

12. God vs. gods

October 5, 2014

From worshipping an Egyptian Pharaoh, to their own ancestor worship, to bowing down to the fat guy with a pair of big ears in lotus sitting position, to praying to Buddhist temple guardian statues that they would protect people from bad luck, and to placing the virgin Mary in the position of the Messiah Jesus Christ, they all have a terrible common denominator – idol worship.

Some people would say, “Hey, we don’t bow down to those statues. After all, this is the 21st Century. We all know that those idols cannot do anything. We are sophisticated civilized people.” Yes, they may not bow down to statues, but many people will have their own idols. 1 in 10 of the average people in the North America are into celebrity worship syndrome. This is an obsessive-addictive disorder in which a person becomes overly involved with wanting to know the details of a celebrity’s personal life.

A while ago, a group of seminary students were given the task of organizing the Ten Commandments in their perceived order of importance. Interestingly, these students felt that the sixth commandment – “You shall not murder” – should be placed first on the list. The seventh commandment – “You shall not commit adultery” – was also placed near the top. But the group downgraded the first commandment – “You shall have no other gods before Me” – to the bottom of the list. They didn’t think it was all that important.

In God’s listing, however, it is a different story. He puts this commandment at the top of the list. But why is it the No. 1 offense to God? It comes down to this: If you have broken this one, then everything else will fall apart.

From chapter 43 to 46, the Lord speaks to the people of Judah who were drenched with idol worship even though the Lord protected them and provided for them all these years. They ignored the Lord and they’d rather worship the idols they themselves created. Don’t you ever think that idol worship was only for the ancient people. This still applies to all of us because we all have a tendency to put ourselves before the Lord.

A. BESIDES ME THERE IS NO SAVIOR

Isaiah 43:11-15 I, even I, am the Lord, And besides Me there is no savior. 12 I have declared and saved, I have proclaimed, And there was no foreign god among you; Therefore you are My witnesses,” Says the Lord, “that I am God. 13 Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it?” 14 Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, The Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I will send to Babylon, And bring them all down as fugitives-- The Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships. 15 I am the Lord, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King.”

The Lord declared to us that He is the only God and there is no other. Then, someone would argue, “Hey wait a minute. Jesus Himself said, ‘you are gods’ in John 10:34.” Since you said it, let’s go there:

John 10:34-36 Jesus answered them, “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, “You are gods”’? 35 If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), 36 do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God’?”

Jesus is quoting Psalm 82:6 to the Pharisees who knew the OT like the back of their hand.

Psalm 82:6 I said, "You are gods, and all of you are children of the Most High.

Jesus was using a typical, rabbinical argument – arguing from the lesser to the greater. Psalm 82:6 represents God as addressing a group of human judges whom He calls “gods” – ‘elohim’ in Hebrew – and “children of the Most High” because in their office they determined the fate of other men. The use of ‘gods’ in Psalm 82 was a metaphor.

Then another person might say, “How about 2 Corinthians 4:4? Apostle Paul called satan ‘the god of this age.’”

2 Corinthians 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

Is satan really a god, a rival god to the Lord like Hollywood wants to portray him? No, a thousand times no. The title ‘god of this age’ is not used of satan anywhere else in Scripture. Indeed, there is a significant and real sense in which satan “rules” this world. But not in an ultimate sense, because, the earth belongs to the Lord. Yet, Jesus did not contest satan’s claim to rule over this present age in Luke 4:5-8, because there is a sense in which satan is the “popularly elected” ruler of this age because people follow him in their spiritual blindness.

Let me make this very clear to all of you. Actually there is no god with the exception of our God, period. There is no second class god, no junior varsity god, certainly no rival god to our Lord.

The Lord said that the Jewish people are His witnesses. Indeed, the mere existence of the Jewish people and their country are out of the faithfulness of God.

Once the Prime Minister William Gladstone of England of 19th Century to Queen Victoria when she asked him for any historical evidence for the accuracy of the Bible: “The Jew, Madam, the Jew.” I couldn’t agree with him more.

B. I AM THE FIRST AND I AM THE LAST

Isaiah 44:6-8 "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God. 7 And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. 8 Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.'"

I am sure that you’ve heard the Bible verse from the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."

I love this verse like Isaiah 44:6, because they both show me that God is above the time and not created by someone greater.

An idol can never be the ‘First,’ because an idol needs someone to make it. An idol can never be the Last, because they wear out and break. But the Lord God of Israel is both the First and the Last; He is completely unique, and besides Him there is no God.

C. MAN-MADE GODS

Isaiah 44:14-17 He cuts down cedars for himself, And takes the cypress and the oak; He secures it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a pine, and the rain nourishes it. 15 Then it shall be for a man to burn, For he will take some of it and warm himself; Yes, he kindles it and bakes bread; Indeed he makes a god and worships it; He makes it a carved image, and falls down to it. 16 He burns half of it in the fire; With this half he eats meat; He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He even warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire." 17 And the rest of it he makes into a god, His carved image. He falls down before it and worships it, Prays to it and says, "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

Isaiah brilliantly shows the foolishness of idol makers. A simple look at how idols are made shows how silly it is to regard them as gods, so the idol makers themselves are their own witnesses against themselves.

Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a Japanese warlord who ruled over Japan in the late 1500s, commissioned a colossal statue of buddha for a shrine in Kyoto. It took 50,000 men five years to build, but the work had scarcely been completed when the earthquake of 1596 brought the roof of the shrine crashing down and wrecked the statue. In a rage Hideyoshi shot an arrow at the fallen buddha statue. The warlord shouted at the destroyed idol, "I put you here at great expense, and you can't even look after your own temple." So much for men-made gods.

The Bible clearly tells us about making and worshiping idols:

Leviticus 26:1 'You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the Lord your God.

In Hebrew, idol is 'eliyl' and means a "nothing." That's good, don't you think?

When people make their 'idol', they are making nothing, nothing worthy. Nada. Then they worship this "nothing." What a vivid picture for us! When we don't worship our God and replace Him with this "nothing," guess what? We get nothing.

Alan Redpath, a well-known British Bible teacher and pastor of yesteryear, said, "Our god is the person we think the most precious, for whom we would make the greatest sacrifice, and moves our hearts with the warmest love. He or it is the person who, if we lost him, would leave us desolate."

That really opens up a good explanation about the idols in our hearts. There are many persons or things that can be a god in our lives. It is basically what we live for, what we think about, and what we get up for in the morning. And for many, their god is themselves. They worship themselves.

Romans 1:24-25 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Some people worship their bodies and appearances. And though I am not against keeping yourself in shape, the pendulum can swing too far that way. Then there are people who are absolutely absorbed with their appearance. They invest hours and hours into trying to look a certain way. Others worship the god of success or the god of pleasure. Then there is the god of possessions that literally owns its people. Some people hold onto their money so much that they ignore what the Lord says about serving the god of greed:

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other . You cannot serve God and mammon.

Every man, every woman, has God or a god – someone or something they live for , some pursuit in life they get passionate about. It can be the one true God or your spouse, your children, your sports, your job or your hobby. To many people, these people or things take higher priority over God in their hearts. Now , that is a good reason for you to examine your heart. And the true but terrifying thought is that a person can worship in church every Sunday, but in fact be a full-tilt idolater.

D. ONE OF THE MANY THINGS THAT SETS GOD APART

Isaiah 45:1-4 "Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held-- To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: 2 'I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. 3 I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the Lord, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. 4 For Jacob My servant's sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me.

The Bible and Christianity are set apart from other religions because of its prophecies. The biblical prophecies are extremely accurate without any fault so far . No other religion dares to prophesy, because their leaders do not know the future.

In chapter 45 of the Book of Isaiah, we see the Lord prophesied about king Cyrus of Persia through prophet Isaiah – how He was going to use this king to rebuild Jerusalem.

As we learned that this Book of Isaiah was written between 700-680 B.C. and king Cyrus of Persia was on the throne 559–530 B.C. Almost 200 years before baby Cyrus was conceived in his mother's womb, the Lord called him by name in this chapter and predicted that Cyrus would work for the Lord.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus, when Cyrus entered Babylon to conquer it, some of the Jewish scribes came to him and showed him this prophecy in Isaiah. Cyrus was so impressed by the prophecy that he made the decree to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) When we don't worship our God and replace Him with idols of our choice, we get NOTHING.

2) Not only is idolatry disobedience to God's Word, but it is also foolish and useless since the idols people choose are dead substitutes for the ever-living God.

3) Either we have man-made gods or men made by God. We are far too easily pleased with lesser things than the Lord.