

Choosing God

Many of us may remember when David Letterman hosted a late-night television talk show. One of his signature segments was the top 10 list. This morning we will have a top 10 list. Our list will not be designed to elicit a laugh. Rather, our list should make us think and realize that following Christ is a daily decision. Jesus told His disciples this and we find it in Luke 9:23.

And He was saying to *them* all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. (Luke 9:23 NASB)

As a back-drop for this top 10 list, let’s read about a choice that was giving to God’s people. Joshua reminds them that they had seen God’s hand giving them all the good things that had been promised. With this reminder comes the warning that if they forget and turn to other gods, then God’s wrath will be against them.

Joshua lays out a clear choice for the children of Israel on that day. Let’s look in the 24th chapter of Joshua and begin with verse 14.

“Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

The people answered and said, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and who did these great signs in our sight and preserved us through all the way in which we went and among all the peoples through whose midst we passed. The LORD drove out from before us all the peoples, even the Amorites who lived in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God.”

Then Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you.” The people said to Joshua, “No, but we will serve the LORD.” Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen for yourselves the LORD, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” “Now therefore, put away the foreign gods which are in your midst, and incline your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel.” The people said to Joshua, “We will serve the LORD our God and we will obey His voice.” So, Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made for them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. (Joshua 24:14-25 NASB)

We know from our study of the history of the children of Israel that they never kept their vow to leave behind the other gods and follow God only. At times, I believe that we develop an attitude of superiority and wrap up in the mantle of condescension. We are so much better than them because we don’t follow those silly gods.

The plurality of gods was an answer to the unknowns of their world. When things happened that were out of the expected, then it must be the action of a god. St. Augustine, in the City of God, examines the often-overlapping gods that governed every facet of life in the Roman empire. It was not just Neptune who ruled the waters, there were gods over calm water, stormy waters, fresh waters, salt waters, and the list is nearly endless. We read of these and we reflect that we are so much more enlightened than they were. We read of the various gods that were prevalent in

the times and regions where the children of Israel lived. We read names like: Baal, Molech, Ashtoreth, Artemis, and others. We never hear of these now. So, we think that the time of following other gods must be in the past. These other gods are called idols. So, when we are warned about following idols, we dismiss the warning because idols, according to our thought process, are a thing of the past.

Well, according to the dictionary (Merriam-Webster) an idol is: 1) an object of extreme devotion; 2) a representation or symbol of an object of worship (false god); 3) a likeness of something; 4) fallacy; 5) form or appearance visible but without substance.

With this definition, I put forth my top 10 list of new idols. These are objects that we worship and adore. We are devoted to these beyond all else in our life. As we look at this list, notice that none of these items or idols are inherently bad. In fact, most are good. The issue is that we have allowed these items to supplant God and thus become an object of extreme devotion. The order of these idols or false gods is, admittedly subjective with the exception of number one. Also, there are several that deserve honorable (or dishonorable) mention for their prevalence. They are close to the top 10 but were edged out. The three that are near the top are: entertainment, power, and popularity.

Decidedly, we value our entertainment and allow it to displace so much in our life. We plan many of our events around entertainment. We can't attend church, participate in benevolent activities or even spend time with our families because of "The Game."

We can easily see that many politicians ignore doing what is right for the common good because they might need to share or cede their power. However, we may fail to see that we are equally guilty of seeking and keeping power in other areas of our life.

How many people have sacrificed their integrity or compromised the truth in an effort to gain or maintain their status in the community? They would rather be popular than say or do the right thing.

Now, the gods that fail to deliver and thus are:

10. Education

Education has promised to eliminate crime, prepare us for careers, and solve all of societies problem. We do not accept anyone without "formal degrees" and thus belittle people. Education, while important, has failed to deliver as promised.

9. Beauty

The writer of Proverbs speaks of the true qualities we should cherish and in verse 30 of the 31st Proverb we read: **Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain.** Yet, we judge people by their looks. We shun or abuse people because of their outward appearance. We waste large amounts of money trying to prevent the natural fading of our beauty. This is a god that we will never satisfy.

8. Comfort

The god of comfort is another god that fails to deliver. Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes the 2nd chapter: **All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. Thus, I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 NASB)**

We spend our life and a great deal of our treasure seeking comfort in leisure only to find that we are still empty.

7. Substances

Immediately, when I mention the god of substances, we think of alcohol, drugs, or even food. The obvious addictive substances may include those things. However, in our materialistic world, we all listen to the siren's call of "things" we must have. Rather than finding satisfaction, we are still left empty and looking for something else to fill that hole. We become addicted to things.

6. Family

Wait a minute. Families are good. Yes, they are but they do not replace God. Spouses are not perfect, children eventually have their own life, and each individual will, at times disappoint others in the family.

Families are a blessing from God but they will never replace God.

5. Religion

Religion and God are not the same thing. For some, religion has been fashioned to bring comfort while failing to listen to the words of God. In the long run, religion without God is an empty shell. Religion offers comfort, but not necessarily real hope. Only God rightly known and understood can bring true hope, because it is a hope that is grounded in reality and not blind faith. Religion can't deliver you, but God can.

4. Science

We live in an ever increasingly secular society; more people trust in science than trust in religion. We believe that science has all of the answers for us. We believe that if science confirms something to be true, it must be true—despite the fact that science changes all the time depending on recent findings. We trust that science will give us the solutions to all the plagues that face humanity. Science certainly does benefit us greatly. We enjoy the benefits of technology and medicine and physics every moment of every day. But if we think that science is the one hope for mankind, we are fooling ourselves. Mankind cannot save itself. Rather, the one thing mankind is an expert at is self-imploding. Science can help ward that off for a while, but it cannot be counted on to deliver us in the end.

The next two gods compete for position. However, one, I believe, edges out for top billing due to the fact that a main motivator of one is the other.

3. Sex

Fifty years ago, people would talk freely about death but never hush a word about sex. Nowadays it is the complete reverse. Sex is everywhere. It dominates music, movies, video games, TV shows, advertising, and even just everyday life. To some degree this makes sense: sexuality is a part of human nature and an important and powerful one at that. But when we take a good thing and make it a god-thing we have gone too far. Sex, perhaps more than any other area of life, is considered to be untouchable by moral restraints. The only moral restraint for sex of any kind seems to be consent. Other than that, have at it! But such a sexual free-for-all is also wreaking havoc in the world. Marriages fall apart left and right. STD's and unplanned pregnancies are common. People are hooked on pornography in increasingly violent forms and at increasingly younger ages. We are destroying ourselves because of our licentiousness. We are even willing to kill our own children to have consequence-free sex. We really aren't that far off from the ancient gods who required child sacrifice.

2. Money

As I stated earlier, this edges out sex only because the love for money is driving much of the sex industry.

We are told: **For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (I Timothy 6:10 NASB)**

The love of and worship of money not only is found in the sex trade, it drives people to sacrifice their integrity, destroy their lives and families. Money is a poor god.

1. Self

Most of us realize that mowing over a weed does not stop it from reappearing. The same is true of the false gods that keep popping up. They all have one common source. Somewhere along the line, we have decided that we are in a better position to know our situation and make choices for us. We have replaced God with self. We take center-stage even in our acts of charity and kindness. We post our acts of kindness on Facebook, or other public platforms so others can see “how good” we are. Nothing in the teachings of Jesus suggest anything of that kind. In fact, we read many times within God’s word passages like this on forum in Galatians 2:20.

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; (Galatians 2:20 NASB)

Humanity is broken. We all know it. Things are not as they should be. As a result, we are all looking for answers to solve our problems. In looking for those answers, we have turned to and placed our trust false gods that cannot deliver them.

Thousands of years of human existence has proven that we are not on an evolutionary trajectory upward. We are on a never-ending cycle of chaos.

We stand before God just as the children of Israel did when Joshua warned about the false gods. We have the same choice to makes: **choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.**