



IDOLS

REPLACEMENTS FOR GOD

INTRODUCTIONS

SECULOSITY

This study converses with a newish book named “Seculosity” by David Zahl. David Zahl is Christian thinker who is the leading figure behind Mockingbird Ministries (mbird.com) and who also serves as the college and young adult minister at his church, Christ Church Episcopal.

DEFINING AN IDOL

The first commandment states, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Luther explained this to mean, “we should **fear, love, and trust in God above all things.**” So anything that is not God has the potential of becoming an idol. The operative definition of an idol has nothing to do with the idol itself. **The operative definition of an idol is where God is absent in our fear, our love, and our trust.** Where these things exist without God, we find an idol. And when we find our own fear, love, and trust in something absent of God, **we find an idolater in ourselves.**

THE GOLDEN CALF

Scripturally, one of the clearest pictures that we have of idol worship is the infamous “Golden Calf” in Exodus 32.

Read Exodus 32:1-6. What do you notice?

ENOUGHNESS

The Christian concept of “righteousness” is important in understanding our “enoughness”. In fact, **for a Christian, “righteousness” and “enoughness” might even thought to be synonyms.** Christians themselves confess that they are not, and cannot by themselves become “enough”. Even our “enoughnesses” are as filthy rags to God, to paraphrase Isaiah 64. But in Christ Jesus, we have the “enoughness” of God, to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 1.

So even though a Christian may sin, he or she is “enough” (c.f. he or she is declared righteous), because like Abraham, God counts belief as “enoughness”.

Increasingly what we find is that the further we stray from Biblical “enoughness” won by Christ in total for the Christian, the less we are concerned with “enoughness” before God, and the more we are concerned with proving our “enoughness” to ourselves. No wonder we call people concerned with this struggle “self-righteous”.

The idols which we will be looking into are simply the creative ways in which people have attempted to reach “enoughness” on their own.

LIVING IN A HYPER-RELIGIOUS CULTURE IN 2019

To live as an American in 2019 is to live in a hyper-religious culture. That may not seem self-evident, however. If “religious” means simple attendance at church or self-identification with a denomination, our cultural religiosity is waning. However what is waxing in its place is perhaps a less graceful and more stringent religiosity (fear, love, trust) whose objects are things like food, romance, education, technology, leisure, etc.

There are our “secular pieties,” and our idols. **While we may sleep in on Sundays, we have become much more religious about a great many other things** – praying to our social media screens more than the most pious Muslim, tithing to our wifi with more determination than the most conscientious Christian, and holding great online Bible studies of the television shows and movies that we watch.

Read Acts 17:22-31. What do you notice about Paul’s experience of living in a hyper-religious culture. How does he approach the culture?

IDOLS AND OBJECTS

A few warnings worth mentioning during this study:

- a.) The goal of the study is not to make an idol of our own religiosity, but to explore our cultural idols. **We should try to guard ourselves against the urge to present ourselves as superior to others**, but rather see ourselves as co-strugglers with all human beings in a world filled with sin and temptation.
- b.) All biblical idols were created from or representative of things that were created by God. These were good things. Often these were very valuable things like gold and silver, very useful things like wood and stone, or monuments of God's glory such as the Sun or rain. Just because we humans have made idols of these things by misplacing our fear, love, and trust for God in them, does not make the things in and of themselves bad or evil. **We should try to guard ourselves from denigrating God's creations, even from the creations of the human mind which He created.**

THE IDOLS AROUND US

Keeping in mind that idols are objects which receive the fear, love, and trust that should be placed in God. **What are some of the idols that you see around in our culture? What do you notice about the idols that you mention?**