

Every Carnal Man's PhD

“Those who fashion a graven image are all of them futile, and their precious things are of no profit; even their own witnesses fail to see or know, so that they will be put to shame...the craftsmen themselves are mere men...The man shapes iron into a cutting tool and does his work over the coals, fashioning it with hammers and working it with his strong arm...He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow...Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast and is satisfied...the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, “Deliver me, for you are my god,” Isaiah 44:9-17.

Idolatry is when someone has any other god than the one revealed in Scripture. The God of heaven and earth revealed Himself in the Son, Jesus the Christ, many years ago. He is the triune God who long ago redeemed Israel. He is the *only* God, Isaiah 43:10. He is the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is known through the Bible alone. The Bible is His word to mankind. When a person is an idolater, he or she is most often in direct worship of a demon, Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Corinthians 10:20. A “carnal” man, in the context of non-believers, is anyone not born again by the Holy Spirit, i.e. a non-Christian. Idolatry, in the main channel of thought in this letter, is anything that inspires the pseudo-creation of false gods. Since such things represent a lie, they are not from God. It is the work of devils and the demonic influence. Friends, people are idolaters today on an unprecedented scale. Both inside and outside of the church, people are making up gods. This is a violation of God's commandment. To understand a bit about why can help the Christian to sharpen the weapons of his warfare, and also direct his vigil to the breaches in the walls of his own life as well, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

A friend once gave me a book that was written by his father, a long time missionary to the cannibal islands of New Guinea back around the 1960s. The book recounts some of the events in the lives of the brave men and women who gave their all to bring the gospel to the natives on that difficult mission field. The book is called *Confession of a Cannibal*. In it, Lovstrand tells the story of an amateur former sorcerer who confessed to murdering the daughter of an elder in his church by stabbing an incanted image of her that had been demonically conjured inside a glass of water. In the story this man was paying another man to teach him black magic in order to take revenge on this elder who had wronged him some time before. The junior sorcerer, in his ignorance, was terrified yet momentarily seduced by the power made available to him by the devil. It did not last long in his life, and in fact, the man was converted to Christ not long after. The elder recalling the story to Mr. Lovstrand in the book was the father of the girl who'd been slain. He was instrumental in the murderer's conversion, and even though it was hard, he freely forgave him for everything.

The church elder telling the story to Mr. Lovestrand was an easterner. He asked several questions before beginning the story like: “Do you think that I’m crazy,” or, “Have you ever known me to lie to you in all these years?” Mr. Lovestrand, you see, was a westerner. Even though they had known each other for some time, the elder felt that he had to somehow first remind or otherwise establish some credibility with his western friend before telling him the story. He did this because he knew that we westerners are not often accustomed to such demonic manifestations and the kinds of things he described. Jesus often commanded demons to come out of people, Mark 9:17-27; Luke 8:30-33; Matthew 8:16. Even though most of us have not encountered such manifestations, to deny that such power can be manifest is an affront to the credibility of Christ. The demonic realm is still very real, and is all around us. Demonic activity like we see in Jesus’ day, or that which Mr. Lovestrand wrote of, is very easy to identify. You see it coming from a mile away. Among us here in the west, however, it’s often a bit tougher to identify the works of a demon.

Reading this book has me thinking of how the demons operate in the world I live in. I personally have seen demons before my very eyes on more than one occasion. Many have not. Most have not. Excluding such minor incidents, it is the normal operation of the satanic realm in our land that’s on my mind here.

In the east (like New Guinea) especially in the more rural regions, it seems that the demons operate somewhat differently than they do here *for the most part*. We westerners think that it’s all superstition when we read stories such as what Lovestrand was told. We think this only because we’re deceived by devils. I believe it was Charles Baudelaire who first said that, “The greatest trick the devil ever played was convincing the world that he did not exist.” In our day many in our land are too “smart” to acknowledge the works of Satan. This is exactly how he wants it. In fact, such guerilla warfare is the fundamental decisive operation in his new world line of effort. There is no definitive geographical code of conduct in the demonic realm, but in a general sense it just seems that the demons among us here in the west have a very different (perhaps even more effective) strategy for destroying lives. Instead of physical demonstration, the demons here are more bureaucratic. They’re paper pushers. Instead of possessing the son of one peasant to terrify a town here, they energize with evil ideals the leader of a state. Instead of the outright shock and awe campaigns of the shaman in the hills, it’s the smiling uncle with a message of a false peace through a false god that they use here. Such differences in their operational stratagem have been corroborated by many westerners who’ve been east doing Christian work. In many places it’s still just outright possession; here it is more academic, tasteful or crafty. You could say that many demons outside our land still operate a bit more like what we see when we open the pages of the Bible. Here in the west I think that the devils of the land have taken on a wholly different, though still identifiable, *modus operandi*. In his classic work *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis writes well about what I have in mind. I think that if we recognize it, it will help us to

remember our only effective tool against such powerful works- the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why I'm writing this letter.

The demons here lie exceptionally well, poetically, intelligently, secularly and exhaustively. It's one thing when a demon inspires a poem, but it's even more chilling when one inspires an entire volume of books or an entire religion. Many people, albeit sometimes unbeknownst to them, have PhDs in demonology. The devils here lie even when there seems to be no advantage to it. They don't care for credit or glory. They favor the hat of "seducer" or "enlightener" rather than that of the dragon. Many of the demonic lies are actually so diluted by us that they can actually come across as Christian ideals, and some of their deceptions even claim to be Christian. As long as it's not the true faith in the true God it's false. Please remember in all this that, "...Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light," 2 Corinthians 11:14. I wrote about this from a different angle in my letter *Satan's isms* as well. The devils here, through distorted worldviews, seduce the weary and create a sort of stupor or dream world from which their captives (of which we all once were) do not wish to wake. They stroke desires and create ego cathedrals for many false gods. Most often these "gods" are really just ghostly images of their makers.

Here in the west it is a subtle idolatry that seems to be the drug of choice. Idolatry is the opiate of *our* masses. We are not religious; we're "spiritual" people. Yeah right. What we are is idolatrous, and this is nothing new, Ecclesiastes 1:9. We're not mere helpless victims in all this; along with the demons, we're also the perpetrators. I might even go so far as to narrow much of our twenty-first century idolatry to covetousness. Coveting, forbidden by the tenth commandment, has well been called, "the spark to the flame of all sin." Before I steal, I covet what I'm stealing. Before I lust, I covet her, etc. Covetousness, Scripture literally says, "...is idolatry," Colossians 3:5 (NKJV). The NASB translates this Greek word for covetousness (*pleonexia*) as "greed." We here in the west are very greedy people, aren't we? We are a people for whom privilege has become right, and I am a product of my time. This has been worked against us. Throughout all of history this has been the downfall of many. Plenty seems to always foster idolatry, Amos 6:1-7. This is truer now than ever before. We expect a great deal in life, don't we? In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis writes an insightful treatise from the perspectives of two demons. It is a very interesting book and describes what I feel is indeed the tactics of many devils in the "advanced" societies, like ours, of the world today. The letters are a correspondence between a junior demon named Wormwood, and a senior demon named Screwtape. In one place Screwtape writes, "Whatever men expect, they soon come to think they have a right to; the sense of disappointment can, with very little skill on our part, be turned into a sense of injury." In many ways it is simply our own spoiled natures that cause us to divine many of our false gods, and to turn away from whatever we know of the true God. We want gods who'll give us (or tell us) whatever we want and so we

turn to them, 2 Timothy 4:3. Hence we have the word of faith religion or prosperity gospel so prolific in our land.

Scripture says, “You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God,” James 4:4. As enemies of God, 1 John 2:16 describes my people well. If I were to pick a single word to best describe who and what God is I’d use the word “Holy.” If I had to pick a word to best describe all that is evil in my culture (and sadly even my church) today I would use the word “worldly.” Our idolatry is a byproduct of our worldliness, and we in the advanced world are very worldly indeed. Much of this directly influences the creation of the false gods in our day. Lewis says elsewhere in the same book quoted above that, “Prosperity knits a man to the world. He feels that is ‘finding his place in it,’ while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of really being at home on Earth, which is just what we want.” A land like ours that is so full of the pursuit of anything *but* righteousness is dangerous for a great majority of us. It quickly becomes a breeding ground for already idolatrous minds to open up to a demonic influence. Christian thoughts are utterly alien to the lives of 80 to 90 percent of the people I meet daily. For them it can be like learning a new language to discuss the Bible. Men are supposed to find their contentment in Christ. Anything or anyone else will simply not do. Augustine said it well: “Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” Instead of this, people often try to find contentment in *what they do*. This breeds greed because there’s always more to do. People in our culture nowadays are not at all defined by who they are before God; rather they’re defined only by what they do. Instead of being in the image of God first, we’re lawyers, soldiers, bankers or whatever. The only origin for our greed and non-self-awareness is the fall of Adam. It’s not new; it just takes new shapes in new generations. In our day it’s a *whoever has the most toys wins* kind of thing.

It’s more than just a greedy appetite though. Our idolatry is more treacherous than just that. We’ve truly become people, as one author said, who’ve been “educated into imbecility.” We literally feel we’re smart enough to create or re-create God. It has well been said that if a devil can’t get you in your weaknesses, he’ll get you in your strengths. This is very true I think, and we are very smart. We are experts at electronics and agriculture, and masterful market researchers yet most of us cannot name the Ten Commandments. In short, we are very distracted. Our distraction in life is another fundamental to the demonic plan used against us in the advanced world. Because we are only concerned with the things of this world we’re no heavenly good and only major in the minors. The overwhelming majority of Americans could not even name half of the Ten Commandments, the standard by which their own judgment will soon be pronounced. Most of us have not sat under one solid hour of biblical instruction in our

lives. We (humans) design little gadgets that keep the heart pumping, which is great. We design supersonic airplanes and internet technologies that have even within my own lifetime literally changed everything! When I was growing up there was no World Wide Web. I can't even imagine such a barbaric age anymore! We are wonderful builders of many things that are not often at all bad in and of themselves. There's a cost, though, my friends. We have quickly forgotten what makes us God's highest creatures, and cannot entertain ourselves in a room alone for an hour.

We are masterful idolaters, but not exactly like those mentioned at the outset of this letter by Isaiah. We design our gods in ways and at rates in which the world has never before seen. Today we sit on the heels of the 18th century enlightenment and the advent of the industrial age. Mankind as a whole has changed. We now have more talents with which to create our false gods. Think for a moment back to the artwork of the Egyptians of so long ago. Have you ever looked at their paintings? Consider one of them, and then place it in your mind next to the paintings of a Michelangelo or Rembrandt. Look at how the skill of art itself has grown. Was there no one in 1450 B.C. who could paint like Michelangelo? Was it a matter only of materials? Of time available? Everything develops, it seems, both for the bad and good. Sin and idolatry are sadly the same way. We are much better at them. Idolatry is much more ornate these days. Because of the advanced era in which we live, we can take the thoughts and words of the greatest of thinkers and do whatever we wish with them. Our gods are our ideas. This has in turn changed the face of evil among us. The Scriptures call idolatry foolish. The man in view in the passage from Isaiah quoted at the outset of this letter is a dumb fool. He, Scripture says, is as dumb (unable to speak) as his idol. That's many people today. They're just as dumb as that guy was. Somehow though, their idolatry manages to look better. It's usually dressed up a whole lot nicer.

Most especially from the sex and drug revolution of the 1960s in the west was born a demonic culture unlike any other. Thinking for yourself is the new motto. "Do what thou wilt..." is literally the written creed of ardent Satanists. In our culture we are "free" thinkers. Many are in the more advanced world. This is not to say that people in other places less fortunate are not, but I know best what I see. While individual thought has flowered in the past few centuries, what have become more abundantly clear to me these days are the weeds left to grow alongside it all. No one would ever pull out the weeds because no one claims the authority to do so. As a consequence, people can now just "invent" religion as they see fit. We're masters of it. We are doctors of it. This is the long sought work of the demons in our land. Mostly our idolatry today is shown in our universalism or an *all roads lead to God* kind of thinking. Nobody really believes that all religions teach the same thing, but you hear it *all the time*. This is idolatry. In our ignorance we have created a mishmash image of a god-thing in heaven that incorporates the views of everyone. Baha'ism and the Free Mason movement religiously encapsulate this collective idolatry well. Such things are the result of people who 1) hate the Biblical

Jesus, 2) couldn't really care less because their lives are about the pursuit of anything but God, and 3) who have not spent more than a day in their lives in an honest investigation of what religions really teach. In the darkness of ignorance alone do the false gods of our day shine. We're not "free" thinkers. We're thinkers in bondage being led as cattle to slaughter. Steve Turner wrote a rather comical poem called *Creeds*. It describes many of the people I meet day to day very well. He wrote:

We believe in Marxfreudanddarwin.
We believe everything is OK
as long as you don't hurt anyone,
to the best of your definition of hurt,
and to the best of your knowledge.

We believe in sex before, during
and after marriage.
We believe in the therapy of sin.
We believe that adultery is fun.
We believe that sodomy's OK.
We believe that taboos are taboo.

We believe that everything's getting better
despite evidence to the contrary.
The evidence must be investigated.
You can prove anything with evidence.

We believe there's something in horoscopes,
UFO's and bent spoons;
Jesus was a good man just like Buddha
Mohammed and ourselves.
He was a good moral teacher although we think
his good morals were bad.

We believe that all religions are basically the same,
at least the one that we read was.
They all believe in love and goodness.
They only differ on matters of
creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation.

We believe that after death comes The Nothing
because when you ask the dead what happens

they say nothing.
If death is not the end, if the dead have lied,
then it's compulsory heaven for all
excepting perhaps Hitler, Stalin and Genghis Khan.

We believe in Masters and Johnson.
What's selected is average.
What's average is normal.
What's normal is good.

We believe in total disarmament.
We believe there are direct links between
warfare and bloodshed.
Americans should beat their guns into tractors
and the Russians would be sure to follow.

We believe that man is essentially good.
It's only his behavior that lets him down.
This is the fault of society.
Society is the fault of conditions.
Conditions are the fault of society.

We believe that each man must find the truth
that is right for him.
Reality will adapt accordingly.
The universe will readjust. History will alter.
We believe that there is no absolute truth
excepting the truth that there is no absolute truth.

We believe in the rejection of creeds.

Postscript:
If chance be the Father of all flesh,
disaster is his rainbow in the sky,
and when you hear
State of Emergency!
Sniper Kills Ten!
Troops on Rampage!
Whites go Looting!
Bomb Blasts School!

It is but the sound of man worshipping his maker.

Since the fall of Adam, mankind has gotten progressively better at sinning, Romans 1, and sin in its global sense has had a cumulative effect on us all. While our fathers five millennia ago inherited an idolatrous landscape that could not be built in one generation, ours could not be built inside five millennia. Our gods couldn't happen overnight. With demonic inspiration, we are now PhD level idolaters on earth. Humanity as a whole has long had to labor to construct a generation as adept at the evil of idolatry as we. We are a very different people from all those before us, and the rate at which we've morphed is unprecedented. Between the time before the 1900s and after, you can literally divide the world into two categories. For thousands of years men rode horses or chariots; what did you ride in today? For thousands of years men beat drums or sent smoke signals to talk over long distances. What gadgetry is in your pocket? Today we have lasers that can cut metal or shape your eyeball, and machines that can view your veins without your bones. We can put satellites into space and view the world from the vantage of angels. As we have changed, we have attempted to change the immutable One along with us. Oh, how the world has changed and how we have changed with it! Our gods are instant and spontaneous phantoms. They're ideas that have never been given an elemental form. Our gods are so fluid. We need not enshrine them any longer to believe they're there. In this we find a false sense of awe because of their pretended mysterious and aloof natures. Truly we just couldn't define them if we tried. The false gods of many before us were specific. They had names, boundaries and origins. They were made of iron, wood, gold or stone. Ours, however, *must* be more mobile. They must be more easily morphed if we change our...excuse me, if whatever it is were to communicate something new to us. We need apparitions. In ancient times men were at least under their false gods; today, many feel that their god is whatever they make him to be. We need gods of play dough therefore. We need to be able to remove a limb, add a truth, subtract a dogma, create a mantra and change a sex, whatever, and all on the fly. We feel that we have far too much information on God to bind it in a text. We absolutely *cannot* have the Bible. Ideas never really established, but only lazily surmised, work great in this milieu. The gods of many today are ideas, videos, and sound bites strung together by nothing more than the inventive processes of a fallen human brain. They are figments of imagination. They are memories of our childhood, the scent of a young girl mixed with the emotions of our first day of school and coupled with the TV show we saw on the ancient religions of South America. We think that God is in our experiences. Our god never really takes shape and so becomes next to impossible to identify. The idolaters at Babel were unified in their idolatry; we in the west are only unified in our collective overload of ideological fancy. Anything goes! We don't know what's true. No one does. In fact, claiming ignorance in front of our play dough gods is perhaps what makes us most pleasing in their sight. We are too "humble" to know for sure what they think, and

we're sure of that. We are a people sure of ourselves, but unsure about what we believe in. Beloved, it was always supposed to be the other way around.

We are a people with "private" religions. What this often translates into are beliefs that obviously mean nothing to us. Jesus did not have a private faith, and neither can His disciples.

We may not all have seen the things in Scripture regarding demonic manifestations or black magic, but we have seen the works of demons. We have not all been to rituals in the animistic regions of Africa, South America, Russia, New Guinea or Asia, but we have interfaced with our share of devils. The demons in the west, while they may operate in a wholly different arena, still operate. We must understand this. We would have to explain to our eastern friends in the faith that we're not crazy when we tell them about the evils of our land. We would find ourselves saying things like, "Have you ever known me to be insane? You're not going to believe this, but where I come from there are people who actually believe we're the descendants of monkeys. Seriously." We would have to explain how we exalt cinema and call its sick perversities neutral because they're not real. We would have difficulty explaining how our people, "Flock to movie theaters by the tens of millions to see sequels about mass murdering cannibalistic aristocrats (*The Silence of the Lambs*) while, of course, not condoning that lifestyle choice." They'd be incredulous. In the end, no matter where you are, the result of evil is the same- bondage, misery, death, and hell. Whether you've seen a man's eyes roll back in his head while he levitated, or simply had your loving grandmother tell you that all religions ultimately lead to God as Masonry taught your grandfather, you've seen the devil at work. In the end it produces the same cold, lifeless and hate-filled mob that would cry out in a satanically swayed rage, "His blood shall be on us and on our children!" Matthew 27:25. This would happen to Jesus again on Wall Street, Pennsylvania Avenue or in Mineral Ridge, OH, today just as it did then. If God's time of earthly incarnation was 2002 then we'd simply have a much lower A.D. today. It chills my blood to hear people just spout out idolatrous things beginning with the phrase, "Jesus, to me, is like..." without a cringe of reservation. Their god(s) tells them this is ok. They make up divine truths *as they go*.

We call the right of each person to make up a god as you see fit "freedom." Alcoholics Anonymous, a program which has no doubt done a lot of good in our world, has had since 1927 the ludicrous mantra, "be at peace with God, whatever you conceive him to be." This is idolatry. No god can suit us all, we reason, so of course he would have us to create him as we see fit. This violates the second of God's Ten Commandments, which is idolatry. God says we dare not make a god to suit ourselves. It is what the devils want.

There is so much information rattling around in our craniums today. Our gods are conjured up and coupled together in instantaneous and amazingly complex ways. I once witnessed to a long established Wiccan priest who told me how he'd trodden the astral

plane of the universe and seen people worshipping all the gods that they had created. He came across scores of people bowing down to Elvis, Jesus, Allah, Oprah, etc. He said that that's how it works. If someone, or most often more than one person, creates a god then it literally comes to life "out there." I was not impressed with his idolatry. I know how the brain works, and I know its potential for good and evil. The IBM supercomputer "Deep Blue" that finally defeated chess master Garry Kasparov around 1997 was an incredible machine. It was designed to play a man in a game. Here's part of what we know about "Watson:" It was powered by 10 racks of Power 750 servers running Linux, containing 15 terabytes of RAM and 2,880 processor cores operating at an unbelievable 80 teraflops. Each Power 7 system could run thousands of simultaneous analytical algorithms to sift through more than 15 terabytes (about 200 million pages) of information stored in Watson's "brain." This machine could go through about one million text books in less than three seconds to make a confident chess move. Amazing! Yet next to the human brain it's just a big abacus. It cannot tell you how it feels (because it has no feelings) it cannot make a baby, heal its wounds, feel laughter, play an instrument, grow a farm, have an ethic, eat, love its maker or even recharge itself. Humans can do all this by noon. Disconnect "it" from its battery or power source and it's a heavy wedge of silicon. Think of the supercomputer brain that developed it. Think of what a fallen human instrument like that can do if given enough raw data. Combine our vocabulary, fantasy fancy, greed, business, zero accountability/autonomy of opinion along with our fallen propensity towards idolatry and you've got yourself a devil's masterpiece. Give that creation a pretended free reign and look out. The "gods" can't even keep up (unless, of course, we design ones who we say can). Welcome to the "enlightened" age!

I'll never forget the story I heard some time ago on the news. I think it was in California. There was a school psychiatrist arguing her point about how a certain school's basketball team could *not* be changed to the "bullies." The school board and student body were looking to change the name of its team. She rallied her forces and managed to get the school to not change the name of the team to the bullies. She argued, because bullying is such a huge problem today, that the term just conjures up too much fear and negativity. A bully is a very negative thing, she said. Do you know what the school ended up changing the team's name to? The "devils!" No negativity there. That's what you call being "educated into imbecility."

We are like starving people at an ideological smorgasbord these days. Everyone has "an opinion" to offer on religion. Most people would not venture to speak intelligently on computers if they'd only spent a day on the subject. No one makes up ideas about who Plato is "to them." No one would take up the scalpel who'd only watched a Discovery Channel show or two on the E.R., yet when it comes to religion- everyone's an expert! I'll get to why I think so later. Who cares what we think? When it comes to divine absolutes, God doesn't! Jesus said, "**Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God,**" John 3:5b. Scripture says elsewhere in

Romans 12:2 that even Christians must no longer be, "...conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [the] mind..." Christians have to also be washed in their brains from this world's views. They must look to the Scriptures as only the holy Scriptures are, "...able to make [one] wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," 2 Timothy 3:15. Ideas are everywhere and the devils want everyone to think that their opinions about God are just as valid as anyone else's. It is a matter of conditioning and we are a new breed of idol craftsman. Ideas to us that seem reasonable overnight become life mottos. We look inward for truths rather than to Christ. *Because we're only looking inward* we can easily make dupes of ourselves by assuring ourselves of our logic all day long, all the while resisting all that God has made plain to us, Romans 1:19. Is this not then self-worship? Our gods come with stickers that read "assembly required" and so movie punch lines must become our philosophy. We're all a bit like Jim Carrey's character in the movie *the Cable Guy* who had, "Learned the facts of life by watching *the facts of life*." 99% of you who read this got that reference, and thus help establish my point. Bumper stickers define our worldviews, and tattoos show our alter egos. We can become absolutely sure of something because we saw it on National Geographic once, and we can now blog about it anonymously to a billion people. Idolatry is easy for us because it remains in the abstract world of thought and carnal speculation like most everything else. We work hard to suppress the truth of God in all this, and our culture gives us free reign to do so in privacy. Idolatry like ours is not possible just anywhere. You need a special place. You need a mystical place that has nothing certain to challenge your opinions. You need a place where everyone just wants to pursue happiness, and forget about "divisive people" like Jesus and His prophets. You need a place where wimpy "preachers" just want to make Jesus attractive to people and make the "gospel" more appealing to the lost, *as if that were possible*. You need a place where the only real sin is telling anyone that they're wrong or offending anyone. You can't just have tree huggers; you need idol huggers. You need a place where anything goes "As long as it doesn't hurt anyone" *except of course* if that someone is the God of Scripture, or the Christian who's offended by your sin of unbelief. You need a place where Bill Maher can actually have a TV show. That's our culture here in America. We have that magical place. We are fashioners of our own gods just like the man who uses part of the tree to warm himself as he bows to his god from the other end of the stick. The only difference between him and many of us today is that we have electricity for warmth. We are so out of touch with God's diagnosis of our hearts that we actually think our hearts are good even though God taught us the exact opposite, Matthew 15:18-19. We are like stubborn children who refuse the medicine of truth because we hate its taste. We are detached from reality because we have created a masterful false one in which we spend all of our time. Only the fake is appealing to our children now because that's all they know. If "in the beginning" was *not* the CGI enhanced animatronic fifty foot flying robot with an eternal soul that teaches me how to cast magical spells as the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy

written of me that makes me the hope of the gods while I travel back through time in a battle to save the universe and rescue the most beautiful girl in the world who's head over heels in love with me then many are not interested. Their life's meaning is only in whatever is *not* real. You know how you can tell that our culture is purely idolatrous? Look at what we watch on the big screen. Think on what characters always receive the exaltation. The glory is given only to men. We're the saviors of man. We're the ones who find peace at the end. We're the ones whose egos are stroked as we receive the prize. We're the humble warriors. One the most absolutely fascinating and sociologically insightful movies on this topic for me was called *The Fountain*. It was released in 2006. If you want to see a prime example of idolatrous imagination, see this film. Man gets every single drop of the glory in this dreadful thing. This is usually the case, but this movie was extremely insightful. This is only one example. Giving the biblical God glory in anything is almost completely foreign to most of us. No, my friends, we may not see demons every day, but we live in a time that is the work of their hands. Things like cinema, educational irrationality, evolutionary fiction and postmodernal nonsense bear this out daily. We are a culture of people who've actually built our own individual or "private" Babel towers and idolatry is truly the carnal man's PhD.

I realize that when it comes to speaking about the influence of cinema and such in the lives of our people today that not everyone shares my past. For this I'm grateful. I nearly lived by proxy through the influence film had on me as a young man. I further realize, however, that while not everyone shares my background, that we have all been greatly influenced, whether directly or indirectly, by our "media" culture. I believe it was Fyodor Dostoevsky who said, "First art will imitate life, then life will imitate art, then life will find its very meaning from the arts." That's us. We are a people who are trying to be what we "think we see" others being. We want the things we think will make us better. The problem is that what we see most often simply isn't real. Those images with which we are bombarded are the arts or trades of other fallen people around us trained to sell them. The women on the magazines are nowhere near real, and the actors and actresses many worship are in rehab. Our politicians are crooks, and our favorite pitcher just went to jail again for beating his wife. In fact, the worst day of our lives for many of us would be the day we actually met our heroes because we'd realize they're not that special after all. Oz is only great behind the curtain. I suppose it was always this way. We are a people more aware of the temporal than the eternal, more enamored with stuff than with God. Sir Peter Ustinov said, "Since we are destined to live out our lives in the prison of our minds, our one duty is to furnish it well." We are about this task in a corrupt way, but beloved, there is something greater than all the opinions of man and devils. He is not of this world, but is its maker, John 8:23. Through the cunning craftiness and useless wranglings of fallen angels and men, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and

knowledge,” Colossians 2:8 & 3. In short, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols,” 1 John 5:21.

We who love Christ and love the lost, despite the changes and challenges of a culture like ours, must not abandon the simple preaching of the cross to save. An electronic Jesus will *not* save more people. The gospel will always remain “stupid,” 1 Corinthians 1:18, to those against God, but it is not stupid to flee from sin and Satan. The world *cannot* believe it (1 Corinthians 2:14) except by grace so preach primarily for an audience of one. God will have His way. Salvation is a sovereign work of God. Preach so that they might be saved. You cannot win them by your lifestyle; only Christ can win them. Let your lifestyle accompany a sound, consistent and loving proclamation and you’ll do well.

John Calvin (1509-1564) was one of the most brilliant lights in Christ’s church. He dealt, like all Christians, with the subject of idolatry in his own day. What I’m talking about today was going on in his day too; we’re just more advanced in it. We are indeed faced with new challenges in our defense of the faith today because there’s more information out there coupled with a cultural ideology of idolatrous ease, but there’s really nothing new under the sun when it comes to the sin of idolatry. Men were still men in Calvin’s day, and they waged war against God by their false gods. Calvin wrote the following words that describe exactly what I see today, and they didn’t even have the web:

Hence that immense flood of error with which the whole world is overflowed. Every individual mind being a kind of labyrinth, it is not wonderful, not only that each nation has adopted a variety of fictions, but that almost every man has had his own god. To the darkness of ignorance have been added presumption and wantonness, and hence there is scarcely an individual to be found without some idol or phantom as a substitute for Deity. Like water gushing forth from a large and copious spring, immense crowds of gods have issued from the human mind, every man giving himself full license, and devising some peculiar form of divinity, to meet his own views. *The Institutes* 1.5.

God is *not* ok with idolatry, Exodus 20:3; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8. Have you warned them? If not, then you don’t care about them. When was the last time you told someone that God was going to destroy them for their beliefs? It is a horrible sin to be a non-Christian, and while I am deeply and personally offended by people who are not Christians, I would see them saved. I will tell them what I have to. Will you?

We have forsaken God in our culture. We’re not the only nation that’s done it, no, but we’re now leaders in the field. With all that’s good and what I love about America, there is a cost to our freedom and prosperity. People in our culture are hostile against Christ in astonishing ways. This is because of our idolatrous world. Let me give you some evidence. The Bible says that no one is good, not even one person among us,

Romans 3:9-12. Go and talk to strangers. Ask them if they think they're good? The near total majority will answer quickly that "yes" they are a good person. Then tell that same "good person" that they're not good according to God's standards. Tell them they must be born again. Give them the law of God, the Ten Commandments. Show them their sin and watch them evidence a hostile resentment to the message of Jesus. He's offensive to them. Just hold up Bible verses for them. Do it caringly and you'll see that your tone is not the issue. They hate Christ. He assured us this would happen, John 15:18-19. You will see John 3:19-20 and their hatred of light behind their half smiling and half twitching faces. Push it enough (enough often being about one minute) and they might crucify you. Love them still. You will not be invited to parties. You will not win elections. You will not likely be the next four-star general. I've witnessed to the nicest of people. Great co-workers that I'd worked with for years, and the hour after we talked about Jesus they would not even look up at me from the table to say hello anymore. Others would go and report me to the boss like a thief or a pervert. Why? It's because I dared to challenge them and their gods even if at appropriate times and manners. I would not help them stand their Dagon up after God cast him down. They hate the truth and this is the manifestation of something lying just beneath the surface. It is camouflaged, but it's not far below the brush. It is sin, the same old thing. The gospel exposes it. It is why a true Christian will *always* offend many people, 2 Corinthians 2:16.

Idolatry in our land and in our time is a tricky thing. Identifying it does not mean that we can defeat it with mere words. God has not chosen the wisdom of this world or the "wise" of it, 1 Corinthians 1:26. This letter is not about some new strategy, but a reiteration of Christ's strategy. We must preach the gospel because that's His choice, 1 Corinthians 1:21. We must love it over ourselves, our children, in our churches, and on the streets. That gospel will never change! It's still the forgiveness of sins...and then all that may go along with it. Men who do not desire truth will never desire Christ.

Idolatry has always been hard, but today it's extra hard. Here's why I think so. Here's why I say that idolatry is every carnal (or non-Christian) man's PhD: Let's say that you're an electrical engineer who has designed some new hydro-electrical propulsion engine for an automobile. You alone know its design. Let's say you've spent twenty years designing and patenting it. Who would know that design better than you? Who could correct you on its design? Answer: no one. Similarly, if you have built your own god, how can I ever convince you that you're wrong? You've designed it, and have been at that design for as long as you could be. You know it's every detail and things about it that no one else ever could, and you are proud of it. That's the difficulty with idolatry in our day. It is designed, and no one knows the design of each man's own "personal deity" better than the hand that first began to shape it over the coals. The demons assure their makers that they're right. It's a combination of information available and the bad-ole fashioned idolatrous mind that make idolatry a difficult enemy. Because information and the growth of lies have grown exponentially with time, idolatry is *more idolatrous* today.

Brethren, no amount of apologetics, no fine articulations, and no amount of kindness can change people; only the grace of God can truly change people, and cause them to detest their idols and toss them into the fire. Do the former without forgetting the latter. Rest in this as you're going: God must give men life before they can perceive truth. God gives life *and then* men believe, 2 Corinthians 4:6. We must faithfully preach the message of life in Christ's name.

It's always difficult to battle idolatry, but today, perhaps unlike ever before, it seems doubly difficult. As I move to close, I'll give you two reasons why I think this is so. First, idolaters are often sincere. I know that I was once an idolater. I had a fake Jesus. My Jesus was alright with fornication, looked favorably upon my greedy plans, didn't mind my perverse speech, hated lying (but excused me for it because he knew my heart), and had nothing to offer black aborigines because they couldn't relate to him, and so was only one way among many to heaven. That is a false Jesus, but I somewhat loved him. I prayed to him, thanked him when I was "blessed," called out to him when I hurt, and thought I heard his cryptic messages to me in my life all the time. I had a relationship with that fictitious being, and my prayers never passed the ceiling. He was an imaginary friend. I created him in my own image, and He hated it. He was a combination of Sun Tzu, Radha, some Bible stories, what I saw in the mirror, and a few hundred Hollywood or musical philosophies. I could not define him any more than I could hear from him, but no one could tell me I was wrong. He was what "worked for me" because I was his maker. The second reason it's tough to battle idolatry today is because many of the idolaters in our land are behind pulpits, and know Bible verses. It was Leonard Ravenhill who said, "The Bible suffers more today from its exponents than its opponents." There are many false prophets who smile a lot, and are very well respected. It's hard to battle the demonic influence when the proponent of it feeds the poor. It's hard to battle idolatry like this as we see it here in our culture. The battle must be waged nonetheless, and we must be wise, Matthew 7:15.

Today, information is everywhere. Worldviews are communicated fifty times a day on commercials alone. Music and culture, like never before, have a tremendous influence. Ideas that may have at one time been very hard to search out, like Gandhi's view on marriage, for example, are available in milliseconds on *Google* with 100,000 resultant hits. Consequently, I see unrestrained ideas going into the brains of our people and swirling into a terribly ugly idolatry. It is deeply rooted. Being aware of it can help to focus us back on the simple truths of the gospel. We must preach repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ, Acts 20:19-20. We must meet our western devils head on. We must preach the ageless glories of the gospel in the ears of our fellow westerners without asking them to judge it as if there was any option at all that it was not true. They are not the judges of truth.

The devils in our day stand on the shoulders of their own giants. They have indeed inspired many philosophers, "scientists," song writers, "preachers," religionists,

politicians, professors, movie stars and poets of the past and present who did not or do not love Jesus. This world as it now stands is theirs. They have created a milieu of idolatry among us unlike anything that went before. Being aware of it can cause us as believers to examine our own selves, 1) to see what influence of it may yet linger in our own brains, and 2) to cause us to rest in the message of the cross against it all. We'll do this once we see that man's ideas can only beget more of man's ideas. We are not philosophers who are in Christ. We may philosophize, but no, we are theologians who love the Scriptures. We are not professionals, we are disciples. Let the devils operate as they may; wherever we find them, we will share the message of the cross.

The Apostle Paul, I believe, was a brilliant man. He knew several languages fluently, was well versed in culture and tradition, was trained by very celebrated teachers in his day, was well travelled, could quote from the poets of the ancient world in his discourses, knew his way around formal proceedings, and was born a citizen of the most powerful nation the world had known at the time yet when he preached he preached a seeming fool's message. Listen to his candor. As you read the passage, take measure of what's being said here. Look closely at your wasting world. You are outnumbered. Take in all the opinions of men who've come and gone. Take measure of the false prophets among us now. Take measure of the false religions that swirl and whirl to conjure up false gods through the minds of the idolatrous. Think of the collective cacophony of prayers that must rise as a foul stench in the nostrils of God. Consider the *impossible task* of changing it in the least, and then take heart. Consider well the words of perhaps the greatest descendant of Adam who ever lived: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God," 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. We are not Apostles, but the gospel power wielded by the lips of the feeblest witness this day is no less phenomenal than that present the day God created the heavens and the earth. We speak wisdom, vv. 6-7, it's just that fools don't hear us.

Go and demonstrate that power. The demons will fall and the idols will crumble. It doesn't matter if you're in the remotest of jungles of New Guinea or the largest city in the most advanced world, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever," Isaiah 40:8. Let the world grow more and more wise *in its own opinions*, you preach the cross. Let the devils philosophize, you preach the cross. Preach the message of the cross. Learn it, pray about it. Determine to do so. Tell the world you live in to repent and trust in Christ. Give them the message of the cross. "...it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes," Romans 1:16, and no devil can defeat it.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.