

Pitfalls: Idolatry

## The Only God

Tozer writes, “What I believe about God is the most important thing about me.”

Idolatry is a tainted picture of what God wants from us. God wants **all** of us because He has given **all** of Himself to us. It’s a genuine relationship. That relationship must be pure, uncompromising and committed to God alone.

We live in a world of many religions and many gods. Hinduism has 320 million gods, and is a varied system of religion, philosophy, and cultural practices born in India. Islam has one god, Allah; and focuses on submission to Allah and accepting Mohammed as the chief and last prophet of God. Buddhism is a system all about relieving suffering by losing all desire. God is an unsure figure in Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

Despite pluralism’s insistence that all religions teach the same things and are equally valid, there is real truth and solid answers.

“All religions are not the same. All religions do not point to God.

All religions do not say that all religions are the same.”<sup>2</sup>

God asks a question:

“Is there any God besides Me,  
Or is there any other Rock?  
I know of none.” (Is. 44:8)

One of the greatest pitfalls in the world today is idolatry.

The first and second commandments forbade worship of false gods. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments the people fell into idolatry, worshipping a golden calf. They had just experienced God’s miraculous deliverance on their behalf from the land of Egypt, the land of slavery. They had seen so many miracles, including walking on dry land through the Red Sea. Yet, they were worshipping a golden calf, that they claimed had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.

1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: “You shall not make for yourself an idol...”

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<sup>1</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Jesus Among Other God’s*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), pp. 36-38.

<sup>2</sup> Ravi Zacharias, p. 8.

As the children of Israel were being prepared to enter the Promised Land Moses warned them not to even tolerate the people of the land who were idolaters.

Ex. 34:11-17 <sup>11</sup>“Be sure to observe what I am commanding you this day: Behold, I am going to drive out the Amorite before you, and the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite. <sup>12</sup>Watch yourself that you make no covenant with inhabitants of the land into which you are going, or it will become a snare in your midst. <sup>13</sup>But rather; you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim <sup>14</sup>– for you shall not worship any other god, for the Lord whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God – <sup>15</sup>otherwise you might make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land and they would play the harlot with their gods and sacrifice to their gods, and someone might invite you to eat of his sacrifice, <sup>16</sup>and you might take some of his daughters for your sons and his daughters might play the harlot with their gods and cause your sons also to play the harlot with their gods. <sup>17</sup>You shall make for yourself no molten gods.”

Idolatry is often spoken of as “playing the harlot with other gods;” in a metaphorical comparison with adultery in marriage. Israel is spoken of as the *wife of God* in the same way as the church is referred to as the *bride of Christ*.

Some of the most severe warnings of Scripture are found in Leviticus 26. Israel as the Covenant people of God is promised unusual blessings in the first half, followed by great penalties for disobedience in the second. One of the consequences of their disobedience will be God raising up other nations to war against them.

“I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins...”  
(Lev. 26:17-18).

**God’s disciplines** are to deliver His people from the folly of their sins against Him.

**I Kings 18:26-29 provides a demonstration of the folly of idolatry.**

The setting is on Mt Carmel. Israel (along with the whole earth) had been experiencing a three-and-a-half-year drought.

James writes about this,

“...the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain out and the earth produced its fruit.” (James 5:15b-17).

Elijah’s first recorded act was to pronounce to Ahab a coming drought as God’s judgment against Israel’s idolatry. (1 Kings 17)

The time frame of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) is a few days before the end of the same long drought. The sons of Israel have also been in a spiritual drought brought on by a massive departure from worshiping the one true God. Elijah, who was on King Ahab’s most wanted list, set up a meeting with Ahab.

“When Ahab saw Elijah, Ahab said to him, Is this you, you troubler of Israel?” He said, “I have not troubled Israel, but you and your father’s house have, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have followed the Baals. Now then send and gather to me all Israel at Mount Carmel, together with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.” (1 Kings 18:17-19).

Baal: *lord, master, possessor*- husband – male god of Phoenicians and Canaanites.

Asherah: Counter part of Baal – *goddess of sex and violence*

Ahab was willing to set up the meeting: Elijah Vs. 450 prophets of Baal. Not doubt he thought it to be a great opportunity to hold a public execution of public enemy #1 in front of all Israel, and stamp out the scourge of Israel once and for all. Ahab was complimenting his brilliance and good fortune over the next few days.

## **The gathering**

:20

### **1. Elijah’s challenge to the people :21**

### **2. The Contest :22-24**

Whoever answers by fire is God!

“That is a good idea!”

- **Baal’s prophets go first :25-29**

The prophets chant

Elijah mocks the prophets – “Shout louder” Baal is hard of hearing.

“Perhaps he is too weak of a god and can’t do two things at once.”

“Baal has locked himself in the celestial men’s room...”

Lit. “*relieving himself*”

The prophets chant and cut themselves.

After shouting all day long with no results:

***“But there was no voice; no one answered, no one paid attention.”***

- **Elijah’s turn :30-35**

Sacrifice prepared – builds an altar rocks, wood and ox

Drench the sacrifice with water- 12 barrels of water saturated the sacrifice.

Elijah prays :36-37

Demonstrate that He is God

Revival to all the people.

God answers :38 ***“Checkmate!”***

People respond :39

Seize the prophets of Baal :40

Repentance and Obedience to the Word of God.

### **3. Contest over**

Prophets of Baal – no score

Elijah wins by fire –

**Summary: The Problem with Idolatry**

**1. Idolatry is Deceptive.**

Just as the prophets couldn't make Baal answer their request because he wasn't real, so idols are not real. They are like imaginary friends made up to fill the emptiness of the soul.

Ungodly and unrighteous men 'suppress the truth in unrighteousness' ... 'For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they become fools, 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.' (Rom. 1:18-23)

Trading truth for a lie is insanity. (Various degrees of denying reality)

John summarized the true gospel and then contrasted it with the early Gnostic heresy's false Jesus, which amounted to New Testament idolatry.

"And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so that we may 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. Little children, guard yourselves from idols." (1 John 5:20-21).

Those who have a false view of Jesus are in idolatry.

1. To put something before God

2. To replace God by attributing to God something that is not true of Him.

Paul wrote, "...we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one." (1 Cor. 8:4)

Later on Paul wrote that sacrificing to idols was really done to demons.

"Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. **Do not be idolaters**, as some of them were; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to plan.'

Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come... Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry**... What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything? No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons."

(1 Cor. 10:6-7, 11, 19-20)

Idolatry is connected to the demonic realm. There may be supernatural phenomena associated with idolatry, fueled by demonic activity.

Idolatry is deceptive.

## **2. Idolatry is Destructive**

The priests of Baal cut themselves for hours as they cried out to their idol.

Idolatry is destructive to the body.

Idolatry is included in the lists of practices that keep someone from entering heaven. Idolatry is destructive to the soul. Idolatry becomes the doorway to great sins that harden hearts and deaden minds to the truth.

### **Steps to depravity: *God gave them over...***

Rom. 1:18-23 – Idolatry

:24-25 – Impurity

:26-27 – Degradation (degrading passions)

:28-32 – Depravity

Idolatry is deceptive and destructive.

## **3. Idolatry is Degrading**

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of man's hands.

They have mouths, but they cannot speak;

They have eyes, but they cannot see;

They have ears, but they cannot hear;

They have noses, but they cannot smell;

They have hands, but they cannot feel;

They have feet, but they cannot walk;

They cannot make a sound with their throat.

Those who make them will become like them,

Everyone who trusts in them. Ps. 115:4-7

“Is there any God besides Me,

Or is there any other Rock?

I know of none.” (Is. 44:8)

**Isaiah 44:9-20**

**45:5-7,20-22**

**46:5-9**

The apostle John ended his first epistle with the warning,

“Little children, guard yourselves from idols.” (1 Jn. 5:21).

Idolatry is deceptive, destructive, and degrading in this life and in the life to come.

The Scriptures specifically confirm that idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of heaven. --1 Cor. 6:9 Eph. 5:5 Col. 3:5-6 Gal. 5:19-21 Rev. 21:8; 22:15

1. Idolatry is putting something before God Matt. 6:33
2. Idolatry is attributing something to God that is not true. 2 Tim. 2:15

How do I know if I am involved in idolatry?

- When our trust is not fully in the Lord.

Jesus asked, "How can you call Me, Lord, and not do what I say?"

- When we want things more than God.

"You cannot serve God and Mammon" (materialism). (Matt. 6:24)

- When we have no time for church.

"Do not forsake assembling together..." (Heb. 10:24)

- When there is immorality or covetousness

- When we say "no" to God.

Who is on the throne of our lives, us or the Lord?