

“IDOLATRY’S SEDUCTIVE POWER IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REBUILDING OUR ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS”



The depravity and beauty of human beings are sometimes so inextricably linked that it is often difficult to isolate which is which. No better example of this ungodly marriage is found than how society has appropriated deity-based ethics as its own. The theft has not only been subtle, it has abrogated God’s sovereignty, seduced believers, and comforted non-believers into idolatry. The problem is subtle, severe, and vast. An explanation and plan for reconfiguring our ethical foundations follows.

PROPOSITION I

God created human beings “in Our image, in Our likeness” (Genesis 2:26). Since the nature of Father God is spirit (John 4:24) and the nature of

Holy Spirit God is obviously spirit (Genesis 1:2; John 14:16-18), and the Christ emptied Himself yet added humanity through Holy Spirit (Luke 2:35; Philippians 2:7), then we can learn much about God by understanding ourselves—our spiritual selves. Of course, myopic use of this approach is problematic. The better way to understand God is by studying what He has revealed through the Word, Scripture and His creation, which of course we are a part.

We human beings, however, are rarely content with the finite nature of our understanding; nonetheless, we continue to seek to understand the infinite with finite knowledge. This continuing quest for understanding our purpose, our nature, and our universe in which our nature expresses our purpose is part of our God-given legacy from creation (cf., Psalm 8:4—“What is man that You are mindful” of us? and Ephesians 1:9—“And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ ...”).

PROPOSITION II

God created human beings to worship Him (Genesis 2:8, Ephesians 1:5, Romans 1:19-20). While there are other reasons for our creation (e.g., to be loved by God and to love others), worshipping God is central. If God is God, then He will act in the nature of a god. A god seeks to be worshipped—if He is truly God. As God, He is completely Holy; and thus, when in relationship with us, demands His holiness, sovereignty, and omnipotence be acknowledged, praised, and worshipped.

We know that when our divine nature is constrained or poisoned by culture, it will nonetheless manifest itself in other ways—ways that often are deleterious, if not tragically sinful. For example, God created humans to seek intimacy with others. When obfuscated by sociological (culture) or psychological forces (ego, id, & super-ego), the drive for intimacy can be satisfied by marital faithfulness, or marital unfaithfulness. Similarly, human beings were created with a drive to worship. It too can be directed toward the sublime, or the coarse.

PROPOSITION III

Today’s idolatry desecrates the human drive to worship (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Timothy 4:3). Given the God-given drive of human beings to worship, they will worship. Surreptitiously, the idol makers of today seduce humans with this power. Our societies manage human behavior by rewarding those who manifest characteristics of a worship-driven human being. Corporations praise workers for their self-sacrifice, dedication to service, and faithfulness to the corporate vision, mission, and objective. Organizations praise individuals who put the organization first, are generous with their time and money, and become virtual “citizens of the organization.” “Why he’s no ordinary man, he’s an Exxon-man!” Religious institutions are not immune for they too guilt the disobedient into faithful service, manipulate social cliques to build membership rolls, and promise social approval for faithful-like behavior.

Reasonable people recognize that it is not “bad” to be faithful to our employing organizations, our social clubs, or our religious institutions. But when we use these criteria as indications of worth—as a substitute for worshipping the Creator—like artificial sweetener, we desecrate the altar and its temple. We leave a bitter taste in God’s mouth. After all, the commands of the Lord are compared to honey, not Sweet ‘n Low (Psalm 19:9a-10).



Bottom-line? When we revere within ourselves or others, for example, the faithfulness of a “good employee” as if it were equal to faithfulness to God the Creator, we insult the Creator.

PROPOSITION IV

Idoltrous entities use our “worship drive” for its ethical foundation rather than God (Romans 1:22-23). Anarchists, atheists, agnostics, and secularists alike need ethics just as much as believers. If there is no standard for what is right or wrong, then laws, rules, and even norms can not be established. Furthermore, society never has sufficient resources to police, and therefore, can not police all “unethical” behavior. There must be social conditioning apparatuses; otherwise, we would expend the vast majority of our energy supervising ourselves as if we were small children.

Accordingly, society has appropriated and thus stolen, if not abrogated, God’s standards for worship—faithfulness, trustfulness, honesty, contrition, compassion, to name just a few. Society has used these standards for managing society by proposing that faithfulness, trustfulness, honesty, contrition, et cetera are the touchstones of ethics.

It is difficult to overstate the evil and subtlety of this seduction. To be faithful to the Hitlers of the world is evil. To be compassionate only to those I know is evil. To be honest only because I want others to trust me is evil. To be faithful to my wife simply because others (or she) would reject me is evil. To be contrite because it will get me what I want is evil.

To be good for the wrong reason is evil. To be good to please God is what He intended in our creation, and expects daily. Yes, God is smart. And, when obeyed, His dictates are extraordinarily functional—both culturally, socially, and psychologically—but when it’s all said and done, our God created us to be used for His glory, not to be used by the world for its sordid purposes. From the beginning God has known that if we worship Him, seek Him, love Him, we will be what **He** wants us to be—not the world’s whore.

Paul wrote to the church at Colosse saying, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.”

Finally, Jesus the Christ said it is important to worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. Our spirit is God’s and our truth must be His. When we worship, then, let us be wary of who and what we are worshipping. The world would have us worship faithfulness to a king rather than the King.