

Understanding Idolatry

The biblical concept of idolatry is difficult for modern Christians to understand. Yet throughout both the Old and New Testaments God is very clear on how he views it. (NT:

1 Cor.10:14, Gal. 5:20, Col. 3:5, 1 Peter 4:3) He forbids it, as we can read in the fourth of the Ten Commandments. (Exodus 20:4) So what is idolatry and why is it so bad?

Human beings were created to worship, enjoy and glorify God. That is our purpose. When our hearts are in a posture of worship we grow closer to God and are able to receive our true inheritance as members of God's family, joy and peace. (Col. 1:12; John 14:27, 15:11, 16:22, 16:33) In John 16:22 Jesus tells His disciples "...no one will take away your joy." We have to give it away or allow something or someone to steal it. The amount of peace and joy that we experience may indicate how successful we are at fulfilling our purpose in life. Romans 12:1,2 tells us much about our spiritual act of worship, which is triggered by our gratitude for all the Lord has done, resulting in surrendered lives and the pursuit of a renewed mind in the truth so we are able to discern God's will and obey him.

We are born into a battle, a spiritual battle. It rages all around us, and the Bible tells us that we fight it in our minds. (2 Cor.10:3-5; Eph.6:10-12) Our spiritual enemies are the rebellious angelic beings cast from heaven whose leader is Satan. Satan wants to steal our worship, thereby robbing God of the purpose of our creation. Satan is no match for God, but he can hurt us. Satan steals our peace and joy by having us doubt that God can or even desires to meet our legitimate needs. His method is to erode our trust and faith in God's character, his word and his love for us. His tactic is to promote anything or anyone, *especially good things*, that we would accept as a replacement for the true God. These become our idols. In Matthew 22:38 Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with **all** your heart and with **all** your soul and with **all** your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment." Notice this is not just a suggestion. When we are not worshiping God, trusting in Him only, we disobey him.

Worship is based on relationship. We cannot worship God unless we are in a personal relationship with him. Christ died to restore that relationship. Our idols (replacements for God) damage our trust in God and slow our ability to grow and enjoy all the blessings of being Father God's children. Our goal is to mature in our faith and take responsibility for eliminating those things that damage our relationship with our kind God by making him Lord over every part of our lives.

God knows that what we worship has the power to control us and, therefore, to hurt us. That is why he warns us not to worship idols, that is, give them power in our lives. As we choose to resist, we are not to trust in our own strength to be rid of the idols, but we are to ask God for His supernatural wisdom and strength. See Isaiah 40:18-31. Verses 28-31 are favorite verses to quote for those who are struggling, but notice that what precedes those wonderful words is all about idolatry. "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak." This is especially true when our idols have become addictions.

Our needs are real and legitimate, and we are meant to look to God to meet them. If we are not, we must identify to whom or what we look for them to be met. When it is not to God, we need to renounce what we rely upon as an idol. It is not enough just to identify the idols. That leaves us open to more failure and gives Satan ammunition to make us miserable through accusation.

To be set free, we repent, turn away from that thing or person and turn toward God. We then confess the sin, and receive God's forgiveness and cleansing from any damage. (1 John 1:9) Next we must purposefully **choose** to trust God to meet our need.

Once submitted to God, we are able to recognize that the good things that used to be our idols are actually God's provision and the control they have in our lives will be broken. We look to God first, and he uses them to bless us without the danger of them controlling our lives. For example, our job: We recognize God gave us the opportunity and it is he who uses it to provide for our needs through it.

When we examine our idols in the light of God's truth, we see that they are empty, without value compared to God. Each time we turn from an idol and choose God to meet our needs a spiritual battle is won. We turn from emptiness and death and choose fullness of life. Lord, give us the courage to release our idols to you and to choose joy and peace!

HOW TO FIND OUR IDOLS:

Find a quiet place and give yourself some time to listen to God. Ask for God to protect your mind and for the Holy Spirit to guide you and to lead you into all truth.

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the things that you rely on apart from God. Write them down. **To help you, ask yourself:**
 - a. What do I think about more than God?
 - b. When I feel overwhelmed or stressed, what do I think about or do?
 - c. When I want to run away or escape to what or to whom do I go?
 - d. What makes me feel significant, important?
 - e. What makes me feel safe, secure?
 - f. What or who makes me feel like I belong, that I fit in, am not rejected or alone?
 - g. What gives me comfort?
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you if they really meet those needs. For how long? How do you feel afterward?
3. Ask God to give you a Bible verse for each to show you how God intends and can meet that need.
4. Renounce the thing or action as an idol. *We do not renounce a good thing, but the control we gave to it.* We now choose to see God meeting our need through it. Pray something like:
“Father God, I renounce the lie that I need _____ to meet my need for _____. I announce the truth that only you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit can truly meet my need for _____. I confess _____ as an idol and release it (him, her) to you. Please, forgive me and cleanse me of all unrighteousness my relying on it (him,her) has caused. Thank you for your forgiveness and cleansing.
Restore all that the enemy may have stolen as a result of this sin against you. Lord, strengthen my will to resist _____ and to choose you to meet that need. I choose to believe that you, Father, will meet all my needs in Christ Jesus. Thank you that you are more than willing and able to do that. Thank you for this freedom! Amen”.
5. Make a plan as to how you will change any patterns of thought, attitude or behavior so as to be able to resist falling into relying of these things again.
6. Ask God to teach you and protect you from any idolatry. Thank Him for the peace and joy that He gives when you trust in Him. Receive the joy!