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A young child can receive a gift under the Christmas Tree that they don't want. After peeling off the wrapping, the box is opened, and it holds underwear. We can understand why a child might not find that gift very pleasing.

There are some gifts people want to give to God, but He is displeased with them, and most of us can't understand why. Sometimes when people praise or worship God He can't accept it. We should be able to understand that. We don't always want the gifts we receive. We understand that the intentions may be great, but we just can't want the gift we received. With God it's a little different. Sometimes people want to worship God in a way that is simply wrong. He can't accept their worship because it just isn't right.

For one thing, sometimes our worship isn't addressed to God. Imagine getting a present that had someone else's name on it. You might feel it is wrong to accept a gift that was intended for someone else. If you pray to "Whom It May Concern," instead of to the God of the Bible, He may not receive your prayer.

Think of a gift that can only be used by one person, like a tooth brush, but you are told to share it with everybody in your family. You probably wouldn't want to do that, especially if someone in your family is sick with the flu. You might have to either refuse the gift or use differently than it was intended. God doesn't accept worship that isn't given specifically to Him.

Why? Why is it this way?

To take a closer look at the kind of worship God wants us to give Him, I will ask a few questions and look at the answers the Bible provides:

Should a person who belongs to Jesus Christ and worships Him as Lord and Savior also worship other gods? What if a Christian believes that the other gods are different expressions of the same God of the Bible? After all, shouldn't there be freedom to do whatever a person feels is right? If a person feels like doing something who has the right to say that it is wrong?

We might ask: "What's wrong with worshipping other gods? What harm can it do?"

To answer these questions we will look at what the Bible teaches about worshipping other gods and the worship of idols. Actually, the Bible has a lot to say about this. We might think that because it was written at a time when most people worshipped idols made of wood, stone, or metal that what the Bible says doesn't apply to what people do today. Actually, you will see that the Bible has a lot to say about what people are doing today.

Now let's look at what the Bible says about why we should never worship idols, or false gods. I'm going to go forward and backward in Israel's history.

Idolatry Is Worshipping What Is Not God

How idolatry began, even when there were no idols in the world. The very beginning of turning away from God.

[Genesis 1](#) "26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God

blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.””

What happens when something is an image of something else? The image shows a reflection of something other than itself. God created human beings to reflect His reality and His glory. They were to fill the earth with God’s glory.

Remember that when God created Adam and Eve He had communion with them, and had given them dominion over the earth. This meant that they were like priests who approached God directly without intermediaries. They were also like a king and queen who ruled over the earth. As a result of being both priests and rulers, under God, they were in a position to judge what was right and wrong in the Garden of Eden. Obviously, the serpent was wrong to claim that God had lied to them (Genesis 3:14). Yet, instead of driving the serpent out of the Garden, which Adam should have done because the serpent said that God had lied. They decided that God’s Word should not be trusted. When Adam and Eve treated God as a liar they did exactly what the serpent had done. They joined the serpent in his lies about God’s trustworthiness. At this point they stopped worshipping God. They incorrectly replaced God’s moral judgments about right and wrong with their own judgments about right and wrong, and they chose to do what was wrong.

When Adam and Eve sinned, they became like God in the wrong ways, and they severed out their connection with God instead of glorifying God. They put themselves in God’s place as the judge of right and wrong. As they filled the earth with their descendants they didn’t fill the earth with God’s glory. They didn’t expand the boundaries of the Garden of Eden. Instead, God threw them out of the Garden of Eden. When they lived in the Garden they had experience God’s rest of the Sabbath. After leaving the Garden they labored and toiled (Genesis 3:19).

Adam blamed Eve for his sinful action, shifting the blame from himself to her. But the Apostle Paul, blamed Adam for sin entering the world (Romans 5:12-19) because Adam was supposed to be the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). Adam and Eve became like the serpent by not trusting what God had said (Genesis 2:16-17 and Genesis 3:6). Instead they trusted what the serpent said (Genesis 3:1, 4-5).

What was the idol for Adam? Because Adam and Eve were the first humans to sin no human hand had yet made an idol. In that sense, they did not worship an idol carved by human hands. However, the root of their sins was identical to the root of idolatry: they rejected the worship of God and rejected God’s word for a lie. They did not trust God, but trusted in something or someone other than God.

Several other Old Testament passages comment on idolatry, and how those who worship idols reflect what they worship:

In the Ten Commandments believers are commanded not to make idols or use idols in their worship.

[Exodus 20](#) “4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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.”

This is one of the Ten Commandments. God doesn’t want His people to use physical, or carved objects, as part of their worship. This applies both to worship of other gods, or to the worship of the God of the Bible. In Exodus 20:5 we read that God is “a jealous God.” Not only are Christians supposed to avoid using idols they are to worship only the God of the Bible exclusively.

People who worship idols reflect what they worship.

[Exodus 32](#)

We won’t quote all of Exodus 32 here, but you can read it on your own.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, after receiving the Ten Commandments for the first time, he arrived at the encampment of the Israelites, and found them worshipping a golden calf that Aaron had made for them. The people claimed

that the idol Aaron made was an idol to the one true God, who delivered them from Egypt. You might think that as long as the idol was to the one, true God that there might be an exception to God's command not to worship idols. You might expect this because the Israelites hadn't even received the Ten Commandments at this point. But God made no allowances for any of these considerations.

Why did they make an idol of a calf? Because they had worshipped similar idols in Egypt. Almost immediately after God punished the people for their sin of idolatry, Moses described the Israelite people in ways that demonstrate that they had taken on the characteristics of the golden calf they had worshipped:

- They are stiff-necked who do not obey God, like a half wild calf ([Exodus 32:9](#), and [Exodus 33:3](#), 5; [Exodus 34:9](#)),
- They **“had broken loose”** like a rebellious calf that broke off its halter ([Exodus 32:25](#) “And when Moses saw that the people **had broken loose** (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies),”),
- They **“turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them”** like a calf that rebelled against the hand that fed it ([Exodus 32:8](#) “They have **turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them**. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ ”),
- They needed to be “gathered together” again “in the gate” like a calf that had gotten loose would need to be brought back to the gate to a pen where it could be kept safe ([Exodus 32:26](#) “then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him.”),
- Only after receiving correction and rebuke could Moses could lead the Israelites where God told him to go - like a rebellious calf that had to be disciplined before it could be kept and fed ([Exodus 32:34](#) “But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.”)).

The Israelites became like a rebellious calf when they worshipped the golden calf. Pay attention because we're going to build on this. People who worship false gods or idols become like the object of their worship.

Those who worship idols lose their sense of sight, hearing, and touch

[Psalm 115](#) “4 Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. 5 They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. 6 They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. 7 They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. 8 Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.”

When a person rejects God and worships a false god instead they come to reflect characteristics of the god they worship because they were created to reflect God's image. But reflecting God's image was their purpose when God created them. In Psalm 115:4-8 we see that those who worship idols die a slow death when they reflect the image of the idols they worship by becoming like the idols they worship.

Adam and Eve became like the serpent when they did not trust God's Word. They replaced their God's moral judgement with their own moral judgment. They became liars who could no longer trust each other. Because they broke God's command they faced a life of toil and suffering, which only ended when they died.

Those who worship idols lose their God-given capabilities to see, hear and feel what they touch. Their blindness, deafness, and numbness cut them off from the full life-giving reality only God can provide.

Often those who worship idols believe, incorrectly, that they are committing themselves to the source of life. Psalm 115:4-8 tells us that those who worship false gods come to resemble the lifelessness of the idols they worship.

Isaiah 6:9-10 “9 And he said, “Go, and say to this people: “ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ 10 Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.””

The notes for one translation of Psalm 6:10 say, “One might paraphrase: “Your preaching will desensitize the minds of these people, make their hearing dull, and blind their eyes.” From the outset the Lord might as well command Isaiah to harden the people, because his preaching will end up having that effect.” (The NET Bible First Edition Notes).

Keep in mind what was explained in Psalm 115:4-8, people who worship idols lose their spiritual sight, hearing, and sensitivity. Now, as we look at Isaiah 6:9-10, we see that when God called Isaiah this same principle is also at work. Isaiah is called by God to deliver God’s message to His people, but because they have been worshipping idols they will be unable to hear what he tells them and repent of their sin. They have been worshipping idols so long that they have no capacity to hear the truth about God.

What might surprise you is that the people God called Isaiah to go to and preach to worshipped both the true God and false gods. It wasn’t that they never worshipped the true God at all. They worshipped both. What evidence is there that in Isaiah’s time they worshipped both the God of Israel, and other gods? First of all, in Isaiah 1:29, God says, “You will be ashamed of your idol worship.” Clearly they were worshipping other gods than the God of Israel. Then in Isaiah 29:13, God says, “Their worship of me is nothing but man made rules learned by rote.” Clearly, their worship of the God of Israel was not from the heart. They were like actors in a play, saying the right things but they were just pretending.

What is most helpful in understanding why both worshipping God in the Temple and worshipping idols was offensive to God is to see what God considers the cure of their sin would look like. If they stopped sinning, this is what would happen, “only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved” (Isaiah 30:15). However, if they did return to following God, “then you will destroy all your silver idols ... gold images” (Isaiah 30:22). The most important result is that then “everyone who has eyes will be able to see the truth” (Isaiah 32:3).

The sin of the people of Isaiah’s time becomes still clearer when we see what God considers to be what they should be doing instead of worshipping idols and going through the motions of worshipping Him. God says, in Isaiah 30:15, “Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved.” If they were to repent, and return to God, “then you will destroy all your silver idols ... gold images” (Isaiah 30:22). As a result of returning to God, and worshipping Him alone, “Then everyone who has eyes will be able to see the truth.” The effects of being blind like an inanimate idol made of wood or metal, is reversed.

Because they didn’t worship only God, God wanted Isaiah to preach repentance to the people of Judah and Benjamin in such a way that their hearts would become harder, and more determined to continue to worship their false gods. This was God’s judgment against them. If they repented, then God would have forgiven them. But God would punish them for their insincere worship.

Take a look at Isaiah 6:13 “And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.” God promised that He would destroy the great majority of the people of Judah and Benjamin. It would be like a tree that was cut down and only a stump remained. But out of the stump a shoot would grow. From that shoot, would grow a new line of God’s people.

Ironically, today we think that a preacher who has no one who will repent is a failure. Yet, that is exactly what God commanded Isaiah to be. He preached his heart out, and few if any repented.

Jesus quotes this passage of Isaiah quite a lot in the Gospels. Jesus considered the sin of Isaiah’s day to be very similar to the sin of the Jews who lived in His time on earth. They rejected worship of the one, true God.

Restoration for Those Who Will Bear God's Image

We have seen that the Bible teaches that when a person worships an idol, or false god, that he or she becomes like what is worshipped. Human beings were created to bear the image of God. When they refuse to worship God, they bear the image of whatever takes God's place in their hearts. The Apostle Paul repeats this in the book of Romans.

Remember that worshipping idols puts to death your sight, hearing, and ability to feel what you touch.

Romans 1:20–29 (ESV) 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.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness...

Those who worship idols become lifeless and defiled.

- **Where did Paul get his ideas?**

- [Psalm 106:19–20](#) “They made a calf in Horeb and worshiped a metal image. They **exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox** that eats grass.”
 - This refers to the Israelites worship of the golden calf when Moses came back from meeting with God on Mount Sinai.
 - This psalm was written during the Babylonian exile.
- [Jeremiah 2:11](#) “Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have **changed their glory for that which does not profit.**”
 - The book of Jeremiah was written just before and during the beginning of the exile in Babylon. (late 500s bc).
 - The people were worshipping idols. That was the main reason God was sending them into exile. They had worshipped false gods when they should have been worshipping the true God.
 - Other nations didn't exchange their gods for others, but Israel did.
 - As a consequence, their punishment would be that they would lose their glory. They had exchanged the glory of the true God for worshipping false gods who had no true glory. God would make the punishment fit the crime. They would lose their homeland, the land of Israel, that God had promised them. They broke the covenant with God, so He would dissolve His part of that covenant since they lived as if the covenant did not exist.
- [Hosea 4:7](#) “The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; **I will change their glory into shame.**”
 - Hosea was written about 150 years previous to the exile of the Southern kingdom.
 - The Israelites had been a proud people, ready to show off their riches and accomplishments.

- The Temple in Jerusalem was beautiful, but they would lose it. It would be totally destroyed. Their hope of a future with God in their lifetimes was gone.
- Paul wrote about the idolatry of the gentile people and its similarity to the idolatry of the Jewish people.
 - He showed that both Jews and gentiles had worshipped false gods and idols.
 - What is an idol?
 - Anything that takes the place of God in a person's life by giving it the trust and loyalty that only God deserves.
 - Adam and Eve didn't worship any idols made of wood, stone, or metal, but they did listen to the words of the serpent instead of the word of God.
 - Both gentiles and Jews who committed idolatry were punished by becoming more and more like the idols they worshipped, and less and less like God.
 - Not only was Paul quoting Old Testament scripture, he was pointing out that the problem of idolatry has existed as long as there have been human beings who should be worshipping the one true God, and only the one true God.
- Remember that when God created Adam and Eve He had communion with them, and had given them dominion over the earth. This meant that they were priests, who approached God directly without intermediaries. They were also like a king and queen who ruled over the earth. As a result of being both priests and rulers, under God, they were in a position to judge what was right and wrong in the area where they ruled. Obviously, the serpent was wrong to claim that God had lied to them (Genesis 3:4&5). Yet, instead of driving the serpent out of the Garden because of His claim that God had lied, which they should have done, they trusted the serpent instead of God. They decided God's Word should not be trusted. By treating God as a liar they did what the serpent had done, and they joined the serpent in his lies about God's trustworthiness. At this point they stopped worshipping God. They incorrectly replaced God's moral judgment with their own.
- But the Gospel is good news. Life can return to you. You can know the difference between right and wrong. God can give you new sensitivity to light, hearing the truth, and feeling the reality of God.

Worshipping the Savior Can Bring Sight, Hearing, and Touch - making you alive in a way that was dead

Romans 12:1-2 ESV ¹ I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ² Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

This time, instead of pointing directly to the Old Testament, Paul points back to his earlier statements in the book Romans.

- Paul had written in [Romans 1:24](#) "Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the **dishonoring of their bodies among themselves**," but in [Romans 12:1](#) he encouraged his "**brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice**". Instead of **dishonoring their bodies** they gave up their own bodies as a **living sacrifice** to God.
- Paul had written in [Romans 1:25](#) "**they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.**" Idol worshippers "**worshipped and served the creature**" ([Romans 1:25](#)) but Christians worship and serve the Creator with genuine, "**spiritual worship**" ([Romans 12:1](#)). Because Christians worship the true God they are renewed in their minds and become able to **discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**" Paul explained in Romans 12:25 that his readers had previously "**worshipped creature rather than creator**," but now, as explained in [Romans 12:1](#), their sacrifice was "**holy and acceptable to God**".
- In Roman 1:28 Paul explains that the minds of people who worshipped idols were corrupted because "**they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind** to do what ought not to be done." Previously they had corrupted and "**debased**" minds ([Romans 1:28](#)) but now they were being "**transformed by the renewal of your mind**"

([Romans 12:2](#)). God's action of transforming their minds gave them the ability to “**discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect**” ([Romans 12:2](#)).

- What was dead was made alive again.
 - I can't tell you how many times one of the men here has come to me and said something like this: “There's something I've been doing for years. It didn't used to bother me at all. Now everytime I even think about considering doing it, I feel almost sick. What's wrong with me?”
 - I tell them, there's nothing wrong with you. There's something right with you. Your conscience was not working. It was dead. Now it's alive because Jesus breathed new life into your heart. Your mind and heart are being renewed. God is waking you up to sense what is right and what is wrong.
 - I say, “The first time I had a sip of coffee I was about 8 years old. I spit it out all over the kitchen floor. It was so hot it burned my mouth. Now, I practically drink it in by the mouthful - well, not exactly by the mouthful, but I don't mind that it's hot. In fact, I like it. The ability to sense temperature in my mouth has been dulled, so that I don't feel it like I used to. Something like that happens to our conscience. The first time we commit a particular type of sin we feel awful, even sick about doing it. But each time we do it again, it gets less and less painful, until we barely think about it at all. That was what happened to you. Now God has breathed new life into your conscience.”
 - A living a vibrant conscience may not be the most welcome gift God gives to believers, but it is one of the most helpful gifts. When something is sinful, we will finally get to the point where even thinking about will make you want to do what is right. Not only will doing what is wrong feel wrong, but doing right will feel right. You will be glad to do what pleases God. At first, it will be a struggle, kind of like learning to walk. But like a toddler learning to walk, after a while it will happen with less and less effort.
 - Don't misunderstand me. This doesn't mean that doing what pleases God will not involve some painful sacrifices, where we have to struggle to do what is best and most pleasing to God. But it will become a joy to serve the Lord.
 - Even though I've been a Christian for something like 60 years, I am still learning how to grow in the joy and peace that comes from drawing closer and closer to Jesus. The sacrifices have been worth it.
 - Following Jesus will never be boring. There will always be a temptation to turn away from Jesus. But when we walk with the Savior, closer and closer each day, in the long run, we will not regret it one bit.

Let's go back to the questions raised at the beginning, now that we've learned the answers given in God's Word.

Questions Answered

- Should a person who belongs to Jesus Christ and worships Him as Lord and Savior also worship other gods?
 - No
- What if a Christian believes that other gods are different expressions of the same God of the Bible? After all, shouldn't there be freedom to do whatever a person feels is right? If a person feels like doing something who has the right to say that it is wrong?
 - If we think of worship as something we do for God and not for ourselves, we understand that the quality of our worship depends on whether God is pleased with our worship or not. For example, if someone gives you a gift that you really don't want, you won't be happy with it (think of a ten-year-old boy who gets clothes for Christmas). God should decide what kind of worship He wants, not us. We should give God the kind of worship He wants. Paul suggests in [Romans 12:1&2](#) that if we offer our bodies to Him as our sacrifice, it will be pleasing to Him. He will be able to take control of our lives and make us new, if we give ourselves to Him.
- We might ask: “What's wrong with worshipping other gods? What harm can it do?”

- The greatest harm worshipping other gods can do is to make a person believe that He doesn't need Jesus as Savior. The more a person worships a false god the more convinced that person will become that Jesus isn't needed.
- As the Creator, and the Savior, Jesus is the only way that a sinful human being can be made right.
- Jesus died for every believer's sins. Those who repent of their sin, and put their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, will be saved.
- Because He is God, only He can give believers the gift of life.