

d. What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What preoccupies me?

e. What do I want to do that I can't do? What do I think about turning away from God?

f. What makes me feel the most self-worth? What am I the proudest of?

g. What do I really want and what do I really fear? What would really make me happy?

SUMMARY:

Now that you've answered the questions above, look for common themes. Write below what you think are your functional masters? What things tend to be too important to you?

E. HEALING IDOLATRY WITH THE GOSPEL.

1. Avoid the "Moralizing" Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among orthodox and conservative Christians can best be called the "moralizing" approach. Basic analysis: **Your problem is that you are doing wrong. Repent!** This focuses on behavior but doesn't go deep enough. We must find out the why of our behavior. *Why* do I find I want to do the wrong things? What inordinate desires are drawing me to do so? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an unhappy person (or yourself) to repent and change their 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 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.

2. Avoid the "Psychologizing" Approach.

A very typical approach to personal change among more liberal religious groups can best be called the "psychologizing" approach. Basic analysis: **Your problem is that you don't see that God loves you as you are. Rejoice!** This focuses on feelings, which seem to be deeper than behavior but it also fails to go deep enough. We must also find out the why of our feelings. *Why* do I have such strong feelings of despair (or fear, or anger) when this or that happens? What are the inordinate desires that are being frustrated? What are the idols and false beliefs behind them? To simply tell an

unhappy person (or yourself), “God loves you--rejoice!” is insufficient. 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.

3. Adopt 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 will the idol's power over us be 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.

"The faith that...is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness...It is often said today, in circles which blend popular psychology with Christianity, that we must love ourselves before we can be set free to love others....But no realistic human beings find it easy to love or forgive themselves, and hence their self-acceptance must be grounded in their awareness that God accepts them in Christ. There is a sense in which the strongest self-love that we can have...is merely the mirror image of the lively conviction we have that God loves us. Moralism, whether it takes the form of either denunciation or "pep talks," can ultimately only create an awareness of sin and guilt or manufactured virtues built on will power....We all automatically gravitate toward the assumption that we are justified by our level of sanctification, and when this posture is adopted, it inevitably focuses our attention not on Christ but on the adequacy of our own obedience. We start each day with our personal security not resting on the accepting love of God and the sacrifice of Christ but on our present feelings or recent achievements in the Christians life. Since these arguments will not quiet the human conscience, we are inevitably moved either to discouragement and apathy or to a self-righteousness [some form of idolatry] which falsifies the record to achieve a sense of peace...-- Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What helped you most?

2. What questions were raised?