

COUNTERFEIT GODS WEEK 6 (Chapter 5)

The Power & The Glory

Quotes from Counterfeit Gods:

“Ernest Becker wrote that in a society that has lost the reality of God, many people will look to romantic love to give them the fulfillment they once found in religious experience. Nietzsche, however, believed it would be money that would replace God. But there is another candidate to fill this spiritual vacuum. We can also look to politics. We can look upon our political leaders as “messiahs,” our political policies as saving doctrine, and turn our political activism into a kind of religion.” page 98

“One of the signs that an object is functioning as an idol is that fear becomes one of the chief characteristics of life. When we center our lives on the idol, we become dependent on it.” page 98-99

“The main problem in life is sin, and the only solution is God and his grace. The alternative to this view is to identify something besides sin as the main problem with the world and something besides God as the main remedy.” page 100

“The original temptation in the Garden of Eden was to resent the limits God had put on us (“You shall not eat of the tree. . .”; Genesis 2:17) and to seek to be “as God” by taking power over our own destiny. We gave in to this temptation and now it is part of our nature. Rather than accept our finitude and dependence on God, we desperately seek ways to assure ourselves that we still have power over our own lives. But this is an illusion.” Page 101

you make “your political philosophy into a saving faith.” page 104

“they go back to the beginning of the world, to our alienation from God, and to our frantic efforts to compensate for our feelings of cosmic nakedness and powerlessness. The only way to deal with all these things is to heal our relationship with God.” Page 107

“We are not infinite Creators, but finite, dependent creatures.” Page 110

“human beings have a deep fear of powerlessness stemming from their alienation from God, then there must be many ways that they deal with it, not just through politics and government. Power idols are a “deep idols” that can express themselves through a great variety of other “surface” idols.”⁸⁸ Page 111

⁸⁸ “I am describing in this paragraph is how “surface idols”—sex, religion, money—can serve the “deep idol” of power. Compare this with what was said about deep and surface idols in Chapter Three.” Page 195

“Those in power should see that they have not achieved power but have only been given it by God, and that all human power crumbles in the end.” Page 113-114

“What we learn here is that theology matters, that much of our addiction to power and control is due to false conceptions of God. Gods of our own making may allow us to be “masters of our fate.” Sociologist Christian Smith gave the name “moralistic, therapeutic deism” to the dominant understanding of God he discovered among younger Americans. In his book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*, he describes this set of beliefs. God blesses and takes to heaven those who try to live good and decent lives (the “moralistic” belief). The central goal of life is not to sacrifice, or to deny oneself, but to be happy and feel good about yourself (the “therapeutic” belief). Though God exists and created the world, he does not need to be particularly involved in our lives except when there is a problem (that is “deism”).”⁹⁰ Page 115

⁹⁰ Christian Smith, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 162-170.

“Most of the forces that make us who we are lie in the hand of God. We should not “take pride in one man over against another,” wrote the Apostle Paul. “For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” (1 Corinthians 4:6-7).” Page 117

“The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” This means that anyone who is successful is simply a recipient of God’s unmerited favor. Even the people at the top of the world’s hierarchy of power, wealth, and influence are really “lowliest”—they are no better than anyone else. This is a rudimentary form of the gospel—that what we have is the result of grace, not of our “works” or efforts. “ Page 120

“God was saying something like this: “King Nebuchadnezzar—you must understand that your power has been given to you by grace from God. If you knew that, you would be both more relaxed and secure and more humble and just. If you think you earned your position through your own merit and works, you will continue to be both scared and cruel.” Page 120

“One of the great ironies of sin is that when human beings try to become more than human beings, to be as gods, they fall to become lower than human beings. To be your own God and live for your own glory and power leads to the most bestial and cruel kind of behavior.” Page 121

“When we set our hearts on power, we become hardened predators. We become like what we worship.”⁹⁴ Page 122

⁹⁴We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

“Jesus lost all power and served, in order to save us. He died, but that led to redemption and resurrection.... Jesus’s example and grace heals our will to power. The normal response to our sense of powerlessness is to deny it, to find people to dominate and control in order to live in that denial. But Jesus shows us another way. By giving up his power and serving, he became the most influential man who ever lived. Jesus is not only an example, however, he is a Savior. Only by admitting our sin, need, and powerlessness, and by casting ourselves on his mercy, will we finally become secure in his love, and therefore empowered in a way that does not lead us to oppress others. The insecurity is gone, the lust for power is cut at the root. As a preacher once said, “The way up is to go down; the way down is to go up.” Page 124-125

Scripture References: Philippians 2:1-11; Romans 1:28-32; Psalms 2:4-5 (God sits in heaven and laughs at those who oppose Him), Psalms 33 (He brings the counsel of nations to nothing), Psalms 74:12-17, 105:16-22, 115:3 (Our God is in the heavens and does all that He pleases), 135:6 (whatever the Lord pleases, He does); Proverbs 21:1 (God turns the King’s heart wherever wants)

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways have you attempted to fill the “power void” in your heart (ie politics, patriotism, causes, personal accomplishment, etc)?
2. Have you ever considered that your “main problem in life is sin, and the only solution is God and his grace?” In what ways have you tried to solve your own problems on your own?
3. Do you find the absolute Sovereignty of God encouraging or discouraging?
4. Explain how Jesus giving up all of His power & privilege (Philippians 2) for you allows you to rest and not have to strive to be in control?