

Gospel Truth

Biblical Instruction and Encouragement for the Mission Field Worldwide.

NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME

Humankind was created with a living soul. From the dawn of creation, there has been an innate desire to worship something. While Yahweh wanted to be the object of that devotion and is the only one that can satisfy the deepest spiritual needs of humanity, people have invented false gods and devoted themselves to serving tangible and intangible idols and philosophies. This is idolatry, which is the worship or adoration of idols, false gods, or of anything that takes the place of God Himself. Anything physical or spiritual other than God that controls affections, time, energy, money, and devotion is idolatry.

There have been idols and gods of many different types and called by many different names through the thousands of years of civilization. The Old Testament refers often to the false gods and idols of the pagans. Dagon, with a human head and body of a fish, was the god of the Philistines (1 Samuel 5:1-5). Merodach or Bel, of Jeremiah 50:2, was the Babylonian "lord of the gods of heaven and earth." Baal, the sun god, was the supreme god of the Canaanites.

1 Kings 18 relates the encounter of Elijah and the prophets of Baal praying for fire to fall from the sky. In 1 Kings 11:33, we read of Ashtoreth, the Zidonians' goddess of fertility; and of Chemosh, the god of the Moabites; and of Milcom, the Ammonites' god of divination. The fire god, Molech, to whom children were sacrificed, is written about in Leviticus 18:21.

These are just a few of the invented gods, mystical beings often described with animal and human characteristics, that originated from man's imagination.

The scripture relates the waffling purpose of the children of Israel throughout the generations as they served God and then turned to the idols of the land. At Mt. Sinai, the Israelites demanded that Aaron make them a golden calf after the pattern of the Egyptians who had made molten images to worship (Exodus 32:1-4). Moses came down from the mountain with the command of God, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image....Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:3-5). This command of God is fundamental and is incumbent upon all people that "thou shalt worship no other God" (Exodus 34:14). Jesus reiterated this command in the New Testament: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8).

All forms of idolatry and worship are sin except that devotion that is given to the God of Heaven. Leviticus 26:1 forbids the creation of idols and graven images and the bowing down unto them. Deuteronomy 4:15-19 warns the people not to corrupt themselves with idols. They are instructed not to make an idol after the manner

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“Thou shalt have no other gods before me...for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.”

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WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT...

Word of God

2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 24:35

Relationship of Love

Matt. 22:37-40; John 14:21-23; 1 John 4:7-11

Repentance

Acts 3:19; Acts 17:30; 2 Cor. 7:10

New Birth

John 3:3-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 6:1-4;
Eph. 2:1, 5-6

Freedom From Sin

1 John 5:18; Matt. 1:21; John 8:11

Infilling of the Holy Spirit

Acts 19:2; Acts 15:8-9; Acts 1:8

Holiness

Luke 1:73-75; Heb. 12:14; 1 Peter 1:15-16;
Titus 2:11-12; Rom. 6:22

Kingdom of God

Luke 17:20-21; Romans 14:17; John 18:36

The Church

Acts 2:47; Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col 1:18

Unity

John 17:20-23; Gal 3:28; Rev. 18:2-4

Ordinances

Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 26:26-30;
1 Cor. 11:23-27; John 13:14-17

Divine Healing

Luke 4:18; Isaiah 53:4-5; James 5:13-16

Sanctity of Marriage

Matt. 19:5-6; Luke 16:18; Rom. 7:2-3;
1 Cor. 7:10-11

Outward Appearance

1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Cor. 11:14-15; Deut. 22:5

End of Time

2 Peter 3:7-12; John 5:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:10;
Matt 25:31-46

Pacifism

Luke 6:27-29; Luke 18:20

Worship

John 4:23-24; Eph. 5:19; 2 Cor. 3:17

Great Commission

Mark 16:15

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of animals or humans. They are warned not to worship the sun, moon, or stars.

There is only one true God, and all honor, praise, glory, and devotion belong exclusively to Him. Jesus prefaced the greatest command to love with this



basic truth: “Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord” (Mark 12:29). “Beside me there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6). All other gods must be banished, for devotion to the idols of man robs God of the devotion that is due unto His name.

In the midst of idols and images of gods on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul gives a beautiful message about the true God who made the heaven and earth (Acts 17:22-31). God dwells not in temples made with hands nor is He worshipped with their hands. It is He that gives life and breath, and it is He that will judge the world on an appointed day. This God is not made

“We are to have no other
gods before us physically
or in our hearts.”

from gold, silver, or stone and is not a depiction of artwork nor a creation of man. This God is the creator of the universe. He has a son, Jesus, who was crucified and was raised from the dead in three days. It is THIS God alone that can bring soul peace and satisfy the internal longing of the soul. Truly, God is worthy of our praise, for all things were created for His pleasure (Revelation 4:10-11).

All images of worship, all idols of devotion, and all objects of adoration must be eradicated completely from our lives. God is a jealous God (Exodus 34:14), and He will not accept mixing the worshiping of idols with devotion to Him. There are many images and false gods to which people pray still today. They may be called by different names than those of ancient days, but they are still false gods and idols. Many countries, tribes, and nationalities continue to be steeped in the worship of idols. This is idolatrous and sinful.

We are to have no other gods before us physically or in our hearts. While some people may have rejected the idol itself, even many professing Christians are wrapped in the trappings of pagan worship and false gods of the past. Let us sanctify our lives and our worship that they may be singularly devoted and pleasing to the one true God. ■

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Editorial



I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. —Isaiah 42:8

God is glorious and His works are marvelous. There is no entity in heaven or in earth that even begins to compare to the majesty and power of the Lord God. He is due honor and glory and will not give that praise and honor to any other being or graven image. Only God can redeem mankind, and only God has the gift of eternal life to give.

The subject this quarter is on the topic of idolatry. The world has many religions in which people are bowing down and worshipping idols. There are many more people that are worshipping idols that are not hewn from a rock or formed by a silversmith. People are devoting themselves to the things of this world, and while most people would not want to acknowledge it, that is idolatry.

Pagans and false worshippers need to renounce their false gods and follow the one true God. Their homes need to be purged of all icons and symbols of idolatry, and the Word of God should have preeminence in their hearts. Many Christians would agree with this, but what about the other gods? What about the god of materialism and the god of nationalism? What about the god of self? What about the idol of church dogma and the idol of the pastors and prophets? Can we as Christians also recognize these as idolatrous practices?

What about how we spend our time? Is it possible that social media or sports could become idols to us? They are idols if we let them control our time and our lives revolve around them. If we are more devoted to them than to the worship of God, is that not idolatry? It is amazing that people can spend money and time on the things of this world so easily, but when it comes to the service of the Lord, there just is not enough money or enough time. Should this not stir us in our spirit?

It takes self-examination and a lot of honesty to admit that there might be things in life to which one has given one's devotion in a way that is robbing God of the glory and position that only He should possess. We look at things from a limited, oftentimes selfish perspective in the flesh. May the Lord help us take a step back from our lives and practices and ask: "How does God see it?" What message are we sending to our Creator if we involve ourselves in idolatrous practices or mix with the idolatrous crowds in their revelry, all the time saying, "My heart is right."

Marriage, like a relationship with God, is to be an exclusive relationship. What message would it send to my wife if I were to keep a picture on my desk of an old girlfriend and commemorate her birthday every year? Would it make a difference if I told my wife it was not in my heart? Is it any different with God? Lord, help us to rid ourselves of all idolatry and love God with all of our hearts.

Michael W. Smith

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Is God First? Identify Modern Day Idols

Where are my affections? Where do I seek fulfillment? What occupies my mind? Where do I spend my time? Where do I spend my money?	Money/Material Things Jobs/Status Influence/Fame Physical Appearance Sports/Entertainment	Ungodly Relationships Phones/Technology Religious Doctrines Education Nationalism
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Bible Study Guide

Subject: Idolatry

Scripture Reading: *Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.* —Luke 4:8

Definition: Idolatry is defined as the “worship of idols, images, or anything which is not God; the worship of false gods. Excessive attachment, or veneration for anything; respect or love which borders on adoration” (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

Summary: Adoration and worship of anything other than God Himself is idolatry—whether an idol, invented god, religions of man, or something of this world which governs affections, time, energy, and money.

I. There is One God

- A. Mark 12:28-29 The Lord our God is one Lord.
- B. Isaiah 44:6 Beside me there is no God.
- C. 1 Timothy 2:5 One God and one mediator.
- D. Revelation 4:10-11 The Lord is worthy of worship.

II. Idolatry Condemned

- A. Exodus 20:3-5 Have no other gods, make no graven image. The Lord is jealous.
- B. Deuteronomy 4:15-19 Do not worship idols, the sun, moon, or stars.
- C. Leviticus 26:1 Make no idols.
- D. Deuteronomy 7:3-4 Do not marry idolators.

III. Worship God Alone

- A. Luke 4:7-8 Worship only the Lord.
- B. Matthew 6:24 No man can serve two masters.

IV. True God vs. Idols

- A. Act 17:22-31 God is Creator, not created.
- B. Deuteronomy 4:28 The work of men’s hands.

V. Old Testament Idolatry

- A. **Golden Calf:** Representation of Yahweh and/or Egyptian object of worship (Exodus 32:1-4).
- B. **Nebuchadnezzar’s Golden Image** (Daniel 3:1-5).
- C. **Dagon:** God of the Philistines; human head and body of a fish (1 Samuel 5:1-5).
- D. **Merodach** (Marduk, Bel): Babylonian lord of the gods of heaven and earth (Jeremiah 50:2).
- E. **Baal:** Supreme god of the Canaanites—sun god, storm god, fertility god (1 Kings 18:21-40).
- F. **Ashtoreth:** Zidonians’ goddess of fertility and maternity.
- G. **Chemosh:** National god of the Moabites; human sacrifice.
- H. **Milcom:** Ammonites’ god of divination (1 Kings 11:33).
- I. **Molech:** Fire god, child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21).

VI. God of This World

- A. 2 Corinthians 4:4 God of this world blinds minds.
- B. Ephesians 2:2 Prince of the power of the air.
- C. Ephesians 6:10-13 Powers and rulers of darkness.

VII. Worship of False Religion & Tradition

- A. Revelation 14:8-10 The beast and his image.
- B. Mark 7:6-9 Exalting the tradition of men.

VIII. Worship of Men

- A. Acts 12:21-23 Herod venerated as a god.
- B. 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 The man of sin.
- C. Acts 14:12-15 Paul and Barnabas refuse honor.
- D. Revelation 19:10 Do not worship the messenger.
- E. John 7:16-18 Self-promotion contrary to Christ.
- F. 2 Corinthians 4:5 Preach not yourselves.

IX. New Testament Idolatry

- A. Colossians 3:5 Covetousness is idolatry.
- B. Philippians 3:19 Their god is their belly.
- C. Romans 16:18 Serving self rather than Jesus.

X. Worship of Things of this World

- A. 1 John 2:15-16 Love not the things in the world.
- B. Romans 1:23-27 The creation; homosexuality.
- C. 1 Timothy 6:10-11 Love of money.
- D. 2 Timothy 2:3-4 Affairs of this life.

XI. Judgment Against Idolatry

- A. Galatians 5:19-21 Idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

—Matthew 6:24

IDOLATRY OF THE WORLD

One need not look to ancient civilizations to find idolatry and false gods. There are idols all around us in modern society. Idolatry is much more than just bowing down to an image in worship, it is anything that someone loves and is devoted to more than God. John Calvin had it right when he wrote: “The human heart is a perpetual idol factory.”



“When something is valued above God and His Word and that thing is trusted to bring satisfaction, it becomes an idol.”

Idolatry of Our Day

Contrary to the law of God, there are many religions still today where people bow down to graven images of metal or stone. However, while the greater part of society has rejected these idols, greater and more powerful idols of the heart and mind have been erected on which people are lavishing time, money, and affection. Anything that supersedes God as the focus and priority in life becomes an idol. The essence of idolatry lies in the heart and is found in that which someone loves, trusts, and worships.

Spiritual Warfare

We are in a spiritual battle against Satan and his deceptive spirits who are working to steal our hearts from true worship to God. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12). The forces of evil are all around, influencing people to worship at the altar of self, pleasure, sports, religion, politics, nationalism, science, education, and materialism. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Idolatry in Religion

Idolatry is found not only in paganism but in Catholicism and Protestantism. The Roman Catholic church is rife with pagan practices and traditions that have no foundation in the pure Word of God. The exaltation of an institution of religion of any kind is a form of idolatry.

“If any man worship the beast [Catholicism] and his image [Protestantism], and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14:9-10). People so often devote themselves to the cause of their fellowship or religious organization more than to the cause of Christ Himself. This is idolatry. In Mark 7:6-9, Jesus spoke of people who honored Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. “Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.” While people may profess to love God, it is idolatry if they exalt their traditions above the simplicity of God’s Word. This can be true of professing Church of God saints. Allegiance and devotion to a tradition or to a doctrine (as correct as it may be) can become idolatrous when it is given inordinate standing in one’s life or congregation.

Worship of Man

Exalting political and religious leaders and giving them control and devotion that belongs only to God is also a form of idolatry. In Acts 12:21-23, Herod gave a great oration to the people. They shouted and said, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.” The angel of the Lord smote Herod and he was eaten of worms because “he gave not God the glory.” 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 warns of being deceived, for a man of sin would exalt himself above God and would be worshipped as God. This scripture often relates to the Catholic pope who professes to be the substitute of Christ on the earth. This is blasphemous and idolatrous. However, there are many ‘little popes’ who reside as overseers, pastors, and leaders in congregations and religious bodies. They place themselves on an exalted level and their words are to be deemed on the level of scripture. The people may stand in awe and shout and proclaim their spiritual bona fides as men and women of God, but this is nothing short of idolatry. It is Christ who is worthy of our praise, not man. Paul and Barnabas performed miracles for which the people began to esteem them as gods come among men (Acts 14:12-15). These true men

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of God rejected the praise and adoration and proclaimed that they were “men of like passions with you.” John the Revelator bowed down in worship to an angel who had given a vision. The angel responded: “See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God” (Revelation 19:10). Any people that worship their spiritual leaders are guilty of idolatry, as are the ministers who accept this kind of praise and adoration.

Worship of Self

Self-promotion of any kind can become idolatry. The worship of self is one of the biggest idols in this generation. This applies to spiritual things as well as to worldly things. Jesus said that, “He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory” (John 7:16-18). In religious groups, too many ministers speak of themselves and exalt their ways, whereas the apostle Paul declared: “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Corinthians 4:5). We live in an age where people are trusting in their own ideas, opinions, and ways. They love themselves and live selfish, self-centered lives. This is just as idolatrous as bowing down to a statue in worship.

Philippians 3:19 refers to those “whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” People are rejecting the holy things of God and are devoting themselves to their own pleasure and satisfaction. They are controlled by ‘their belly’ and do those things which they deem pleasing in the flesh. They “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly” (Romans 16:18). This not only applies to gluttony but to all fleshly things that control people.

Gods of this World

God is worthy of our love, but many are giving their affections to the things of this world. “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are centered around modern-day idols. What are people lusting after and worshiping? What controls their time, money, and energy? What are people esteeming and turning to in their time of need? Do not pleasure of the flesh, nationalism, fashion, sports, and entertainment fit these criteria? Lawful things can become idols. Many people are offering their sacrifices at the altars of these modern-day idols.

From Idolatry to Depravity

Romans 1:23-27 relates how people have changed the glory of God into an image made like man, birds, and beasts. Verse 26 states that they “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.” This is happening in many forms, but the scripture directly relates this worship of the creature as applying to the lust and acts of homosexuality. While prevalent in society and justified by many and excused by others, it is sin and an extreme form of idolatry.

Worship of “Things”

Colossians 3:5 teaches that covetousness is idolatry. The love of material things, wealth, prestige, power, and recognition is idolatry because it undermines what should be the primary purpose and cause to worship and serve God. “The love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Many have erred from the faith as they began to follow after and serve the things of this world more than God Himself. What is controlling your time, your money, and your energy? Do you place God and His work before other things? Do you reserve time to faithfully be in worship service with the saints or do you excuse yourself as you devote yourself to other pursuits? Hearts are revealed by the decisions and choices of life. What dictates where you live, who you marry, what you do, and where you go? Is it possible that an idol has taken the place of God in your life?

Exaltation of Causes

Paul warned Timothy, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life” (2 Timothy 2:3-4). There are lawful concerns and issues of our time that we have to address, but we must not get entangled in them. Political, moral, racial, and societal “causes” can too quickly captivate someone to the extent that it controls and becomes an idol. Be careful, child of God, about getting entangled in what might appear to be a good cause. Soon, the cause becomes more important than God and His way of love, forgiveness, and longsuffering.

Worship God Alone

The idols of today are more deceptive and much more deadly than the physical idols of gold and silver. There is one God, and our love and service to Him are to be exclusive. Let us examine ourselves and see if there are any idols that need to be torn down. Purge and sanctify yourselves of the idols of this world, for of a truth, idolaters and “they that do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Galatians 5:19-21). ■



“Self-promotion of any kind can become idolatry. The worship of self is one of the biggest idols in this generation.”

Symbols, Icons, Gods & Practices

ROOTED IN IDOLATRY



Talisman: An object considered to have religious or magical powers intended to protect, heal, or harm individuals (i.e. a crucifix, yin-yang, rabbit's foot, amulets, crystals).

Virgin Mary: Mary, the mother of Jesus, to whom the Catholics began praying in the third century.



Buddha: The 'Awakened One' or the 'Enlightened One' from South Asia in the fifth century. While not considered a god, Buddhists bow to his image in respect and seek to gain positive spiritual energy.

Ganesha: One of the most well-known and worshipped Hindu gods. The lord of success and the remover of obstacles.



New Age: All things are one. A diverse spiritual grouping of beliefs that seeks harmony in nature and from within oneself. God is in everything and man is god. The mind creates reality. Many occult practices.

Ancestor Veneration: In some cultures ancestors are honored as spirits, and it is believed that they can warn, protect, and influence daily lives. They are sometimes prayed to and food is left out for them.



Witchcraft: The use of supernatural power or magic to control people or events.

Astrology: A type of divination that forecasts events based through observation of the planets and stars. Horoscope.



Holidays

While there are spiritually lawful ways to enjoy some national holidays, a child of God does not always observe them in the same manner as the world. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." —1 Corinthians 10:31



Easter (Not to be confused with Resurrection Sunday): Often considered a pagan holiday originally observed to celebrate the goddess of spring and fertility. The hare was the symbol of fertility in ancient Egypt, hence, the Easter Rabbit. Eggs were a symbol of fertility and life and the coloring of eggs dates back to these pagan traditions.



Halloween: Originally a pagan holiday to celebrate Samhain. The beginning of the Celtic winter; a time to honor the dead when the boundary between the living and dead became thin. Carved pumpkins/turnips were used to ward off evil spirits. In the eighth century, the Catholic church attempted to replace this Celtic festival with All Saints Day.



Christmas: Originally a pagan holiday that celebrated the winter solstice and the rebirth of the sun god. The Roman Catholic church adopted the holiday and "Christianized" it so converted pagans could continue with a similar celebration. The use of wreaths and evergreen trees was deeply rooted in pagan practice.



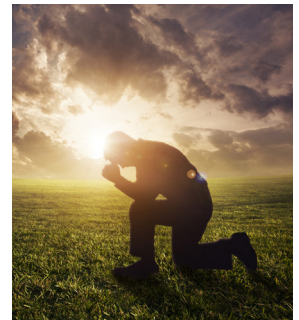
The Origin of Steeples: The history of the obelisk traces back thousands of years to Egyptian pagan worship. It was a phallic symbol which honored the sun god and fertility. Many pagan symbols were merged with the Roman Catholic Church in the fourth century. The tower was used as a watchtower, for bells to be heard, to ward off evil spirits, and to symbolize reaching the heavens. It became part of church architecture and identified a building as a place of worship.



TO HIM BE GLORY

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. —2 Peter 3:18

Statues and monuments are erected to memorialize the dead and to inspire the living; grand universities are built to perpetuate human knowledge and to honor the intelligence of man; skyscrapers may testify of ingenuity and ability; and physical and digital libraries are full of the philosophies of mankind. Child of God, by which principle of this world shall we endeavor to live? To whom shall we honor and glorify with our lives?



The goal and purpose of God’s children should daily be to glorify Jesus Christ as the sovereign Lord and Savior of the world. While people of the world exalt themselves in that which they have done and plan to do, our exaltation should be in Christ alone.

May we seek to know and understand Christ that we may increase in His divine graces by the influence and power of the Spirit of God. As we love and obey God, our submission and consecration will deepen, and we will possess more and more the character of Christ Himself. In so doing, it is Christ alone that is exalted. May every goal, purpose, endeavor, dream, and ambition be rooted in the base cause of Christ, ever seeking the glory of the one and only savior of the world.

All honor, glory, and praise belong to Jesus Christ, for He is the Lord of lords, King of kings, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher of our faith. He possesses all power and dominion and reigns over every god and spirit of this world.

We can, should, and must—without apology and without shame—live to glorify the Lord Jesus every moment, until eternity, where we shall forever be in the wonderful presence of the almighty God. He is worthy of our praise and adoration in every situation of life. To Him be glory in time of trial, in the fire, in the darkness, through the tears, and even in death. It is not a hardship but an honor to glorify our Lord. ■

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HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD