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The Allure of False Religion

Romans 1:23 (NASB), “**and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.**”

The fourth reason why every person is born under God’s wrath and condemnation is man-made religion. This is reflected in the countless systems man has devised to replace the truth and the worship of the true God.

Although sinful and fallen man is not naturally godly, he *is* very much naturally religious. According to a recent Pew Research Center study there are approximately 5.8 billion people worldwide who have an identifiable religious affiliation of some sort. Many more are said to have some form of unidentifiable religion.

For example Hindus have over 330 million gods, which amounts to about eight gods per Hindu household. They also revere cows and countless other animals that they consider to be sacred. In Sri Lanka there is the Temple of the Tooth where one can find a two inch long discolored tooth, which they claim belonged to Buddha and was supposedly retrieved from his funeral pyre in 543 B.C. This shrine is worshiped by millions of Buddhists.

Sadly the beliefs and practices of ritualistic Christianity differ very little from such pagan superstitions.

Many sociologists, philosophers, and liberal theologians maintain that religion is a mark of man’s upward climb from primitive chaos and ignorance, ascending through animism to polydemonism to polytheism and finally to monotheism. But the clear testimony of Scripture contradicts this. Scripture testifies that human religion of every sort, whether simple or highly sophisticated, is a downward movement away from God, away from truth, and away from righteousness. The natural trend throughout history has not been upward but downward. It has, in fact, descended from monotheism to idolatry and polytheism.

This truth is attested to even by secular history. Herodotus, the famous Greek historian of the fifth century B.C., said that the earliest Persians had no pagan temples or idols. The first century Roman scholar Varro reported that the Romans had no animal or human images of a god for 170 years after the founding of Rome. Lucian, a second-century A.D. Greek writer, made similar statements concerning early Greece and Egypt. The fourth-century Christian historian Eusebius declared that “the oldest peoples had no idols.”

Even many ancient non-believers understood the absolute folly of worshipping something that was fashioned by the hands of a man. Horace, the Roman poet of the first-century B.C., satirized the practice when he wrote, "I was a fig tree's trunk, a useless log. The workman wavered, 'Shall I make a stool or a god?' He chose to make a god, and thus a god I am."

After the Fall of man at first it says in Genesis 4:26, "**men began to call upon the name of the Lord,**" because He was the only deity of which they had any knowledge. The next two chapters of Genesis make clear, however, that merely calling on the name of the true God did not prevent men from progressively falling into ever increasing amounts of sin. As ancient Israel proved again and again throughout her history, merely knowing about and claiming the true God did not protect her either from sin or from spiritual unbelief and divine judgment. As Jesus clearly asserted in Matthew 7:21, "**Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.**"

As mankind turned away from the true God, they began to create substitute gods, probably first only in their imaginations and later with their hands. By the time God brought His people back into the land of Canaan after their bondage in Egypt, they discovered idolatry was just as rampant in Canaan as it had been in Egypt. The idolatry of the pagan inhabitants they had disobediently failed to destroy would be a continuous threat to Israel until God allowed them to be taken captive to Babylon.

Romans 1:23 says that the rebellious, proud, vain, foolish, and darkened Gentiles and many Jews as well had "**exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for**" that which is inglorious, shameful, and "**corruptible.**" They substituted the reality of the holy God for the vain "**image**" of every sort of creature which of course God had created.

In our spiritual blindness, intellectual darkness, and moral depravity, mankind is by nature inclined to reject the Holy Creator for the unholy creature. Because something inside of us even in our fallen state demands a god, but one that we like better than the true God, so we devise deities of our own making.

It is not some sort of theological coincidence that the Ten Commandments begin with the admonition in Exodus 20:3-5: "**You shall make no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them.**" Yet at the very same time this commandment and the others were being given to Moses, the children of Israel were making a golden calf to worship.

The first creature that man substitutes for God is himself, "**an image in the form of corruptible man.**" Instead of glorifying and worshiping God, mankind attempts to deify himself. It was Voltaire who once wrote, "God made man in His own image and man returned the favor."

Every form of idolatry is a form of self-worship, just as every form of idolatry is a form of demon, or Satan worship. Whether the idols are fashioned out of his own depraved thinking or

are inspired by Satan, every false god appeals to man's fallen nature and entices him to glorify and indulge himself. In one way or another, all idolatry is worship of self and service of Satan.

In the Old Testament in the Book of Daniel in chapter 4 we read the account of the Babylonian monarch King Nebuchadnezzar who said, **“Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built up as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?”** By exalting himself as virtually a god, the proud king exceeded the limits of God's patience, and in an instant both his power and his sanity left him for **“seven periods of time.”** It was not until Daniel 4:34 that he was restored to sanity and power when he says, **“At the end of that period, I Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever.”**

A.W. Tozer once wisely observed that idolatry begins in the mind when we pervert or exchange the idea of God for something other than what He really is.

Even more ridiculous than the worship of self is the form of idolatry which Paul noted as the worship **“of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.”** Many ancient cultures and religions were filled with the worship of **“birds,”** such as the Roman eagle. The worship of **“four-footed animals”** is almost too numerous to count. The Egyptians worshiped the bull-god Apis, the cat-goddess Opet, the cow-goddess Hathor. The Canaanites worshiped bulls, the Greek goddesses Artemis and Diana, did not have the form of a beautiful woman but rather that of a gross, ugly female beast. We also know from secular sources and from Scripture that many kinds of **“crawling creatures”** were worshiped as well, many of which are still defied in parts of the world today.

Lest we think that modern and contemporary man has risen above this we have to consider the monumental increase in occultic practices both here in the United States and throughout much of Europe. In addition to that there is the constant obsession with the idols of wealth, health, pleasure, prestige, sex, sports, entertainment, celebrities, success and power.

Countless websites, books, magazines, games and movies glorify sex, incest, rape, homosexuality, brutality, deceit, manipulation of others to one's own advantage, and every form of immorality and ungodliness. Moral and spiritual pollution is epidemic in our society and it is a degenerative and addictive form of idolatry. Unfortunately this is being packaged through social media and other technology for younger and younger audiences.

The poet and preacher J.H. Clinch once wrote, “And still from Him we turn away, And fill our hearts with worthless things; The fires of greed melt the clay, And forth the idol springs! Ambitions flame, and passions heart, By wondrous alchemy transmute earth's dross To raise some gilded brute to fill Jehovah's seat.”

Do you worship the one true God who is **“the way, the truth, and the life?”** Or do you worship some “gilded brute to fill Jehovah's seat?”