

The huge ancient city of Corinth was full of idols and idol temples. There was much readily available there to entice and tempt people into various forms of idolatry. The apostle Paul warned Christians: “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry.” (1 Corinthians 10:14 NIV) He didn’t just say to “avoid” idolatry – he said to run from it!



In most places in the western world today, idolatry does not seem so apparent or visible.

Nevertheless, the warning is just as important. In the Old Testament (OT) Israel was warned to keep the laws of the Old Covenant, or they would lose God’s favor. The first two of the ten commandments involve having no other gods but Yahweh alone, and not honoring any idol or image.

(Exodus 20:2-5) Israel broke this covenant because

The Bible warns Christians to flee from idolatry “they worshipped other gods” and “they worshipped idols.” (2 Kings 17:7, 12 NIV) This idolatry led to numerous other gross sins against Yahweh. The result was that the covenant was finally terminated by God.

“I, Yahweh, have not changed.” (Malachi 3:6 CSB) Almighty God Yahweh doesn’t change, but today he deals with Christians through the New Covenant, mediated by Jesus. (Hebrews 8:7-13; Hebrews 9:15; Hebrews 12:24) Idolatry of any sort is still prohibited by God.

The principles of the New Covenant bar “idolaters” from “inheriting the Kingdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21)

“Idolaters” will wind up in “the lake that burns with fire and sulfur.” (Revelation 21:8 CSB)

“Idolaters” are not allowed to enter New Jerusalem. (Revelation 22:15)

Christians are warned at both [Ephesians 5:5](#) and [Colossians 3:5](#) that a “greedy person” is an “idolater.” If we are not very careful, it is easy for a sinful person, such as we all are, to idolize our own desires.

One example of this is in [Philippians 3:19](#) which says: “Their God is their stomach... Their minds are occupied with earthly things” **(NAB)**. This is what idolatry is at its core: our ‘minds occupied with earthly things,’ or merely physical things, as opposed to God.

The case of Paul at the Areopagus in [Acts 17:16-34](#) is very instructive. He spoke to the “wise men” there about what they “unknowingly worship.” ([Acts 17:23 NAB](#)) One key aspect of idolatry is worshipping what one does not really know. While Paul used this one idol shrine with an inscription “To an Unknown God” as a springboard to witness about the true God, in reality these Athenians were worshipping what they did not know. ([John 4:22 NAB](#))

Israel’s wilderness experiences are used to warn against overconfidence in [1 Corinthians 10:1-13](#). Sins like evil desires, revelry, immorality, unwarranted complaining, etc. are connected to idolatry in vs. 14 by: “Therefore.” (NIV) Our sinful desires can be idolized. Desires which are not sinful, in, and of, themselves, such as the need for food, clothing, shelter, relaxation, recreation, transportation, making a living, etc., can be idolized, if we allow them to get out of control. At [Colossians 3:5](#), covetousness, or greed, is called idolatry.

We have need of good governance, law and order, and God has allowed human governments to function to fulfill this need to a degree. ([Romans 13:1-7](#)) However, this could turn to idolatry, and often does, when people give “allegiance” to nations. ([Revelation 13:3 NLT](#)) This is not just patriotism – it is nationalism!

Idolatry is often encouraged or promoted to the point of putting pressure on people by those who profit off of it, such as merchants and others who capitalize on it such as politicians and rulers. A notable example of both is in [Acts 19:23-41](#). Demetrius’ strategy for stirring up this riot was to appeal to his fellow workmen’s love of money and then to encourage them to hide

their greed behind the mask of patriotism and religious loyalty. The rioters couldn't see the selfish motives for their rioting. Instead, they saw themselves as heroes for the sake of their homeland and idolatrous beliefs. Today, idolaters, and promoters of idolatry, act in similar ways.

The seven congregations of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 present somewhat of a picture of the overall Christian church through the ages. Therefore, we do well to take note that two of the seven congregations were counseled by Jesus about idolatry.

In modern times, idolatry is just as pervasive as in ancient times. And, like Bible times, idolaters are usually very much in denial as to their sin. Modern-day idolatry is much more subtle and blended with other things so it can be more difficult to identify. However, we today have the complete Bible in easily accessible form, which gives us an advantage, if we make skilled use of it. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 4:12)