58), but by the grace of God, I am what I am (1 Corinthians 15:10)

John 5:1-16, 39-44

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. ^{4a} ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, ¹⁰ and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

¹¹ But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’ ”

¹² So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

¹³ The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

¹⁴ Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” ¹⁵ The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him.

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³⁹ You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹ “I do not accept glory from human beings, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father’s name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

John 9:1-38

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ... (Jesus) spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. ⁷ “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

⁸ His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.”

¹⁰ “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked. ¹¹ He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” ¹² “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. ¹⁴ Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. ¹⁵ Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided.

¹⁷ Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. ¹⁹ “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” ²⁰ “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. ²¹ But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

²⁴ A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” ²⁵ He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!” ²⁶ Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷ He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?” ²⁸ Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! ²⁹ We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

³⁰ The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. ³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴ To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” ³⁶ “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷ Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” ³⁸ Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.