*Do not fear or be afraid; have I not told you from of old and declared it? You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know, and so they will be put to shame. Who would fashion a god or cast an image that can do no good? All its devotees shall be put to shame; the artisans, too, are merely human. Let them all assemble; let them stand up; they shall be terrified; they shall all be put to shame. The blacksmith works it with a tool over the coals, shaping it with hammers and forging it with his strong arm; he becomes hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water and is faint. The carpenter stretches a line, marks it out with a stylus, fashions it with planes, and marks it with a compass; he makes it in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine. He cuts down cedars or chooses a holm tree or an oak and lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a cedar, and the rain nourishes it. Then it can be used as fuel. Part of it he takes and warms himself; he kindles a fire and bakes bread. Then he makes a god and worships it, makes it a carved image, and bows down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he roasts meat, eats it, and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says: “Ah, I am warm by the fire!” The rest of it he makes into a god, his idol, bows down to it and worships it; he prays to it and says: “Save me, for you are my god!” They do not know, nor do they comprehend, for their eyes are shut, so that they cannot see, and their minds as well, so that they cannot understand. No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say: “Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. Now shall I make the rest of it an abomination?* *Shall I fall down before a block of wood?” He feeds on ashes; a deluded mind has led him astray, and he cannot save himself or say: “Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?”* Isaiah 44:8-20

*My brothers and sisters do not claim the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ of glory while showing partiality. For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say: “Have a seat here in a good place, please,” while to the one who is poor you say: “Stand there,” or: “Sit by my footstool,” have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that He has promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor person. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into the courts? Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it.* James 2:1-10

*Six—year—old Molly complained to her mother that her stomach hurt. Realizing it was almost lunch time, Mom told Molly, “Your stomach is empty, you’ll feel better after you put something in it.” Later that evening, the Pastor came over for a visit. During the conversation he mentioned he had a headache. Molly piped up with a solution: “That’s because it’s empty. You’ll feel better when you put something in it.”*

The Idiocy of Idolatry

1. In the *“Christmas Carol,”* Ebenezer Scrooge is introduced to two creatures, two ragged children crouching down in misery at the feet of the “Ghost of Christmas Present,” beneath his robe. Charles Dickens introduces them with these words: *“This boy is ‘Ignorance.’ This girl is ‘Want.’ Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.”* Both of these beings represent the dark sides of a human soul, and unfortunately, both of them are still very much alive and well in our society today. In some sense and to some degree, these two are the powerful driving force behind many of the human actions and endeavors. In his prophecy, Isaiah speaks of a man whose actions are motivated by the same dark sides of the man existence. Isaiah also concludes that the *“dark side motivations”* of the human soul eventually lead to nothing else but a destruction. I believe the Dickens’ warning reflects Isaiah’s message as much and as well, as George Lucas’ *“Star Wars,”* the *“dark side of the force”* does.

2. The *“western civilization”* might be more affluent today that any other civilization in the history of the humanity, but still, notwithstanding the prosperity of our modern age, as a society, we are even more empty and shallow than our ancestors and the previous civilizations were. We can easily see this in the human’s pursuit of temporary pleasures, driven by the desires of one own *“wants and fantasies.”* The prevalent use of drugs, alcohol, sexual pleasures, the drive for power and control, inevitably lead to the destruction of not only the human souls but also the human bodies. Isaiah calls this pursuit: *“the feeding on ashes.”* He says sarcastically: *“Shall I fall down before a block of wood?”* And yet, that is what our society embraces, worships, and admires. Modern culture adopts scientific knowledge and elevate science to almost an omniscient position. And yet, what the science of the days I studied in college, taught us that our species, the *“Homo Sapiens,”* were the evolutionary descendants of *“Homo neanderthalensis,”* otherwise called the *“Neanderthals.”* Today, just a few decades later, the same science teaches that our two species, not only coexisted for hundreds of years, but even interbred, and we all have the fragments of the *“Homo neanderthalensis”* genes in our DNA. This is just one small example clearly suggesting that no science is infallible, only God is.

3. The view of life which excludes God might be convenient for our modern society which prefers to be devoid of any moral, ethical, and spiritual values and standards. In the end however, this lack of standards actually presents a tragic deformation of humanity. When as humans we try to undermine God and His presence, we actually and literally rob ourselves of the very humanity that distinguishes us from other species on earth. When the people try to nurture themselves with the *“man-made”* views and philosophies, no matter how beautiful and sound they might appear on the surface, sooner or later they will discover that all these views, the philosophies, and the ideologies, lead to nowhere else, but to the brink of a destruction and annihilation. The history proved this time and time again. Unfortunately, as Georg Friedrich Hegel said: *“History teaches us that man learns nothing from history.”* Or as Isaiah writes: *“…a (man) deluded mind has led him astray.”* Nothing can substitute God in our heart, not a philosophy, not a science, not a man-made morality or ideology. Isaiah words: *“deliver me, for you are my god,”* extrapolate the fact that the *“man-made”* idols have no power and cannot change and to fill the emptiness of the human’s heart. We need God, even though, as modern society, we try to remove Him from our midst. The *“Ignorance”* and *“Want”* seem to succeed in this day and age.

4. As I already shared with you in the past, in all the years of my ministry I have witnessed death many times. I worked with the families of those who died, as well as with the dying themselves. I was called to the hospitals in the middle of the night to comfort the grieving family or the dying patients. I have witnessed many types of death and many ways of handling it. I have never ever however, witnessed the situation, when death was accepted as a natural part of a human existence by an atheist, or an atheist’s family. While facing death and mortality, these people expressed their broken heartedness, demonstrating the emptiness in their hearts, and a total lack of any, even slightest ray of hope. The tragedy of death and of dying was always written all over their faces. No matter how much people try to convince themselves, no matter how much they try to supplement God with their own ideologies, philosophies of points of view, in the end they face the reality where all these ideas crumble down and fail them. Like the proverbial *“house made of straw.”* Without God there is no hope, and without hope there is no consolation. Without God there is no solace, and the tragedy of death prevails. The ignorant ones, those whose hearts are empty and without hope in the last moment of their life realize that *“they cannot save themselves.”* Just as the prophet Isaiah writes: *“a man cannot save himself.”*

5. In a dramatic contrast, I have also witnessed the death of those who believed and were able to find the consolation and hope in Jesus’ words: *“I am the resurrection and the life.”* This does not mean they did not grieve, because they did, but for them hope was the driving force behind the capability of overcoming their grief and loss. Contrary to the tragedy of the atheists, those who embraced God and their Savior Jesus, were often calmly and peacefully awaiting for the moment when they will see their Savior face to face. There is no tragedy in the believer's death, instead, there is a powerful testimony in the Christian’s death. The history and the literature shows many examples of this, delivering many testimonies of the people who kept the assurance and certainty of knowing where they are going. I have witnessed this a countless number of times. Such is the power of hope and of God’s presence in the believer’s life.

6. How do we face the daily trials and struggles of life is modeled by what we believe and who do we trust. The Scriptures illustrates these many times. David, as a young man, was not afraid of Goliath because he knew that he, David, is in God’s hands, and he trusted God. Joshua was not afraid to enter the Promised Land, neither the first time when he went in as a spy, nor or the second time, when he initiated the conquest of Canaan. Once again, he did so simply because he trusted God. When after 40 years of wondering through the Sinai peninsula’s wilderness he launched the conquest of Canaan, he did not doubt, for he knew God is with him. Jesus Himself also trusted His Father to the point of acknowledging the importance of God’s presence even in the most crucial moment of His life when He said: *“Why have You forsaken me?”* With almost the same breath He concluded, by saying these immortal words: *“It is finished!”* Jesus’ words however were not the words of the defeat but of the victory. They echo loudly in this wonderful song by Ray Overholt that says: *"To the howling mob He yielded; He did not for mercy cry. The cross of shame He took alone. And when He cried: “It’s finished,” He gave Himself to die; Salvation’s wondrous plan was done.”*

7. Isaiah is right on target when he puts the question into the mouth of a man who does not trust the Lord, unable to say: *“Is not this thing in my right hand a fraud?”* Many people eventually realize that life without Jesus is empty and meaningless, but they still refuse to open their hearts to Him, and not only out of stubbornness, but out of lack of faith, a lack of the desire to commit themselves to Him, or a lack of the desire to follow certain codes, whether moral, ethical, social, or spiritual. It seems it is so much easier to follow the *“anything goes”* approach than to commit oneself to accepting that: *“enough is enough.”* The *“Ignorance”* and *“Want,”* succeed and our society is a living proof of this, but as long as we share God’s message with the world, there is still a ray of hope that, just as Scrooge realized, people too will realize these two cause nothing else but a destruction, death, and tragedy. The creatures invented by the human desires, *“the ignorance and want,”* might sound appealing for a moment, but in reality they are nothing else but a fraud, just as the ideologies of communism and Nazism sounded, and for some still sound appealing, but the history, if we want to learn from it, has clearly shown that embracing them will only totally destroy of whatever humanity we are left with.

8. When my son, Philip, was a young boy, we often listen to the beautiful children songs performed by the Bob Evan’s “Donut Club.” One of this songs compared the life without Jesus to a donut. It says: *“Life without Jesus is like a donut, there’s a hole in the middle of your heart.”* When people disregard God, when He is ignored, when people try to fill the emptiness of their heart with the *“man-made”* creations, philosophies, points of view, ideologies, no matter what they might be, sooner or later they will discover all these do not truly work. Our society tries to find some sort of an idol to replace Jesus with, but in the end all they find is that anything we create is but a lie, a fraud, a mirage. In life people must make a decision to either follow Jesus as Joshua did when he said: *“as for me and my house we will serve the Lord,”* or to choose their own destruction, bylistening to embracing the devil, who already in the Garden of Eden, convinced Adam and Eve with his message, to disobey God and instead become gods themselves. The consequences of their decision are well known to all of us. There is no a *“third way,”* no matter what our modern, supposedly sophisticated, intellectual, but morally corrupt society may claim. There are many people around us who live an empty and broken lives, even if they do not want to admit

this. As Christ’s own we however know and we may show them that God indeed loves them, and He can

fill the emptiness of their heart, giving them the only true and everlasting peace and hope.