

CONFRONTING THE IDOLS OF OUR TIME  
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Finding our Place in the Biblical Story Conference  
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I. A Spiritual Disease: Idols of American Culture

- A. Hedonism: pleasure/good feelings as ultimate goal
- B. Consumerism: acquiring as much as possible of *whatever* gives pleasure
- C. Pragmatism: adopting whatever means bring success in consuming pleasure
- D. Spiritual problem according to Jesus (Mt. 6:19-34) and Paul (2 Tim 3:1-5)

II. The Causes and Contributing Factors

- A. The Fall into Sin: disordered desires, loss of well-ordered life as created by God
- B. A Version of the American Dream: “right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”
- C. Tremendous freedom and affluence that enables worship of these idols
- D. Waning traditional religious and moral restraints
- E. World-views that promote the idols (e.g. evolutionism; relativism; capitalism; cynicism)

III. Significant Effects

A. In culture. “Postmodernism:” world-views are individual or group preferences; moral relativism; maximal individual freedom vs. responsibility; mass consumption and over-indulgence; recreation as the purpose of life; feeling-focus of media and politics; feeling “comfortable” as criterion of truth and morality; “exciting/boring” as key criteria of life and religion; malls/arenas as worship centers

B. In religion. Identification of biblical “abundant life” with American life-style; health and wealth gospel; erosion of disciplined religious/Christian/Reformed doctrine and life; confusion of edification with good feelings; confusion of blessing with numerical growth; accommodation of worship, church education, evangelism, church growth, etc. to what works, that is, what gives people what they like; dynamics of entertainment, advertising, and marketing in religious practice; etc., etc.

IV. Possible Diagnoses

Idolatry or false religion? Polytheism (God and mammon?) Poor stewardship and discipleship? Addiction? Whatever the diagnosis, it is a spiritual disease that needs spiritual treatment.

V. The Treatment

- A. Acknowledge the problem.
- B. Accurate Diagnosis
- C. The Cure: The Word and Spirit of God
  - 1. Scripture: light on the place and dynamics of pleasure, wealth, and happiness in the creation, fall, and redemption of God’s Kingdom
  - 2. The Power of the Spirit through prayer for discipline and sanctification
- D. Applying the Treatment
  - 1. Preaching, Bible study, and prayer: “seek first the Kingdom” and God’s glory; gratitude (not guilt) as the motive for discipleship: love of neighbor, justice, and stewardship
  - 2. The church, its worship, and its programs: be as engaging and appealing without compromising basic principles of doctrine, worship, education, or life-style
  - 3. Personal and family life-styles: resist what is negative in culture and choose or develop positive alternatives; modeling and good explanation important for children
  - 4. Community attitudes, life-styles, and political-economic choices: should we look and act a bit less like typical upwardly-mobile North Americans?