



Links Players

IDOLS | COUNTERFEIT GODS

*For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
(1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)*

Even if you are only tangentially familiar with the culture of golf, you have heard players referring to the “golf gods.” When your partner hits a beautiful shot that hits a sprinkler head and ends up out of bounds, you might hear him exhale, “The gods of golf; I’m cursed again!”

If you’re a Westerner, you probably laughed or instinctively dismissed it as just figurative speech. After all, no one believes the gods interfere with our shots, right?

You are in the middle of the fairway with a five-iron into the green. The strike is pure; the compression was perfect. The ball’s flight blends with the pin. Then, out of nowhere, it hits the pin and ricochets into the water hazard left of the green. You are speechless.

This is completely unpredictable; the laws of physics can’t explain what just happened. No natural explanation suffices. So, you turn to otherworldly explanations—the “golf gods demanded a sacrifice.”

Assuming you’ve spent most of your life in America, knowingly or unknowingly, you’ve been led to believe that “gods” do not actually exist; rather, that’s just language we use when things happen that defy explanation, and so we default to “mythic stuff.”

Certainly, any familiarity with societies prior to the Enlightenment, whether in the East or West, would reveal a strong belief in a world that encompassed both visible and invisible realities—God, angels, and demons were definitive parts of both educated and uneducated cultures.

As C. S. Lewis reminds us, thinking that our current society is wiser than cultures in earlier centuries is “chronological snobbery”—just because we arrived later doesn’t mean what we believe is true.

Countless scholars across many fields in the last two hundred years now acknowledge that “the inevitability of progress” was a myth. While it is true that many advances have been made in medicine and technology, life remains as perplexing to our generation as it was to those of the past.

When we bring up the topic of idols or gods in our modern world, it usually rolls its figurative eyes as if to say, “Don’t give me any of your superstitious nonsense.”

Even if our “enlightened” neighbors never say it out loud, you can hear them thinking, “Wait a minute! I don’t bow down before carved wood or stone. I don’t pray or light candles to the PGA. I don’t worship my career, stock portfolio, or political party.”

The brilliant, tormented, and late David Foster Wallace, a self-professed agnostic, nailed it when he wrote, “In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.”

I’m not claiming that the “gods” caused my wayward shots, even though it often seems that way; however, Scripture teaches that behind all our secular idols lie unseen forces trying to dissuade us from turning to the living God.

Idol worship isn’t just physically bowing to carved stone or wood; instead, it means our hearts prioritize anything or anyone over the “true and living God.”

If your life is filled with ongoing disappointment and chronic dissatisfaction, there is a good chance you are worshipping a counterfeit god.

When Paul writes that the Thessalonians turned from idols to serve the true and living God, he means they abandoned Zeus, Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysus.

They had lived their lives depending on fictitious abstractions for power, enlightenment, fertility, and pleasure. They were much like us—“looking for love, power, control, insight, resources, and pleasure in all the wrong places.”

Prayer: Jesus! Open our eyes to the real you!

