

The False Idols of Beauty and Success

If Jesus is the express image of the truth, then what is the express image of the lie? Just as truth needs an image for expression, power and validation, so the lie must have an image or it remains powerless.

You and I are painfully and constantly made aware of the image of the lie. It is everywhere we happen to glance. It is projected on television and at the movies, plastered on billboards and splashed across magazine covers. Most of us encounter it daily on one level or another.

Today's expression of this image has been built by multitudes of advertising and media experts who feed off our external influences. On the surface there is nothing wrong with this image; yet it is what she represents that is dangerous. She is the image of the ideal woman.

Portrayals of the ideal woman are presented to all ethnic groups. She never ages, and behind her facade of perfection she mocks every flaw and imperfection of others. Her skin is flawless in tone and complexion. Her nose is straight—not too small or too large. Her eyes are bright and lack any dark shadows, circles or lines around them. They are encased in luminous, wrinkle-free skin. Her lips are full and artfully shaped. Her teeth are perfect and gleaming white.

Her body is perfectly proportioned and sits atop long, strong legs. She is the perfect height. Her breasts never age (or nurse)! This image is always just beyond our reach, taunting us with her seductive eyes. Who is she anyway?

Her name doesn't really matter; she is not real. She is an image molded and forged by the spirit of this world. She is a Photoshopped, deaf, dumb and blind idol.

Though we know she is not real, women of all ages look at her in awe. The younger are inspired, and the older are depressed.

Men are not immune to these types of comparisons, for this woman has a counterpart. He is naturally gifted with a great body and sense of style. He always has the right words to say, whatever the situation. He never loses his eight-pack or his hair.

This man works a full day at the office, then returns home ready to repair all things mechanical or electronic with ease. His unparalleled intelligence is evidenced by the row of degrees hanging on his wall. He maintains the perfect balance of toughness and tenderness at all times. The dividends of his portfolio provide him with abundant financial stability—not only for himself but also for his wife or girlfriend. He is the fastest, strongest and best at every sport, and he enjoys all manner of cultural activities.

This image too eludes attainment, disapproving others with his steely gaze. Yet he also is deaf and dumb, an idol.

Idols

Before I go further it is important to describe the worship of idols or idolatry in contemporary terms. For until I do so, idolatry still may seem a foreign term. *An idol is anything you draw your strength from or give your strength to.* It is how you spend yourself—your time, your efforts and your thoughts. It is the driving force behind your actions. It is what makes you feel confident and comfortable. *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* defines an idol as “something we ourselves make into a god.” It can be anything that stands between you and the Lord—a substitute for God.

How can people you have never met influence you so profoundly? Because you have not allowed the imprint of God to influence you as deeply as they have. Without a definitive raising of *His* standard, you are likely to accept the seductive, graven

image of the world.

“Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit” (Is. 44:9, NASB).

To *fashion* something is to make, model, form or manufacture. In the Bible the words *image* and *idol* are used interchangeably with the exception of two references. Therefore, we could go into the above Scripture and paraphrase it in today’s terms. Then it would read: “The ones who make and model idols or fashion images—all of them are empty and lifeless. What they value and prize cannot profit or help you.”

Isaiah tells us in the second part of this verse why this is so: “For their idols neither see nor know. No wonder those who worship them are so ashamed” (TLB). The ancient idols or graven images were forged by craftsmen who made them out of wood or stone. Sometimes they were overlaid with precious metals or costly jewels. But they were never more than lifeless—dead—wood or stone.

No matter how dressed up they were on the outside, they had no life on the inside.

The people would model and form images and idols and then bow down to what they themselves had crafted. These crafted images (of wood, stone or precious metals) were made by the created (humans). Then the created subjected themselves to the crafted. Crying out to images that had no breath, those with eyes asked guidance of blind idols. Those with breath, mouth and voice cried out to mute idols with lifeless lips. Those with ears to hear cried out to deaf ears of stone. They offered fragrant incense and food to idols that could neither smell nor taste.

The created longed to worship the work of their own hands, though these idols could never raise a finger in response. The created cannot *create*—it can only *craft*. The crafted cannot even craft.

You might be thinking, *“But, Lisa, I’ve never bowed my knees to an idol or sought wisdom from a graven image. So what does this have to do with me?”*

When you don’t take your problems to God, you end up crying out to the very problem that has you ensnared. When you worship the work of your hands or the works of the flesh, you are worshipping images of the *creation* and not the *Creator*. Let’s go into the New Testament to find how this could be relevant today: “For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:21, NIV).

They knew there was a Creator God, but they didn’t want to glorify Him or acknowledge His provision by thanking Him. They turned their eyes from God and began to worship images. Soon their hearts became like the idols they worshipped—void of light and futile. This parallels Isaiah’s description of useless idols.

The image you behold is the image you become—not outwardly but inwardly. The apostle Paul further expanded this concept in the book of Romans: “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:22–23).

The idol-worshippers claimed to be wise creators, but when you bow to that which is equal to (mere man) or lower than yourself, you become degraded, abased and deceived. When you serve what is lifeless, you die.

“Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen” (Rom. 1:24–25).

They wanted to serve the works of their flesh, so God let them become mastered by their flesh. They worshipped images fashioned after their own desires, so God turned them over to their basest desires.

Where there is idol- or image-worship, sexual sin can always be found. It comes in the form of promiscuity and perversion. Sexual impurity is accompanied by an increased prominence of sexual expression. Nudity is common. What once was saved for intimacy is now displayed for all to view. Men and women who were inwardly fashioned for the habitation of the Spirit of God become temples of sexual perversion and depravity instead.

Sexual perversion and promiscuity are not merely physical acts. There is a much deeper and stronger spiritual connection that ties the physical sexual realm to the unseen spiritual realm. *We exchange the truth for a lie whenever we worship or serve the created and not the Creator.*

We all serve something or someone. It's not an option. So the question is not if you serve but whom you serve. As Christians it is important to determine whether we are serving an image of God or God Himself.

If you are serving the gods or idols of this world, you will recognize it in your desire to conform to the world's image. You will want the acceptance and approval of your culture. You will desire what the culture desires. You will seek its reward and system of social and financial security. The image will always be before you, inviting and enticing you to be like it. You will look toward it, gauging your success or failure according to the messages you receive from these idols.

If you serve God and not merely an image from any other source, you will experience a constant and ongoing transformation into His image. *All lasting liberation, healing or change begins with inward transformation.*

There are multitudes of books offering outwardly focused

information—diet plans, exercise regimens and self-improvement suggestions for your makeup or wardrobe. This book is not one of them. I'm writing to tell you that only what God does in your life will last. Time is short, and this message is urgent. *God is calling you to radical transformation.*

Perhaps this has opened your eyes to the reality of whom you've been serving. Your situation may not have anything to do with an eating disorder, but you've come to realize that, in some way, instead of allowing yourself to be transformed into *God's* image, you've been trying to conform *God* to *your* image. As a result, your image of God is distorted. In reality it is the image of *you*. It's an idol.

It's time to stop conforming and start transforming. You've known the lie, but now you've been introduced to the truth. Now is the time to be honest. What image are you serving?

Judging or Misjudging?

Because we have judged by appearances, we often misjudge.

God judges us by our *fruit*, not our *fruit bowls*. He wants our hearts to be fresh and useful, not cold and beautiful yet artificial. Therefore, we are mistaken when we judge others by the packaging of outward appearances.

If you want the true transformation I've been writing about to begin in your life, it starts by crying out to God and asking Him to reveal Himself to you (and as a result, worshipping Him). Ask yourself these questions: *"Do I long to fit the image of an ideal woman or man? Do I strive to meet the shape, size, success or social standing of celebrities and icons? Do I believe that these ideals will bring me love and happiness?"*

The next step is to repent for allowing other things to block or distort your image of God. By doing this you renounce the hold and influence of the idols in your life. This will be an act of submission to God and aggression against a long-term

spiritual stronghold in our culture.

Lisa Bevere empowers men and women by weaving the practical with the profound truth of God's Word in award-winning curriculum and best-selling books, such as *It's Not How You Look, It's What You See*. This article is an excerpt from that book.