WHEN NOTHING BECOMES SOMETHING by David Diestelkamp

First Corinthians 8:4 states what most of us would say is fundamental to our faith: “…we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one.” Idols, both the physical objects representing their deities and the deities themselves, are “nothing”.

The Psalmist well expresses our faith in Psalm 135:5-7:

“For I know that the Lord *is* great,  
And our Lord *is* above all gods.  
Whatever the Lord pleases He does,  
In heaven and in earth,  
In the seas and in all deep places.

He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth;  
He makes lightning for the rain;  
He brings the wind out of His treasuries.”

The Psalmist then states what we know about idols in Psalm 135:15-18:

“The idols of the nations *are* silver and gold,  
The work of men’s hands.  
They have mouths, but they do not speak;  
Eyes they have, but they do not see;  
They have ears, but they do not hear;  
Nor is there *any* breath in their mouths.  
Those who make them are like them;  
*So is* everyone who trusts in them.”

Although literal idolatry seems wrong almost to the point of being silly to us, it is currently growing. For example, the number of Hindus in America is expected to double in the next 25 years to nearly 6 million. Curiosity in Eastern Religions will be peaked by those looking for alternatives to traditional religions, people will be meeting people involved in idolatry, and we will begin seeing it practiced in popular entertainment media. We need to prepare to show and warn that “an idol is nothing” and these “so-called gods” are not God at all (1 Co 8:4-5).

Traditional idolatry is probably currently not very tempting to most of us so we probably pay little attention to the charge, “Flee idolatry” in 1 Corinthians 10:14. But fleeing includes the things related to it. It includes things we trust and ask and depend on that replace God.

I was in a bookstore and was struck by the number of books about tarot, healing crystals, magic candle burning, and psychic powers. I know none of this is new, but there seems to be renewed interest. It is repackaged idolatry and occult as “therapeutic power,” “ancient art,” and “connecting with yourself to live mindfully.” Who doesn’t want power, art, and mindful connection in their life? It’s tempting. We know it’s “nothing” so what can it hurt?

Paul wrote that we know idols are nothing as a reminder so we won’t make nothing something! We must not say they are nothing but then dabble in them because others are, because they might work (or won’t hurt), or because it’s fun. We flee idolatry and things associated with the “so-called god” and powers. But what if you don’t?

First, dabbling in the occult makes nothing become something by failing to glorify the one true and living God because it gives power to something other than to Him and prayer. Second, connection to an idol makes nothing become something by being a stumbling block to someone weak in faith who is struggling to put their faith wholly in God and not in powers that are “so-called gods.” (1 Co 10:14-33) Third, what is nothing becomes something anytime we ourselves start to think these powers are somehow real and produce results when God doesn’t.

“What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” 1 Corinthians 10:19-22

We know nothing is nothing. So, have nothing to do with it.