

# When Ministry Becomes Idolatry

by Shane Idleman

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*The sermon addresses the dangers of idolatry in ministry, emphasizing the need for humility and self-examination to avoid pride and coveting others' callings.*

**Duration:** 29:02

**Scripture:** Proverbs 16:18, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 1:29-31, 1 Corinthians 11:30-31, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

**Topics:** "Ministry"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the challenges and power of breaking free from idolatry and self-exaltation. He emphasizes the danger of being driven by the pace of life and the pursuit of success, which can lead to slavery and replace true worship. The preacher draws parallels to the story of the Israelites in Egypt, where they were bound by quotas and forced labor. He also highlights the influence of the business model in the church and the need for unity and a focus on God's model. The sermon concludes with a warning about the growing divide between true worshipers of Jesus and those who prioritize popularity and fame.

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## Transcript

I'm preaching to myself tonight, but so many times we can hide behind the excuse of, you know, it's my calling or my ministry or my gifting. And that can be a cloak that hides a deep sin issue. When ministry becomes idolatry, and I should define these really quickly, idolatry, as many of you know, is putting anything before God.

And how ministry can become an idol is it becomes in preference to God, and we focus on that instead of God. And then coveting, of course, most of us know what that is, it's desiring what someone else has and wanting that. And there's so many different levels of coveting and idolatry.

There's so many different groups of people that listen to these messages that it's hard to find what works for everyone. Because in the Christian music industry, or in popular Christianity, this is going to be really applicable. But it's also going to be applicable to those who maybe, you know, you want to start a ministry, or you want to be used of God, or you have a gifting of God.

Most every Christian, I would say every Christian of course, has a, you just don't know what it is sometimes, but you have a gifting. God has gifted you for a particular thing. There's a bent to what God, how he has designed you.

And what is so repulsive in the church is not the sinner caught in sin, but the coveting saint. The Christian who appears, you know, one way and is really another, it's hypocritical. And what's very interesting, I'm going to put this into an article too, everything here.

And as I'm working on the article, I'm seasoning it with grace, I'm trying to find soft words. And it's just a couple hours into it, I realize God doesn't want me to do that in this case. And I think it's okay to say what God's word says, and we don't always have to worry about how it's going to come across.

Especially if we've gotten our own hearts right. And sometimes when we soften up what we want to say, it doesn't hit like God wants it to hit. And so again, I'll be putting all this in an article.

But something, there's four scriptures I actually want to put up that I've been just focusing on all week. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 1.29. And this is just a portion of that. No flesh should glory in God's presence.

No flesh should glory in God's presence. In other words, when God is moving, if we start to take credit for that, and look what we have done, or look what I have done. And it can happen all areas of ministry.

You know, you hear the term I used before, prayer warrior. But the more you pray, the more people you see set free, you can start to get pretty proud of yourself. Even pastoring, correct? That's why I tell even, I was talking to a younger pastor, make sure your critiques equal the compliments.

In other words, make sure you're getting critiqued and you're getting humbled as much as people are praising you. Because it has to balance out. No flesh should glory in His presence.

Philippians 2. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem, esteem others better than himself. John 3.30. He must increase, but I must decrease. In your Christian walk, did you know that Jesus is supposed to increase and you're supposed to decrease? Now you might increase in status.

You might, God might grow your influence or grow, but the heart is always pushing Jesus up. It's not about self-exaltation, it's about exalting Him. So when God begins to use you, you point people to Him and not to think so highly of yourself.

Because He puts you there. John 4.4. I must go to Samaria, Jesus said. You know why this is so interesting to me? The King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, went to Samaria for one person.

The people you watch on YouTube, some of the musicians, you know, the popular ones. And it's, you kind of get hit this brick wall, you know, sometimes. Only for this dollar amount.

And only if my limousine is 75 degrees. And only if, you know, I'm kidding about the limousine. But there's a demand and an uppity-ness.

And when we start to, God starts to use us, we start to get prideful and take glory in what He is doing. Us giving us the glory. Pop star preachers and woke worship leaders love the scent of Babylon.

And we start to get involved, even in church. Here are my demands. Here's what I want.

God has used me before. And we come in like a steamroller. And we roll people over and we begin to think more highly of ourselves than we should.

And what's crept into the church is the business model versus God's model. This is hard because I actually came from, not hard, but it's hard to watch. We don't really focus on the business model here.

But I came from a business background. And when you come from a business background and you work for a large corporation like I did, which at that time was 24-hour fitness, many of you know. And I was a district manager and we had a board of directors.

And I had to hit certain revenue line items. And it wasn't about the people, it was about the money. And the people helped me reach the numbers.

And many times, if we're not careful, we put profit over people. Image over individuals and revenue over relationships. That's when ministry becomes idolatry.

And we know the Bible says knowledge puffs up, but so does success. People can be popular, but they have no spiritual power. They have ability, but there's tremendous arrogance.

And there's gifting, but it's vain glory. Scripture that's always interested me. In 1 Corinthians 11-31, Paul said, But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under God's judgment.

In other words, if we would examine our own hearts. Are any of you tired of getting spanked by God? Chastised by God? Disciplined by God? Often, if we would just examine our own hearts and repent, get rid of wrong attitudes, get rid of wrong thinking and wrong actions, we wouldn't receive the chastisement and judgment of God. Now, the context of 1 Corinthians 11, many of you know, is about communion, of course.

Paul said, many people are actually sick and dead in the church because they took communion in an unworthy manner. And that's why he goes on to say, If you would just discern yourselves, if you just look within, look at your own heart, God wouldn't have to discipline you. God wouldn't have to judge your actions.

And it's not like somebody makes a mistake and God judges them. It's a pattern. Month after month and often year after year after year of belligerent pride that God finally says enough is enough.

It's discerning our own heart. Like the world is a blind beggar unworthy of our attention. And those four verses are so important.

No flesh should take glory in his presence. It's basically, no one should take credit when God begins to move in their heart. No one should begin to take credit when God begins to do something.

And so many times we've seen it in the church and it's really sad. People say, you know, I've been such and such for five years. Or I've been such and such for ten years.

Or I've cast out ten demons. Or I've led this kind of ministry. It's puffing themselves up and it's sad.

Vain glory. No flesh should glory in his presence. Let nothing be done, nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit.

Isn't it hard though because as Christians it's working within us. You know, you can sing, you want to be on the worship team. You want to be on the worship team, you want to be front and center.

You want to be front and center, you want to be on YouTube. Then you want to be on the radio. It's like this putting others before and let God promote you.

Isn't that wonderful? When God promotes you, it's incredible. Many times, not many times, sometimes people mail me things in the mail. Or when I was at the Christian Broadcasting, I don't remember what it's called now.

It's in Nashville usually. It was in San Diego. It's a Christian Broadcasting Network or something like that.

Big, big convention. And we had to put, you know, we had to say where we're coming from. And I had like 91.9. I was there representing the radio station and the church.

And all these guys were coming up like, oh man, you've got to listen to my CD. Man, God, you've got to put this on the radio. And I'm like, what is this? And it's just that self-promotion.

And I know it's tough because we're excited about what God is doing. And we want to promote things. And, you know, sometimes we should if the heart is right.

It's okay to spread that information about what God is doing as long as the heart is right. And we're not allowing our flesh to glory in His presence. And John the Baptist, this is incredible.

Probably second to only Jesus at that time. He was the forerunner. He was baptizing everyone.

He was the controversial figure. The Pharisees didn't like him. And everybody said, but John, they're leaving you and following him.

He said, that's okay. He must increase. And I must decrease.

And that position, to go up, you've got to go down. To go higher, you've got to go lower. And what's wonderful about going lower and humbling ourselves and doing all these things is as we go through and we humble ourselves and we put others first, there's tremendous peace that follows.

The most miserable people in the church are prideful people. I just didn't get my way today. I want this.

It's like a ten-year-old. Actually, a five-year-old. Have you ever seen them throwing temper tantrums? Well, that doesn't happen in your home.

No temper tantrums. I've got my little two-year-old on video, and I showed her today. It was not pretty.

Just kicking. I want, I want, I want. But it's no different in the church.

We're just not kicking and screaming. We're backbiting and yelling in our heart. Give me, give me, give me.

When ministry is idolatry and your calling is coveting, you're coveting other people's callings. You're wanting and desiring. I mean, think about it.

So many people, you know, I want the anointing of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah. But do you want to cry out like Isaiah? Woe is me. Woe is me.

I am undone. I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people with unclean lips, and I have seen the king of glory. Oh, woe is me.

You want that anointing. You better be broken like that. You better be humble like that.

God can't use a man greatly until he hurts him deeply. He breaks him. He hurts him in a good way.

And the anointing of God flows out of that brokenness. Do you want the anointing of David? David at the end there after Bathsheba, he's telling God, created me a clean heart. Lord, renew a right spirit within me that the bones you have broken may rejoice.

God, return to me the years of your salvation. And the Bible says David was a man after God's own heart. He spared the life of Saul.

He would walk before God. Yes, he was not perfect, but the anointing of David flowed from a broken, humble man of God. Same thing applies to us.

Do you want the anointing of the New Testament church? Do you want to be used by God? Then you have to humble yourself, and don't put other things before God. Watch out. God is a heart inspector.

We can fool people, can't we? We come in, you're not going to know somebody's in a bad mood. They're angry. They're prideful.

They're jealous. They're backbiting. They're gossipers.

You're not going to hear it. You're not going to know it. Maybe you might sense it, but God is a heart inspector.

God knows. He searches the deep things of the heart. He knows the heart better than we do.

And then one verse that's been just amazing for me from 4 this morning, just writing it down and studying it. I want to put it up there from Isaiah 14, because what I'm talking about is I. I, I, I. I want this. I can do this.

I'm an expert in this. I have this many years of experience here. I've been called to this ministry.

I, I, I, I, I. And we read in Isaiah, I will ascend into heaven. For you have said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above God.

The stars. I will sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest side of the north. I, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.

I will be like the most high God. It's interesting. He's not saying here.

I will be God. I will be like. I will.

I will. Now the context is interesting because it begins with talking about the king of Babylon. Many people say, some people say this is still talking about the king of Babylon.

However, if you look at how deep this begins to go and, and, and, and just the context seems to support much more than the king of Babylon. This is where many say that this is a scripture about Satan's fall.

Satan's fall from heaven.

And because I love context, I can see both sides of it. It's no doubt though. This is what could have happened to Satan.

That's why I don't say this is for sure. Satan. This is how Satan fell, but it's probably more than likely what happened.

I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will.

And so you have the self exaltation because ascending into heaven is self exaltation. Exalt my throne. My name.

I will exalt my name above even God's name. The stars that I will sit on the Mount of the congregation. I will lead the congregation.

I will rule and reign in this area. I will ascend above the heights. I will accomplish more than anyone else.

I, I, I, I, I. It's that spirit of self exaltation. And I realized this morning what God is moving so powerfully here. So is the enemy.

And if we're not careful, a movement can become just an afterthought. I don't want to build an idol factory. I don't want to lead a pride-filled church.

And I don't want to fuel egos and build images. And breaking is painful, but it's powerful. Breaking is, is, is hard.

But it's powerful. And if you're angry, you're missing it. You're missing.

If you're angry at this, this is God working inside the prideful heart. And putting this type of sermon together was, was challenging all day. Just feeling the, the demonic weight of it.

Not wanting to talk about this. Or maybe even the video I'm going to share with the, the congregation. Because it's getting right to the heart of, of, of Christians.

The, the idolatry. That if we're not careful in self exaltation and promoting ourselves. And wanting to be this and wanting to be that.

So that kind of sets the stage for this. It's going to be an eight and a half minute clip. So I would just really encourage you not to look at your cell phones.

Don't fall asleep. Be attentive because it's very powerful. If we, if we get through it and hear what he is saying.

He has a lot of experience in ministry. And seeing what is going on inside the church. The dividing lines are being drawn.

Because there's those exalting themselves. There's those people in it for the wrong reasons. The wrong motives.

And then there's a lot of people who love the Lord. And the problem with, with, with ministry is idolatry. And, and putting too much emphasis on our calling and our gifting.

Is we become prideful and it divides the church. It's a divisive attitude. It's a divisive heart.

Because they, they, they can take charge. And they, they want to be bombastic. And they want to, they want to just, there's no humility.

And when there's no humility, there's no unity. And when there's no unity, it's hard to work together. And so I'm just going to set this clip up by saying that.

If you really just take in what he's saying. And I've had this happen just a few times. Where God just pours into his heart.

What's going on inside the church. And it might not be real relevant for everyone here. Or most people here.

But I think for those watching. And those who watch it later. It's going to be very relevant.

The dividing line. Between the bride. Who worships Jesus himself.

And Babylon. Who sings songs and fills arenas. And concerts with Christian lyrics.

Is becoming more and more pronounced. Perhaps the difference has never been. More evident between the two companies.

You see there is always another tree in the garden. That beckons us to eat of its good fruit. Yet it is not God fruit.

Friends it is the choice between being known on earth. And being deeply known and recognized. In the fiery courts of heaven.

It is the choice between his manifest glory. And the temporary applause of men. That only births a short-lived fame.

That will burn like chaff at the throne. The choice is now being offered between earthly wealth. Recognition and fame.

And the spiritual riches of Christ himself. That's what I want. It is slavery to a tower.

Named Babel. And the system we build. And we put it on our own backs.

Only to rename our new. Idol. My calling.

This new idol creation. Then offers a pace of life. That drives us and pushes us.

Beyond his beautiful feet. And the rest of his presence. And then the slavery sets in.

Many times unnoticed and often times celebrated. As though the slavery is a breakthrough. Yet we're bound with chains.

And corporations replace houses of presence. Shows and concerts replace the cloud. And heavenly songs that used to fall into the hearts.

Of trustworthy Levites. During precious moments of worship. Are now replaced by the hurry of songwriting collabs and gatherings.

That demand a quota. I remember such a story from the word of God. Do you? Do you remember the word quota? Did Pharaoh not place a quota on God's children? The Israelites to build Egypt's cities.

Of sin. And so today 28 minute talks. Replace the breaking of the bread of life.

Found in the depths of the scriptures. Shows replace holy offerings of incense. And then friends the fragrance lifts.

Jesus walks away while his gifts remain. But the intangible. I pray this never happens here.

The intangible in the air is gone. His kiss is gone. Because we've turned our faces to another.

And the joy in the room is now masked with noise. Gifted musicians replace holy Levites. Gifted vocalists replace Mary's of Bethany.

The magnetic pull of his residence among the people is replaced by marketing. He once drew them. Now dollars draw them.

And we call it wisdom. Church planting initiatives replaces glory. Yet we continue.

We continue because growth takes place. And the young childlike born-again believer. Once listened to songs and teachings with his or her heart.

Their heart was the barometer. It was the presence of the spirit upon our hearts. That told us whether a song was even good.

Or a sermon was worth listening to. It was the warmth on our hearts that drew us to worship. Or to listen.

The choice was made through sensitivity to his touch. There are few ploys from hell that are more riddled with deceit. Than heavy ministry idols that we construct.

In our own strength. And then rename them our callings. According to Jesus we have one calling don't we? For this is the will of the father.

To cling to the son. Oh what a tragedy. To labor in his name for our entire lives.

And all the while having been driven by the devil. There are few motives more putrid. Than the ones who use the priceless name of Jesus.

And attach them to their songs. Songs birthed in Babylon. From the rivers of Babylon yea we wept.

They attach the name of Jesus. To their initiatives. And the precious name of Jesus.

The father adores. To further their own agendas. And to lift themselves up.

Such initiatives are birthed in the bowels of hell. Prostituting the Lord's holy name. Only to make us.

Bigger and more preeminent. Have we forgotten. That our good shepherd never drives us.  
Is he not the cloud the one shining in the midst. Of the cloud who leads and offers rest. All the while.  
We believe we do it for him. All in his name. Precious Jesus deliver your people.  
Deliver us. And have mercy on us all. Truly be our everything.  
Amen. Amen. Father.  
Have mercy on our. Weakness. As the word says.  
You've weird yourself. With the multiplicity of your ways. Keep us at the feet of Jesus.  
Write your story through us. Destroy initiative. And birth yielding.  
Please never leave us here. I pray our children's children would say. The Lord built the house.  
And they did not labor in vain. It was the Lord who built the house. Do it Jesus.  
Reflect on. Where our heart is at. Has idolatry crept in.  
Putting anything before God. Or coveting. Wanting or desiring something that is not.  
Ours or that God has not given us. Like I said we don't want to build an idle factory. We don't want to lead  
and be part of a pride filled church.  
And we don't want to fuel egos and build images. And so I think the reason the Lord put this on my heart.  
This week specifically.  
Is because we've had. Two incredible weeks. I can't.  
I don't even know where to begin. With the testimonies. You'll hear I think Sunday morning.  
If she's going to make it out. But she came a few times from Ridgecrest. And.  
Brought her parents. Your dad's not a believer. I don't know where her mom was at.  
But of all the nights. She brought him to the testimony and prayer night on Thursday. And we don't know  
what he thought or anything.  
But on Sunday morning. They were at home in Ridgecrest watching the live feed. And he just he decided  
to finally repent.  
Give his heart to the Lord. And she'd been praying for that for years and years and years. And just the  
marriage is restored.  
And the addictions broken. It's just it's just quite overwhelming. We'll be putting together the testimonies.  
But in the midst of that. I saw a lot of ugliness as well. True hearts came out.  
Ulterior motives came out. Jockeying for position. It was sad to watch.

And again, I'm not preaching at you. I'm preaching to you as a group. All that can slip into my heart. Just as easily. But we have to be careful. When ministry is idolatry and your calling turns into coveting. God can't use a prideful person. I see so much potential. So much potential in this church. And God is releasing that potential. But I see so many hearts. Stopping that potential. The excuses are endless. And I hear so many people. But I've been a Christian 20 years. Or I've been gifted in this area. Or my ministry is this area. Or I've done this. And it's just it's a stench. In the nostrils of God. No flesh to glory in his presence. God help me.

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