

# The Humanity Of Idolatry

Baal. Zeus. Ashteroth. Hermes. Call them what you want, but they all have one thing in common: their uselessness. But that certainly did not stop people from worshipping them for hundreds and even thousands of years. Great monuments and ornate temples were set up every day to pay homage to these images, giving respect to an inanimate object, and honor to a worthless display. To the idolater, the appeal of these false deities has, for all these years, seemed otherworldly, a force that is beyond comprehension of a mortal mind. Yet when we look at these objects from a purely logical standpoint, we find they are quite the opposite.

In Acts 17, Paul goes into the midst of heathenism, approaching the Areopagus of Athens to preach the message of the one true God, the One the pagan city had forgotten. As we look back on our knowledge of Roman and Greek culture, we understand that these people had gods for everything, from war to doorways, always careful to never miss one. Multiple idols were needed to depict the different aspects of human life, thereby making a "deity" nothing more than an enhanced version of mortality. Clearly this was not the God that Paul preached, saying, "*God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of Heaven and Earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands*" (Acts 17:24). God the Father, the one true Deity, is not a mere heightened version of man, but a Supreme Being that spun the world into existence, and knows everything about His creation (Job 38-39).

The interesting thing about idolatry is their personification of human values and limits. They have within them a perfect reflection of the personalities of humans, complete with needs, desires, and weaknesses. Yet people worship them as higher than themselves! This is nothing more than fear of the neighborhood bully, trying to pay off the gods so that he/she/it will attack someone else. Compare this to the sovereignty that God has over the earth, proclaimed in Psalm 47:2, "*For the Lord most High is awesome, He is a great King over all the earth.*" The God we serve is not one of many who form a group to rule over us, but one Supreme Ruler, with absolute power.

Riddle me this: What makes a person worship a graven image? Answer: sight. The ability to see and physically touch an object that is in existence proves an equality of that object on at least some level. What reward lies in that? Those who worship the gods of this world will receive an inheritance that is also of this world (Matthew 6:1-18). If all we wanted to obtain were a temporary fleeting reward, we would gladly serve idols and reap the benefits of this age. "*But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly*

*country*" (Hebrews 11:16). We seek a higher reward, and it is only logical that we serve a higher God to obtain it.

Now put down that remote control and think about this next part. The worship that used to be given in temples toward the false gods has now taken the form of New Age philosophies. No one would be foolish enough anymore to bow down to a piece of wood that they set on their mantle, but yet the world shells out millions of dollars each year to listen to someone tell them how to "Live Your Best Life Now!" This same idea of humanistic deities applies even today, telling the world to worship self, earth, and/or stone. Idolatry may have changed shape, but it certainly has not gone away.

The early Christian writer Tertullian once said this about idolatry: "The essence of fraud, I take it, is, that any should seize what is another's, and refuse to another his due ... but idolatry does fraud to God, by refusing to Him, and conferring on others, His honours." Idolatry takes from God and gives to something else. In the Jews' day, idolatry came in the form of Ashteroth and Baal, or a golden calf. Today, it comes in the form of Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, and any other televangelist that seeks to serve self above God. The point remains the same, these are humanistic ideas with humanistic goals wrapped in the shroud of deistic worship. Let us not be fooled, but rather keep in mind what Moses reminded the Israelites about in Deuteronomy 32:21, when he brought to mind their past failure: "*They have provoked Me to jealousy by what is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.*" That is not an attitude we want God to have toward us.

Brady Cook