

# Bible Studies

## Idolatry

*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. 1 John 5:21*

Throughout the Old Testament God continually battled with the people's persistent idolatry. The Prophets consistently preached against it, but Jesus did not have to. By His day Judaism, thanks to it's time in exile, was largely free from idols.



**Read Jeremiah 10v1-10**      Isaiah 40v18-25

**In this passage what is an idol?**

**What contrast is made here between God and the idols?**

**If an idol is only wood, stone or metal what is the harm in it?**

**Do these idols still exist?**

In a sense, the passage deliberately misses the point. Even the pagans did not believe that the wood itself was powerful, the idol became a vehicle for the god whom it represented and who indwelt it.

**What makes a carving an idol, rather than a statue?**

I would say the act of worship or devotion, (by someone not necessarily just you) and declaring it as such. In 1 Corinthians 8v4, Paul says *We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.*

**What does he mean by nothing at all?**

**What is behind an idol?**      1 Corinthians 10v19-20, Deuteronomy 32v16-17, Psalm 106v35-37

**What danger could there be for the believer in such idols?**

**What kind of things should we avoid?**

The first commandments prohibit the making of idols, not only of foreign gods, but also of idols intended to represent Jehovah. *Deuteronomy 4v15-19.* It is likely that the golden calves made by Israel, first at Sinai and then at Dan and Bethel, were intended as images to represent the true God.

**Why did God refuse to be worshiped this way?**

There are many answers to this question. Firstly I think God want to avoid being seen as one of many competing gods. I think He also wanted be free from the our preconceived ideas about who He is and what He is like. You can't contain God and you must let God speak for Himself, this He has done in Scripture.

*This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be? Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?" Isaiah 66:1-2*



### Spiritual Idols

Believers in the first century world were confronted with physical idols as are believers today in many parts of the world. Obviously the perils of us falling for physical idol worship, although existent, are slim. This kind of idolatry is not hard to identify or avoid. John has a different kind of idol in mind.

**When John says 'Keep yourselves from Idols' what kind of idols does he mean?**



**Read Ezekiel 14v1-6**

**What kind of idols are these?**

**What is this kind of an idol?**

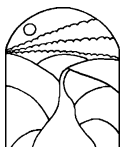
**What does this mean?**

These were not physical idols, representing false gods. This was something internal, something in the heart or mind. The simplest definition of this kind of idol is: *anything that takes a place in our lives that is intended for God.*

*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature...greed, which is idolatry. Colossians 3v5, Ephesians 5v5*

**Why does Paul say greed is idolatry?**

Greed is idolatry because a greedy person believes the things of this life will take care of him. *Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Luke 12:15*





## Read Matthew 6v20-21

### Is Jesus suggesting that our treasure can be an idol?

Why can a desire for wealth so easily become an idol? 1Tim 6:v9-10, Heb 13v5

### How are we going to recognize the idols in our lives?

Anything that takes away from our worship of God. It can be in the area of our affection, finance or time. The best technique is to ask God to show you the idols you have set up. Whether we realize it or not, we are all philosophers. We all have a view about what is important in life and how we should live. A way of making sense of the world. An idol is a product of our belief system. Within these personal philosophies you will find many of our idols.

We do not think of these things in terms of worship. Who ever admitted to worshipping a car? So for us a better question might be;



**To what do you trust your future?**

**What do you trust to provide for your needs?**

**To what do you attribute your success?**

**What do you love more than God?**

If you exercise self reliance, instead of God reliance, self has taken the place of God. You have made yourself an idol!

### Are such idols just ideas in our minds or can they be physical things too?

Often the idols of our minds find a physical expression. A lust for wealth may materialize into a fine house. A god of freedom may manifest itself in a flash car.



**Is materialism an idol?**

**Is secular humanism an idol?**

**What makes something an idol for you?**

### What kind of things could be an idol for us?

**Which of these could be an idol?** *Car, pride, control, lust, money, TV, free time, personal rights, family, beauty, music, Pastor, celebrity.*

### Are they of themselves bad?

There is nothing radical about this idea it has been preached the world over. Yet many of us find it very hard to identify the things in our lives that are idols. (It's much easier to identify them in other peoples lives). *You mean the things I love and cherish so much are actually idols!*

If an idol is something that takes, time, affection or finance away from God.

**How much is too much?** (When does it stop being an acceptable part of our life and start being an idol?)

### What things result from, or are associated with idol worship?

*Ezekiel 14:3*

**What does this mean?**

*Jonah 2:8*

**What does this mean?**

*Judges 8:27*

**What does this mean?**

*Deuteronomy 4v16*

**What does this mean?**



### A Graven image

We have seen that an idol can be a physical image or something set up in our hearts. That it can also be an image of a false god or a false image of the true God. There is a danger that in our religion we create idols of God. We create a defective or limited view of who God is and what He can do. When we do this we worship an idol of our own making and not the true God. God seems to take delight in shattering these false views of who He is.

### Do we worship God or our concept of God?

When the form of religion becomes more important than the God behind it, we practice idolatry. For example; when we put our faith in the act of prayer and not the God who answers prayer, we practice idolatry. Attending church never saved anyone, responding to God did. We must remember that Christianity is an act of the heart, which expressed itself in our actions. If we trust in the actions and forget the all important things like faith, love and relationship we become idol worshippers.

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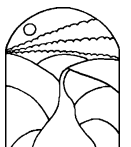
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To what do you attribute your success? *skill, reputation)*

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Ezekiel 14:3

*stumbling-blocks*

What does this mean?

Jonah 2:8

*forfeit the grace*

What does this mean?

Judges 8:27

*became a snare*

What does this mean?

Deuteronomy 4v16

*Corruption*

What does this mean?



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