

Leave Thee! No, My Dearest Savior

The Christian's Spiritual Song Book (1845), John Stamp

Leave Thee! No, my dearest Savior,
Thee whose blood my pardon bought;
Slight Thy mercy, scorn Thy favor!
Perish such an impious thought:
Leave Thee—never!
Where for peace could I resort?

Be offended at Thee—never!
Thee to whom my all I owe;
Rather shall my heart endeavor
With unceasing love to glow:
Leave Thee—never!
Where for safety could I go?

Thou alone art my salvation;
There is none can save but Thee:
Thou through Thy divine oblation,
From my guilt hast set me free:
Leave Thee—never!
Thou who deign'st to die for me.

But, O Lord, Thou know'st my weakness,
Know'st how prone I am to stray;
God of love, of truth, of meekness,
Guide and keep me in Thy way;
Blest Redeemer!
Let me never from Thee stray!

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Tried with Fire: The Things On the Earth

Kevin T. Bauder

Our greatest temptation is not to treat evil things as if they were good. Our greatest temptation is to treat good things as if they were God.

We were created to worship. We can't help ourselves. The most earthbound among us are compelled to look upwards toward something outside ourselves, to give ourselves to it, to delight in it, and to find our satisfaction in it. Seeking satisfaction in anything less than the true and living God, however, is the essence of idolatry.

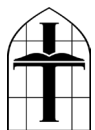
The miser who seeks satisfaction in money is an idolater. The lecher who seeks satisfaction in promiscuous sex is an idolater. The stoner or drunkard who seeks satisfaction in drugs or alcohol is an idolater. But so is the patriot who seeks satisfaction in service to country, the mother who seeks satisfaction in children, and the executive who seeks satisfaction in upward mobility. Every one of these people places some created thing in the place of God.

Not that these things are wrong. Money? God gives the power to get wealth (Deut 8:18). Sex? Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled (Heb 13:4). Alcohol? Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts (Prov 31:6). The problem is not the *things*. They are all good gifts of God. The problem is with their *use*. Anything can be used wrongly, and the most serious misuse of any created thing is to make it a substitute for God.

We were not created to worship just anything. We were created to worship the true and living God. Our souls contain an emptiness that only He can fill, but as sinful creatures we try to stuff that void full of things that are not God. We give ourselves to non-Gods, delight in them, and seek satisfaction in them.

It will not work. All created things together are too small to fill the cavity left in our souls by the absence of the one true God. They cannot take His place; they cannot bear the weight of the human soul.

Finite things are good in their place. God gives them to us as gifts. He wants us to use them. In some cases, He delights us with them (for what is the use



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of a sunset if not to delight?). But we must keep them in their place, and their place is not His place.

In short, we must learn to set our affections—our minds, that is—on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:2). We must pursue God as the *telos*, the goal, the purpose, the one great good, the absolute value of our lives. We must discern the value of all other things by their relationship to Him, rather than judging His worth or worthiness by His distribution of them.

Sadly, we are inveterate idolaters. Almost habitually we take created things that are good but finite, contingent, and transient; we set them apart in our hearts, and then look to them for what can only be found in the true and living God. All of the gods we manufacture, however, will betray us and we will be hurt.

Arguably, much of progressive sanctification involves learning to love created things only as much as they deserve to be loved, and with a love that is suited to their nature. When we love them inordinately, that wrong love must be challenged, broken, and reshaped into a right love. In other words, the idols must be toppled, shattered, and put back together in their proper place under God.

We may even be aware that we are loving things wrongly. We may realize that we are trying to treat them as gods, but we do not know how to stop. We cry out to God, and in His great mercy He sends us help to break down our idols.

God's help arrives in many forms. One of the most common is pain. God allows us to experience the hurt, emptiness, and despair that envelop us when our idols betray us (as every idol eventually does). He puts us in positions in which we must lean either on our idols or on Him. If we choose to lean on the idols, they fracture. We lose what we thought we loved. Worse, when the idols shatter, their shards and splinters damage us in other ways.

We always knew in principle that our idol was fleeting and temporal. Now we know it by touch and feel. The more we experience the hurt and pain of broken idols, the better equipped we become to move them out of the position that only God can fill and into the position that God intended them to occupy. More and more we set our minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

We should use what God has given us to use, as God intends it to be used. We should enjoy what God has given us to enjoy, as He intends it to be enjoyed. But we can only ever find satisfaction in Him. He alone is to be worshipped.

One reason God permits trauma in our lives is so that we may learn to love things as they ought to be loved. He turns our hearts away from the temporal and toward the eternal, away from the finite and toward the infinite, away from the earthly and toward the heavenly. When an idol breaks, the result is pain—but that pain is God's mercy to us.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
