

## 8B 2021

There is a struggle among Christians, a struggle between the worship of ideas and the worship of God, between idolatry and faithfulness, between valuing symbols and actually living out the values those symbols represent.

This same problem afflicts people at large in terms of non-theological issues.

In both cases, it is a symptom of *valuing ideas over people*.

Ideas are properly tools—tools to serve people, to help people, to solve problems.

When we value ideas over people, we create gods out of our own tools and enslave ourselves to them.

They become our idols.

A hammer is useless unless it is building shelter.

When the shelter is complete, we put it away.

We do not continue hammering things, and, pray, do not use it as a weapon.

Likewise, ideas are destructive when they are not actively solving people's problems and should be put away until needed.

Our goal as Christians is to serve the living God, not ideas.

I hope that, after this homily, you will be able to recognize easily when you see people or even yourself, valuing ideas over people and will be able to liberate yourselves of any oppressive ideology or idol from which you might suffer.

In other words, I want to teach you how to avoid slavery to ideas, including to the *idea* of God.

The process of making ideas into ideology is simple to understand, but challenging to apply to our own idols.

Simply put, we become enthralled when we mistakenly believe that *two or more ideas are irrevocably linked for all time.*

For example, the pharisees believed that work on the sabbath always equalled sin, but Jesus taught that the sabbath was made for people, not people for the sabbath.

The acts Jesus performed on the sabbath such as healing others were done out of love and were justified, as they served God.

In other words, the sabbath is our tool.

It serves us; we do not serve it.

Despite the pharisees' rigidity, God cannot be bound by the chains of our linked ideas.

God is love, and love is not unforgiving, unchanging, but adapts, seeks ever better ways, heals.

Some current examples will help us to understand.

I have been thinking about this very matter in relationship to two recent events.

One is the coming out of pro-football player, Carl Nassib, and the other is German soccer stadiums' fight to be allowed to light up in rainbow colors to protest a new law in Hungary that seeks to oppress gay people.

These events caused me to reflect on when I was a boy.

Then there was a very clear ideology, a powerful linking of ideas: sports equalled male equalled macho equalled heterosexual.

Very little in society was unaffected by these linked ideas.

It was, in fact, part of two even longer contrasting chains of ideas for males and females.

Girls played with dolls; boys played ball.

When I played the piano rather than basketball, I made people in my factory town uncomfortable.

I had strayed outside the rigid ideological chain of ideas.

We were told that allowing women to be doctors and men to be nurses would be the end of civilization.

Now we see that "sports equals male equals macho equals heterosexual" was a false linkage that governed the lives of everyone.

Those who had based their self worth on this ideology were severely threatened by any hint that it might come apart and be revealed an illusion.

Rather than ask where God, that is, where Love was leading, rather than ask how to bring reconciliation and healing, many lashed out, caused suffering, spread hatred in defense of an ideology, in defense of linked ideas.

They were trapped in service to their own tools.

Worshipping ideas is easier, you see, than letting go and standing naked before God, vulnerable, awaiting direction as one seeks to discern the most loving approach in every situation.

Another common linking of ideas is the notion that the current system is fair, thus all its outcomes are fair.

Any claim to the contrary is unpatriotic whining.

System = fair, yet there has never been a society, to my knowledge, that was entirely fair.

Utopia is not for the earth, but occurs solely in the court of God.

This world is not our home, but our temporary classroom.

Recognizing the unfairness of the world, Paul encouraged action to help counterbalance economic injustice.

In his letter to the Corinthians, we read today Paul's guiding principle, "it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is

written, ‘The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.’”

Yet we justify tremendous wealth inequality as the fair results of a fair system.

Every now and then, I check in on how Jeff Bezos is doing.

It is not because I am worried about him, but because it is sobering.

I want to share with you.

I chose a day at random and learned that on June 23, he earned 2,611,540,425 in Amazon stocks alone.

He has other sources of revenue, of course.

To put that in perspective, 2,611,540,425 seconds is almost 83 years, a lifetime of seconds earned in one day.

With all the money he made on that day, here are some of the things Mr. Bezos could do:

“Enroll approximately 102,832 students in a 4-year, public college at average in-state annual costs of \$25,396.

Give 71,275 employees a bonus of \$36,640. This was the 2019 median annual income of an Amazon employee in the U.S.

Pay cash for about 68,995 new cars at the national average cost of \$37,851.

Purchase approximately 8,402 homes at the nationwide median home price of \$310,800.

Buy himself somewhere between 29 and 870 private jets, depending on how extravagant

he was feeling.”<sup>1</sup>

But people who believe very firmly, system = fair, will tell me that Bezos worked hard for that money.

I do not doubt that he did.

You know who else worked hard?

The Amazon employees.

Bezos started Amazon after his parents loaned him over half a million dollars.

Workers making \$36,640 will never lend their children half a million dollars to start a company.

No system is fair.

The sooner we abandon that ideology, the sooner we can start working on practical solutions for real problems.

Sadly, it is easier to fight over ideas, easier to defend the chains that enslave us, than it is to work together to find pragmatic solutions.

There is the *idea* of God, and then there is the living God, who is always somewhat of a mystery, never bound by chains of *our* creation.

We have no idea where God, who is love, might lead us next.

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1 <https://www.hmdbm.org/>

People who identify with the *idea* of God inside their heads become self-righteous, full of hubris.

Knowledge of the living God, on the other hand, brings humility, compassion, a practical desire to help.

We are always seeking where God might be leading now.

After Christ raises from the dead the daughter of the synagogue leader, he puts away his tools.

He instructs them to tell no one, and he very practically asks them to give the girl some food.

(Apparently, being dead gives one an appetite.)

Christ always puts people before symbols, people before ideas such as ritual purity and the sabbath.

If we are honest with ourselves, we want people to be more concerned about our well being, to value us more than their ideology, and we must attempt to do the same for them.

People nevertheless will claim that those who value ideas and symbols over people are more righteous, more patriotic, more virtuous, but I will tell you that anyone who values an idea or a symbol, that is to say, a tool more than a human being, is quite simply lost, bound in ideological chains that prevent us from serving God.

Freedom, the freedom to follow Christ, comes when we dispense with all such ideological linkings.

This freedom cannot be taken away.

It is a freedom I wish for each of you, so I encourage you to seek out any ideology, any linking of ideas that might be oppressing you, and cast them off in order to free yourself to serve the living God.