

Making God Known Confronting Idolatry

Based on Christopher Wright's *The Mission of God*

Introduction:

Theme: Are other gods something or nothing?

I. In one sense other gods are nothing. In another sense other gods are something

A. In relationship to Jehovah all other gods are nothing.

Deu 4:35 (NASB) "To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him.

B. In relationship to their worshipers other gods are something.

The gods of the nations, with their names, statues, myths and cults, clearly do have an existence in the life, culture and history of those who treat them as gods. It is not nonsense to form sentences like, Marduk was a god worshiped by the people of Babylon.

They are something in the sense that worshipers put their trust in them.

C. Notice how the New Testament explains the tension between the ideas that idols are nothing and still something.

1. The New Testament along with the Old affirms that there is but one God and thus all gods are nothing.

1 Cor 8:4 (NIV) So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We

know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

2. However, what are called gods by people abound.

1 Cor 8:5 (NIV) For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"),

3. That does not take away from the truth that there is still but one living and true God.

1 Cor 8:6 (NIV) yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

4. However, for those who do not know this truth idols have significance.

1 Cor 8:7 (NIV) But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled.

- II. Idols and other gods are icons (objects) which are nothing because they are mere representations of God's creation.

- A. Unlike the living and true God that is distinct from creation, the idols are replicas of creation.

Deu 4:14 (NIV) And the LORD directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess.

Deu 4:15 (NIV) You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully,

Deu 4:16 (NIV) so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman,

Deu 4:17 (NIV) or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air,

Deu 4:18 (NIV) or like any creature that moves along the ground or any fish in the waters below.

Deu 4:19 (NIV) And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon and the stars--all the heavenly array--do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the LORD your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.

- B. Mankind is without excuse for failing to see the distinction that exists between the false gods and the living and true God - Jehovah.

Rom 1:20 (NIV) For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Rom 1:21 (NIV) For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Rom 1:22 (NIV) Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools

Rom 1:23 (NIV) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images

made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Psa 106:19 (NASB) They made a calf in Horeb, And worshiped a molten image

Psa 106:20 (NASB) Thus they exchanged their glory For the image of an ox that eats grass.

Psa 106:21 (NASB) They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,

Psa 106:22 (NASB) Wonders in the land of Ham, And awesome things by the Red Sea.

- III. Idols and other gods are sometimes, though rarely, associated with demons in the Old Testament. They are nothing for it is created fallen angels that are worshiped.

Deu 32:16 (NIV) They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols.

Deu 32:17 (NIV) They sacrificed to demons, which are not God-- gods they had not known, gods that recently appeared, gods your fathers did not fear.

Psa 106:35 (NIV) but they mingled with the nations and adopted their customs.

Psa 106:36 (NIV) They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them.

Psa 106:37 (NIV) They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.

Psa 106:38 (NIV) They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was desecrated by their blood.

A. Satan would deceive the people into thinking that the idols had powers.

B. The peoples knew and understood the limited nature and power of their

gods.

- C. That is why the nations round about them were polytheistic in their worship.
- D. But even Satan himself is not a god, for he is created like all the rest of creation.

Col 1:16 (NIV) For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.

- E. Nevertheless, Satan is behind all the false worship of this world.

2 Cor 4:3 (NASB) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,

2 Cor 4:4 (NASB) in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

- IV. Idols and gods are nothing because they are merely the work of human hands and human imaginations.

This is by far the most common description of an idol in the Old Testament

- A. Idols and gods are merely the work of human hands.

Psa 115:4 (NIV) But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

Psa 115:5 (NIV) They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they

cannot see;

Psa 115:6 (NIV) they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell;

Psa 115:7 (NIV) they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

Hosea 8:4 (NIV) They set up kings without my consent; they choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.

Hosea 8:6 (NIV) They are from Israel! This calf--a craftsman has made it; it is not God. It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria

Isa 41:4 (NIV) Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the LORD--with the first of them and with the last--I am he."

Isa 41:5 (NIV) The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward;

Isa 41:6 (NIV) each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!"

Isa 41:7 (NIV) The craftsman encourages the goldsmith, and he who smooths with the hammer spurs on him who strikes the anvil. He says of the welding, "It is good." He nails down the idol so it will not topple.

Isa 41:8 (NIV) "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend.

Acts 19:26 (NASB) "And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.

B. Application:

1. An idol is not even a living creature in its own right. But merely the product of mankind. What possible claim can it have to be divine?
2. There is big business in deceiving people and there still is big business in spiritually deceiving people.

Acts 19:27 (NASB) "And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence

C. Idols and gods are merely the work of human imaginations.

Rom 1:21 (NIV) For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

V. The futility of worshiping idols and all false gods.

- A. The leader of the Assyrians declares that the gods of the nations could not deliver the nations from his hands.

2 Ki 19:12 (NASB) 'Did the gods of those nations which my fathers destroyed deliver them, even Gozan and Haran and Rezep and the sons of Eden who were in Telassar?

- B. Hezekiah recognizes that the gods of the nations could not deliver them from the Assyrians.

2 Ki 19:17 (NIV) "It is true, O LORD, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste these nations and their lands.

- C. Hezekiah is not surprised because the gods of the nations were no gods at all.

2 Ki 19:18 (NIV) They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by men's hands.

- D. Hezekiah expects the living and true God to deliver the Israelites.

2 Ki 19:15 (NASB) And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.

2 Ki 19:16 (NASB) "Incline Thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open Thine eyes, O LORD, and see; and listen to the words of Sennacherib, which he has sent to reproach the living God.

- E. Hezekiah desires that God deliver the Israelites so that God would demonstrate that He is the living and true God.

2 Ki 19:19 (NIV) Now, O LORD our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms on earth may know that you alone, O LORD, are God."

VI. Conclusion:

- A. It is not just the Old Testament but the New Testament as invites people to turn from false idol worship to the true worship of the living God.

1 Th 1:9 (NASB) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,

Rev 9:20 (NIV) The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood--idols that cannot see or hear or walk.

- B. All false worship is seen as futile,

1. The idols themselves were viewed at best by the surrounding nations as representative icons of gods that dwelt in heaven.
2. However, these so called gods who dwelt in heaven could not even protect those images that were supposed to represent them - let alone the worshipers who served them.

- a. The gods were not a help. The gods were a burden to the people.

Isa 46:1 (NIV) Bel bows down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.

- b. The gods could not even deliver their idols which represented them let alone the people that worshiped them.

Isa 46:2 (NIV) They stoop and bow down together; unable to rescue the burden, they themselves go off into captivity.

- c. The futility of trusting in idols. The people who worship idols will be as dead as the idols themselves.

Psa 115:4 (NIV) But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

Psa 115:5 (NIV) They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see;

Psa 115:6 (NIV) they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell;

Psa 115:7 (NIV) they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

Psa 115:8 (NIV) Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.

Psa 115:9 (NIV) O house of Israel, trust in the LORD-- he is their help and shield.

- 3. It is futile to trust in Satan. Satan will not be able to deliver himself nor those who worship him.

- a. Satan will not be able to deliver himself from judgement.

Rev 20:10 (NASB) And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented

day and night forever and ever.

- b. Satan will not be able to deliver from judgement those who worship him.

All those who fail to worship the living and true God will have been deceived by Satan and cast into the lake of fire along with him.

Rev 20:15 (NASB) And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

- 4. Our duty is to make God known

Psa 96:1 (NIV) Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Psa 96:2 (NIV) Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.

Psa 96:3 (NIV) Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.

Psa 96:4 (NIV) For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.

Psa 96:5 (NIV) For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

Isa 12:4 (NIV) In that day you will say: "Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted.

Isa 12:5 (NIV) Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.

