



January 2023

Idolatry

Vol.7 No.1

## Idolatry

By: Amanda Stephanus

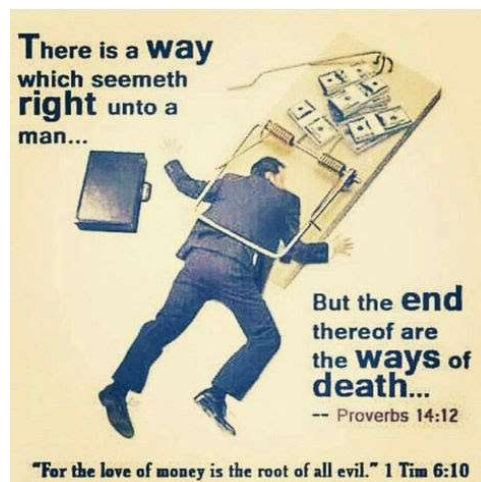
When we think about idolatry, most people instinctively associate it with Old Testament practices. Contrary to God's command to have no other gods before Him (Exodus 20:3), idolatry was common practice in the nation of Israel. Idolatry defined is "the worship of idols, images, or any thing made by hands, or which is not God, excessive attachment or veneration for any thing, or that which borders on adoration" (Websters 1828 Dictionary). Idolatry is still a prevalent problem (1 Corinthians 10:13).

There are those, who like the children of Israel in Exodus 32, become impatient and desire something tangible to worship. The Israelites were overanxious about Moses' return. Instead of trusting in God, who had brought them out of Egypt, they demanded that Aaron build them a golden calf to worship. Once built, they worshipped and gave credit to the golden calf for their freedom from Egyptian bondage. God told Moses the people had corrupted themselves with this false worship. How many people today grow tired of serving God or grow impatient because they don't think things are going the way it should? Instead of being patient and trusting in God, they place their faith in something or someone else and fail to give God their complete devotion.

There are those who are like Jeroboam who create false gods and negatively influence those around them (1 Kings 12:25-33). Jeroboam's lust for power prompted him to build two golden calves to keep people from going to Jerusalem to worship. He influenced those in his kingdom to worship these idols so he would not lose his power, his kingdom, and his life (1 Kings 12:27). He pretended to have their best interest at heart by saying it was too much for them to go to Jerusalem and that he would provide for them an acceptable alternative. We see this in the religious world today. Some religious leaders promote worship practices contrary to God's word which draw people away from worshipping and serving God.

While we can examine ourselves and confidently know we are not worshipping physical idols or engaging in false worship, materialism is another form of idolatry that can slowly creep into our lives if we are not careful. Christians have been commanded to “put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**” (emphasis added) (Colossians 3:5). Meriam-Webster defines materialism as “a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things”. When we start to worry about things of this life, concern ourselves with money and the obtaining of it, or desire the amassing of things to the neglect of spiritual things, we have allowed materialism to put our souls in danger (1 Timothy 6:10).

A study of Acts 17:16-31 proves that there is only one God who has all authority, has made all things, and gives us all things. Therefore, it is only right that we honor Him, praise Him and worship Him and Him alone.



## Idolatry Today?

By Wilburta Arrowood

Exactly what is idolatry? Does it exist today? Am I guilty? We tend to think of idolatry only as worshipping some pagan structure someone had fashioned and set up as a powerful god. Is that all idolatry is? Let's look at what the dictionary says and then let's look at what the Bible says.

Dictionary: the worship of idols. Extreme admiration, love, or reverence for something or someone. Any person or thing that consumes your thoughts, words, time, energy, or money other than God is an idol.

Bible: Exodus 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before Me."

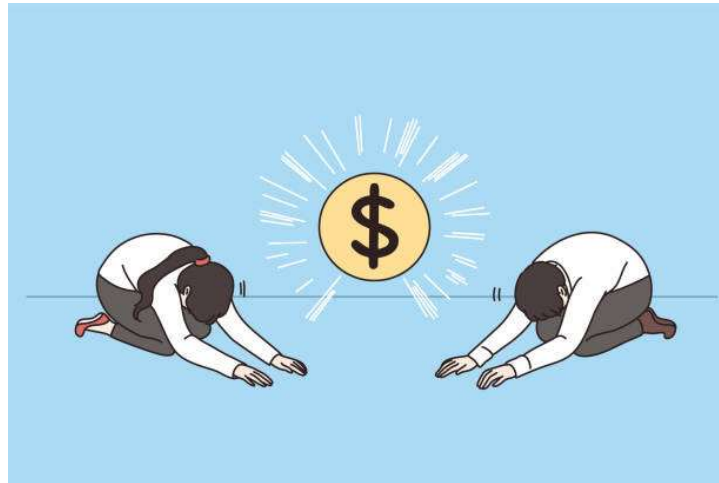
Does this mean that people or things in my life can become idols? When a teenage girl screams, and tries to tear pieces of clothing from a popular singer or movie star, is that idolatry? When a teenage boy collects baseball cards and becomes obsessed and memorizes stats for a popular player, or a race car driver, is that idolatry? When I drool and swoon at that beautiful new car I just saw on tv, or that huge diamond ring that I absolutely adore in the window of the jewelry shop down the street, is that idolatry?

Honestly, I think only the person involved can answer that. It is one thing to admire something. It is all together different to become obsessed over that same thing. It behooves each of us to examine our motives and our actions to be sure we are not giving anything or anyone priority over God.

We have a responsibility to love and respect God and His commands, but if we truly love Him we will not let anything or anyone else interfere with those responsibilities. We are to have no other gods before Him. If popular singers, or sports figures, or even our children and grandchildren become more important than God, then we have a problem. That said, I would like for some of my sisters to examine the idea of whether an education for their children becomes their idol. I see many of my sisters spend hours with their children at school or sports events when they could/should be in bible classes or worship. I'm told they have to play and not miss any games, because their scholarship depends on it. Granted, a quality education is important, but is it that important to override a responsibility to God? I am not judging you. I am asking you to examine it for yourself. Is it truly that important that you could not manage another way?

Another area to examine is our career choices. We are told "if a man won't work, let him not eat." God expects us to support our families, but He also gives guides for how to care for the family relationships. Does our career choice leave time for us to nurture the family, and to worship God as He commands? If not, is it idolizing the money we earn and/or the things we buy with it? Do we really need so much stuff? I cannot tell you any of these things absolutely fall into the idolatry category. I can tell you it is important for you to examine it for yourself and determine if God truly is first in your life. If He is, that is awesome. If He is not, please, please do whatever it takes to fix that.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me.



## "Covetousness Is Idolatry"

by Elizabeth Turner Beall

This is a concept many would question. However, the apostle Paul, in Colossians 3:5 uses these very words when he says, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these you too once walked when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of the creator" (Col. 3:5-10). Paul is telling these Christians that whatever is earthly is not spiritual, must be done away with, and then tells them what that is.

The entire list is important, but our topic here is idolatry, and as has been mentioned before in the previous two articles, idolatry is anything that takes us away from God and puts our focus on something or someone else besides God. To covet is to strongly desire something or someone that belongs to someone else, as can be seen in Exodus 20:17: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's." In today's language we might say we should not covet our neighbor's house, our neighbor's spouse, car, career, or anything else our neighbor owns. But if we do, how is that idolatry?

Liking, even wanting, the very thing the neighbor has is wrong because you are working to get it from the neighbor. Liking, even wanting, something just like the neighbor has is not necessarily wrong. When that desire for it becomes so strong that we put all our focus on getting whatever it is, that is wrong; when that desire is so strong we plan our lives so as to acquire

whatever it is, and our focus goes off God, and getting whatever it is consumes our life, then we have gone into idolatry.

Having goals and making plans to meet those goals are not wrong in and of themselves. Having a nice house, a nice car, a good education, or a great position in a career field is not wrong. The wrong is how we get them. Is God included in those plans? Have you sought His will in those plans? Is it something that will spiritually help you in your walk to Heaven? Is it something that will help you help others to also get to Heaven? If it's according to God's will, everything will fall into place because of God's providential care, and those goals will be realized. Yes, you may even reach those goals without seeking God's help, but in the end that will be emptiness and spiritual destruction because you left God out.

Knowing when you have crossed the line into idolatry is something each of us has to evaluate for ourselves. We each need to look at our own lives to determine if there is covetousness, and if so, confess it and work to rid ourselves of those desires. And if those desires have caused us to leave God out, then we must recognize that, show repentance, make confession of it, and ask God's forgiveness and help from our brethren.

In this day and age when materialism and instant gratification are more the norm, we must guard our hearts and minds, have the knowledge of God's word in our hearts well enough to know what He wants in our lives, and strive to live that commitment.

God bless us as we make our walk towards Heaven!



## Questions for Meditation and/or discussion :

1. What are some forms of idolatry that are prevalent in today's world?
2. Compare idolatry of the Jews in the Old Testament and idolatry in today's world. How is it the same? How is it different?

Ideas for application of our topic:

1. Study passages such as Jeremiah 10:1-6; Isaiah 44:6-28; and Romans 1:25 for other examples of idolatry and the condemnation of it.
2. Evaluate your priorities. Where is God on your list? IF God is not first on your list, consider putting Him there and planning your daily activities around Him. Try it for the next 3 months.
3. IF God is already first on your list, evaluate how well you do and consider any adjustments needing to be made, i.e., leaving off or doing less of something, adding more prayer time, more Bible study, family devotion time, visiting/contacting those who are sick or need encouragement.
4. Encourage those in your local congregation and in the mission fields supported by your congregation to keep up their work and keep God first in their lives.

Suggestions for prayers:

1. Ask God's help in making more time for Him.
2. Ask God's help in teaching your children about Him and to love Him more.
3. Ask God's help in being aware of others who need encouragement.



Find the following words in the puzzle below:

GOD	DESIRE	JEROBOAM
LOVE	HEAVEN	NEIGHBOR
SELF	IMAGES	ADORATION
SOUL	PRAISE	SPIRITUAL
COVET	WORSHIP	GOLDENCALF
HONOR	EVALUATE	MATERIALISM
IDOLS	IDOLATRY	PREOCCUPATION

P R A I S E N E V A E H  
R R Y M E A C T E J M O  
E O B A L D F A H E S F  
O N E G F G E A J R I L  
C O V E T R I L K O L A  
C H R S I M D A N B A C  
U L O S S L O V E O I N  
P Q E L G O D E R A R E

A D O R A T I O N M E D  
T D S P I H S R O W T L  
I D O L A T R Y X W A O  
N E I G H B O R L U O S

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