

Idolatry - The Danger of Subjective Syncretism

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[0:00] If you would please turn to Judges chapter 17. Judges 17, if you're visiting with us, that black Bible that's here in front of you, starting the book of Genesis, and find page 194, 194, and find Judges 17, and some of you might be saying, might be asking, wait, what did he say?

Wait, what did he say? I thought we were supposed to be in chapter 10. Oh, I'm glad you asked. Wink, wink, wink, wink, wink, wink, wink, wink. Yes, that's correct. We should be. But we're going to study chapters 17 through 21, in the book of Judges, and then we're going to go back to chapter 10, and we're going to do that for two reasons.

First, these chapters, 17, 18, 19, 21, they illustrate just how far Israel had gone in their idolatry, immorality, immorality, and brutality.

If you want to sum up these chapters, there you go. Idolatry, immorality, brutality. Idolatry is this week, next week.

[1:38] Immorality is chapter 19, and then chapters 20 and 21 is brutality. That's what you see. It describes horrible, wicked things that they did to each other.

So that's the first reason. But second, these chapters, 17 to 21, actually happened earlier in the history of the book of Judges.

So we look at it, and it comes later. So we're thinking, oh, that's later on. That's after Samson type thing. Well, no, actually, it's not. It's put at the end of the book by Samuel as an illustration.

This is how far gone they had gone. This is how bad they had become. But it actually happened earlier on in Israel's judge history.

Maybe in the time of Jephthah. Maybe in the time of Gideon, or after Gideon with my dad's king, Abimelech. Which actually makes it even worse for them.

[2:45] Because you see how things spiral downward for Israel. And it all ends, so to speak, with the birth of Samuel, and for Samuel.

And then him being a young boy, and you find out the priests are sleeping with the women, and they're stealing the food from the people. Nice. That's great.

And that was only the tip of the iceberg. So, that's why we're going to embark on this area in chapter 17 of Judges.

So, let's read that. Judges chapter 17. And then we'll jump in. Now, there was a man of the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Micah.

And he said to his mother, the eleven hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you uttered a curse in my hearing. Behold, the silver's with me. I took it. And his mother said, Blessed, praised be my son by the Lord, by Yahweh.

[3:54] He then returned the eleven hundred piece of silver to his mother. And his mother said, I wholly dedicate the silver from my hand to Yahweh, for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image. Now, therefore, I will return them to you.

So, when he returned the silver to his mother, his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, gave them to the silversmith, who made it into a graven image and a molten image. And it was in the house of Micah.

And the man, Micah, had a shrine. And he made an ephod and a teraphim and consecrated one of his sons that he might become his priest.

Key verse. In those days, there was no king in Israel. Every man did what was right in his own eyes. Verse seven. Now, there was a young man from Bethlehem and Judah, of the family of Judah, who was a Levite.

And he was sojourning. Then the man departed from the city, from Bethlehem and Judah, to stay wherever he might find a place. As he made his journey, he came to the hill country of Ephraim, to

the house of Micah.

[4 : 56] And Micah said to him, Where do you come from? And he said to him, I am a Levite from Bethlehem and Judah. Micah, I'm going to sojourn wherever I may find a place. Micah. Then he said, Do it with me.

And be a father and a priest to me. And I'll give you ten pieces of silver a year, a suit of clothes and your maintenance. So the Levite went and the Levite agreed to live with the man. And the young man became to him like one of his sons.

So Micah consecrated the Levite. And the young man became his priest and lived in the house of Micah. Micah. And the cake, icing of the cake.

Then Micah said, Now I know that Yahweh will prosper me seeing I have a Levite as a priest.

There's a book called In Praise of Mixed Religion.

And the publisher says this about the book. Quote, An increasing number of people are intentionally combining elements from various religious heritages demonstrating that religions do not have firm boundaries nor are they purely distinct.

[6 : 06] In Praise of Mixed Religion discusses the concept of syncretism. The term for the mixing of religious perspectives. The religious studies discipline has traditionally distinguished between these between two responses to syncretism of subjective view which treats syncretism as morally reprehensible and objective view which treats it as a morally neutral phenomenon.

William Harrison who's the author of In Defense of Mixed Religion In Praise of Mixed Religion William Harrison adopts a third perspective the advocacy view which claims that mixing religions is a good and necessary process.

He cites countless examples from both history and recent years to show how religious traditions have gained theological and practical wisdom by borrowing key ideas beliefs and practices from outside their own movements by encouraging syncretism in praise of mixed religion contests the hard boundaries between religious world views and presents a dramatic alternative for thinking and talking about religion.

End quote. Now for us as Christians this comes across to us across to us as repulsive. This is reprehensible which by the way that's not the subjective view that's the objective view.

I mean we would never do that. Would we? Maybe we are doing that. And we don't even realize we're doing that.

[7 : 47] You ever thought about that? We love our idols. The book of Judges is about God's never ending relentless His overwhelming love for His people.

That's what it's about. And then the subtitle helps us even more so with His never ending overwhelming relentless love for His people the subtitle He loves us so much that He wants us to solely love and want Him.

He loves us. He loves you so much that He wants you to solely love Him to chiefly want Him.

Another way to say it He loves us so much that He'll discipline us to make that to make sure that He is our chief love.

He wants to be first and foremost in your life and He'll discipline you to make that happen. He'll allow things into your life that's not fun and He'll extract these things and reveal things about your life where you actually love this thing or love that person or love stuff more than God and He'll discipline us in that.

[9 : 26] Which leads us to the title for this morning's chapter, chapter 17 in the book of Judges I titled it like this Rival Love or in parentheses you can also put the danger of subjective syncretism.

The danger of subjective syncretism. we're going to define those terms subjective syncretism we kind of already defined it thank you in praise of mixed religion I guess Rival Love and we've said this before last week chapter 3 in Judges God takes seriously if or when our love for Him is rivaled He doesn't like that He's not thrilled about that in your life and in my life He doesn't want a rival in your love for Him He takes that seriously which is why the idea is this don't mix your love and worship for Christ with anyone or anything else just because it feels like the right thing to do go to the Word of God it might feel right it might seem right but it's not why do you know

Scripture objective truth syncretism is the union or the attempted union of different religions subjectivism is emotionalism personal preference based solely upon your emotions not objective truth and the objective truth is God's Word so subjective syncretism is the subjectivity personally individual my feelings I'm going to mix that in with different beliefs because it feels like the right

thing to do when really there's a rival love for God I'll put it different way love for Christ plus fill in the blank driven by our emotions or our subjectivity a good desire a good desire you want something but that good desire becomes a God desire that good thing becomes a God thing and that's that's that's a bad thing right you know what are the odds like if you're visiting here especially what are the odds you hear a sermon from the book of Judges let alone from the book of Judges chapter 17 I mean wouldn't you rather hear a message from the book of Philippians it'd be a whole lot easier I mean how in the world does this chapter affect and apply to our lives how how does it make a difference well this chapter describes to us how confused and depraved Israel had become it describes how Israel was wallowing in her idolatrous evil immoral mess even thinking that God was blessing them as they committed idolatry this is success all the while they're being disobedient oh that's so much the way we live our lives if we see success oh God must be what blessing you really how do you know that are you sure about that maybe subjectivity is playing a factor into your evaluation this is what classified it like this it's it's called convenient

Christianity I can make Christianity be whatever I want it to be I can be a gay Christian and God is fine with that I can be a drunken Christian and God is fine with that I can go to a worship service even be a member of a church even be a deacon and beat my wife and God is fine with that we post our wants to God expecting him to give us those wants and when he doesn't we say there's something wrong with God not me he's supposed to make me happy right giving me what I want right and when we're told that God doesn't work that way then we bail on him well you're an idiot you don't know what you're talking about

[15:11] God really we like to add God to our shrine we do it we all do it I'm talking to you and I'm talking to me it's so easy are we merging our love for Christ with our love for ourselves what did Jesus say if anyone wishes to follow after me he must deny himself take his cross and follow me he wants us to want him solely that's the gospel God should judge us as sinners and yet he sent Jesus to die in our place to take the wrath of God and he did that for all those who repent and trust him alone who turn away they deny themselves and they put their trust in Jesus are you here and not a

Christian you should repent and trust Jesus you should follow Jesus which means you deny yourself you take up the cross and you follow Jesus that's what it means to be a Christian I didn't make it up Jesus did come trust Jesus and you'll find compassion and mercy you'll find forgiveness that's the gospel so that's the introduction to chapter 17 and I was trying to figure out how do you split this chapter up in points here's a first point here you go first point with no king it was bad that's that for a point with no king it was bad and we're gonna look at chapter six I mean verse six in just a moment but let's walk through these first five verses then we'll really hone in on chapter on verse six first five verses notice there's a man of the hill country of Ephraim whose name was Micah you know what his name means his name means this who is like

Yahweh oh interesting he stole 1100 pieces of silver he admits it to his mom and then his mom praises him praises Yahweh and dedicates some of the silver to make a graven and molten image so she gave the 200 pieces of silver verse four gave them to a silversmith and made them made it into a graven image and molten image do you notice something do you notice that putting together dedicate to Yahweh and making a graven image this is kind of like putting together oil and water it just no just doesn't mix no it's like mixing fruit and chocolate it's just you just don't do that that's just like evil and if you like that you need to repent you know that's just wrong don't mix your fruit with chocolate don't blaspheme the name of chocolate like that they're blaspheming the name of God like this I mean this completely and totally contradicted what God revealed to Israel dedicated to Yahweh make a graven image is anybody using their brain right here I don't know and the ironic contrast this is what gets me the ironic contrast between Micah's name and the mundane silver God and the plethora of other gods in his shrine who is like Yahweh and yet you have all these gods there you see the irony it's sad not to mention keep in mind the pieces of silver were stolen so now you have a god of theft oh that's wonderful no that's ridiculous this totally violated god's first command not to make a graven image and it also glorified robbery

I mean they're way off and it's quite possible that the god was cast in the form of a calf because later it's associated with the city of Dan in first kings well actually in chapter 18 and then in first kings with Jeroboam sin if you go to first kings you see Jeroboam sin it actually takes from this from the city of Dan this shrine and actually makes it into for the god of Israel this is your god Israel who delivered you from Egypt Micah's little shrine he already had verse 5 he already had a house of gods along with an ephod remember the priests were the ephod those are the priests and from that

you'll be able to tell like he was ministering to the people and also tell the will of god he had one he made his own not to mention he had a teraphim a bunch of gods he contrasts that with what Samuel tells us in chapter 18 verse 31

[20 : 52] Samuel says so they set up for themselves Micah's graven image which he had made all the time that the house of god was at Shiloh already having a shrine the mom's gifts to her son enhance Micah's little worship center so what was the real problem syncretism mixing love for christ for yahweh with other loves or loves for something else or someone else they are totally disobeying god's word it runs contrary to what god commanded israel about having private sanctuaries the tabernacle the house of god was at shiloh there was only to be one sanctuary in shiloh the tabernacle yahweh wanted to be central in all their thoughts and all their actions he was to be first and foremost as their king and as their god it was about him and they didn't get it faith our worship our beliefs it's regulated it's driven it's based in in this in scripture but now listen the idea that faith worship and beliefs are regulated by god's revelation from his infallible inerrant word subject to how he says he should be worshipped it's ludicrous to our culture they think you're crazy and guess what some christians think you're crazy if you believe that too some christians actually think this but that's why we do what we do in our gathering god said this that's why we read scripture that's why we expound scripture that's why we pray the gospel that's why we sing the gospel because god told us to do that and notice what he did look at verse 5 again middle of verse towards the end of verse 5 consecrated one of his sons that he might become his priest he did what yep you read that right he appointed one of his sons to be his priest this completely disregarded what

Yahweh commanded Israel but as you can see nobody cared verse 6 in those days there's no king in Israel every man did what was right in his own eyes nobody cared I can do what I want don't tell me how to do things I can do what I want had there been a king a good king this would not be happening in Israel a good king that is a monarchy that was faithful to Yahweh in his covenant a king that would destroy this kind of syncretism and direct God's people to love him solely and chiefly oh we have that in Jesus don't we our Messiah directs us to how we're supposed to worship God we worship him in spirit and in truth the Holy Spirit and the truth of who Jesus is someone like Moses someone like Joshua that's what Samuel means here in verse 6 a person who would direct God's people to worship him solely chiefly first to go to the law to the truth to his word with no king it was bad verse 7 through 13 with no king it got worse verses 7 through 13 look at verse 7 a young man from Bethlehem and Judah the family of Judah who was a Levite he was sojourning there okay first okay stop what in blazes was he doing in Bethlehem what in blazes was he doing in Bethlehem that was not one of the Levitical cities as Yahweh marked out by Moses was it no what was he doing there problem number one he was an opportunist looking for a good spot to make a little bling bling for himself that's what he was doing and you see he's sojourning he departed from Bethlehem Micah comes to the whole country of Ephraim Micah says hey where do you come from oh I'm a Levite verse 10 Micah says hey come with me now though he seemed to be an opportunist we also know that Levites the Levites and the priests were most likely scattered because the people were not supporting them as they should because nobody cared remember the tabernacle was in Shiloh who cares the people should have been caring for those who ministered to them but they didn't and I guess his son Micah's son he wasn't cutting it maybe he was just like I don't know a terrible priest or something so he makes this Levite a priest and this Levite was a clear sign of God taking care of him wasn't it oh totally I mean talking about providence I'm being sarcastic here I'm laying it on really thick people okay the son was not to be the priest let alone this Levite

Levites were assistants I mean if this wasn't so blatantly against God it would actually be hilarious and here's the icing on the cake so he says hey dwell with me I'll take care of you so Levite says awesome I am set baby cool came to him became like one of his sons he consecrated the Levite the young man became his priest and here's the icing here it is right here laying it out for you verse 13 now I know that Yahweh will prosper me you got to be kidding me I mean are you reading that do you see this this is unbelievable now that I have a Levite as a priest Levites weren't supposed to be priests only the descendants from Aaron were supposed to be priests they were supposed to be assistants

[28 : 21] I totally know God prospered God's blessing me he thought God would bless him a total contradiction here is subjective syncretism that's what it is nice shrine Levitical priest a vast tree of idols I'm set God loves me I can totally tell Yahweh is going to prosper me are you crazy this guy was totally off he forgotten what Yahweh commanded in his word he didn't get that his words

completely conflicted with his actions so what does this have to do with us realize your worship of God and your ministry in a church can have great success and yet be under God's judgment judgment because it's being done the way you want it done not the way God prescribed that's scary worshipping God becomes like

Plato right you can you can make it so it benefits you and we can end up doing the same thing when we see these signs of God what's the phrase this is opening doors for this or that to happen how do you know that what if you're wrong what if this whole Levite encounter was not meant for him to utilize that you ever thought about that Micah you ever thought about that Christian oh no an open door is good but a closed door is bad really what if an open door is bad and a closed door is good you ever thought about that you know God will by means of Christ through the spirit discipline us so that we maintain pure worship of him alone we cannot add God to our list of things or the desires that we want that's not how God works and yet we want a convenient store shrine and for God to play along because based on how we feel I feel God leading me in this direction how do you know that what if your feelings are wrong you ever thought about that it's dangerous to the word to the word to the word are we worshipping Yahweh the wrong way do we think that even attending this service does you good we check it off our list I'm good for the week I'm set awesome and it's not to say we shouldn't be here be gathering together we should we should be encouraging each other to do this and all the more but where's the daily worship of God or is it just about going up to the mountains by yourself and that's your church and I'm not talking about going to the mountains the river

I'm talking about this in the first hour going somewhere between you and the Lord with your Bible you know I said that one time somebody got so mad they left they never came back that's not what I'm saying if that's your devotional time your time with the Lord I'm not talking about has our worship become an individual thing even a personal preference where we say you can't tell me otherwise is that how we've become that's our American culture is infiltrated into the church so that we make our worship into doing things the way we want to do them not the way God has prescribed to us from his word and James talks about this James chapter four he says you have these desires and you can't get them why do you fight and quarrel because you want these things and you can't have them and then you know what he says he says you adulteresses don't you realize friendship with the world is hostility towards God you can't have both

God doesn't play like that he takes it seriously when love for him is rivaled and he loves his people so much he'll discipline you so that you'll love him he will he don't mess around is it really all about how you feel that's our culture our culture teaches that do you feel like you're a girl do you feel like you're a boy do you feel like you're both neither something else people really believe that if a guy feels like he's a girl he should be free to express that no matter his genitalia people actually really believe it's all about their feelings and we should not laugh at that

[34:17] I know it's at first you're just like this is kind of silly but we shouldn't laugh that's not funny this is real people really think that and that is infiltrated into the church where you actually have these young 20 year olds who think I can be a lesbian and a Christian with that lifestyle at the same time these 20 year olds really think that I can be some other gender and be a Christian all at the same time they really think this you know what that's called what I have in my notes what's where is oh the danger of subjective syncretism that's what that is you want to mix our beliefs with beliefs of God and we do it based upon our feelings people really believe she or he can be gay living our lifestyle that lifestyle and be a

Christian at the same time I can be a drunkard I can be this I can be this it doesn't matter they actually really believe this whatever happened to truth whatever happened to going to scripture to see how God wants us to worship him how has God prescribed us to worship him with our lips and with our lives be careful of doing this without this and it's so easy isn't it it's easier for me than for you I can do it up here I can do a show for you you have no idea where my heart is do you and do you care should you care I care where your heart is it's so easy to do this remember what Jesus said in Matthew chapter 15 to the Pharisees you worship me with your lips but what your heart is far away from me that's why Jesus made it clear in Matthew chapter 6 you can't serve me and money you can't serve God and stuff you can't serve God and your desires which might be a good desire but that good desire becomes a God desire that good thing becomes a God thing and that's a bad thing God plus he loves us so much God loves us so much he loves his people so much he wants us to solely love him on him because God takes seriously if or when our love for him

is rival love if you get anything from this message get that he takes it seriously that's why we sing these songs give us clean hearts clean hands clean hearts oh God we cast down our idols prone to wander

Lord I feel it prone to leave the guy I love here's my heart oh take and seal it that's why we sing these songs oh great God of highest that's why we sing that song oh worship the king that's why we sing that song I'm smarter than I look I'm not as dumb as I look my kids tell me that all the time dad you're you're not as dumb as you look thanks guys don't mix don't mix your love and worship for Christ with anyone or anything else just because it feels like the right thing to do your feelings have no factor in this now we should have a feeling of our worship for Christ of course there should be feelings involved but what happens is we become driven by feelings it's subjective syncretism go to the word it's an encouragement for you may Yahweh God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give us grace to worship him in true wholeheartedness and fidelity to his truth you know the great thing about this remember this is his love for his people he loves you

Christian and he'll do what it takes to make you holy because he sent his son to die he sent his son to die for you loving that thing or that person more than him that's why Jesus had to die isn't that a good thing that's a really good thing let's pray we do pray Yahweh God our Father Lord Jesus Spirit give us grace to worship you in true wholeheartedness and fidelity to your truth we bow our hearts we bend our knees oh Lord come make us humble we turn our eyes from evil things oh Lord we cast down our idols what are those desires that we have that have become primary more than you maybe it is success pleasure a good job good relationships whatever those things are whatever those relationships are make known the idols of our heart and remind us first Jesus that's why you had to die because prone to wander

[40 : 45] Lord I feel it prone to leave the God I love thank you Jesus you died for that and then we renew we renew our commitment to be a servant of the Lord Jesus here's my heart take and seal it here's my heart may be true to you love for you devotion to you allegiance to you and showing that same love and grace and mercy to your people work in us as your church we pray I encourage you at this time which we do this each week it's like a couple minutes a couple minutes of silence between you and the Lord maybe by the spirit the Lord brought to your mind an idol that you love more or desire you love more than him confess that repent and lay it before him say that say Lord

I cast down this idol bam maybe you want to do that maybe read through your notes whatever fill your mind with truth let yourself ponder on these things let your brain be filled with truth with gospel truth we'll sing two songs we'll pray but this time between you and the Lord us collectively as his people together meditate fill your mind with this truth please if you would do that now love together grass you yeah you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you you