

Modern Idolatry or The Other Gospel
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1. Introduction: In our modern day we seldom think of idols. They are usually something relegated to ancient history and other cultures. Secularists lump all spiritual matters into the category of myth.
 - a. The same function these stone, metal, or wood images played with ancient people are still performed today.
 - i. Idols don't need to be physical to give them value (or worship).
 - ii. Today idols don't have ancient names. They come with names that seem to be innocuous. However they are still dangerous.
 - iii. We will start in the Old Testament for a background definition and work our way to the present.
2. Six examples of use of “idols” found in the Old Testament.
 - i. Deuteronomy 29:14-19. 14 Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath, 15 but with him who stands here with us this day before Yahweh our God, and also with him who is not here with us this day 16 (for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed; 17 and you have seen their **abominations, and their idols**, wood and stone, silver and gold, which were among them); 18 lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turns away this day from Yahweh our God, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there should be among you a root that bears gall and wormwood; 19 and it happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, **I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart, to destroy the moist with the dry.**
 - (1) [Hebrew: Shiqqus or Shikkaeots] not only refers to the idol, but also the rituals that are attached to them.

- (2) God's purpose was to establish a people for Himself. Loyalty to that purpose is vital to proper worship of Jehovah.
 - (3) A covenant was made between God and the people.
 - (4) The idols were observed and thought of as desirable.
 - (5) The heart's loyalty is at stake.
 - (a) Follow the Lord.
 - (b) Follow the dictate of the heart. This is important to remember.
- ii. Ezekiel 14:3-7.3 Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their heart, and put the stumbling block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? 4 Therefore speak to them, and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Every man of the house of Israel who **takes his idols into his heart**, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet; I Yahweh will answer him therein according to the multitude of his idols; 5 that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols. 6 Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Return you, and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For everyone of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, who separates himself from me, and takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to inquire for himself of me; I Yahweh will answer him by myself:
 - (1) [Hebrew gillul. Meaning log or blocks] see Lev. 26:30 “pile you on rotten logs”. This is a testament to the supremacy of Jehovah.
 - (2) Israel had set these up in their heart. This is one of the turning points from physical idols to idols of the heart (worshiping in spirit and truth).
 - (3) There may be a connection to Matthew 7:4-5 (remove the log from your own eye...).
- iii. Psalm 106:34-37. 34 They did not destroy the peoples, Concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, 35 **But they mingled with the Gentiles And**

learned their works; 36 They served their idols, Which became a snare to them. 37 They even sacrificed their sons And their daughters to demons, 38 And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with blood. 39 Thus they were defiled by their own works, And played the harlot by their own deeds.

- (1) [Hebrew: asorb. An idol of sorrow or which brings sorrow.]
- (2) They did not destroy these, nor become separate, which is another term in the New Testament for “sanctified” or being “holy”.
- (3) They sacrificed their children, leading them in unholy practices and actually killing them.
- (4) They were defiled, unfaithful, and unclean which brings sorrow

iv. Jeremiah 50:38. 38 A drought is against her waters, and they will be dried up.

For it is the land of carved images, **And they are insane with their idols.**

- (1) [Hebrew ehmah used here it seems to mean the idol is something that brings “craziness.”]
- (2) “It is what they lived for.” And it was found out to be empty. The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over, expecting different results. This is where superstition comes from.

v. Zechariah 10:2 **For the idols speak delusion; The diviners envision lies,** And tell false dreams; They comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; They are in trouble because there is no shepherd.

- (1) [Hebrew teraphim, a household god of divination] “The idol has spoken”
- (2) Some translations say the “healers” have spoken. This is a connection to worldly counselors that lead people away from God.
 - (a) Psychology. A search for significance. “Am I important?”
 - (b) Philosophy. A search for knowledge. “What can be known for certain?”
- (3) They provide vain comfort. I.e., it isn’t your fault.

- (4) The people are actually “sheep without a Shepard.”
 - (a) No boundary. Your feeling, emotions, are the guide.
 - (b) No firm direction. Dream your own dreams.
 - (c) No call to Yahweh. No repentance, no turning from darkness to light.

vi. Jeremiah 7:17-18 (44:17-25), Queen of Heaven.

- (1) Although I have avoided naming false gods, this one is particularly interesting.
- (2) A goddess women in Judah worshiped to ensure fertility and material stability. (Thanks to Trevor)
- (3) Prosperity is one of the key issues with the Queen of Heaven. There is nothing new under the sun. People always want the best.

vii. Is there any important information we can draw from this information?

- (1) Idols are not always something we see.
- (2) Idols are an abomination to God. They take His position. Usurp Lordship.
- (3) Idols divert our loyalty.
- (4) It is best to deal with our personal idols before we help others with theirs.
- (5) Idols will bring sorrow.
- (6) Vain comfort.
 - (a) Telling someone it isn't their fault, when they know it is, is not helpful.
 - (b) There is more help in the call of repentance and confession.
- (7) False sense of prosperity.

3. Moving to the New Testament idea of idols.

- a. The same idea is displayed as the standard Old Testament meaning.
 - i. Flee idolatry. 1 John 5:19-12; 19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. 20 We know that the Son of God has come, and has given us an understanding, that we know him who is true, and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and

eternal life. 21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

- ii. Keep pure from idolatry. Acts 15:20; but that we write to them that they abstain from the pollution of idols
 - (1) Pollution is “to be soiled” (eidolon).
 - (2) Defilement in the pagan way of life (molysmos 2 Cor 7:1).
 - (3) Defilement is also “fouled with pagan practices” (miasma 2 Peter 2:20).

4. A widening view of idolatry

- i. Covetousness is identified with idolatry. Colossians 3:5 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. “Which is”, could also be which are, referring to the whole list.
- ii. A “belly” is considered an idol. Philippians 3:18-19; 18 For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame-who set their mind on earthly things.
- iii. 1 Corinthians 10:7 -14; 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them.
As it is written, "**The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.**" 8 Nor let us commit **sexual immorality**, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; 9 nor let us **tempt Christ**, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; 10 **nor complain**, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but **God is faithful**, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. 14 **Therefore**, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

- (1) I think that the case can be made for “eating, drinking and playing, sexual immorality, tempting Christ, and complaining.,” being forms of idolatry.
 - (2) All of these conditions are introduced with “don’t become idolaters” and it is concluded with “flee from idolatry”.
- b. “Lust” (a desire for what is forbidden) keeps us wandering as sheep without a Shepard.
- i. Lust is idolatry, because it comes down to what we want!
 - (1) Idolatry is a turning from The One True God.
 - (2) Looking for security, provision, or protection from the wrong source.
 - ii. The heart’s desires. “I know what I want.” This is very unstable.
 - iii. Looking for satisfaction. Pursuing the good life. Never satisfied.
 - iv. Looking for fulfillment. Becoming somebody with a reputation. Losing first place.
 - v. Looking for pleasure. Avoiding pain and discomfort.
- c. The flesh worships idols.
- i. It knows what it wants.
 - ii. It knows what it dislikes.
 - iii. It knows what upsets the calm of life.
- d. Who do you turn to when things don’t go your way? Or times get hard.
- (1) Deuteronomy 13:3 "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God is testing you to know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.
 - (2) Isaiah 45:20-21; "Assemble yourselves and come; Draw near together, You who have escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, Who carry the wood of their carved image, And pray to a god that cannot save. Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, A just God and a Savior; There is none besides Me.

(3) Jeremiah 2:27-28; Saying to a tree, 'You are my father,' And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.' For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble They will say, 'Arise and save us.' But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, If they can save you in the time of your trouble; For according to the number of your cities Are your gods, O Judah.

5. False Saviors and other gospels.

- a. Thus says the Lord: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; 24 But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the Lord. (Jeremiah 9:23-24)
- b. Are you trusting in your own...
 - i. Goodness? As being someone special. Better than others?
 - ii. Power? Both physical and political.
 - iii. Wisdom? Knowledge of Scripture more than any other.
 - iv. Wealth? The ability to get what you want.
- c. In What Do You Glory? What brings you happiness?
 - i. All of these are siren songs from idols.
 - (1) No need to fear God.
 - (2) The society is the standard.
 - (3) There is a fix to (or pill for) your problem.
 - ii. Here's a poem:

Momentary Medication
Medication for the moment
often sought, this quick relief.
It helps us with our life encounters
with effects that are too brief.

As denial, drug addition,
fits of rage, or overeating,
Symptomatic medication
Is too often very fleeting.

Just get by, get past this crisis,
Make me smile, or ease the pain.
For the moment it's forgotten,
Life moves on with little gain.

- d. There are false saviors for what we think ails us.
 - i. The voices clamor from every direction.
 - ii. We are too sophisticated to fall for “graven images”.
 - iii. We know all too well “what we want and when we want it”
- e. Five elements of a false gospel.
 - i. Need for love. This is acceptance for who I am.
 - (1) God does not affirm who you are, but rather sets about changing you into a fundamentally different person.
 - (2) God isn't like us, but He wants us to be like Him. Just as Jesus is (Rom 8:29).
 - ii. Need for significance. The craving for impact on others.
 - (1) God frees us from “felt needs” to fear Him and keep His commandments.
 - (2) This alone makes what you do of lasting value.
 - iii. Self-esteem, self-confidence, self-assertion. A confident identity.
 - (1) Our opinion of ourselves is less important than God's opinion.
 - (2) An accurate self-assessment comes from God's assessment.
 - iv. Need of pleasure. “I want to be happy!”
 - (1) The way of real joy is suffering and endurance
 - (2) A willingness to put away your most precious desires and interests.
 - (3) God wants us to be obedient more than He wants us to be happy.

- v. The need of excitement and adventure. Where are the new and exciting experiences?
 - (1) The road to the kingdom is not glamorous. Others may have a bigger house, new car, or comfortable retirement.
 - (2) The joys God's children know produce endurance in the trenches.
 - f. What are our driving motivations?
 - i. We could fear man. Need praise, acceptance. Fear rejection and humiliation. And thereby worship men's admiration.
 - ii. We could lust for power over people. And thereby worship the need to be in control.
 - iii. We could desire to escape confrontation. And thereby worship our own comfort.
 - g. Trusting false saviors is deadly.
 - i. Building a house on the sand.
 - ii. Those who are fleshly minded are dead.
 - iii. One way to life.
6. How God is Worshiped, Praised, Glorified.
- a. In spirit and in truth. Our words correspond to our actions.
 - i. Not just "doctrinal" truth.
 - ii. Not just "pentecostal" spirit.
 - b. He is the Living God. Unlike the idols which can't speak, hear, or see.
 - i. He wants to be first.
 - ii. The great directive of life is to give Him our all.
 - c. From the heart we love Him.
 - i. Know that what is inside is important to Him.
 - ii. Idols are found in the heart. This is true more so today.
 - iii. The best indicator...
 - (1) Self sacrifice in response to God.

(2) The opposite of self-love.

iv. Worship and service are connected. (Matthew 4:9-10)

7. What should we do if and when idols are identified?

i. The first call to action is to confess that sin.

(1) Call them what they are.

(2) Speak about what we wanted and how this could bring it about.

ii. The second is to turn from it, which is repentance, the sky won't fall in.

(1) Consider why you thought salvation would come through this idol.

(2) Bring the condition of your heart into agreement with how you worship.

iii. Keep walking in the Spirit not the flesh.

(1) Learn to know the difference.

(2) Let your worship of the One True God be a light in every encounter.