

Idolatry

Commentary for January 1, 2007 — The Attempt Is Worse than Useless

“No man can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24). Jesus spoke these words to the multitude on the mountain. Either God is served, or mammon, which means the flesh.

In the New Testament idolatry came to mean that nothing created by Man or God should receive any of the honor that rightly belongs to God alone. God’s will should (indeed must) be supreme in your life. Anything else is idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14; Galatians 5:20; Colossians 3:5; 1 Peter 4:3).

The [“January 2007 Newsletter”](#) and Article this month discuss the topic of idolatry and how it began with Israel soon after their exodus from Egypt. Being carnal (like you and me *were*) and a stiffnecked people (like many of us *are*), Israel almost immediately fell victim to a gross form of idolatry, foolishly acknowledging a creature as the creator. You will find it very interesting to learn what the creature was that they called and worshipped as the creator “God.”

Whenever we read the exploits and missteps of the people of Israel, keep in mind always that they are our example as types for us to learn from (1 Corinthians 10:1–22). This passage which deals with idols, idolatry, and food sacrificed to idols, was written by Paul to very young Christians. The Corinthians were former pagan worshippers of idols and false gods. They had many misconceptions of God’s requirements in the world.

The Development of Idolatry

Idolatry began early when mankind began to worship the creature rather than the Creator, as the apostle Paul makes clear:

“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head; so that they are without excuse: ...

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature [the creation] more than the Creator, ...”

• *Romans 1:20–25*

Like Israel, the gentiles worshiped the creation rather than the creator, which is rather stupid when you think about it. However, because all creation, including man, is created subject to vanity (Romans 8:20) it is “natural” that an image or idol of what they suppose god to be is created in the likeness and image of man, rather than man being created in the image of God, which is the true reality.

God’s Jealousy

The jealousy of God toward Israel is a positive thing. God is jealous for Israel against idols and against other gods. The extent of Israel’s idolatrous actions caused His jealousy to turn to anger.

“They provoked him [YHWH] to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. ...

‘They have moved me [YHWH] to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.’”

• Deuteronomy 32:16, 21

Later, after King Solomon died, his son King Rehoboam of Judah provoked God to jealousy still more:

“And Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord [YHWH], and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done.”

• 1 Kings 14:22

God’s jealousy burns like a fire (Psalm 79:5). God is specifically stated to be a jealous God several times in the Old Testament.¹ Israel’s idolatry was the reason for God’s jealousy. Eventually God’s jealousy for Israel shall involve severe punishment of the nations (Ezekiel 36:5; Zechariah 1:14–15) who cause harm to Israel and participate in seducing Israel to serve gods other than YHWH. Again see Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian *ekklesia* in 1 Corinthians 10:21–22, a passage at the end of a long statement about idolatry (as mentioned above):

“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: you cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?”

• 1 Corinthians 10:21–22

Some people think they have the right to do whatever they “think” is correct in the worship of God because it makes them feel good. They have pictures of a “Jesus” (with long hair, of course) by their bedside or on their walls, or perhaps images of Jesus’ relatives at places around their house (or statues on their lawn). Perhaps they wear images around their necks of the “cross” they think He died on. (He died on a tree.) They think that regularly attending houses of worship with male and female sex symbols (why are they there?) that greet your incoming and outgoing are somehow “acceptable” to God because their attitude is that of worshipping God. Their intentions are good. Somehow God will “understand.”

He understands all right. He understands that His jealousy is provoked by those of His children who profess to know better. Obviously they do not. The apostle Paul admonished the *ekklesias* in the area of Ephesus to renounce their pagan ways (Ephesians 5:3–20) taught by false teachers (Colossians 2:20–23; 1 Timothy 1:3–11, 6:2–10; 2 Timothy 3:1–9). Worship of God is a serious matter. You are free to do as you wish regarding to your worship of God. You are free to error and sin. Just do not be foolish enough to expect reward for improper behavior.

There is ONLY one image of God the Father. That image is Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 4:4; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). There is ONLY one Word of God, that Word is Christ. If you perform idolatrous acts, God has those who will not bow the knee to Baal (Romans 11:4). He loves and desires you, but God is jealous over you (1 Corinthians 6:9; Ephesians 5:5).

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1. See Exodus 20:5, 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; Joshua 24:19; 1 Kings 19:10, 14; Ezekiel 39:25; and Nahum 1:2 for examples of God being labeled as a jealous God. The apostle Paul exhibited the same jealousy over the Corinthians **“For I [Paul] am jealous over you with godly jealousy [with a jealousy of God]: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ”** (2 Corinthians 11:2).