

## MODERN IDOLATRY

### Judges

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The message of apostasy from God has great contemporary significance. As mentioned in the introduction (see pp. 45-47), the myth of secularism is that there are no idols because there is no God. But if idolatry is worshiping the creation, or some part of it, instead of the Creator (cf. Rom. 1:18-23), then the process of sacralization (the process by which created things become central to life, invoking religious-like awe and submission) provides numerous examples of idolatry in modern contexts.

One object of sacralization is money and material possessions. This is the idol of Mammon (Matt. 6:24), which leads on to sins such as covetousness (named specifically as a form of idolatry in Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Underlying this idol is the fundamental belief that utopia exists and that its essence is material well-being. Set in opposition to this approach to life are numerous biblical texts: for example, "one's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15 NRSV); and "keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have" (Hebrews 13:15). "The Christian view of the world does not make economics coterminous with life, nor does it confuse wealth with moral worth, nor promote greed as a virtue."<sup>1</sup>

The biblical view sees creation as the possession of the Creator, not humanity's possession that can be endlessly manipulated and exploited. All creation belongs to God and is graciously provided to us as stewards. As Schlossberg has noted, this biblical view of wealth "seems odd only because we have adopted as normal a way of life that is hopelessly unable to produce what it promises and has demonstrated that inability to almost everyone."<sup>2</sup> Instead, it is the worship of this idol that is "odd," indeed truly insane, when one recognizes that it cannot bring well-being to its worshiper, but rather only mars human life in its often oppressive demand on our time and energy as workers and in its production within us of unrest and discontent. A quick survey of virtually any adult Sunday school class will reveal significant levels of unrest and discontent among Christians. It is ironic that the ultimate end of the worship of this type of idol is destruction, for "insatiable greed placing infinite claims on finite resources can have no other end."

Materialism with its pursuit of possessions and financial independence and security are probably the biggest obstacles to spiritual advancement. Everything in our culture, from commercials to our education, pushes us in the direction of advancing our standard of living for more comfort, pleasure, and self-confidence without any thought of the Creator. Thus we become our own deity, controlling our lives and manipulating things for our gratification. Ultimately, it is our greed that is the idol, with things being the means of its appeasement.

We must resist the rhetoric of advertisers and the devotees of this idol and their message that one is what one owns and consumes. We must not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewal of our minds by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:2). This requires an intense involvement with God's Word and with other believers who are dedicated to growing in their faith and who resist succumbing to the pressures to worship this idol.



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<sup>1</sup> I. Provan, "To Highlight All Our Idols: Worshipping God in Nietzsche's World" *Ex Auditu* 15 (1999):19-42.

<sup>2</sup> H. Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Nashville: Nelson, 1983), 311.