

# The First Commandment

## Chapter 3: The First Commandment Expounded

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The first commandment says, “You shall have other gods before Me” (Ex. 20:3). This commandment is foundational and basic to the covenant people’s relationship to Jehovah and to the keeping of the other nine commandments. Thus, the first commandment is the most important commandment of all. If one keeps this commandment then one will keep the entire law. Our relationship to God has a profound effect upon our thinking, speaking and actions. Jesus called this commandment (as stated in positive form, Dt. 6:5) “the first and great commandment” (Mt. 22:37). Loyalty, faithfulness and submission to God are needed to comprehend and obey the whole law. “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Pr. 1:7). By implication the first commandment teaches that true faith always precedes obedience. “Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6).

Before we consider the duties required in this commandment a brief exegesis of the passage is in order. As in all the eight commandments that are negative, this commandment is *emphatic* in the Hebrew. “God absolutely did not want the Israelite to do this, and He fully expected that he would not do it.”<sup>1</sup> The commandment is given in the *singular* “you” indicating that every individual person has a moral obligation to worship and serve the true God. The phrase “before [or besides] Me” (Heb. “*al-panay*”) is liable to different translations and thus has aroused some debate among scholars. The words can have the sense of “above me,” “besides me” or “over against me” (cf. Gen. 16:12, 25:18; Ex. 20:20; Dt. 21:16). They also can be rendered “before my face,” “in my sight” or “in my presence.” Both translations essentially teach the same thing: that God does not tolerate for one second the believing in, serving, or worshiping or having any relationship to any other supposed god. The meaning of “in my sight or presence” is rooted in God’s omniscience. Those “who secretly turn aside to false worship, and cherish

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<sup>1</sup>W. H. Gispen, *Exodus*, p. 189. Victor P. Hamilton writes, “Eight-tenths of the Decalogue are negative apodictic (i.e., categorical) prohibitions, put in the second person singular. The Hebrew language has two ways of expressing a prohibition: the negative particle ‘*al*’ with the jussive form of the verb (reproduced in the Septuagint usually by *m□* with the imperative or aorist subjunctive); the negative particle *l’* with the imperfect form of the verb (reproduced in the Septuagint usually by *ou* with the future indicative). John Bright has analyzed the distribution of these two formulations of prohibitions in the Old Testament. As to the difference in nuance between the two, he concludes that ‘*al*’ with the jussive is the weaker of the two, and is concerned with a specific command for a specific occasion, with no implication for the future. [“The Apodictic Prohibitions: Some Observations,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 185-204] The first formulation predominates in wisdom literature, where a prohibition is often justified by a motive clause: “do not walk in the way with them...for their feet run to evil” (Prov. 1:15-16). The second is clearly the choice in the Pentateuch, especially in sections dealing with legal and cultic matters. Thus, in the four chapters of Exodus occupied with the laws of the covenant—21-23, 34—the first occurs but twice, while the second is used fifty-five times. It is not incidental that the laws of prohibition in the Decalogue have been consistently couched in the strongest form of negation the Hebrew language had available. The commandments are not open to review and/or revision by any advisory panel, which may freely abandon them if convenience warrants. They have, linguistically, a built-in permanence. Obsolete they are not. Absolute they are. (*Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982], p. 197).

their errors within their own bosoms, may be able to evade the eyes of men, yet their hypocrisy and treachery will not escape the notice of God.”<sup>2</sup> “Cursed is the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret” (Dt. 27:15).

Modernists often have taken the phrase “beside me” in a henotheistic sense, meaning that at this particular time in Israel’s history Jehovah was not regarded as the only God, but only as supreme among the gods. Such a view, however, is based on social evolutionary presuppositions and not upon the biblical text. That Jehovah is the one and only God is assumed throughout the creation narrative that was penned by Moses. Obviously, if God created all things whether spiritual or material, there can be no other gods. Moses also excludes all polytheistic conceptions of God when he asks the rhetorical question: “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders” (Ex, 15:11)? The answer is no one. God is the one and only, a totally unique being. The Bible teaches a strict monotheism from cover to cover. When the ark was placed in the temple Solomon declared, “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is not other” (1 Ki. 8:60). Isaiah said, “There is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other....And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me (Isa. 45:6, 21). Likewise, Paul wrote: “there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things...and one Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 8:6; cf. 1 Tim. 2:5). Oswald T. Allis writes: “Does it [the first commandment] deny the existence of other gods (monotheism) or merely prohibit their worship (monolatry)? The answer is given in such passages as Genesis i, xxiv. 3; Exodus XX. II, which describes the God of Israel as the Creator of heaven and earth. The Old Testament writers, of course, recognize that the nations, and often even Israel herself, worshiped ‘other gods.’ But again and again they point out how empty, vain, and sinful is such worship. The people gathered at Sinai have just a wonderful demonstration of the impotence of the gods of Egypt (xxii. 12). Moses’ estimate of such gods is given quite clearly in Deuteronomy iv. 28. They are ‘no god,’ they are ‘vanities’ (Deut. xxxii. 21), while Jehovah is the creator of heaven and earth (Deut. iv. 35, 39, vi. 4, x. 14 cf. Exod. xxxi. 17). Yet, on the other hand, the appeal which they make to men is due to the fact that the worship given to these vanities is really offered to ‘demons,’ to Satan and his angels (Deut. xxxii. 17; Ps. cvi. 37). This is especially clear in I Corinthians x. 20. The idol is ‘nothing,’ but the worship rendered to it is given to ‘demons’ (cf. Eph. vi. 12) and the powers of darkness are very real and terrible (I Pet. v. 8) as well as subtle (2 Cor. xi. 14)”<sup>3</sup>

## The Duties Required in the First Commandment

The first commandment (like all the other commandments) has both positive and negative duties. Although the commandment is stated in a negative form (“Thou shall not”), the keeping of this commandment would result in the service and worship of the one true God—Jehovah. The positive form of this commandment is given in Deuteronomy 6, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength” (vv. 4-5).

God sets before man only two alternatives. One either worships the true God or one serves idols. Jehovah by His very existence, His perfect and infinite attributes, His role as the

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<sup>2</sup>John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, 1:419.

<sup>3</sup>Oswald T. Allis, *God Spoke by Moses: An Exposition of the Pentateuch* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1951), p. 74.

Creator and preserver of all reality, His love and mercy in Christ's redemption demands and deserves our faith, loyalty, service and love. There can be no middle ground or neutrality in this area. Those who claim that they neither believe in nor reject God, who say they are merely neutral seekers of the truth, who have not yet made up their minds regarding God's existence are living in self-deception. This point is proven in two ways by Scripture. (1) The apostle Paul teaches that no one has an excuse for being an atheist or agnostic. He writes: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things" (Rom. 1:18-23). Paul says that Jehovah's created order (what theologians call "natural revelation") reveals God in such a manner, that all men know that the true God exists; and thus have a responsibility to worship their Creator. What this means is that even people who do not have access to a Bible ("special revelation") cannot claim ignorance as an excuse to violate the first commandment. Murray writes: "The inexcusableness resides in the fact that being in possession of this knowledge they did not render to God the glory and the thanks which the knowledge they possessed ought to have constrained. To glorify God as God is not to augment God's glory or add to it; it means simply to ascribe to God the glory that belongs to him as God, to give to him in thought, affection, and devotion the place that belongs to him in virtue of the perfections which the visible creation itself makes known. This glory they failed to ascribe to him and they were destitute of that gratitude which the knowledge possessed should have elicited and which ought to have expressed itself in thanksgiving."<sup>4</sup> Everyone in the entire world has a moral obligation to glorify God as God.

This point raises an important question. If all men are without excuse because they have a true knowledge of God from natural revelation, then why is idolatry universal in the world apart from the saving operation of the Holy Spirit? The answer is simple, yet tragic. Before man fell into sin, Adam had a personal loving relationship with Jehovah. He walked with God in a constant consciousness of worship and adoration. His deep love of God flowed from his own nature. He was created in the image of God with true knowledge, righteousness and holiness. Being created good, he was naturally drawn to God as a moth to a light. Loving and serving God was part of his being. But when Adam sinned he became a fallen being. The fall of man has rendered man totally depraved; thus, all men from birth are morally corrupt (Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Ps. 14:2-3; 51:5; 58:3; Mt. 15:19; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 8:7-8; Eph 2:3). Everything about their nature is in rebellion against God. Unlike Adam, who before the fall had a natural innate love and devotion toward Jehovah, fallen man has an inborn aversion to and hatred of God. Therefore, (as Paul says) even though he knows the true God exists, he *continually* suppresses or holds down that knowledge in unrighteousness. In other words (apart from Jesus Christ) all men are born idolaters. People do not glorify the true God, because they do not want to glorify Him. The God of the Bible is *repugnant* to man. This means that all conceptions of man as a sincere seeker after religious truth are totally false. The natural man is always running from the true God. "They have all turned aside, they have all together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, no not

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<sup>4</sup>John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 1:41.

one” (Ps. 14:3). “There is no one who understands; there is none who seeks after God” (Rom. 3:11).

According to the Bible, pagan idolatry is not some primeval development out of which mankind gradually evolved into a superior monotheism. The exact opposite is true. Man rejected the true God and turned to idols to escape reality. “The mind of man is never a religious vacuum; if there is the absence of the true, there is always the presence of the false.”<sup>5</sup> Van Til writes: “When man fell it was therefore his attempt to do without God in every respect. Man sought his ideals of truth, goodness and beauty somewhere beyond God, either directly within himself or in the universe without reference to God; we mean of course without reference to the kind of God defined above [i.e., the Christian God].”<sup>6</sup> Without the transcendent, uncreated, self-contained triune God of the Bible, man is left with that which is immanent, created, fallen and finite. By rejecting God, man commits himself to the blasphemous monstrosity of worshipping filthy little creatures and dumb inanimate objects. By seeking wisdom and truth autonomously (i.e., apart from God and His word) men become ethical degenerates and utter fools.

(2) Apart from the worship of the true God, idolatry is inevitable because man was created a religious being. Man was created to worship and serve Jehovah. Although man is now a fallen being, mired in sin, at enmity with God and in rebellion against Him, the religious impulse that is a fabric of his being has not been and cannot be eradicated. The vacuum created by the hatred and rejection of God must be filled by the service toward a new god. Man must find something in this world to believe in, trust, love and serve. Therefore, idolatry is not simply worship of an explicitly religious object or statue. Anything that takes the place of God is a violation of the first commandment. Herbert Schlossberg writes: “Idolatry in its larger meaning is properly understood as any substitution of what is created for the creator. People may worship nature, money, mankind, power, history, or social and political systems instead of the God who created them all. The New Testament writers, in particular, recognized that the relationship need not be *explicitly* one of cultic worship; a man can place anyone or anything at the top of his pyramid of values, and that is ultimately what he serves. The ultimacy of that service profoundly affects the way he lives.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the words of Jesus the divine-human mediator are most appropriate. “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Mt. 12:30). There is no fence-sitting or middle ground possible on this issue. “Next to the Lord there is nothing. He is God, and God alone. Beside Him there is no Savior. All things and every creature are but means in His hand. And therefore, to place our trust in things or creatures is to rob the living God of His glory and is to serve idols.”<sup>8</sup>

## Positive Requirements

The first commandment in its positive form requires all men to love the one true God with all their heart, mind and soul (Dt. 6:5; Mt. 22:37). What does it mean to love God? How is this love of God achieved? What are the fruits of love toward God? When the Bible discusses the love of Jehovah it is not primarily concerned with our feelings or emotional state but with a saving faith directed at the proper object (the triune God) that is accompanied by obedience.

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<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>6</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols For Destruction* (New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 3:135.

There are a number of things that are necessary to have a biblical love of God.

The first thing that men need to love God is a biblical knowledge of Him. Men must believe in Jehovah the one true God *as He is defined by Scripture*. Obedience to the first commandment is contingent upon gaining a certain amount of knowledge that can only be found in the Bible. It is not enough that a person assert a belief in one God alone as in modern Judaism, Islam or the many monotheistic cults (e.g., The United Pentecostal Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, The Way International, The Unitarian Church, etc.). One must know the God who is (Heb. 11:6), the true God, the God of Israel. "Knowledge is the foundation of all religion, for religion is a reasonable service. The mind of man should be clear and distinct in the uptaking of divine things."<sup>9</sup>

The Samaritans of Jesus' day were a people who rejected the prophetic and poetical books of the Old Testament and who mixed their own superstitions with their concept of God. Thus, they did not know the true God and received the strong disapprobation of our Lord when He said to the Samaritan woman, "You worship what you do not know" (Jn. 4:22). Because the Samaritans did not carefully define God according to the whole of divine revelation, they worshiped a god of their imagination. Indeed, everyone who ignores or perverts the Scriptures will create and worship idols. We must look to the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible for a saving knowledge of God.

To love God, our knowledge of Jehovah must extend not only to the fact that He exists but also to His nature and character. The Christian God is personal. He thinks (Isa. 58:8-9), communicates with mankind (Heb. 1:1-2), acts in history (Heb. 2:14), is self-reflective (Isa. 44:24), self-conscious (Ex. 3:14) and self-determinative (Jn. 5:26). The God of the Bible is not some impersonal force, particle field or energy mass. He is an independent (Ac. 17:25), eternal (Ps 102:12; 9:2) living being (Jn. 6:69; 1 Th. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; 4:10). God is kind (Ac. 14:17), merciful (Ps. 86:15), compassionate (Ps. 145:8-9), absolutely righteous (Ps 98:9), holy (Rev. 4:8), and good (Dt. 32:4). He is infinite; therefore all of His attributes are unlimited. God is everywhere present (omnipresent) without being part of the universe because He is pure, uncreated Spirit (Jn. 4:24). His essence is totally different from created reality. The universe is finite; it is a speck of dust in God's sight. God is all knowing (omniscient, Heb. 4:13; Rom 11:33). His knowledge is exhaustive; nothing can be added or subtracted from it. Therefore God, not man, is the source of truth. God is all-powerful (omnipotent, Jer. 32:17; Isa. 14:27). His power cannot be diminished; He cannot run down or get tired. All energy in the universe is created energy and is running down. Because God is all-knowing and all-powerful, whatever He wills, will come to pass. He cannot be taken off guard, surprised or frustrated in His plans for He is totally sovereign (Ps. 139:16).

The God of the Bible is transcendent (Job 11:7-9). He is above, beyond and separate from the created universe. God is eternal (Ps. 90:2). He is not subject to time. Indeed, He created time, space and matter. The universe had a beginning (Gen. 1:1ff.) but God has existed from eternity. God does not change (immutability, Ps. 102:27; Ja. 1:17). God will always be God; He does not evolve. He does not become the universe for He is uncreated, independent and self-existent (ontological, Jn. 5:26; Ac. 17:25). God is in need of nothing outside of Himself. The universe, however, is totally dependent on God for its existence.

Jehovah, the God of the Bible is a triune God (Mt. 3:16-17; 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14; Jn. 1:14; 15:26). There is one God existing eternally as three persons: God the Father, God the Son and

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<sup>9</sup>Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Water Revival Books, 1993 [1853]), 2:92.

God the Holy Spirit. There are not three Gods but only one God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not one-third God each or parts of God, but all are fully God of one indivisible essence, power and eternity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three manifestations of one God. Each is completely equal, possessing the full divine nature. When the Bible teaches that God is three persons, it does not mean that there are three individuals “but only personal self-distinctions within the Divine essence, which is not only generically, but also numerically one.”<sup>10</sup> Any form of theism that teaches that Jesus Christ is not both man *and* God is a violation of the first commandment. When modernists, Unitarians, Jews and Mohammedans claim that Jesus was only a man and nothing more, they explicitly deny the God of the Bible and are idolaters. When Arians and Jehovah’s witnesses claim that Jesus is the first created being (a mighty angel) they deny the God of Scripture and worship an idol. “Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also” (1 Jn. 2:23). Further, when cults claim that the Holy Spirit is not a person but an emanation of God’s power or energy, they reject the God of the Bible.

The fact that God must be believed in and worshiped as He is revealed in Scripture, needs to be emphasized in our day when in most nations religious pluralism reigns supreme. In this climate of opinion it is repeatedly said that Jews, Mohammedans, Mormons and Christians, etc. all serve the same God. This statement is untrue, unbiblical and irrational. The only God who exists is carefully defined in His own revelation of Himself (the Bible). All other definitions come from man’s imagination and thus have no basis in reality. If one wants to know the true God then one must diligently search the Scriptures for they and they alone contain the sum of saving knowledge. “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn. 17:3). “The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty...” (Ex. 34:6-7).

Furthermore, in order to love God we must not only have a biblical knowledge of Him, we also must believe in Him. We must acknowledge Jehovah to be our God by trusting in His Son (Jesus Christ) as our Lord and Savior. It is not enough that people have a mere intellectual assent to certain biblical propositions about God. There must also be a faith in God. It is one thing to understand that God exists; and another to believe in a saving manner, to know and love God. When James discusses the need of a genuine faith he points out that, “Even the demons believe—and tremble” (Ja. 3:19). The Israelites who wandered and died in the wilderness because of their unbelief (Heb. 3:12-19; 4:2, 6) knew that God existed for they were eyewitnesses of His miraculous power. “The knowledge of God is either speculative or practical. The former we may have and be none the better, but only the more guilty. The practical knowledge of God is saving. It controls the heart and life; it brings our moral nature into a blessed conformity to the truth of God.”<sup>11</sup> People who say they believe in God but do not act in a manner consistent with that profession are practical atheists. As Paul says, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work” (Tit. 1:16). What then does a saving and practical knowledge of God mean? “It is to have a lively apprehension of his relation to us, as our God in Christ, as is accompanied with an habitual conformity to his will, in heart and life.”<sup>12</sup> “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep

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<sup>10</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), p. 87.

<sup>11</sup>William S. Plumer, *The Law of God as Contained in the Ten Commandments, Explained and Enforced* (Harrisburg, VA; Sprinkle Publications, 1996 [1864]), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup>By Several Ministers of the Gospel, *The Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism Explained by Way of*

His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

In a fallen world ravaged by sin, obedience to the first commandment cannot be separated from a belief in and love of Christ. "For we see in the gospel, the glory of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; or behold the perfections of the divine nature as displayed in and through a Mediator. To know God thus, is to possess that knowledge which is absolutely necessary to salvation."<sup>13</sup> There is a common notion today that all paths (i.e., religions) lead a person to God. Such an idea is totally false and spiritually deadly. There is only one path to God and that is Christ. Jesus said, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved" (Jn. 10:9). "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Ac. 4:12). "If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed" (1 Cor. 16:22).

A saving belief in Christ is absolutely necessary for obedience to the first commandment and all other commandments. There are a number of reasons why this statement is true. First, Christ is God the Son, the second person of the trinity. He must be worshiped, adored, served and obeyed. Second, as noted above, God the Father can only be approached through Christ. None of our service, works or worship can be accepted as pleasing in His sight unless our sins are covered by the blood of the Lamb. Third, Christ alone delivers us from the guilt and power of sin. It is because we were united with Christ in His death and resurrection, that we receive new hearts of flesh that love and believe in God. Jesus enables us by His grace to serve the living and true God. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:17).

In order to love God we must obey His word in every area of life. "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:30). "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 2:3). Craigie writes: "Thus the implications and obligations of the first commandment are far-reaching in their significance. The commandment calls for a style of life dominated by a relationship to God. The commandment was not merely 'theology,' nor was it concerned simply with the proper form of worship. It affected the whole life of the whole covenant community. Its implications remain the same today; the relationship to one God must dominate every sphere of life, whether the life of action, of thought, or of emotion. There can be no area of life in which a person or thing comes before the commitment to the one God. The *other gods* may take on forms more subtle than wooden images or stone idols; indeed anything that relegates the relationship with God to second place functions in effect as 'another god.'"<sup>14</sup> Because this commandment has implications for all of life, there are a number of areas that need to be considered under obedience. All of these areas are inter-related.

First, there must be a confession of Christ before men (Rom. 10:9; Mt. 10:32; 1 Jn. 4:15) and a willingness to acknowledge God in all our ways (Pr. 3:6). The first commandment like all the other commandments has both an internal and external aspect. If there is a love and devotion to the true God in the heart, it will express itself in the life. There is no such thing as a private Christian or a true believer who is unwilling to confess Jesus publicly before men. A love of Christ requires a willingness to take a stand for Him whatever the cost, whether that means being

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*Question and Answer* [Commonly Called Fisher's Catechism] (Philadelphia: A. Walker, 1818), 2:29.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Ridgeley, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993 [1855]), 2:316.

<sup>14</sup>P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, p. 153.

an outcast, suffering economic hardship or undergoing persecution. The cowardice common among professing Christians today, that leads evangelicals to repeatedly compromise the truths of God's word in the areas of science, morality, doctrine and worship is a reflection of lack of true faith in and love of God. True love of God leads to a boldness in confessing His name and seeking first His kingdom.

Second, the fear of God must permeate all of our thinking and actions (Lev. 25:17; 1 Pet. 2:17; Ps. 34:9). Believers must always have their mind focused on God and His word as they make decisions. There must be a perpetual God-consciousness. Does this thought, or word or action please my God? Because sin and idolatry always begin in the heart, our hearts must be permeated with a holy reverence and fear of God coupled with love. Calvin writes: "We manifest a becoming reverence for him, only when we prefer his will to our own. It follows then that there is no other legitimate worship of him, but the observance of righteousness, sanctity, and purity."<sup>15</sup> Those who fear God always have Him in their thoughts and before their eyes. They know that God is watching everything we say or do. A holy fear of God restrains our hand from evil even when we are alone, when no one can see but God. We must have the mentality of Joseph who said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9)? Or, the attitude of Anselm, "If hell were on one side, and sin on the other, I would rather leap into hell, than willingly sin against my God."<sup>16</sup>

Third, there must be a steady and continuous trust in God's word and His providence. The root cause of Israel's rank idolatry prior to their captivity in Babylon was a refusal to trust in Jehovah. When the Israelites moved into Palestine and had an economy based on agriculture they almost immediately began worshiping the Canaanite fertility gods. Why? The primary reason was their lack of trust in Jehovah's absolute control over the realm of nature. In Canaan, agriculture and religion were bound together. The fertility cult's whole purpose was to insure proper rains, the fertility of livestock and an abundant harvest. The covenant people looked to the fertility gods for prosperity instead of Jehovah. The people looked to the tangible, visible gods and sensual rites of the heathen instead of trusting in God's providential care. Professing Christians are often tempted to worry about finances and compromise ethically in their business practices to attain food, shelter and clothing. Jesus, however, instructs us not to worry but to trust in God. "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Mt. 6:33).

It is often adversity in life whether financial, medical or from persecution that tests our faith in God. When hardship or tragedy arises do we imitate righteous Job who blessed and worshiped God in his time of crisis (Job 1:21) or do we act like faithless Saul who turned to rebellion and sorcery (1 Sam. 28:7)? Those who do not trust in God's providence for sustenance will instead invariably trust in an idol. "A good Christian believes, that if God feeds the raven, he will feed his children; he lives upon God's all-sufficiency, not only for grace, but for food. He believes if God gives him heaven, he will give daily bread; he trusts his bond: 'verily thou shalt be fed.' Psa. xxxvii 3. Can we trust God in our fears? When adversaries grow high can we display the banner of faith?"<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, there must be a habitual obedience to God's word. Can a person say "Jesus is Lord" when he refuses to submit to His lordship, when he is living in open rebellion against God's precepts? Jehovah said to Abraham, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be

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<sup>15</sup>John Calvin, as quoted in William S. Plumer, *The Law of God*, p. 109.

<sup>16</sup>Anselm of Canterbury, as quoted in Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 51.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 52.

blameless” (Gen. 17:1). The Israelites were repeatedly commanded to “be holy, for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). When Israel affirmed the covenant with God they said, “All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient” (Ex. 24:7). There is only one true God and thus there is only one true and binding ethical standard. This one standard reflects God’s nature and character. Therefore it is absolute, eternal, unchanging and non-negotiable. Anyone who rejects God’s law either explicitly by adopting a humanistic or pagan law order or implicitly by refusing to obey God’s voice and following the lusts of his own heart is an idolater. As we noted earlier, the first commandment is foundational and basic to all the other divine imperatives in Scripture. There is one God and the belief in and service to this God involves a total allegiance to His one law-word.

Everyone who rejects the true God will in some manner reject divine revelation and those who reject the Bible will always reject the God of the Scripture. Israel’s idolatry was always accompanied by a blatant disregard of all the commandments. When the Israelites worshiped the golden calf (Ex. 23:1 ff.) they rose up to play (Ex. 32:6) like a heathen mob. When Israel joined itself to Baal of Peor (Num. 25:3) their act of treachery was accompanied by rampant fornication (Num. 25:8-9). The period of the judges was a time of idolatry (Jdg. 2:11-13, 17-19) and blatant lawlessness (Jdg. 17:6; 21:25). The period of the kings of Israel after Solomon is a history of rank idolatry (1 Kgs. 15:26, 34; 16:19, 26, 31; 22:52; 2 Kgs. 3:3; 10:29; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 29; 17:21-22) coupled with murder, intrigue, sexual immorality and war. The major prophets present a picture of society full of idolatry (Isa. 42:17; Jer. 8:19), oppression, injustice, adultery, selfishness, dishonesty, treachery, sorcery, divination, theft and wickedness. “They weary themselves to commit iniquity” (Jer. 9:5).

The prophet Samuel places disobedience to God and idolatry in the same category. “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you [Saul] have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king” (1 Sam. 15:22-23). When people reject God’s commandments they reject His authority; rejecting Jehovah’s authority is the same as rejecting God Himself. Rejecting God’s authoritative word is compared to divination because when God’s word is rejected, truth, meaning and justice must be derived from another source. It is a form of idolatry because it is based on the philosophical idea that truth, meaning and ethics can be found outside of God. Whatever men look to for ultimate meaning and ethics is the god they serve. Why is such idolatry always accompanied by lawlessness and societal decay? The answer is simple. Because the triune God of the Bible is the only source for meaning and ethics, a rejection of the true God leaves a society with finite gods determined by the autonomous mind of man. Whatever the god is that idolaters serve (even monotheistic non-Christian conceptions), it is always a creation of man’s imagination. It is always some form of human autonomy dressed up in religious or scientific terminology. What this means is that all non-Christian ethical systems are at bottom relativistic and arbitrary.

The rejection of the true God always comes with God’s judgment; and, this judgment Paul says always begins with lawlessness. The apostle says that the gross sexual immorality of the Gentiles (e.g., homosexuality and lesbianism) and the great wickedness of heathen society is ultimately the direct result of their idolatry (cf. Rom. 1:23-32). God gives them up to uncleanness (Rom. 1:24), vile passions (Rom. 1:26) and a debased mind (Rom. 1:28) because they first became godless in their thinking. They suppressed the true knowledge of God and pushed Him out of their lives in order to live for themselves. God gives them what they want and what they deserve. They wanted human autonomy and self-gratification and they received their lot, a

society in chaos, a culture full of evil, distrust, hatred, pride, envy, covetousness and immorality.

We must understand the interrelationship that exists between a prompt and cheerful obedience to God's revealed will and the keeping of the first commandment. Likewise, we must keep in mind the correlation between idolatry and lawlessness in general. Paul preached the gospel "to make the Gentiles obedient" (Rom. 15:18). A turning to the true God always involves a rejection of the false. Therefore, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim. 2:19).

What does a habitual obedience to God's word involve? It involves studying, applying and obeying the whole word of God in every area of life. This entails diligently working for sanctification by: (1) studying and obeying God's law; (2) attending the means of grace (e.g., public worship, the sacraments, etc.); (3) worshiping and serving God only as He has authorized in His word; (4) engendering covenant continuity by the diligent upholding of family religion; and (5) working for the sanctification of all earthly institutions and nations.

What is the nature of biblical obedience?<sup>18</sup> It must be a cheerful obedience. It is not an outward obedience with inner grumbling and complaints. A child who is asked to take out the garbage and does so while railing against his father under his breath, is offering a hypocritical obedience. He obeys with his hands while he disobeys with his heart. While it is true that we must render obedience to God in all circumstances whether we feel like it or not, we must strive to obey with the proper attitude of gladness to please our blessed Savior. If we are to properly love God and His law, then we need to cherish our duty to obey the law. Whatever the Lord requires of us there must be a cheerful and prompt response of "Yes, Lord, here I am, your servant." A willing obedience is rewarded with great blessings. "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1:19).

Our obedience to God must be fervent. We must be fanatical in our love and obedience toward Christ. It is a sad state of affairs when communist rebels serve their Marxist delusions with utmost sacrifice and fanaticism while many professing Christians have a hard time reading a few chapters of the Bible each day or getting out of bed to go to church. Obedience without fervency is a half-hearted, lukewarm obedience. Do we not profess to believe in a God who created all things, that gave us life, that saved us by His own Son's precious blood from and eternal torment. To whom much is given, much is required (Lk. 12:48). Jesus has forgiven us a mountain of debt and delivered us from a life of slavery and vanity. We who have been forgiven much ought to love much (Lk. 7:47). "As water boils over, so the heart must boil over with hot affections in the service of God."<sup>19</sup> Now that we are saved by Christ we are to live not for ourselves but for Him. We must be fervent in seeking first His kingdom. "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Mt. 10:37-30).

Our obedience must be comprehensive. That is, it must extend to all of God's commands. In other words, a partial repentance is no repentance at all. Many professing Christians fool themselves into thinking they have repented before God by putting away a few sinful habits while clinging to others. All of God's commands, however, come with the same divine authority. We do not have the option of following only our favorite statutes or the easier commandments. Such a view is rooted in a self-deluded hypocrisy. Did not Jesus tell the rich young ruler that he

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<sup>18</sup>This section of the nature of biblical obedience is based on Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, pp. 2-4.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas Watson, p. 2.

lacked one thing (Mt. 19:21)? Did not John the Baptist call attention to Herod's incest at the cost of his own life (Mt 14:4)? Our Lord rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocritical partial obedience. He said, "For you pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Mt. 23:23). Jesus said to His disciples, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much" (Lk. 16:10). "Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Mt. 5:19).

Our obedience toward God must be sincere. All of our thoughts, words and actions must have their aim the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Many people do good deeds with the wrong motives. They seek to glorify themselves and receive the praise of men. Jesus said that such people have their reward (Mt. 6:5). Yes, they will be praised by men, but not by God. We often observe such behavior in Hollywood and Washington where good deeds are announced by microphones and done under the glare of lights in front of cameras. It reminds one of the Pharisees who blew their trumpets to call attention to their giving of alms (Mt. 6:2). "Alms should shine, but not blaze. Jehu did well destroying Baal-worshipers, and God commended him for it; but, because his alms were not good (for he aimed at setting himself in the kingdom), God looked upon it as not better than murder. 'I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu.' Hos i 4."<sup>20</sup> Today, there are many governmental agencies and multitudes of charities dedicated to the service of others. However, since their service is offered solely to men and done in the name of humanity, it at bottom is humanistic and thus dishonors God. When we obey God we must do so not only in accordance with His law, but we must consider the proper end. Just as ultimately all sin is directed against God, all obedience must ultimately be directed toward the exaltation of God and the expansion of His kingdom.

Our obedience toward God must be in and through Christ. Why must every good deed we do be offered to God through our Savior? The Bible says that all of our good works are tainted with sin and unacceptable before God (Lk. 17:10; Isa. 64:6; Phil. 3:8). Indeed, Isaiah says that all of our works are as filthy rags in God's sight (Isa. 64:6). That is why works that are done because of faith in Christ are acceptable to God. "Not our obedience, but Christ's merits procure acceptance. In every part of worship we must present Christ to God in the arms of our faith. Unless we serve God thus, in hope and confidence of Christ's merits, we rather provoke him than please him. As when King Uzziah would offer incense without a priest, God was angry with him, and struck him with leprosy (2 Chr. xxxvi 20); so, when we do not come to God in and through Christ, we offer up incense to him without a priest; and what can we expect but severe rebukes?"<sup>21</sup> Solomon says, "the plowing of the wicked, is sin" (Pr. 21:4). "[W]hatever is not from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

Our obedience to God must be constant. That is, obedience which flows from a living vibrant faith will persevere to the end. What good is it if a man joins himself to the visible church, reforms his life, lives in apparent faithfulness for a season only to abandon all to serve his lusts? Of such men Peter says, "it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them" (2 Pet. 2:21). "Hypocrites' obedience is but for a season; it is like plastering work, which

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<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

is soon washed off; but true obedience is constant.”<sup>22</sup> Paul said with sadness, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10). Jude warned the church of hypocrites who are “clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumns trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots...” (Jude 12). John wrote of false professors saying, “They went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 Jn. 2:19). If we want the crown of life then we must persevere. We must continue in obedience to the end. “And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—...and I will give him the morning star” (Rev. 2: 26, 28). “Blessed are those who keep justice, and he who does righteousness at all times” (Ps. 106:3).

The necessity of a constant obedience is not only the biblical remedy against apostasy and reprobation but also applies to the backsliding Christian. A believer who repeatedly falls may not be an open apostate and will always certainly repent. However, such a person brings shame on the name of Christ and is of little or no use in the advancement of godly dominion. People who want to enter heaven by the skin of their teeth because they are wedded to their lusts must examine their own hearts as to whether they are really even saved. We have been saved to fight in Christ’s army. Therefore, no matter what the temptation or affliction we must fight on to victory. “We have vowed constancy; we have vowed to renounce the pomps and vanities of the world, and to fight under Christ’s banner to death. When a servant has entered into covenant with this master, and the indentures are sealed, he cannot go back, he must serve out his time; so there are indentures drawn in baptism, and in the Lord’s Supper the indentures are renewed and sealed on our part, that we will be faithful and constant in our obedience; therefore we must imitate Christ, who became obedient unto death. Phil ii 8.”<sup>23</sup> For constancy in obedience we must look to Christ the author and finisher of our faith (Heb. 12:2). “He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber....The LORD shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore” (Ps. 121:3, 7-8).

## Negative Requirements

Believing in, loving and serving the true God as *our* God of necessity involves the rejection of false gods in every form whether mental, philosophical, material or cultic. Boston writes: “God says, thou shalt have me for thy God; therefore thou must let these go their way. As one would rise up and say to a woman giving herself in marriage to another, I have a prior right to thee, thou shalt have no other husband but me. So that, could the voice of this command be heard, it would be heard saying and crying out of injury done to thy God, whensoever anything lawful or unlawful gets away the heart inordinately.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore the first commandment is exceedingly broad in its requirements. We will consider the main areas forbidden by this law.

The first commandment explicitly forbids atheism in all its forms. There are at least three main forms of atheism, classical, skeptical and practical. A classical atheist is a person who maintains that there is no God. He would argue in a dogmatic manner that the sentence “God exists” expresses a *false* proposition. A skeptical atheist is a person who does not believe in God with the excuse that we do not know whether there is a God or not. This position, which on the surface appears to be non-dogmatic and more polite than classical atheism, is called agnosticism.

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>Thomas Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, 2:94.

This term was coined by T. H. Huxley in the nineteenth century. Biblically considered, agnosticism is a form of atheism because an agnostic rejects the God of the Bible and His voice in natural and special revelation and in God's place substitutes a faith in mankind. An agnostic's trust is placed either in speculative human philosophy (e.g., Kant, Hume, Darwin, Marx) or in theories supplied by the physical sciences which are based not on reality but on the apostate, unbelieving presuppositions of men. The agnostic continually *suppresses* the truth of God revealed in nature and *presupposes* that God cannot reveal Himself to mankind in propositional form. A common thread that runs through much agnostic thought is the idea that the finite cannot know or understand an infinite and absolute deity. While it is true that Jehovah is incomprehensible and cannot be known exhaustively, the fact remains that man can and does have a limited knowledge of God. God has made Himself known to mankind in His Word. Men will never have a comprehensive knowledge of Jehovah, but they can have truth as far as it goes. The Bible gives us enough information to have a saving knowledge of and a loving relationship with God.

Believers must understand that classical atheism and agnosticism are both totally hostile to the Christian faith. Agnosticism pretends to be neutral and scientific while it rejects God and seeks to undermine faith in Jesus Christ. Note the open hatred of God in the following statements of prominent agnostics. "J. S. Mill declared it was impossible for a thoughtful person to ascribe 'absolute perfection to the author and ruler of so clumsily made and capriciously governed a creation as this planet (*Three Essays on Religion*, 1874). He found 'moral difficulties' also in 'the recognition...of the object of highest worship, in a being who could make a Hell' and create creatures whom he foreknew to be destined to suffer in it eternally."<sup>25</sup> Note the hostility of T. H. Huxley: "In '*Agnosticism and Christianity*' (1889) he wrote, 'I, and many other Agnostics, believe that faith, in this sense, is an abomination.' In '*Agnosticism*' (1889) he said, 'I verily believe that the great good which has been effected...by Christianity has been largely counteracted by the pestilent doctrine...that honest disbelief in their more or less astonishing creeds is a moral offense, indeed a sin of the deepest dye...'"<sup>26</sup> R. Flint (*Agnosticism*, Kroll lectures, 1887-1888, published in 1903) writes: "All that the mind can do on the side of the Unknowable is to play at make believe, to feign faith, to worship nothingness."<sup>27</sup> In other words, Bible believing Christians are morons who believe in pure fantasy, are immoral for adhering to evil doctrines and are wicked in their dogmatism and exclusivity.

The agnostic's lack of neutrality, hatred of God and hostility to Christianity is easily exposed as inconsistent and arbitrary if we examine the presuppositional foundation of his ideas. The agnostic assumes that the final criterion of truth can only be found within himself. He, therefore, presupposes that God cannot speak authoritatively to mankind. The agnostic (like all secular humanists) looks to reason and/or empiricism in the hands of autonomous man (i.e., men who *a priori* reject the God of the Bible) as the only source for truth. By rejecting the Christian God at the beginning, the agnostic is forced to reject the Creator-creature distinction and the doctrine of creation. This *a priori* rejection forces the agnostic to adhere to the materialistic doctrine of evolution by chance. Reality, it is argued, is simply matter plus time plus chance. By adopting the evolutionary chance concept of the universe, however, the agnostic and atheist have in principle completely undercut any possibility of truly understanding any given fact in the

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<sup>25</sup>Ronald W. Hepburn, "Agnosticism" in Paul Edwards, editor-in-chief, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. and The Free Press, 1967), 1:57.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 1:58.

universe. Why? Because a chance universe by definition is a universe of flux in which everything is changing. Thus, the universe is an ocean of facts with no bottom, no shore and no fixed reference point. It is as though man is made of water in an ocean of water climbing a stairway of water into a sky of water. The atheistic or agnostic scientist or philosopher could at best only attempt to define a particular thing at a particular instant of time. Even this, however, would be impossible since man himself is ruled by chance and is in constant flux. In such a scheme of things man is a mutating speck in a universe of mutating specks. The only constant is change itself. This is the world-view of nihilism, absurdity and irrationality. Cornelius Van Til writes,

On the assumptions of the natural man logic is a timeless impersonal principle, and facts are controlled by chance. It is by means of universal timeless principles of logic that the natural man must, on his assumptions, seek to make intelligible assertions about the world of reality or chance. But this cannot be done without falling into self-contradiction. About chance no manner of assertion can be made. In its very idea it is the irrational. And how are rational assertions to be made about the irrational? If they are to be made then it must be because the irrational is itself wholly reduced to the rational. That is to say if the natural man is to make any intelligible assertions about the world of "reality" or "fact" which, according to him is what it is for no rational reason at all, then he must make the virtual claim of rationalizing the irrational. To be able to distinguish one fact from another fact he must reduce all time existence, all factuality to immovable timeless being. But when he has done so he has killed all individuality and factuality as conceived of on his basis. Thus the natural man must on the one hand assert that all reality is structural in nature. He must even assert on the one hand that all reality is non-structurable in nature and on the other hand that he himself has virtually structured all of it. Thus all his prediction is in the nature of the case self-contradictory.<sup>28</sup>

Because the agnostic or atheist cannot escape this dilemma he must steal important concepts from the Christian world-view (e.g., the doctrine of the universe created and controlled by God with fixed laws in which laws of logic can exist, in which reality and facts have meaning; in which history has a beginning and an end), in order to mock and criticize Christianity. He is like a little child who must sit on his father's lap in order to slap his face.

That atheists and agnostics are sinfully biased against the God of Scriptures is also proven by their blatant epistemological hypocrisy. Their major argument against God is that

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<sup>28</sup>Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1955), pp. 143-144. The unbeliever has no solution when it comes to real knowledge, meaning and ethics. On the one hand, the universe is said to be in a state of constant flux. The universe is the product of chance, a soup of random chaos. If meaning is sought by saying that the universe is static like a block of ice, then the fixedness of things is posited, but movement and all particulars are lost in static deadness. The biblical Christian does not have this problem, because the God who is, is transcendent (outside the universe), ontological (self-contained, in need of nothing outside Himself) and triune (three Persons, one God). The problem of unity and diversity, the one and the many, is resolved by the triune God of the Bible. God creates reality and controls it. He reveals truth to man through His revelation (the Bible); thus man can have truth as long as he is dependent on God's knowledge. He must think God's thoughts after him. The knowledge that the unbeliever has is stolen from the Christian worldview. "If we are to have coherence in our experience, there must be a correspondence of our experience to the eternally coherent experience of God. Human knowledge ultimately rests upon the internal coherence within the Godhead; our knowledge ultimately rests upon the ontological Trinity as its presupposition" (Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction, to Systematic Theology* [1949], p. 22. The secular humanist comes under the Christian roof of truth to get out of the rain and then tells the Christian he is all wet.

since God by definition is a pure Spirit, He cannot be observed by man or known by empirical means. Therefore, whether or not God exists cannot be known by man. In philosophical terms it is said that if God exists He exists beyond the phenomenological realm in the neumenal realm of the unknowable, of pure mystery. While it is true that the God of the Bible is a spiritual being and does not have a physical body (Jn. 4:24) the standard agnostic argument against God is fallacious for a number of reasons. First (as noted) it assumes that God has not only made Himself known, but He has done so in an awe-inspiring miraculous manner. Second, it assumes that the existence of God must be proved in the same manner as one proves the existence of a physical object. Obviously, God cannot be observed or handled like an apple or tennis ball. His existence, however, can be proved in a more indirect manner. When a person stands on the floor of a house, he cannot see the beams under the floor yet he knows that the beams exist, otherwise the floor would fall, crashing into the basement. Likewise, the triune God of Scripture is proven by His infallible word<sup>29</sup> and by the fact that reality can only be explained and made intelligible on the presupposition that the God of the Bible exists. In other words, He is proved by the impossibility of the contrary.

Secular scientists and philosophers (who reject belief in God because He cannot be known by direct empirical means) are hypocrites, because they believe in hundreds, even thousands, of things that cannot be observed or studied directly. No philosopher has ever observed a law of logic. No modern historian has ever observed the battle of Waterloo. No astronomer has ever seen a black hole or quasar. No biologist has ever observed evolution take place. No physicist observed the big bang. Yet all these things are believed in the scientific community. The God of Christianity is rejected not because of a lack of proof (indeed, every fact of the universe presses the existence of God on man's consciousness); but because sinful man does not want to submit to God's authority and face the coming judgment.

Let us now turn our attention to the practical atheist. A practical atheist is a person who professes to believe in God yet lives his life without regard to God and His word. In the United States practical atheists are far more numerous than classical or skeptical atheists. In fact, given the doctrine and practice of most professing Christian churches today, one could argue that practical atheism is the chief American religion. There are supposedly fifty million evangelicals in America and this nation is probably the most church going country in the world. Yet, the positive impact of evangelicals and professing Christians on culture is minuscule at best.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>29</sup>“An argument based upon the Scriptures will be considered circular reasoning, unscientific and inadequate by many. However, one must keep in mind that the Bible is unique. Because it is God's word it must be self-authenticating, for there can be no authority above God Himself. The Bible is to be believed because it is God's Word. The author of Hebrews says that ‘because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself’ (Heb. 6:13). This point, however does not mean that a Christian's belief in the Bible is irrational, or a blind leap into the dark (fideism). Belief in the Scriptures is supported by abundant evidences. As the Westminster Confession says: ‘the heavenliness of the matter, the efficacy of the doctrine, the majesty of the style, the consent of all the parts, the scope of the whole (which is to give all the glory to God)...and the entire perfection thereof are arguments whereby it doth abundantly evidence itself to be the word of God....’ (1:5). One could add the amazing discoveries of archeology, perfectly fulfilled prophecy, signs and wonders and so on. While all these evidences testify to the truth of Scripture we must never forget that the Bible ultimately rests upon God's own authority. ‘God “testifies to Himself” because there is nothing more epistemologically authoritative or morally ultimate that could authorize what He discloses.’” (Greg Bahnsen, “The Inerrancy of the Autographa” in Norman Geisler editor, *Inerrancy* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980], p.

<sup>30</sup>Mark A. Noll writes, “[O]n any given Sunday in the United States and Canada, a majority of those who attend church hold evangelical beliefs and follow norms of evangelical practice, yet in neither country do these great numbers of practicing evangelicals appear to play significant roles in either nation's intellectual life. What a British

pollster George Gallup, Jr. has done extensive research into American religious beliefs. What he has discovered is disturbing, yet obvious to the well informed. He writes: “[A]s a people, we lack deep levels of individual spiritual commitment. One sign of this is that the level of ethics in this country seems to be declining—at least in terms of public perceptions of ethical behavior.... [W]e found there’s very little difference between the churched and the unchurched in terms of their general view on ethical matters and also their practical ethical responses in various situations.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, professing Christians engage in premarital sex, commit adultery, get divorced, commit fraud, lie, steal and vote for pro-abortion corrupt politicians at about the same rate as the general heathen population. Such people profess Christ with their lips but their hearts are far from Him (Mk. 7:6). They in reality do not believe in Christ, nor do they fear God. “His laws do not bind them. His mercies do not attract them. His judgments do not correct them.”<sup>32</sup> They know little or nothing of family religion. They hand their posterity over to the Molech-state by putting their children in the public schools. Their spiritual interest lies in prophetic fantasies instead of sanctification and godly dominion. They are salt-less, good for nothing, hypocrites.

Practical atheism in America has taken many forms. There is liberalism or modernism where apostate theologians have openly rejected the Bible and the God defined by Scripture and have adopted a secular humanistic world view. Modernists say they believe in God, Jesus Christ, the resurrection and so forth but they define such terms not according to Scripture (which they regard as mythological and defective) but in terms of autonomous human reason. Modernists argue (in accordance with their anti-supernatural presuppositions) that God’s law is the product of an ancient religious community that believed in many unethical, unjust and barbaric principles. Most of these laws, they argue, certainly do not apply to our modern progressive and enlightened culture. With this unbelieving and blasphemous mindset, modernists *replace* God’s just and perfect law with man-made relativistic law. Thus we find modernist churches advocating many blatantly immoral practices such as: abortion on demand (i.e., murdering babies); homosexuality and lesbianism (i.e., abominable sexual perversions), communism/socialism/welfare fascism (i.e., state theft and redistribution), no-fault divorce, coercive labor unions, the state school system (which indoctrinates children in secular humanism, sexual immorality and ethical relativism) and so on. Among modernists there is no longer a Christian mind. They have been secularized to such a degree that socially, culturally and politically they have aligned themselves with militant atheists, sexual deviants and criminals against the Bible-believing Christians who are attempting to apply God’s infallible word to society. When men reject God’s law-word, they reject God.

It is not an accident that modernists are statists. When men abandon God’s law they abandon ethical absolutes and the rule of law. The unchanging ethical principles of Scripture are replaced by an evolving positivistic law determined by man. In one decade homosexuality is considered a disgusting practice and a crime; then in another decade it is legal and even virtuous. One by one the ethical precepts of the Bible are cast aside simply on the basis of sinful-human and pragmatic considerations. The progressive abandonment of justice leads to greater and greater injustice. In such a corrupt system, dominion oriented Bible-believing Christians become

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Roman Catholic said at midcentury after looking back over more than one hundred years of rapid Catholic growth in Britain may be said equally about evangelicals in North America: ‘On the one hand there is the enormous growth of the Church, and on the other its almost complete lack of interest.’”

<sup>31</sup>George Gallup, Jr., *Forecast 2000: George Gallup, Jr., Predicts the Future of America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), p. 153.

<sup>32</sup>William S. Plumer, *The Law of God*, p. 115.

the chief enemy of state bureaucrats and the secular humanistic intelligentsia. The civil government with the prodding and enthusiastic support of homosexual and lesbian groups will very likely persecute real Christians, beginning with hate-crimes legislation. Men who hate God's word hate God and His covenant people. There is no neutrality.

Another form of practical atheism is antinomianism. This expression of atheism exists in two major forms today: the carnal Christian heresy and the secular doctrine of ethical relativism. The most popular form of antinomianism among evangelical churches today is "the carnal Christian heresy."<sup>33</sup> This teaching is based on the idea that a person can believe in Jesus as savior without also recognizing Him as LORD. This doctrine *divorces* sanctification from justification in such a manner that the necessity of sanctification in the Christian life is completely denied. This heresy (in its modern form) developed in large part from the old dispensational idea that repentance was a requirement for the dispensation of law and applied to the Jews but is not necessary for the covenant of grace and the Christian church. While we need to emphasize that the Bible teaches salvation by grace *alone* (Rom. 3:28; 4:5-8; Gal. 2:16; 3:10-13; 5:2-4, etc.); that Scripture *never* gives holiness or sanctification a meritorious role in redemption, we must not neglect the biblical teaching that everyone who is truly saved will be sanctified and made holy. There is no such thing as a Christian who has not submitted to Christ as Lord and repented of his sinful lifestyle. The idea that Jesus came to suffer excruciating pain and agony in body and soul to eliminate the guilt and penalty of sin, so that people could live a life of sin, serve their evil lusts with abandon and follow the devil, is a blasphemous, damnable doctrine.

There are many reasons why the carnal Christian heresy ("easy believism") must be rejected. (1) The Bible requires all believers to be holy because God is holy (Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; Ex. 19:6; Nu. 15:40; Dt. 23:14). This doctrine is not just an Old Testament teaching but is also clearly taught throughout the New Testament. "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). "But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:15-16). "And everyone who has this hope purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 Jn. 3:3). (2) The Scriptures contain many imperatives that require obedience and holiness in Jehovah's covenant people. "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). "As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,' says the LORD Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:16-18). "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God" (Rom. 6:12-13). "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1; cf. 12:2, 9ff.; 1 Cor. 5:1-11, etc.). "Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). The Greek word for "pursue" indicates an earnest pursuit, a dedicated striving after. "In the Greek text *peace* is feminine; *holiness*, or the process of becoming holy, is masculine; the relative pronoun *which* is masculine singular; therefore the verse says that no one can see the Lord

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<sup>33</sup>The apostle Paul does refer to some believers as "carnal" in 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. By the term carnal, however, Paul does not refer to professing Christians who are habitually practicing evil such as lying, theft, fornication, drunkenness, etc., but rather is referring to people who have a divisive-party spirit within the church. "When one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?" (1 Cor. 3:4).

without going through the process of becoming holy.”<sup>34</sup>

(3) The Bible teaches that people who habitually engage in wicked behavior are not Christians. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:9-11). “Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 Jn. 2:3-4; cf. 3:4-9). “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 Jn. 1:6). “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Mt. 7:22-23)!

(4) The apostle Paul says that professing Christians who refuse to repent of wicked behavior are to be excommunicated and cast out of the church. He writes (regarding a church member involved in sexual immorality): “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh....purge out the old leaven” (1 Cor. 5:4, 7). Paul adds: “But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person” (1 Cor. 5:11). The apostle’s teaching is nothing new. He is simply reflecting the words of our Lord Jesus Christ who taught that if a professing Christian refuses to repent of sin, he is to be excommunicated from the church and regarded “like a heathen and tax collector” (Mt. 18:17; cf. 18:15-20). “A man professing to be a Christian professes to renounce all these sins [see 1 Cor. 5:11]; if he does not act consistently with his profession, he is not to be recognized as a Christian. We are not to do anything which would sanction the assumption that the offenses here referred to are tolerated by the gospel”<sup>35</sup> Spurgeon writes: “If the professed convert distinctly and deliberately declares that he knows the Lord’s will, but does not mean to attend to it, you are not to pamper his presumptions, but it is your duty to assure him that he is not saved. Do not suppose that the Gospel is magnified or God-glorified by going to the worldlings and telling them that they may be saved at this moment by simply ‘accepting Christ’ as their Savior, while they are wedded to their idols, and their hearts are still in love with sin. If I do so, I tell them a lie, pervert the Gospel, insult Christ, and turn the grace of God into lasciviousness.”<sup>36</sup> Can the biblical policy of excommunicating unrepentant church members (as taught by Christ and the apostles) be reconciled to the popular “evangelical” notion that a person can “accept Christ,” be saved, and then repent some time in the future when he decides to get serious about holiness? Absolutely not! Such a teaching is totally foreign to Scripture.

(5) The Bible teaches that Christians have been bought with the blood of Christ and belong to Him. Therefore they are His servants and have a responsibility to live for Him. Paul said, “whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s (Rom. 14:8). We must serve Him in every area of life. “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify

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<sup>34</sup>Gordon H. Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1965), p. 135.

<sup>35</sup>Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974 [1857, 59]), p. 60.

<sup>36</sup>Charles Haddon Spurgeon as quoted in Ernest C. Reisinger, *Today’s Evangelism: Its Meaning and Methods* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982), pp. 25-26.

God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor. 6:19-20). "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness" (Rom. 6:16)?

(6) Believers are required to be holy because Jesus is both savior *and Lord*. The carnal Christian heresy is based upon the presupposition that believers can receive only a part of Christ. Can a person trust in only a part of Jesus' work and still be saved? Can our Lord be received piecemeal? No. The whole savior and all of His redemptive work is necessary for salvation. One must look in faith not only to His suffering and death (humiliation) but also to his rising again and ascension to power (exaltation). Christians must believe in the resurrection and confess with their mouths *the Lord Jesus Christ* (Rom. 10:9). Can a person honestly confess "Jesus is my Lord" when he refuses to submit to His kingship and openly rebels against Christ's precepts? Jesus' exaltation is the conclusion and climax of His humiliation. These events are organically connected and cannot be separated. Thus Paul wrote: "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rom. 14:7-9). The message of the apostles was "Believe on *the Lord Jesus Christ*, and you will be saved" (Ac. 16:31). Paul said, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus *the Lord*" (2 Cor. 4:5). In the book of Acts the "savior" appears only twice (5:31; 13:23), while the title "Lord" occurs 92 times. Throughout the New Testament the lordship of Christ is emphasized. In the book of Acts Jesus is always presented as the resurrected Lord and sinners are always exhorted to believe in and receive Him as the Lord, the prince or king. "There is not one example of Christ being offered any other way....God-centered evangelism proclaims the biblical message of the *lordship of Christ* at the outset, not as a second work of grace, or an act of optional consecration later."<sup>37</sup> True believers receive Christ as prophet, priest and *king*; and, as king, Jesus rules over us and subdues sin in our lives.

(7) The idea that holiness is optional for believers is disproved by the Bible's teaching on repentance. Repentance is never presented in Scripture as optional or for Israel only but is a vital element of the gospel message. "[A]nd that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Lk. 24:47). Christ emphasized repentance in His preaching (Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:14, 15). He warned His disciples, saying "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:5). John the Baptist (Jesus' forerunner) emphasized the need for repentance (Mk. 1:4; Lu. 3:7-9). He told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt. 3:7-10). Those who reject the necessity of holiness often will argue that repentance is a Jewish doctrine that does not apply to the church (which they erroneously assert is a parenthesis in God's plan). Such teaching is refuted by the apostle Paul himself. Paul said, I "taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, *and also to Greeks*, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac. 20:21). To the Greek Athenians Paul said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Ac. 17:30). "[W]herever there is true faith, there is also real repentance. The two are but two

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<sup>37</sup>Ernest C. Reisinger, *Today's Evangelism: Its Message and Methods* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Craig Press, 1982), pp. 25, 27.

aspects of the same turning—a turning away from sin in the direction of God.”<sup>38</sup> Just as no one is saved without the instrument of faith which lays hold of Christ, no one is saved without a change of mind concerning Christ and sin which leads to a changed life (Mt. 3:8; 7:16-20; 1 Jn. 1:6; 2:3, 4; 3:10; Jas. 2:14-16). Although repentance is non-meritorious and does not contribute one iota to a person’s salvation it *always* accompanies regeneration and true faith.

(8) The Bible teaches that everyone united with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection will be regenerated, justified and sanctified. Anyone who partakes of the benefits of Christ’s death must also partake of the sanctifying power of our Lord’s resurrection. Jesus’ salvation is comprehensive. It involves the elimination of the guilt of sin (justification) and deliverance from sin’s dominating power as well (sanctification). All genuine believers will die to sin and walk in newness of life. The carnal Christian heresy asserts that a person can be regenerated and justified while retaining the slavery to sin of the old nature. Paul says that this is impossible. “Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism unto death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin....And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom. 6:1-7, 18). The indicatives of Romans chapter 6 which speak of the reality of a believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection lead immediately to the imperatives of 6:12 and following. Since in chapter 6 a Christian’s obligations are based on a historical reality (i.e., something that is true for every believer), one cannot deny the necessity of obedience without also denying the reality of the mystical union which is the foundation for personal holiness. Although the carnal Christian heresy may be a perfect match for our hedonistic, self-centered culture, it is a deadly, soul-destroying doctrine. How can a professing Christian adhere to a teaching that says that one can be truly saved without the fruit of love and obedience to our bridegroom (1 Jn. 2:3-5; Jn. 14:15)?

Antinomianism has leavened modern culture most effectively through the acceptance of secular humanism and its ethical relativism. What is secular humanism and ethical relativism? Secular humanism (which should not be confused with the historical term “humanist” or “the humanities” or “humanitarianism”)<sup>39</sup> refers to a world-view that is based on materialistic naturalism. The secular humanist presupposes that the God of Bible does not and cannot exist, that we live in a closed universe and that man is the measure of all things. Because the secular humanist rejects (*a priori*) any idea of the transcendent, he makes himself the ultimate reference point of truth, meaning, and ethics. While the biblical Christian seeks ultimate truth in God and His Word, the secular humanist is philosophically committed to judging all matters autonomously (from the Greek *autos*, self, and *nomos*, law). Because the secular humanist rejects the objective, absolute and unchanging law of God and replaces it with whatever he deems right

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<sup>38</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), p. 487.

<sup>39</sup>The term *humanist* originally applied to scholars in the Renaissance who focused their attention on classical literature. Many of these men were professing Christians and had no intention of bringing Christianity into ruins. As time progressed however, the pagan literature did indeed have a negative effect on a number of scholars. Classical thought was deemed superior by many to Christian philosophy. The term *humanities* refers to the study of human thought and relations, as distinguished from the sciences. The humanities focus on literature, art, philosophy and history. *Humanitarianism* refers to acts of philanthropy toward men.

or correct at any given moment, his law or ethical system is relativistic. The Humanist Manifesto openly and proudly proclaim that ethics are “*autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction.”<sup>40</sup> Man without God will determine for himself what is right or wrong. This belief (as we shall see) is a recipe for both anarchy and statism. Without any objective absolute ethical standard, the ethical determinations of man are arbitrary. All morality (in such a system) is equally good or bad, true or false. “Relativism gives only a rubber yardstick, which measures differently for every man, according to his personal measure and purpose.”<sup>41</sup>

Secular humanism is a blatant expression of idolatry. We know that autonomous ethics and self-worship are interrelated, for the Bible places them together. When the serpent tempted Eve he offered her the ability to be as God, knowing [i.e., defining or determining] for herself good and evil (Gen. 3:5). Relativistic or pragmatic ethics is rooted in sinful pride and a desire to be rid of any transcendent, external, ethical restraint whatsoever. Eve believed she could determine reality apart from God’s revelation. Her decision to eat the forbidden fruit was based on empiricism (i.e., the fruit looked good to her) and rationalism (i.e., she used reason independently of God’s revelation to determine truth). She did not accept what Jehovah said on His own authority (i.e., Eve did not trust God’s word) and she believed that she deserved blessing on her own terms (selfish pride) not as a result of grace or faith-directed obedience. The result of human autonomy in ethics is death. There is not only the death and misery that resulted from the fall but also the repeated death of nations and cultures in history which cling to the idolatry of self-law.

Before examining the consequences of adhering to a relativistic ethic one must first consider the irrationality or absurdity of such a system. The secular humanist destroys all possibility of sound, ethical absolutes when he rejects the God of Scripture and seeks ethical norms in this world alone.<sup>42</sup> It is one thing to say that murder, theft, lying, adultery, bestiality, child molestation, torture and so on are wrong or immoral and quite another to give real, sound,

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<sup>40</sup>“Humanist Manifesto II,” *The Humanist*, Sept.-Oct., 1973, vol. 33, no. 5, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 330.

<sup>42</sup>Does the fact that most nations of the earth condemn many of the same activities prove that man can autonomously arrive at universal ethical norms apart from God and special revelation? Does this fact support the secular humanistic worldview? No. Only the Christian world-view can account for reality. The fact that most nations and cultures condemn activities such as murder, theft, rape, bestiality, and such is consistent with the biblical worldview and inconsistent with an evolutionary worldview. The Bible teaches that man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). An important aspect of this image was man’s original righteousness and the moral law of God written upon his heart (Rom. 2:15). After Adam and Eve sinned and mankind fell into sin, man’s nature became corrupted, perverted and depraved. Therefore, man’s conscience could not be depended upon as a reliable source for ethics, because of sin. But the image of God was not eradicated by the fall. Man is still man; he still has a conscience, he still has moral notions. The moral law of God written upon man’s heart at creation explains why men and societies worldwide (and even false religions) condemn many of the same activities. The Bible also teaches that God restrains the evil in societies through his common grace. God does so because He is kind and compassionate, and for the sake of His elect. The evolutionary world-view that has man arising out of an impersonal chance beginning cannot account for the similarity of men in being and ethics found the world over. If evolution were true, moral laws (which, according to their secular humanists’ own presuppositions, are totally arbitrary) would show radical differences not great similarities. If evolution were true, there would be wide differences between peoples who evolved under different conditions. If evolution really occurred, some human “races” would be vastly superior in intelligence, etc. to other “races.” But we know that this is not true. Wherever you go on earth, man is man. Men are the same everywhere. The evolutionary worldview of secular humanism paved the way for the eugenics movement, the Nazi movement, Marxism, abortion on demand, and so on. All men are men *because they were created by God*. Human life has value because everyone is created in the image of God. If people repent and adopt the biblical view of man, racism, hatred and the Balkanization of America will cease.

foundational reasons for such an assertion. Indeed, the secular humanist's presuppositions regarding reality render any propositions regarding ethical norms as totally subjective and arbitrary. Why? The secular world-view presupposes that nothing can exist above and beyond the universe. The idea of an infinite personal God who is transcendent, who reveals ethical absolutes to man (e.g., the Ten Commandments) is anathema to an atheistic naturalist. Therefore, the secular humanist must derive an ethical system from this universe.

But what is the modern view of the universe, of reality? The universe is evolving. It is a product of chance. It is impersonal and in a state of flux. Can ethical absolutes that are valid for all times and places be found in pure contingency? No. They clearly cannot. But what of man himself? Has not man evolved to the point where he can use reason to determine a valid ethical system? Note the misguided optimism of Julian Huxley: "Man the conscious microcosm has been thrown up by the blind and automatic forces of the unconscious macrocosm. But now his consciousness can begin to play an active part, to influence the process of the macrocosm by guiding and acting as the growing-point of its evolution. Man's ethics and his moral aspirations have now become an integral part of any future evolutionary process."<sup>43</sup> The message of Huxley is that, by chance, blind impersonal forces have created a new god-humanity. With its new reasoning consciousness, humanity will determine its own future, ethics and meaning. Through chance evolution mankind has transcended its creatureliness. Man does not look to God for salvation but to himself. The second Humanistic Manifesto declares: "No deity will save us, we must save ourselves."<sup>44</sup>

The problem with all such thinking is that man himself is a product of chance and is in a state of flux. According to the secular humanistic world-view man does not have a soul or spirit but is solely a material organism. All of man's emotions, endeavors and reasonings are simply the electro-chemical responses of the brain. Therefore, when the secular humanist attempts to ground ethics in love, sincerity, motive or sentiment, he (according to his own world-view) is looking to an illusion (epiphenomenon) of electro-chemical reactions between molecules. The modern humanist's presuppositions regarding reality render "ethical or unethical decisions and actions" no more meaningful or significant than the activity of a pond scum. The humanistic view of ethics has absolutely no foundation.<sup>45</sup>

Although humanists ground ethics on a bottomless and shoreless ocean of chance they insist that their own standard be adhered to as if their own morality was thundered from Mt. Sinai. They admit that according to their own world-view moral laws are merely opinion, custom, "community standards," etc., that are constantly evolving and changing; yet, they hold to

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<sup>43</sup>Julian Huxley, "Conclusion" in *Touchstone for Ethics, 1893-1943* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1947), p. 255, as quoted in Gary North, *Genesis: The Dominion Covenant* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1982, 1987), p. 275.

<sup>44</sup>"Humanist Manifesto II," p. 6.

<sup>45</sup>There are atheists who hold to a form of objectivist ethics, who argue strongly against relativism. Some men posit objectivity in nature (e.g., natural law theory). Others hold to a Greek concept of a realm of ideals that exist above and beyond man. Apart from the God of Scripture, however, who reveals His ethical standard to mankind, subjectivity cannot be avoided. Van Til writes, "To say that there is or must be an objective standard is not the same as to say what that standard is. And it is the *what* that is all important. Granted that non-Christians who hold to some sort of something, somewhere above man are better than non-Christians who hold nothing whatsoever above man, it remains true that in the main issue the non-Christian objectivists are no less subjective than are the non-Christian subjectivists. There is but one alternative that is basic: it is that between those who obey the God and Christ of Scripture and those who seek to please themselves. Only those who believe in God through Christ seek to obey God; only they have the true principle in ethics" (Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Theistic Ethics* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980], p. 32).

their own value system with a fanatical religious dogmatism. In fact anyone such as the Bible-believing Christian who adheres to a different definition of what is moral or immoral on such issues as abortion, gun control, property rights and homosexuality must be opposed with dogmatic fervor. The humanist bans the Christian God from existence in the public square and then demands that the masses accept their own definition of morality as if they are God, all-knowing and absolute. Secular humanism is a religious faith with humanity as its god and a deceitful agenda against Christians. It begins with a plea for tolerance and the presupposition that every religious position (except their own which they regard as based on science) is equally mythological and false. All non-humanistic positions are declared equal in stupidity and superstition while the humanistic elite (in the name of science and objectivity) sit over all as lord. "It places man in God's place and, in the name of toleration and equality, relegates Christianity to the junk heap."<sup>46</sup> While they boldly proclaim the death of God and the end of absolutes, modern humanists demand a new faith in a new god (i.e., in humanity or the humanistic elite that rules in the name of all mankind) and demand an unquestioning obedience to a new law. With a fanaticism as strong as any fundamentalist, the humanistic activist seeks to impose his vision of morality on society (e.g., socialism or civil government directed theft and redistribution; environmental laws based on pseudo-science and earth worship; abortion on demand or infanticide; the full legalization and acceptance of sexual deviancy such as homosexuality, etc.).

There are a number of dangerous consequences of adhering to a secular humanistic ethic of relativism. First, the modern humanistic ethic destroys the rule of law, liberty, and justice, by giving men a god-like power over other men. With a Bible-believing Christian ethic, the state has a moral obligation to base its law code or system of justice upon the moral absolutes of Scripture. All men (including kings, presidents, senators, congressmen, bureaucrats and judges) must look to what God has said before making laws or rendering civil judgments over other men. Men are thus limited by law, by an objective, absolute standard that exists *outside* of men to which everyone can appeal. If a ruler sets aside God's law in order to rule autonomously he should be impeached or removed by a lesser civil magistrate. In other words, no one is above the law—*God's law*. The civil magistrate is to be a terror to those who do evil (Rom. 13:3-4) and evil can only be defined by God.

Second, the secular humanistic ethic leads to an antinomian degenerate society. Without laws that are based on God's nature and are unchanging and absolute, the law loses all conviction of ultimacy. If the universe is a product of chance and is impersonal, then all law is pragmatic. Laws are simply the opinions of men and no more. People are left with no real reason not to lie, cheat, steal and murder other than the coercive power of the state (e.g., the police, prisons, etc.). The result of such thinking has been an explosion of immorality and a great increase in crime. In one area after another (as the remnants of Christian culture are cast aside) society keeps defining deviancy downward. Many activities that were considered grossly immoral, disgusting and even criminal are now perfectly acceptable and even popular. Premarital sex, drunkenness, drug abuse, theft, murder, abortion, lying, cheating, fraud, homosexuality, rape, cruelty, and pornography are now a normal part of American societal landscape. This moral decline corresponds to the rejection of the Christian ethic and its replacement by humanistic relativism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, p. 296.

<sup>47</sup>The decline of the Christian worldview and the accompanying hostility to God's law-word is even more extensive in Europe than America. Michael Elliott writes, "**Social liberalism.** Capital punishment is unknown in the EU [European Union]. Marriage is a dying institution. In 1999, 54 percent of all births in Sweden were out of wedlock,

A very important aspect of any social order is self-government. Civil governments (even totalitarian states) are very limited in their knowledge of criminal activities. Further, apart from any concept of absolute law from an all-knowing, all-powerful God, the incentives for being a law-abiding citizen are greatly diminished. This reality was understood by most ancient pagan cultures. Therefore, the civil magistrate was often elevated to a god status to give a sense of ultimacy to the law order. Or, the people would be taught that the law code was given directly to the king by a god. “The famous Hammurabi Stone, for example, shows the sun god Shamash giving the Babylonian laws to the king.”<sup>48</sup> Modern humanistic states with their complete rejection of God and transcendency have a general breakdown in law and order as the populace casts off the Christian world-view and becomes epistemologically consistent with the new secularism. With only arbitrary pragmatic law at their disposal, humanistic states have used different methods for keeping law and order. Totalitarian states such as the old Soviet Union used mass terror, statist propaganda, and state education to keep people in line. Mass arbitrary terror is used to give people a sense of the “omnipresence” and “omnipotence” of the state. The so-called western democracies have not resorted to the terror of the prison camps. They have, however, depended on welfare statism, the public school system, massive fraud and propaganda and economic idolatry. People are not only taught to worship humanity and look to the state for peace, prosperity and concern; they are taught to look at life in terms of economic growth and hedonism. Like decaying ancient Rome, the secular state is left with bread and circuses. Purely immanent incentives, and lies couched in the language of love and concern, coupled with massive prison expansion programs will not preserve a law-abiding social order in the long run. All nations that forget God will be destroyed either from without, within or both.

When a people adopt biblical Christianity or at least when the majority of people in society are directed by the Christian world-view, serious societal decay is avoided. The need for statist “solutions” is also circumvented because the biblical world-view leads to self-government. It gives coherent, logical, foundational reasons for morality and obedience. Jehovah who is sovereign, all-powerful and all-knowing has given mankind the moral law (the Ten Commandments). The Bible teaches that violations against the moral law are violations against God. Good is good because God says so in His word, and likewise bad is bad because God says so. Jehovah has warned everyone that a day is coming when He will judge all men according to their deeds. Every thought, word and deed is done under the eye of omniscience and thus will receive a just reward. The ethical commands of Scripture—all of which are objective and unchanging—are backed up by a morally perfect God, who will punish every wicked act committed by man. In a personal universe where an absolute, infinite, perfect, moral God (who is the creator of meaning, the revealer and enforcer of ethical absolutes and the judge of wickedness) stands behind all created reality, people have a very real reason for personal responsibility.

If modern humanists were intellectually honest they would admit their system leads to nihilism (i.e., there is no meaning to life or ethics). Their message would be: “Do what ever you want—just don’t get caught. And if you get caught, blame it on someone else.” In a world without

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39 percent in France and an astonishing 27 percent in supposedly devout Ireland. In Amsterdam and other cities, recreational drug use has been effectively decriminalized....**The death of God.** Modern Europe is a post-religious society. More accurately, what was once the heartland of Christendom is a post-Christian society. Throughout the continent, churches stand empty. Islam, however, is growing in influence; in France and Britain the most self-confident religious community is Muslim. “Europe: The Un-America” in *Newsweek* [New York: Newsweek, Inc. December, 2000-February 2001], p. 18.

<sup>48</sup>Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction*, p. 47.

meaning, various temptations can only receive a “why not” response. If God doesn’t exist and the Bible is not true then the only logical response to reality is: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Cor. 15:32).

Third, ethical relativism or pragmatism leads eventually to the deification of the state. Belief in the relativism of truth and ethics, coupled with an evolutionary concept of man and history, leads to a populace that increasingly has no regard to past values or wisdom. Under the influence of a secular humanistic world-view, people are chiefly concerned with their own personal peace and affluence. They become narcissistic and look to the pleasure of the moment instead of building a godly family and society for the future. More and more people view ethics like a clothing fashion. If the spirit of the age says that a certain behavior (adultery, homosexuality, abortion or murder) is acceptable then the people follow suit. The standard for ethics is no longer the Bible but the changing fads of Hollywood, the media, the public school and the belt-way (Washington, D.C.).

One of course cannot build a good house with a jello yardstick or a solid long-term social order with arbitrary, changing moral standards. The result of humanistic law is predictable, the breakdown of law and order in society. Humanistic law leads to ethical chaos. With the incredible increase in juvenile delinquency, crime, sexual deviancy, divorce, family disintegration, school violence, gang warfare, drug abuse, drunkenness, etc., there comes a demand for solutions. The people want and need a savior. They demand answers to societal problems. But apart from a sovereign God who has given ethical absolutes to guide men; and, who has sent His Son Jesus Christ in order to save men and enable them to live according biblical principles, the answers or solutions are purely immanent. Because the state is the focal point of power and the determiner of law in a humanistic society, most people (in our post-Christian culture) look to the state as father and savior. Humanistic men seek power through political means (i.e., through legislation, court mandated laws, tax programs) and tragically the people love to have it so. The state plays God and the populace gladly embraces the new idolatry because they have abandoned a full-orbed, life-transforming, biblical Christianity. Secular humanism seeks salvation through legislation. All truth and wisdom is to be found in the president or congress or the courts, or more specifically the experts (i.e., the secular humanistic intelligentsia-- academics, sociologists, scientists, doctors, etc.) who direct and advise the state bureaucrats.

When a people and civil government reject Christ and His law for the relativistic law of humanism, the state will go beyond its biblical mandate of punishing crimes (biblically defined) and protecting citizens from rogue nations. State coercion will be used not simply to restrain evil (as defined by God) but will be used to achieve a particular social end (e.g., eliminate poverty, provide retirement benefits, healthcare, etc.). The Bible teaches that the state is to be a minister of justice—God’s justice. Secular humanism says that the state is man’s savior (provider, definer, predestinator and sovereign). Because the humanistic state takes to itself a role that belongs only to God, it begins to act as a god. It seeks control over every aspect of life. Rushdoony writes, “The state seeks, in terms of its claim to sovereignty, to become the determining and over-arching power over every domain: no sphere is allowed to function except by permission of the state. The earth, air, water, sky all belong to the state, are used only under the law and tax of the state, and are potentially or actually subject to repossession by the state. The state has assumed that ultimacy over man’s life which properly belongs only to God. The creed of the state therefore requires holy warfare against the Christian creed and faith.”<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, most

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<sup>49</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, *The Foundations of Social Order: Studies in the Creeds and Councils of the Early Church*

people in America have become so accustomed to the big brother idol state that they accept and welcome their great loss of freedom.

In order to understand how the deification of the state has affected modern society lets us briefly consider three areas of statist control: education, money and property. The Bible teaches that education is the responsibility of parents and that the entire training process of a covenant child is to be “of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Every bit of training education and knowledge is to converge in total devotion and obedience to Jesus Christ (Dt. 6:5 ff.). Education is inescapably religious in nature for it is concerned with reality and of necessity must present facts in accord with a particular world and life view. Although the public or state schools claim to be religiously neutral they are indeed establishments of the state religion—secular humanism. The idea that morality, history, science and so forth can be taught from a neutral foundation is extremely naive. That state schools are anti-Christ and hostile to the Christian faith is proven by the following points. (1) Jesus Christ and His law word are banned from the classroom. God and His word are deemed unimportant, irrelevant and even dangerous for children. Such a position is implicitly atheistic. Jesus said, “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Mt. 12:30). Scripture says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (Pr. 17). Religious neutrality in education is impossible. (2) State schools teach the theory of evolution as a fact proved by science. Macro-evolution contradicts the scriptural doctrine of creation and is thoroughly disproved by the fossil records, genetics, geology, etc. Evolution is a dogmatic religious belief of secular humanism. Its acceptance completely undercuts all possibility of Christianity and an objective ethical standard. (3) State schools teach a religious pluralism under a secular statist rule. All religions are deemed equal in the public school as long as the sovereignty of the state is not challenged. Biblical Christianity is a totally exclusive religion. Salvation and godly rule are only found in Christ. (4) State schools teach a relativistic or pragmatic form of ethics (e.g., “premarital sex is not a great idea; but, since you’re going to have sex anyway, here is a condom”) Public schools are one of the greatest advocates of homosexual rights. God says that homosexuality in all its forms is an abomination worthy of the death penalty (Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Dt. 23:17-18; Rom. 1:24-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; Jude 7). (5) State schools teach that behavioral problems are not the result of sin but are problems that arise from a bad environment. Children involved in unethical activities (e.g., school shootings and murder) are often said to be victims themselves. Public schools are the greatest drug pushers in America (e.g., Ritalin®). Instead of teaching the children discipline, the schools send them to psychiatrists to get them drugged up for class. (At present the number of children on stimulants is around 6 million.) (6) Subjects such as history and social studies are taught from a statist anti-Christian perspective (e.g., the American Indians [who were violent satanic savages] are presented as noble humanitarians and environmentalists). In short, state schools are training up a generation of immoral, useful idiots, people who are indoctrinated in statist propaganda. What is the general population’s response to our secular humanistic—statist education? Not only do the vast majority of Americans send their children to public schools, but they also (by a large majority) oppose school vouchers and other programs that enable people to put their children in private education. Even the vast majority of evangelicals hand their children over to the big brother idol state.

The modern state’s god complex is also apparent in its attitude toward money and the economy. The attitude of many in civil government is that all money implicitly belongs to the state. This statist understanding of money is found in the current (2001) discussion in Washington over tax cuts. Liberal democrats and republicans opposed to tax cuts make the

argument that the government cannot afford a tax cut. Such a statement presupposes that the present surplus belongs to the state and not the taxpayers who earned the money. The civil government's god complex is also evident in federal tax policy. Schlossberg writes: "When a provision in the tax laws permits the taxpayer to keep a portion of his money, the Internal Revenue Service calls this a 'tax expenditure' or an 'implicit government grant.' This is not tax money that the state has collected and expended but money it has allowed the citizen to keep by not taking it. In other words any money the citizen is permitted to keep is regarded as if the state had graciously given it to him. Everything we have is from the state, to which we owe gratitude. In fact, we are the property of the state, which therefore has the right to the fruit of our labor."<sup>50</sup> Robert Higgs gives an excellent summary of the consequences of a state that assumes a god-like sovereignty over its citizens. He writes,

There was a time, long ago, when the average American could go about his daily business hardly aware of the government—especially the federal government. As a farmer, merchant, or manufacturer, he could decide what, how, when, and where to produce and sell his goods, constrained by little more than market forces. Just think: no farm subsidies, price supports, or acreage controls; no Federal Trade Commission; no antitrust laws; no Interstate Commerce Commission. As an employer, employee, consumer, investor, lender, borrower, student, or teacher, he could proceed largely according to his own lights. Just think: no National Labor Relations Board; no federal consumer "protection" laws; no Securities and Exchange Commission; no Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; no Department of Health and Human Services. Lacking a central bank to issue national paper currency, people commonly used gold coins to make purchases. There were no general sales taxes, no Social Security taxes, no income taxes. Though governmental officials were as corrupt as then as now—maybe more so—they had vastly less to be corrupt with. Private citizens spent about fifteen times more than all the governments combined. Those days, alas, are long gone. Now, in virtually every dimension, our lives revolve within rigid limits circumscribed by government authorities; we are constrained continually and on all sides by Big Government. Regulations clutter the landscape. Governmental spending equals almost four-tenths of the gross national product.<sup>51</sup>

The state's god complex is also evident in its understanding of property. The Bible teaches that God has created all things and that ultimately He, and He alone, owns everything (Ps. 50:10). Although Scripture does teach the concept of private property over which the owner has control (Ac. 5:4), it is understood that man is the steward of property that really belongs to God. Man is to develop and use his property to glorify God and extend godly dominion in the earth. The modern secular state rejects the biblical view and instead regards itself as the ultimate owner and god over all property. This point is proved by the civil government's great expansion of federal lands; the state's confiscation and regulation of land based on absurd environmental regulations; the property tax in which citizens pay large sums of money primarily to fund state schools and libraries. "Property owners" in a sense are paying rent to the civil government for the right to live on their land. If the property tax is not paid the property is confiscated by the state and sold to faithful renters. Regarding the overall economy, America has to an extent abandoned pure capitalism for a unique form of participatory fascism. Higgs writes: "Alone

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<sup>50</sup>Charles Schlossberg, *Idols For Destruction*, p. 187.

<sup>51</sup>Robert Higgs, *Crisis and Leviathan: Critical Episodes of the Growth of American Government* (New York: Oxford Press, 1987), p. ix.

among collectivist systems, fascism preserves private property, but ‘capitalism is turned inside out in this unlikely union.’ Fascism recognizes people’s desire to possess private property and admires the strength of the profit motive, but it ‘uses these features of capitalism [only] *insofar as they do not conflict with the national interest as formulated by fascism’s political authorities.*’ Every part of economic life is ideologically, constitutionally, and legally vulnerable to governmental control. Hence ‘fascism tolerates the *form* of private ownership at the government’s pleasure, but it eliminates any meaningful *right* of private property.’ It is ‘a bogus capitalism indeed, a sham deferral to individual economic rights readily nullified whenever political leaders deem it expedient.’<sup>52</sup> In the United States the means of production are left in the hands of the people while the state regulates, controls and reaps the monetary benefits of industry. Participatory fascism reaps the benefits of a market economy while maintaining a big intrusive civil government. While America may be one of the freest nations on earth today, the founding fathers would be utterly shocked at the present lack of freedom and the statist intervention in the affairs of its people. Sadly, modern Americans accept their slavery with pride.

The first commandment forbids all forms of polytheism. Polytheism refers to the belief in, worship of and service to many gods. Polytheism was the predominant religion of the ancient world at the time the first commandment was given. Virtually all of the nations of the world (e.g., Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenicia, Syria, Moab, Edom, Tyre, the Philistines, the Amorites, Rome, Greece, etc.) had a pantheon of gods or deities. In the Bible adjectives are often used to make explicit the idolatry of polytheism in opposition to the true and only God—Jehovah. They are designated “other gods” (Ex. 20:3; Dt. 5:7) “their [the heathen] gods” (cf. Ex. 23:24, etc.), “strange” or “foreign gods” (Josh. 24:20, 23), “new gods” (Jdg. 5:8) or “no gods” (Gal. 4:8 KJV) or “those who are not gods” (Jer. 5:7).

The idols of the heathen nations are nothing like the true God of Scripture who is infinite, eternal, unchanging and absolutely holy. They are (in the minds of their followers) finite beings with super-human powers who often dominate a certain realm or aspect of nature. There are gods of the hills, gods of war, gods of the weather, gods of fertility, gods of wine and mirth, etc. The chief goal of the typical idolatrous religion is to appease and manipulate the god or gods to one’s advantage. This appeasement is akin to paying off the mafia to conduct one’s business in peace. Various rituals from the sadistic (e.g., child sacrifice) to the profane (drunken orgies etc.) are engaged in to procure the cooperation of the various deities.

Idolatry was the predominant sin of the Israelites prior to the Babylonian captivity. The constant tendency of Israel to lapse into polytheistic belief and worship can be attributed to a lack of faith in Jehovah as well as a strong desire to be like other nations who were abhorred by God. The covenant nation absorbed the surrounding pagan culture instead of transforming it by means of living faithfully within the realm of her covenant bond with God (cf. Dt. 4:5-4).

Idolatry is presented in Scripture as wicked, abominable and hateful to God (e.g., Jer. 44:3 ff.). There are a number of reasons why idolatry is the ultimate sin against God and His law order. First, polytheism teaches the existence and validity of many gods which presupposes many legitimate forms of revelation and many ways of salvation. To accept such a teaching is an explicit rejection of covenant loyalty to Jehovah. Thus, the Bible refers to the worship of false deities as spiritual adultery. “She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot... Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also. So it came to pass,

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<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, pgs. 241-242. Higgs quotes from Twight, *America’s Emerging Fascist Economy*, pp. 14-17.

through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees” (Jer. 3:6, 8-9). Later in the same chapter (3:20), the expression “faithless Judah” is used which applies to both covenant and marriage. “In the context of marriage, it denotes such acts as desertion and the establishment of a relationship with another person; in the context of covenant, it denotes the failure to maintain the responsibilities of relationship.”<sup>53</sup> Idolatry is such an act of covenant disloyalty that it destroys the covenant relationship between God and the nation and merits a bill of divorce.

Second, the polytheistic world-view can tolerate virtually any kind of belief except biblical Christianity. With polytheism there is the acceptance of a plurality of religions and gods. The unifying factor among polytheists is human autonomy which functions as the ultimate organizing factor in a world of chaos, a disorganized multi-universe. Orthodox Christianity is anathema to the polytheist because it teaches that God and God alone is sovereign; that all men must bow before His authority; that the whole earth is under Christ’s law and word. In such a system man is not the ultimate organizer of reality and determiner of truth but is merely a creature under absolute authority. Such an exclusive doctrine (one God, one revelation, one way of salvation) runs completely counter to both the modern secular pluralistic states as well as the polytheistic imperial empires of old. Both modern and ancient polytheistic states divine the state by making it the final arbiter of what is acceptable among the various religious philosophies and law orders instead of God’s infallible word. Politicians and judges stand in judgment over Jehovah’s law as if the one true God was just another idol and His word just another fallible human philosophy. The threat of biblical Christianity to modern “secular” polytheistic states can be seen in Frances Schaeffer’s analysis of ancient Rome’s great hostility toward believers. He writes,

Rome was cruel, and its cruelty can perhaps be best pictured by the events which took place in the arena in Rome itself. People seated above the arena floor watched gladiator contests and Christians thrown to the beasts. Let us not forget why Christians were killed. They were *not* killed because they worshiped Jesus. Various religions covered the whole Roman world. One such was the cult of Mithras, a popular Persian form of Zoroastrianism which had reached Rome by 67 B.C. Nobody cared who worshiped whom so long as the worshiper did not disrupt the unity of the state, centered in the formal worship of Caesar. The reason the Christians were killed was because they were rebels. This was especially so after their growing rejection by the Jewish synagogues lost for them the immunity granted to the Jews since Julius Caesar’s time.

We may express the nature of their rebellion in two ways, both of which are true. First, we can say they worshiped Jesus as God and they worshiped the infinite-personal God only. The Caesars would not tolerate this worshiping of the one God *only*. It was counted as treason. Thus their worship became a special threat to the unity of the state during the third century and during the reign of Diocletian (284-305), when people of the higher classes began to become Christians in larger numbers. If they had worshiped Jesus *and* Caesar, they would have gone unharmed, but they rejected all forms of syncretism. They worshiped the God who had revealed himself in the Old Testament, through Christ, and in the New Testament which had gradually been written. And they worshiped him as the *only* God. They allowed no mixture: All other Gods were seen as false gods.

We can also express in a second way why the Christians were killed: No totalitarian authority nor authoritarian state can tolerate those who have an absolute by which to judge that state and its actions. The Christians had that absolute in God’s revelation.

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<sup>53</sup>Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelly, Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Jeremiah 1-25* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1991), pp. 55-56.

Because the Christians had an absolute, universal standard by which to judge not only personal moral but the state, they were counted as enemies of totalitarian Rome and were thrown to the beasts.<sup>54</sup>

Third, polytheism in any form (e.g., religious pluralism) divorces every concept of ethics from God and His direct revelation. The law is abstracted from God and rendered impersonal, relativistic and purely immanent. With the modern political polytheism and the so-called separation of the state from any faith commitment to Christ, the civil laws of such a nation are at bottom antichrist. “The Bible does not recognize any law as valid apart from the law of God, and this law is given by revelation to the patriarchs and Moses, and expounded by prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles. To have two kinds of law is to have two kinds of gods.”<sup>55</sup> Although America and other western nations still have many laws that are based on a past commitment to the Christian world-view, these laws are now divorced from that world-view and founded upon the covenant-breaking axiom of political polytheism.

### Does the Bible Support or Countenance Political Polytheism?

Most professing Christians today have accepted open, public, government-sanctioned polytheism as the preferred norm for national life. They argue that the Jews had a special covenant relationship with Jehovah and as a theocracy had a responsibility to suppress open idolatry and the open propagation of false religions in their society. We, however, who live in the New Covenant era are only responsible to suppress idolatry within the visible church. Further, they will argue that the days when nations established Christianity as the official religion of the land were times of oppression and persecution.

Does the Bible teach that polytheism is *only* to be condemned within the Old Covenant nation of Israel? Is religious pluralism as practiced in the United States (where all religions are treated the same) acceptable to God? There are a number of reasons why Scripture emphatically condemns such thinking. In the Old Testament God repeatedly condemned the pagan nations for their idolatry. The severe judgments that God meted out on the heathen nations for idolatry presuppose that God expects *every* nation to obey the first commandment in civil, social and cultural affairs. The following examples should make this point obvious.

In Deuteronomy 18 we are told that God drove the heathen nations out of their lands because He hated their false religions. “When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, *and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you*” (Dt. 18:9-12). “These foreign offices and practices, which were an *abomination to the Lord*, were to be forbidden in Israel precisely because they were part of the reason for God's judgment of the Canaanites, which would be seen in their ejection from the land. If the Israelites adopted similar practices, they too would become liable to ejection from the

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<sup>54</sup>Francis A. Schaefer, *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1976), pp. 25-26.

<sup>55</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 679.

land.”<sup>56</sup> One could argue that the main concern of this passage is false forms of revelation. But, are not all false religions and cults founded upon false revelations?

In Isaiah 19 the prophet says that God will judge Egypt for its idolatry. “The burden against Egypt. Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt; the idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst” (Is. 19:1). The prophet Jeremiah says that God will bring judgment upon Egypt, Pharaoh and their false gods. “The LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, says: ‘Behold, I will bring punishment on Amon [a sun god] of No [ancient Thebes], and Pharaoh and Egypt, with their gods and their kings—Pharaoh and those who trust in him” (Jer. 46:25; cf. Is. 46:1). God singles out Amon the Egyptian chief deity of Thebes (No). “Amon was later merged with Re to become Amon-Re, the king of the gods and peculiarly the god of the rulers of Egypt.”<sup>57</sup> Pharaoh who lays claim to divinity is also singled out. Is it not clear that Jehovah punishes idolatry even in non-covenanted nations?

Jehovah, the only God, the Lord of the universe, hates religious pluralism. To Assyria God said, “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation....As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose carved image excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols” (Is. 10:5, 10, 11)? God proclaimed judgment against Moab for idolatry. “‘Moreover,’ says the LORD, ‘I will cause to cease in Moab the one who offers sacrifices in the high places and burns incense to his gods’” (Jer. 48:35). Jehovah also crushed the idols of Babylon. “Declare among the nations, proclaim, and set up a standard; proclaim, and do not conceal it, say, ‘Babylon is taken, Bel is shamed. Merodach [or Marduk, a Babylonian god] is broken in pieces; her idols are humiliated, her images are broken in pieces....A drought is against her waters, and they will be dried up. For it is the land of carved images and they are insane with their idols’” (Jer. 50:1, 2, 38). “Everyone is dull-hearted, without knowledge, every metalsmith is put to shame by the carved image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are futile, a work of errors; in the time of their punishment they shall perish.... ‘Therefore behold, the days are coming that I will bring judgment on the carved images of Babylon; her whole land shall be ashamed, and all her slain shall fall in her midst’.... ‘Therefore, behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘that I will bring judgment on her carved images, and throughout all her land the wounded shall groan’” (Jer. 51:17, 18, 47, 52). If God so hated the idolatry of the Assyrians, Moabites, Egyptians, Babylonians and the inhabitants of Canaan that He poured out His wrath upon them, why should He exempt the inhabitants of America, Canada, or Great Britain, etc., for their idolatries? Political polytheism was a common practice in ancient nations—a practice condemned by God. There is no evidence in the New Testament that God has had a change of mind regarding idolatry.

This point is supported by the fact that Deuteronomy 4:5-8 teaches that Israel was to be an example to the pagan nations around her. She was to showcase God’s law to pagan cultures and societies through obedience so that heathen nations would abandon their idolatry and their pagan law order and turn to the one true God—Jehovah. The rejection of an explicit acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as Lord by Western nations and the acceptance of any public

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<sup>56</sup>P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 261. Another passage which reveals God’s attitude toward pagan religions is Deuteronomy 20:17-18: “But you shall utterly destroy them: the Hittite and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, just as the LORD your God has commanded you, lest they teach you to do according to all their abominations which they have done for their gods, and you sin against the LORD your God.”

<sup>57</sup>A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 694.

religious practice as lawful in these nations presupposes a realm that is outside of God's authority, that God's law word does not speak to every area of life.

The Great Commission teaches that the church is to disciple whole nations so that all nations will become explicitly Christian nations. "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:18-20). The Bible says that the divine-human mediator Jesus Christ has all authority in heaven and on *earth*. It is on the basis of this comprehensive authority that the disciples are to go. Note that the church's task is not simply evangelization and the saving of souls through gospel preaching. It has the task of baptizing nations; that is, bringing whole nations into covenant with Christ so that they can receive the covenant sign and submit to His kingship. The disciples are to teach the nations *all things* that Christ has commanded. This command rules out a vague theism. It rules out the acknowledgment of the false gods of Mohamedism, modern Judaism, Unitarianism and Mormonism. The Great Commission is not fully carried out until every nation covenants with Christ and implements a Christian social order based on God's law. When professing Christians deny the comprehensive nature of Jesus' authority and teach that civil magistrates should implement religious pluralism with its open practice of idolatry and blasphemy, they set themselves in opposition to our Lord's own marching orders.

The Old Testament prophets reveal a time when the goal of the Great Commission will become a reality; when kings or civil magistrates will serve Christ and aid His church. Isaiah prophesied, "Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth and lick the dust of your feet" (49:23). Does Jehovah promise a wonderful future of religious pluralism where the church has an equal status with Satanists, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.? No, not at all. God speaks of a time when kings and nations forsake their idolatry and serve Jesus Christ alone. M'Crie writes, "These promises [Is. 49:23, 60:10, 12, 16] secure unto the church the public countenance of kings and kingdoms as such. *Kings shall be her nursing-fathers; nations and kingdoms shall serve her.* The authority and means competent unto them as such shall be employed on the side of the church, and for the advancement of the true religion; whereas they had formerly been employed against her, and for the support of a false religion. To limit the sense of the words to that common protection which is given to all subjects, and to any society, is to explain away the promises of God....It is equally unreasonable to confine the meaning to the private or personal conduct of rulers, and of their subjects. This would never suggest itself to any who, in reading the passage, had not formed the notion that the church cannot be benefitted by civil power. It offers violence to the plain meaning of the words. It does not accord with the context, which speaks of the public state of the church, and those means which tend to advance its interests in this view."<sup>58</sup> This passage clearly teaches that a time will come when biblical Christianity will be the established religion of nations. Kings will suppress idolatry and support Christianity. These promises cannot be squeezed into the pluralistic paradigm.

There are many prophetic passages which teach the establishment of Christianity among the nations. Psalm 72:11-12 says that "all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him." In Isaiah 56:6 we are told that the Gentiles will keep the Sabbath. Isaiah says that

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<sup>58</sup>Thomas M'Crie, *Statement of the Difference Between the Profession of the Reformed Church of Scotland, as Adopted by Seceders, and the Profession Contained in the New Testament and Other Acts, Lately Adopted by the General Associate Synod, etc.* (Edinburgh: C. F. Lyon, 1871), pp. 137-138.

Gentiles will embrace the Gospel. “Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa. 60:3). Kings shall minister to the church (v. 10) and the wealth of the Gentiles will flow into it (v. 11). Young writes: “Some have applied the fulfillment of the prophecy to the work of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes Longimanus, but their actions were only a prelude to the real fulfillment in Jesus Christ and the preaching of the Gospel unto the Gentiles (cf. Ac. 15:15ff., where the rebuilding of David’s booth is equated with the outcalling of the Gentiles). The prophecy is not speaking of the literal rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls, but of the building up of God’s kingdom through the inclusion of Gentiles therein. Calvin well remarks that when kings serve Zion they do not lose their status as kings, but on the contrary are then enabled to carry out their proper function so as to glorify God and to manifest righteousness in their reigns. Happy is that nation whose ruler looks not to man for the solution of his problems but walks in the light of the Lord.”<sup>59</sup> The Bible says that “the nation which will not serve you shall perish and those nations shall be utterly ruined” (Isa. 60:12). The church “shall drink the milk of the Gentiles, and shall milk the breast of kings” (v. 16). John Owen writes: “Kingdoms are said to serve the church: and how can a kingdom, *as a kingdom*, serve the church, but as putting forth *its power* and strength in *her* behalf? What God hath promised, kings, magistrates, rulers, nations shall do, that is their duty to do.”<sup>60</sup> This (as noted above) does not mean a form of Christian socialism or welfare statism but that the state strictly follows the principles enunciated in *both* tables of the law and the moral case laws. Right after it says that the church will milk the breast of kings it says, “I will make your officers peace, and your magistrates righteousness. Violence shall no longer be heard in your land, neither wasting nor destruction in your borders” (Isa. 60:17-18).

In Psalm 2 the resurrected Christ is promised dominion over the nations. Kings and judges are to be instructed by Christ; they are to “serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling” (Ps. 2:11). If kings, civil magistrates and judges are to sit humbly at the feet of Christ and learn His laws, serve Him with fear and rejoice at His majesty; can one then conclude that serving Christ involves upholding arbitrary humanistic law? Does fearing the Lord involve permitting the open practice of idolatry and blasphemy? Do civil magistrates and judges tremble before the Son by allowing the open practice of homosexuality? “We cannot escape the clear biblical truth that each and every earthly ruler stands under the divinely established moral obligation to ‘serve Jehovah with fear [and] kiss the Son’ (vv. 11-12). Serving the Lord with fear unquestionably means obeying His commandments (cf. Josh. 22:5; Ps. 119:124-126; Dt. 10:12-13). Doing homage to “the Son” in the form of a kiss was an ancient ritual by which the authority of a leader was acknowledged (e.g., 1 Sam. 10:1).”<sup>61</sup> The idea common even in Reformed circles that the civil magistrate is only obligated to uphold the *second table* while ignoring the first is totally contradicted by Scripture. Magistrates do not honor the Son by committing or permitting polytheism.

The biblical teaching regarding the civil magistrate, the duty of nations and the goal of the Great Commission can only lead to one conclusion. All nations have a moral duty to obey the first commandment by bowing the knee to Jesus Christ, by legally recognizing, favoring and supporting biblical Christianity and by suppressing the open practice and propagation of the false religions, cults, and philosophies. Christians must reject the myth of neutrality that is

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<sup>59</sup>E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, Vol. 3, p. 450.

<sup>60</sup>John Owen quoted in Thomas M’Crie, p. 139.

<sup>61</sup>Greg Bahnsen, in Gary Scott Smith ed., *God and Politics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989), p. 30.

foundational to their acceptance of polytheism. Believers in America must reject that part of the United States Constitution that mentions no final authority except the people. America like all nations is obligated to “kiss the Son.” “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Pr. 14:34).

## The Broad Nature of Idolatry

When people consider the subject of idolatry they usually think of people bowing down before statues. Certainly, the gross shocking idolatry of the heathen and backslidden Israel is a predominant subject of consideration in the Bible. Idolatry, however, is much broader than simply bowing the knee to Baal, Ashtoreth or Krishna. There is an idolatry that takes place in secret in the heart of man. Indeed, anything that takes the first place in life before Jesus Christ whether houses, riches, status, leisure, or even parents is an idol. Jesus said, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” (Mt. 10:37). Paul said, “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey” (Rom. 6:16). In another epistle the apostle says, that the covetous man, is an idolater (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). The service of riches for riches’ sake or the supreme love of money and the status, things and power that come with it, is heinous in the sight of God, being a species of idolatry. It is idolatry precisely because the finite creaturely things of life are placed before God. Paul speaks of men and women who are “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Tim. 3:4); of gluttons “whose god is their belly” (Phil. 3:19); of wicked men who set their minds on earthly things (Phil. 3:19). The apostle teaches that many activities in life that are perfectly respectable and even looked up to by a multitude of people are considered to be great sins by God. Various activities which are perfectly lawful become wicked in God’s sight because they take the first place in a man’s life before Him. The Puritan Thomas Watson tells us of the folly of making money one’s god. He writes: “It is folly to trust in our riches; but how many do, and make money their god! ‘The rich man’s wealth is his strong city.’ Prov x 15. He makes the wedge of gold his hope. Job xxxi 24. God made man of the dust of the earth, and man makes a god of the dust of the earth. Money is his creator, redeemer, comforter: his creator, for if he has money, he thinks he is made; his redeemer, for if he be in danger, he trusts to his money to redeem him; his comforter, for if he be sad, money is the golden harp to drive away the evil spirit. Thus by trusting to money, we make it a god.”<sup>62</sup> The Bible’s teaching strikes particularly hard upon modern American culture wherein success, prosperity, financial gain, material possessions, an obsession with entertainment and the rich and famous take first place over the things of God.

The apostle John deals with idolatry in a broad manner when he warns believers not to set their hearts on the world or the things of the world. “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 Jn. 2:15-16). John sets the love of the world (i.e., the world order that is in rebellion against God and the world view and lifestyle that accompanies that world order) against the love of God. These two loves are incompatible, mutually exclusive and thus, cannot exist together. A person either loves God or loves the world. Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for

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<sup>62</sup>Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, p. 56.

yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt. 6:19-24).

Matthew Henry writes: “Where your treasure is, on earth or in heaven, there will your heart be. We are therefore concerned to be right and wise in the choice of our treasure, because the temper of our minds, and consequently the tenor of our lives, will be accordingly either carnal or spiritual, earthly or heavenly. The heart follows the treasure, as the needle follows the loadstone, or the sunflower the sun. Where the treasure is there the value and esteem are, there the love and affection are (Col 3:2), that way the desires and pursuits go, thitherward the aims and intents are leveled, and all is done with that in view. Where the treasure is, there our cares and fears are, lest we come short of it; about that we are most solicitous; there our hope and trust are (Pr 18:10,11); there our joys and delights will be (Ps 119:111); and there our thoughts will be; there the inward thought will be, the first thought, the free thought, the fixed thought, the frequent, the familiar thought. The heart is God's due (Pr 23:26), and that he may have it, our treasure must be laid up with him, and then our souls will be lifted up to him.”<sup>63</sup>

For believers there must be a single eye to the service of God and His glory. Our whole lives, our very existence must be consecrated unto the Lord. We cannot compartmentalize our lives and say, “this part of life is given to God while this other part is to serve the world.” We must either serve this world or live for the next. Professing Christians who attempt to live equally for both are fooling themselves. Where God reigns, the lusts of the world must go. Spurgeon writes: “Oh, to be so decided, that we may pursue one thing only! We would *hate* evil and *love* God, despise falsehood and *hold to* truth! We need to know how we are affected both to righteousness and sin: and when this is ascertained to our comfort, we must stand to the right with uncompromising firmness. Mammon is the direct opposite of God as much today as in past ages, and we must loathed its greed, its selfishness, its oppression, its pride; or we do not love God.”<sup>64</sup>

Idolatry in the broad sense of the term is particularly dangerous because it is subtle, insidious and fashionable. Professing Christians are often conquered by such idolatry because it is not easily perceived at first. Our Lord spoke of those who fall away from the faith because “the cares of this world grow and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word” rendering that person unfruitful (Mt. 13:22). Note, that there is a progression of worldly interests that over time choke the seed of God’s word. The things that pertain to this life whether money, possessions, persons, career, pleasures, etc. become so near and dear to a man’s heart that they crowd out or displace the affections one should have toward the things of God. A man’s time and strength are given over to plastic, wood, stone and paper instead of Christ’s kingdom. The deceitfulness of riches causes the professing Christian to cease to be salt and light to culture. Such a person is mired in the vanity of idolatry. Carnal influences that are not checked lead to dereliction of our Christian duty. When such worldly interests are not cut off and subdued but rather stimulated, fertilized or even just ignored, the end result is total apostasy. The idols of life are given the victory. This form of idolatry can conquer people who at one time were noted for their service of

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<sup>63</sup>Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 5:79.

<sup>64</sup>Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew*, p. 73.

God. Paul probably wept as he wrote: “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world” (2 Tim. 4:10).

James warns believers against making riches, pleasure and luxury idols by describing the eternal consequences of such foolishness. He paints the horrifying picture of the idolater’s own possessions being used as fuel to feed the fires of hell. “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter”(Ja. 5:1-5). Note, that idolatry is a fountain of sin. While the believer in Christ does good works in the service of his God and Savior, the idolater commits a multitude of sins in the service of his idol. Lying, fraud, sexual immorality, oppression of the poor and even murder are all employed in the service of false gods. Ahab had his heart set upon the property of Naboth the point of committing lies and murder. Wicked Jezebel did not rest until the dogs licked up Naboth’s innocent blood (cf. 1 Ki. 21).

A very common form of idolatry today involves a looking to the state as the source of salvation, prosperity and ultimate protection against calamity. For example, in America a president can be a habitual liar, and adulterer, and a whoremonger who has a total disregard for the laws of God and man; yet, if the economy is growing and the country is prosperous that man will be easily reelected to office. Such a nation is idolatrous and ripe for judgment. Jeremiah proclaimed: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert” (Jer. 17:5-6). Technology and military might is no substitute for the trust in God. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the LORD our God. They have bowed down and fallen; but we have risen and stand upright (Ps. 20:7-8). The Syrians came against Israel’s small army with a great multitude, yet they were defeated and slaughtered because they placed their trust in a false god and offended the God of Israel (1 Ki. 20:23-29). Rushdoony writes, “The commandment, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me,’ requires that we recognize no power as true and ultimately legitimate if it be not grounded in God and His law-word. It requires that we see true law as righteousness, the righteousness of God, and as a ministry of justice....The powers which today more than ever present themselves as the other gods, are the antichristian states. The antichristian state makes itself god and therefore sees itself as the source of both law and power. Apart from a biblical perspective the state becomes another god, and, instead of law, legality prevails.”<sup>65</sup> The antichristian states in the west exist because the majority of the populace are idolaters who look to the state as savior. The general attitude of Americans toward the civil government reveals the inroads of theological liberalism and pietistic escapism in our culture.

The objects of practical idolatry are virtually infinite in number given the depravity and foolishness of man. The thread, however, that ties the manifold nature of idolatry together is the worship of self; one’s own human autonomy. The rank idolaters who fashioned gods of wood, stone and precious metals were worshiping the work of their own hands. Everyone who partakes of a false religion is worshiping a creation of the mind of man. Even the will worship of Arminianism is a form of idolatry. Such heretics assert that they are *not* saved by Christ’s sovereign choice and power but by a work of faith, the autonomous choice of man. By pronouncing the magic formula, “I accept Jesus Christ as my personal savior,” the will worshiper

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<sup>65</sup>R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes*, p. 61.

proclaims his sovereignty over the weak and helpless savior. By an act of the human will, salvation is procured. Such a view of Christianity has much in common with rank paganism in which the deity is bought off by a gift or offering. Any one who dares to put their own morality, or decision, or repentance, or ritual in the place of the infinite merits of the Son of God is an idolater.

May God enable us to walk according to His law, causing us to serve and worship Him as the only true God through His Son Jesus Christ. Most merciful Father, enable us by the power of Your Holy Spirit to mortify the sins of the flesh and mind so that we would not set up anything in our hearts before You. Continually cut off our wicked lusts and put to death our sinful members so that we would fear, honor and glorify You in all things. Forgive our sins and clothe us with the perfect righteousness of Christ. Amen.

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