

COUNTERFEIT GODS WEEK 2 (Chapter 1)

All You've Ever Wanted

Worship is an old English word that means worth-ship. Whatever captivates and occupies the upper most affections of our heart is the object of our worship – and our lives will be marked by it. It might be a relationship (or relationships), financial success, athletics, marriage, Christian service or a litany of other things.

Every soul must answer who they will obey as sovereign - themselves, something else in creation, or the sovereign Creator.

“If we make secondary things primary, they cease to be secondary and become idolatrous. They have their place. But they are not first, and they are not guaranteed” *This Momentary Marriage* by John Piper, Page 178

Nothing created can hold the weight of our worship. Created things cannot provide transcendent answers. The idols that you love never love you back.

“The human heart is a factory of idols...Everyone of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.” - John Calvin. The gospel starts a revolt at the idol factory.

We prefer creation to Creator - we want his stuff more than we want Him (Romans 1:21-27). We, by nature, prefer created things to the Creator of all things. This is our base operating system. We really only want God's good gifts; we really only want His blessing. We don't really want Him.

Do you realize that the difficulty, hardship or persistent disappointment that you may be experiencing may be the grace of God to you? Do you realize that God not giving you what you desperately say you want or need is Him refusing to fuel your idolatrous heart? You have to see it as His grace or you will constantly be frustrated with disappointments in life.

Often times, it is not because we love our idols too much, but rather that we love God too little.

What do you delight in? What do you look to for answers, satisfaction, identity or fulfillment? These are your idols. The heart will always worship something – either God or an idol. Many times these are good things that we turn in to god things; things like marriage, family, faithful service, hard work or kid’s activities. We teach our children what is worthy of worship and what they should seek to establish their true identity in life by what we will really trust in and what we really point them to – it may be athletics, relationships, morality, education or financial independence. All of these things are good, but they are not designed to be our ultimate pursuit; they cannot hold the weight of our worship. What “gospel” are you preaching to yourself and your children? What do you say is worth all of your time, energy and pursuit? What is your life ordered around? This is what you really worship. Is Jesus just one of many gods in your life?

Quotes from Counterfeit Gods:

“What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.”

“It is getting your heart’s deepest desire so often a disaster? In the book of Romans, Saint Paul wrote that one of the worst things God can do to someone is to “give them over to the desires of their hearts” (Romans 1:24). Why would the greatest punishment imaginable be to allow someone to achieve their fondest dream? It is because our hearts fashion these desires into idols. In that same chapter, Paul summarized the history of the human race in one sentence: “They worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). Every human being must live for something. Something must capture our imaginations, our heart’s most fundamental allegiance and hope. But, the Bible tells us, without the intervention of the Holy Spirit, that object will never be God himself.” Page 3

“But the question now was—had he been waiting and sacrificing for God, or for the boy? Was God just a means to an end? To whom was Abraham ultimately giving his heart? Did Abraham have the peace, humility, boldness, and unmovable poise that come to those who trust in God rather than in circumstances, public opinion, or their own competence? Had he learned to trust God alone, to love God for himself, not just for what he could get out of God? No, not yet.” Page 6

“This was the ultimate test. Isaac was now everything to Abraham, as God’s call makes clear. He does not refer to the boy as “Isaac,” but as “your son, your only son, whom you love.” Abraham’s affection had become adoration. Previously, Abraham’s meaning in life had been dependent on God’s word. Now it was becoming dependent on Isaac’s love and well-being. The center of Abraham’s life was shifting. God was not saying you cannot love your son, but that you must not turn a loved one into a counterfeit god.” Page 7

“How did Abraham get himself to walk up into the mountains in obedience to God’s call? The masterful Hebrew narrative gives us tantalizing hints. He told his servants that “we will come back to you” (Genesis 22:5). It is unlikely he had any specific idea of what God would do. But he did not go up the mountain saying, “I can do it,” filled with willpower and self-talk. Rather, he went up saying, “God will do it . . . but I don’t know how.” Do what? God would somehow remove the debt on the firstborn and still keep the promise of grace.” Page 11

“Think of the many disappointments and troubles that beset us. Look at them more closely, and you will realize that the most agonizing of them have to do with our own “Isaacs.” In our lives there are always some things that we invest in to get a level of joy and fulfillment that only God can give. The most painful times in our lives are times in which our Isaacs, our idols, are being threatened or removed. When that happens we can respond in two ways. We can opt for bitterness and despair. We will feel entitled to wallow in those feelings, saying, “I’ve worked all my life to get to this place in my career, and now it’s all gone!” or “I’ve slaved my whole life to give that girl a good life, and this is how she repays me!” We may feel at liberty to lie, cheat, take revenge, or throw away our principles in order to get some relief. Or we may simply live in a permanent despondency. Or else, like Abraham, you could take a walk up into the mountains. You could say, “I see that you may be calling me to live my life without something I never thought I could live without. But if I have you, I have the only wealth, health, love, honor, and security I really need and cannot lose.” As many have learned and later taught, you don’t realize Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have.” Page 18-19

“Sometimes God seems to be killing us when he’s actually saving us. Here he was turning Abraham into a great man—but on the outside it looked like God was being cruel.” Page 20

Scripture References: Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:17, 21:5 & 22; Romans 1:19-25, Hebrews 11:

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever considered that some of the difficulties, disappointments & hardships that you face in life may actually be God’s grace to you because He is refusing to give you something that you think you need to make you happy, safe, significant or secure?
2. God’s call of Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-2), can seem harsh & unloving. Discuss how this command was actually the most loving thing that God could have done for Abraham.
3. Discuss how affection for something good often times evolves into adoration for that thing.
4. For Abraham, was God a means to the end or the end in and of Himself? What about for you?