

A9 BIBLE STUDY: I CORINTHIANS #8

Scripture of Lesson: I Corinthians 8: 1~13

1. Idol worship – What it is and how God views it

Definition of idol worship or idolatry:

- “The worship of a picture or object as a god” [Miriam-Webster Dictionary]
- “**Idolatry** is the **worship** of an **idol** or a physical object as a representation of a god. In all the Abrahamic religions **idolatry** is strongly forbidden, although views as to what constitutes **idolatry** may differ within and between them. In other religions the use of idols is accepted. Which images, ideas, and objects constitute **idolatry** is often a matter of considerable contention.” [Wikipedia]

God’s view: second of the Ten Commandments

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” [Exodus 20: 4-6]

Idol worship in Hinduism

The following are two paragraphs taken from the “Hinduwebsite.com,” that explains what idol worship is in Hinduism for our reference:

“A devout Hindu is not ashamed of going to a temple and bowing before an idol. He has no hesitation to stand in front of it and speak to it as if he talking to an individual with exemplary faith and devotion which is not of this world. He may be rich or poor, seeking something or simply praying without any expectation, educated or uneducated, his devotion and dedication to God and his service are unquestionable.

The idols may not speak to him, but he knows that his prayers will surely be heard, and his devotion and love to the deity will surely be reciprocated. Even if his prayers are not answered, he continues his worship considering it a part of his karma, fate or the way God sometimes chooses to respond. Deep in his heart he knows that he is engaged in a spiritual practice, and in the end it will only do him good and take him closer to God.” [Excerpt from www.hinduwebsite.com]

Idol worship in Buddhism

Buddhists, on the contrary, claim they are NOT idol worshippers and justify their position as follows:

“Although it is customary amongst Buddhists to keep Buddha images and to pay their respects to the Buddha, Buddhists are not idol worshippers. Idolatry generally means erecting images of unknown gods and goddesses in various shapes and sizes and to pray directly to these images. The prayers are a request to the gods for guidance and protection. The gods and goddesses are asked to bestow health, wealth, property and to provide for various needs; they are asked to forgive transgressions.

The 'worshipping' at the Buddha image is quite a different matter. Buddhists revere the image of the Buddha as a gesture to the greatest, wisest, most benevolent, compassionate and holy man who has ever lived in this world. It is a historical fact that this great man actually lived in this world and has done a great service to mankind. The worship of the Buddha really means paying homage, veneration and devotion to Him and what He represents, and not to the stone or metal figure.” [Except from budsas.org]

Contemporary application of idol worship to our lives

[Excerpt from www.gotquestions.org]

“When we hear the word idol we often think of statues and objects reminiscent of those worshipped by pagans in ancient cultures. However, the idols of the 21st century often bear no resemblance to the artifacts used thousands of

years ago. Today, we have replaced the “golden calf” with an insatiable drive to reach the top of the corporate ladder or with a myriad of other passionate pursuits. And, sadly, those who aggressively pursue goals and dreams, altogether excluding God, are often admired for their individualism and drive. In the end, however, it doesn’t matter what empty pleasure we chase after or to what or whom we bow down, the result is the same—separation from the one true God.

Understanding contemporary idols can help us to understand why they prove to be such a powerful temptation. An idol can be anything we place ahead of God in our lives, anything that tugs at our heart more than God does, such as possessions, careers, relationships, hobbies, sports, entertainment, goals, greed, addictions to alcohol/drugs/gambling/pornography, etc. Many of the things we idolize can be very good, such as relationships or careers. Yet Scripture tells us that, whatever we do, we are to “do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31) and that we are to serve God only (Deuteronomy 6:13). Unfortunately, God is often shoved out of the way as we zealously pursue our idols. Worse yet, the significant amount of time we often spend in these idolatrous pursuits leaves us with little or no time to spend with the Lord.”

Discussion topics:

- a. *Does the second commandment still apply to Christians today? If so, how do we justify worshiping before ‘Christian’ images and pictures?*
- b. *What are modern-day idols to contemporary Christians? When do hobbies, sports or recreations become idols?*

2. Consideration of others’ feelings/ sensibilities

Eating of meat offered to idols in the city of Corinth in the first century was a serious problem to the Christians who wanted to keep the principle of not taking part in any foods offered to the idols. Paul warns the Christians to be careful lest other believers or even non-believers be offended if any of them were found taking part in such foods, either at an idol’s temple or bought in the market with the knowledge that it had been offered to an idol:

But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? [v. 9-10]

Today in the American society we do not have this problem. But, similar offences can be made when Christians are found engaging in sinful activities. Such offences occur because people have expectations of higher moral standards in a Christian.

Discussion topics:

- a. *Have you ever been offended when another Christian was found engaged in an un-Christian behavior or action?*
- b. *In what ways can we better represent Christ before unbelievers through our speech and behaviors?*