

**WHAT IS IDOLATRY?**

**ANSWER:** Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator for our hope and happiness, significance and security.

**Bible Passage:** Romans 1:18-25

**Memory Verse:** Romans 1:21,25

**Virtue:** Joy

**Big Idea:** Idolatry is loving something in the created world more than God, the Creator.

**Aim:** To understand that our hearts can be tempted to love and treasure earthly things more than God.

**LEADER'S NOTES:**

We are particularly susceptible to the lure of the world, and we can be distracted and seduced by created things that look exciting and promise great things. This catechism question will help us understand more fully what idolatry is and to personally consider whether we are tempted to worship created things instead of the Creator. It is often relatively easy to spot idols because we become so enthralled and entangled with them; however, it is best for our spiritual maturity if we can identify our own idols as we consider our hearts. Many things may become idols for us, but be careful when listing potential idols to clarify that your list is not exhaustive! We are quick to excuse ourselves if a particular idol is not named.

**Things to remember:**

- We are all worshipers and we are either worshiping God or idols.
- We may feel acutely aware of personal idols and may be burdened by guilt from sin.
- Some of us will be unable to do the heart searching without individual help.

**Question 16 Review: What is Sin?**

Sin is rejecting or ignoring God in the world he created, rebelling against him by living without reference to him, not being or doing what he requires in his law—resulting in our death and the disintegration of all creation.

**INTRODUCTION TO QUESTION 17**

Explain to the group that in the Bible we can see example after example of people turning away from God to worship idols instead. They rejected God, the Creator in favor of something created. People may not worship things like a golden calf but they still are predisposed to worship something created rather than the Creator. We are all worshipers. We are made to worship, and if we're not worshiping God as number one in our lives, we will be worshiping something or someone else.

**Ask** the group to identify ways that the prevailing culture may tempt them to idolatry. Explain that an idol will be the object of a person's affections; it will be what they spend their money on or where they spend their time. A passion for an idol will be obvious to the world; it will be where people turn to when they feel sad or lonely or when they are worried. People trust idols to make them feel better, and they mistakenly think that they will make them truly happy.

Everyone directs their love and loyalty toward someone or something, but God longs to be number one in everyone's life. He doesn't want to be downgraded to second place by something or someone he has created!

**TEACHING OUTLINE****READ: Romans 1:18-23**

*18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.*

*19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.*

*20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

*21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

*22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,*

*23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

In this passage, Paul tells the Romans that God is angry. He's angry because he looks at the world and sees people who don't honor him, who don't love one another, and who deny God's existence—despite the fact that plenty of evidence in the world points to the existence of a great Creator God.

## QUESTION 17

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In verses 22 and 23, Paul describes those who worship images rather than the immortal God as fools! This is what God thinks about those who worship idols. If you love money more than him, he thinks you're a fool; if you love sports more than him, he thinks you're a fool; if you love learning more than you love him, he thinks you're a fool.

God is loving, but he is also jealous for our affection. He wants to be number one in our lives because this is ultimately best for us. He wants us to find joy and satisfaction and hope in him alone. He wants us to realize that when we worship and love created things, we're exchanging the truth for a lie, as we read in verse 25. The lie is that anything other than God can satisfy, that anything other than God can save.

Ask the group to examine their own hearts once again. Encourage them to honestly repent if they think that there are things in their lives that compete with God.

**SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY**

Use the thought bubble below and fill it with things that occupy your mind or things that you daydream about. Reflecting on these things may help to reveal hidden idols that we worship throughout daily living.



## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

(Allow for several answers within your group before reading the provided response.)

- 1. Have you mentioned all the things that can become idols?** No! There isn't an exhaustive list of idols anywhere, and that is why it's important for us to consider our own hearts and discern whether we are loving something more than God.
- 2. What does finding joy and satisfaction in God mean?** True happiness and satisfaction can be found only through relationship with God, and that is because that is what we're made for. Nothing else will bring lasting happiness or satisfaction.
- 3. Does God punish idolatry?** God longs to be number one in everyone's life and he will punish those who worship other gods before him. If we repent of our idolatry and ask God's forgiveness, he will forgive us.

### More to consider:

Have you grasped the fact that idols will always disappoint?

Do you need to consider what it means to love God wholeheartedly?

How might you deal with the temptation of idolatry?

### VIRTUE VISION: Joy

Read Romans 15:13: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."

Think of all the ways and places that the world suggests we will find joy and happiness. Identify where joy comes from and who alone gives joy as you read Romans 15:13 again.

What difference it will make in their lives knowing that joy comes from God and that he will fill them with joy. Will external, created things provide joy? Is joy dependent on circumstances? In other words, can you choose to be joyful and reflect on God's goodness during difficult times? Can all Christians experience joy?

### Memory Verse

**"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. . . .They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."**

**(Rom,1:21, 25)**