

## Idolatry

1Corinthians 10:6-13

The Ninth Sunday after Trinity, July 29, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Make no mistake. Modernity offers you an idol. The idol that modernity offers you is not like the idols of the ancient world. The ancients were more honest about their idols. When you went to an ancient city the city elders would post at the gates on sacred stones the instructions for worshipping the God of that particular city. That way when you entered the city you knew exactly what sacrifices to make and what the name of the idol was so that you could worship him or her while you were in his or her city.

Modernity offers you an idol to worship. It is not the true and living God. The difference between modernity's idol and the idols of the ancients is that modernity lies to you about whether or not it is worshipping something. While the ancients gave instructions to visitors regarding the worship of the god of their particular town, modernity denies that it worships a god at all. Modernity claims that it is not doing religion even though it is.

It is hard to name the idol that modernity offers you. The reason that it is hard to name the idol that modernity offers you is that modernity lies to itself and to you by claiming that it is not worshipping anything. In order to figure out what the idol is that modernity is worshipping the easiest thing to do is ask: "With what has modernity replaced God?"

After Israel had come out of Egypt and entered into a covenant with God, they replaced God with a golden calf. You can tell that they replaced God with the golden calf because God was the God who brought them out the land of Egypt out of the house of slaves and yet after Israel had built the golden calf they proclaimed that the golden calf represented their gods who brought them out of the land of Egypt. They replaced the God who had brought them out of Egypt by attributing His saving actions to their false gods.

In the same way then we may identify modernity's false god by asking: With what has modernity replaced the true and living God? In order to answer that question we have to ask what is fundamental about God. While the redemption of Israel out of Egypt is fundamental I think that a more obvious and plainer action of God describes Him in more fundamental terms. That action is the creation. God is the maker of heaven and earth. All of our creeds contain this assertion. The Bible begins with this assertion. When the psalms want to give the main difference between God and the idols of the ancients, the psalms point out how the idols of the nations are nothing, but God made the heavens and the earth.

It is like this: suppose you were to take out an ad in the help wanted section of the newspaper. What you wanted was God. You would list the credentials in this way: applicant needs to be the maker of heaven and earth. All other applicants need not apply.

This is fundamental to being God. If the god in question is not the maker of heaven and earth, then the god in question is not almighty, all-knowing, etc. If the God in question did make heaven and earth then He is by definition also almighty, all-knowing and all of the rest.

With this definition of God in mind we can easily identify the idol that modernity offers us. The idol that it offers is the fundamental forces of the universe which have brought the creation about to its present form.

That is a strange idol. The reason that it is a strange idol is that it does not have a name. Modernity tries to pretend that it is not worshipping anything much less worshipping something false. Because modernity is trying to pretend that it is not worshipping anything they do not give their idol a name. At least the ancients were more honest about the whole situation. When they worshipped an idol they told you so and gave it a name: Baal, Ra, Marduk, Set, Jupiter, Zeus, Poseidon, Molech, etc.

If I may for the sake of simplicity say that the forces with which modernity has replaced God are the forces of physics, geology, chemistry, and biology. These forces are responsible according to modernity for the world as we find it. They are responsible for our existence and for the existence of all things as they are. Because modernity makes these forces responsible for the way that things are, they make these forces responsible for the creation. One cannot make anything responsible for the creation without also making it a creator. Once these forces are the creator of all things as we find them, then these forces are god even if you deny that is so.

With its false god modernity has developed a metanarrative wherein modernity explains where everything came from and where everything is going and what our place in everything is. When modernity does that, it replaces the Bible which is God's way of doing the same thing. The Bible tells us where everything came from, where it is going, and what our place in everything is. Modernity has replaced that with alternative explanations in which they use physical, geological, chemical, and biological forces to explain where we came from, where we are going and what our place is in it. Thus modernity has made these forces into god. It is an idol. It is not the true and living God. The true and living God has revealed Himself in Christ Jesus and modernity has no room for Christ Jesus.

In spite of the fact that modernity claims that these forces are not god and that modernity claims that it is not doing religion, modernity cannot escape the fact that it is doing religion. This can be seen in the popular presentations of modernity's false metanarrative. Every time the forces of physics, geology, chemistry, and biology are used to explain everything which is more than they can explain modernity personifies them. In other words these forces are just that: forces. They are not persons. And yet moderns will still talk about the design of living things. What they mean is the design that these forces have built into living things which they call evolution. Nevertheless any talking about design implies a designer. A designer is a person. Since they insist that these forces designed living things the way that they are, they have personified those forces. They have to personify them because they have an idol and any false god replaces the true and living God and since the true and living God is a person, the only way to replace Him is to replace Him with a person.

I have heard evolutionists say that the womb is designed to be a one passenger compartment. This particular medical doctor was talking about the risks associated with twins and triplets. Then once she said that on the radio she quickly added, "Designed by evolution."

I have heard historians explain the grasslands of the high plains as nature's way of solving the problem of dirt blowing around and when the farmers went in and ploughed it all up it led to the dust bowl of the 1930s. I must ask why would nature care whether or not dirt blew around? If nature is composed of nothing other than non-personal forces then it should not have viewed dirt blowing around as a problem to be solved much less described as that which solved it. But that is how moderns speak. They speak of these things as if they are living persons designing and affecting how we live.

That is to be expected. The reason is because they have replaced the true and living God with these forces and when you replace the true and living God with something else you have an idol. Idols have to be persons because the only thing that can replace a person is a person.

Thus modernity has an idol. It is the fundamental forces of the universe that arose from the alleged Big Bang. Moderns bow down to this god claiming that it or they are the maker of all things.

Now here is the weird thing about idolatry. It always leads to fornication.

In the category of fornication let us include adultery, promiscuity, premarital or extramarital sex, pornography use, homosexuality and the like. That is fornication.

Idolatry always leads to fornication.

Take the golden calf example from last Sunday's sermon. The people of Israel built the golden calf contrary to the Word of the Lord. They worshipped it and held a festival to it and Aaron even tried to call it the Lord. They ascribed their salvation out of Egypt to it. And then the people sat down to eat and to drink and got up to play. In Hebrew the Word play implies fornication. It is the same word that is used to describe what Isaac is doing to Rebekah when Abimelech figures out that Rebekah is not Isaac's sister, but rather Isaac's wife. Whatever it was that Isaac was doing with Rebekah when Isaac "played" with her, Abimelech saw it and said, "Hey, she's not your sister! She's your wife! Why did you lie to us?" In English we have a word with an archaic usage although some of the older members may remember this usage and that is the word "sport." In English sport can mean football, basketball, baseball, etc. and it can also mean fornication where a man sports a woman. An older member of the congregation who is now passed away told me that when he was a boy there were places in Danville describing as sporting districts. You can guess what went on there. So Israel builds an idol, worships it, and the next thing you know they are ignoring God's institution of marriage and committing all kinds of fornication.

The same thing is true in modernity. As soon as we replaced God with the elemental forces of the universe we began to indulge in fornication.

Carl Sagan in the 1980 published a book entitled *Cosmos*. In that book he describes the different planets of the universe. Somewhere in the middle of describing the planets and the galaxies he makes one ethical statement. He indicates that young people in the 1980s should be liberated by the sexual mores of the past. By that he meant that young people should no longer be required to follow God's laws and be virgins when they marry for the first time, rather they should be free to experiment sexually. The reason that he gave was that modernity has

discovered ways of preventing pregnancies and therefore the old sexual mores which were designed to provide for the upbringing of children were no longer necessary. Fascinating. In a book where he describes how the fundamental forces of the universe such as physics, geology, chemistry, and biology brought about the universe as we see it, he also advocates for promiscuity!

Eta Linnemann in her book *Historical Criticism* points out how modernity has taught us that the Bible does not have any authority. That is not surprising. If modernity replaced God with the elemental forces of the universe and replaced the explanation of the universe for the fundamental forces which themselves arose from the hypothesized Big Bang then it should not be surprising when modernity looks at the book that describes the true and living God and how He brought everything about and dismiss it as having no authority. This type of biblical research is still popular in Germany where Eta Linnemann is from. In fact James Voelz formerly of the Saint Louis seminary before his retirement a few years ago pointed out that German biblical scholars still have as their first question when they read any narrative passage of the Bible, "What really happened?" They don't believe that the Bible tells you what really happened. They think you have to figure out what really happened and then explain the evolutionary processes that led from what really happened to what the Bible actually says. Eta Linnemann also points out that in the 1990s these same European universities had large budgets devoted to research in the area of contraceptives. She laments that with all of the other medical problems that our research money could go to so much is and was spent on contraceptives. They are still coming out with new contraceptives in our own day. The need for contraceptives is obvious. It allows fornication without children.

The elder Dr. Scaer from our Fort Wayne seminary has pointed out that when it comes to liberal social values, it is the Sixth Commandment that gets targeted. All modern people still believe that the government should enforce laws against murder with the notable exception of abortion. Moderns still believe that the government should enforce laws against stealing. In a constitutional republic like ours we have freedom of speech and freedom of the press and yet our modern society still enforces laws against slander and libel. It is only when it comes to sexual immorality that modernity advocates for license. And that is to be expected when one is worshipping an idol. Israel worshipped an idol and engaged in fornication not just the golden calf but throughout her history in the Old Testament. When we commit fornication it is because we are worshipping an idol also. We fear and love and trust in something or someone more than we fear, love, and trust in God and that is why we fornicate, why we commit adultery, why we use pornography, why we engage in homosexuality, why we are promiscuous, why we were not virgins when we got married.

Let us make no mistake about it. It is not some little commandment that we are violating. It is the big commandment. We are modern people even if we try to deny it and we have another god.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.