

DOES GOD APPROVE OF THE USE OF IMAGES IN WORSHIP?

Note to the speaker:

Help audience to appreciate that we have a great privilege in worshiping Jehovah exclusively and without images. Idolatry is a danger that must be scrupulously avoided

THE USE OF IMAGES HAS LONG BEEN PREVALENT (6 min.)

On the Areopagus in Athens, Paul addressed a difficult audience—people who prided themselves on piety and intellect

He respectfully noted their “fear of the deities” (Ac 17:22)

Paul referred to use of images in worship, prevalent in Athens

The world has hardly changed in this respect (*w92* 2/15 3-4)

Use of images is widespread in many religions (Select examples from *sh* 96, 99, 117, 141, 157, 182)

Christendom uses images and icons

Statues of Madonna, Jesus, “saints,” other objects are used as “aids” in worship (*sh* 33, 277)

Although Paul spoke tactfully to Athenians, he felt “irritated” because “the city was full of idols” (Ac 17:16)

We may wonder: ‘How does Jehovah feel about the use of images in worship? Are they needed, or are they harmful?’

IS THERE A NEED TO USE IMAGES? (6 min.)

Many think that there is a need to use images in worship

Humans, who are physical creatures, often want to see and touch what they venerate; objects seem more real than spirit beings

Jehovah is real; far superior to all physical creation (1Ki 8:27)

He is “the living God,” alive forever (Jer 10:10)

In contrast to much of what we can see and touch, he is changeless, unaffected by the passage of time (Mal 3:6; Jas 1:17)

Unlike any image, he does not need care, maintenance, or support from his worshipers (Jer 10:3-6)

More than that, “he cares for you” (1Pe 5:6, 7)

As the “Hearer of prayer,” he is approachable; we have unlimited access to him (Ps 65:2; 1Th 5:17)

He acts on the prayers of his faithful servants (Jas 5:16)

Clearly, no one could rightly argue that there is a need for images in worshiping the true God

However, the Bible shows that the matter is more serious still

WHY JEHOVAH HAS FORBIDDEN THE USE OF IMAGES IN WORSHIP (12 min.)

The nation of Israel was given an unusual command—not to make a likeness of anything in creation for worship (De 5:8-10)

This command distinguished Israel from the pagan nations, where idolatry had been entrenched since the days of Nimrod (*it-1* 1169)

Jehovah lovingly explains why image worship is wrong

Consider two important reasons

First, it is impossible to make an accurate image of Jehovah (Isa 46:5, 9)

He is a spirit, invisible to human eyes (Ex 33:20)

Idols are completely unlike the living God—they cannot see, hear, feel, or help their worshipers (Ps 115:4-8; Isa 44:9-20)

Second, Jehovah demands “exclusive devotion” (De 5:9)

He is “the only true God” (Joh 17:3)

There is no other being in the universe that should be worshiped (Isa 42:8)

Jehovah is rightly “a jealous God” (Ex 34:14)

When his ancient people practiced idolatry, he viewed this as spiritual adultery (De 32:21; Isa 54:5, 6)

As adultery creates a breach between adulterer and innocent mate, so idolatry distanced the people of Israel from Jehovah

In Bible times, idolatry also produced bad fruitage, such as prostitution and child sacrifice (1Ki 15:12; Eze 23:37)

Not surprisingly, image worship enrages Jehovah

Much of the history of Israel and Judah is a history of calamities brought on by their idolatry (*it-1* 1169-72)

Is there a place for images in worship today?

WHAT ABOUT THE USE OF IMAGES AS “AIDS” IN WORSHIP? (8 min.)

Many in Christendom are well-intentioned; say they do not worship images but use them as aids in worshipping God

Such an argument does not justify idolatry (*w92* 2/15 5-7; *rs* 183-4)

Gentile Cornelius no doubt had good intentions when he knelt before Peter (*Ac* 10:25, 26)

Apostle John did not intend to commit idolatry when he bowed before an angel, yet he was reprimanded (*Re* 19:10; 22:9)

Since both an angel and an apostle refused to accept worshipful acts, could such properly be bestowed on mere idols, which are far inferior?

The goal of all true Christians is to worship Jehovah “with spirit and truth” (*Read* *John* 4:24)

Cannot worship with “truth” if we believe that lifeless objects have powers that they do not possess

Only one has power to intercede between God and man—Jesus Christ (*Joh* 14:6, 14; *1Ti* 2:5)

Cannot worship God acceptably if we depend on something material that his Word condemns

Need to learn to walk “by faith, not by sight” (*2Co* 5:7)

HOW CHRISTIANS TODAY “FLEE FROM IDOLATRY” (8 min.)

The apostle Paul urged: “Flee from idolatry” (*1Co* 10:14)

Command not just to avoid but to “flee”—to run away!

How can Christians today apply that inspired counsel?

If this command is new to us, we need to act upon it (*rs* 185-6)

Keep in mind that not every image is an idol (*g76* 12/22 12-15)

Some decorative depictions of various creations may have long since lost—or never had—any connection with idolatry

Need to take into consideration local community and culture, consciences of others, use to which object is put (*Ro* 14:21)

We would want to rid ourselves of anything that might cost us Jehovah’s blessing and favor (*De* 7:25, 26; *Ac* 19:19)

Christians must continue to “flee from idolatry”

Even covetousness or greed can amount to idolatry (*Col* 3:5)

Greek word rendered “covetousness” can mean “the desire to have more” (*g79* 4/22 6)

The world promotes greed, materialism (*1Ti* 6:10)

Avoid idolizing any sports or entertainment figures

Anything that we place above Jehovah in our life is an idol

Put Kingdom interests first (*Mt* 6:33)

WORSHIP THE LIVING GOD WITH JOY (5 min.)

Jesus promised: “The truth will set you free” (*Joh* 8:32)

Freedom from idolatry is a genuine blessing of pure worship

Idol worship can be expensive and burdensome (Cite an experience of one who was freed; for example, *w92* 1/1 6)

Idolatry tends to promote selfishness—idolaters ask idols for something; pure worship promotes giving (*Jas* 1:27)

Giving leads to genuine happiness (*Ac* 20:35)

Delight in serving Jehovah, “the happy God,” forever! (*1Ti* 1:11)

(Adhere closely to the outlined material, and observe the indicated timing of each section. Not all cited texts need be read or commented on)