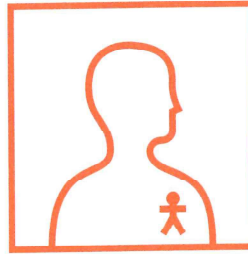


Question 17

What is idolatry?



Answer

Idolatry is trusting in created things rather than the Creator.

Aim

To help the children to understand that their hearts can be tempted to love and treasure earthly things more than God.

Big Idea

Idolatry is loving something in the created world more than God, the Creator.

Bible Passage

Romans 1:18–25

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)

Virtue

Joy





Leader's Notes

Children are particularly susceptible to the lure of the world, and they can be distracted and seduced by created things that look exciting and promise great things. This catechism question will help the children to understand more fully what idolatry is and to personally consider whether they are tempted to worship created things instead of the Creator. It is often relatively easy to spot the idols of children because they become so enthralled and entangled with them; however, it is best for the children's spiritual maturity if they can identify their own idols as they consider their hearts.

Many things may become idols for children, but be careful when listing potential idols to clarify that your list is not exhaustive! Children are quick to excuse themselves if their particular idol is not named.

Things to remember when planning and teaching:

- The children are all worshipers; they are either worshipping God or idols.
- The concept of idolatry may be new for some children.
- Some children may feel acutely aware of personal idols and may be burdened by guilt from their sin.
- Some children will be unable to do the heart searching without individual help.
- Remember to mix and match the activities in the lesson to fit your time frame (see p. 12 for some sample outlines). You won't have time to do them all. Feel free to adapt each activity based on your class's strengths and weaknesses.

Leader's Prayer

O Great God, please help me to love and worship you above all other worthless idols. May I find my joy and satisfaction in you alone. Please help me to see areas in my own life where I'm tempted to idolatry, and protect me from wandering

away from you. Grant understanding to the children who will hear this lesson; may they long to love and serve you as Lord of their lives and flee from worthless idols. In Jesus's name. Amen.

Leader's Tool Kit

- Whiteboard
- Whiteboard marker
- Empty bag
- Markers
- Q17 Thought Bubble (RB), one per child
- A selection of toys



- Tray
- Dish towel
- Paper
- Q17 Comic Strip Template (RB), one per child
- Sticky notes

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10 Catechism Recap

On the whiteboard, draw a grid that is four squares wide and four squares down. Leave room on the board to keep score. In a bag, put slips of paper numbered one to sixteen.

Divide the children into small teams and invite them to name their teams. Set up a score board. Invite each team to pick a number out of the bag. Make sure they can't

see what number they're picking! Explain that each time a team picks a number, they will write it on the grid. They will get ten points if they can remember the question that goes with the number, twenty points if they can remember both the question and the answer. Repeat the process until the grid is filled with numbers or you run out of time. The team with the highest score wins.

5 Introduction to Question 17

Give each child a copy of Q17 Thought Bubble (RB) and some markers.

Ask the children to reflect on what they think about or daydream about often. Get them to write or draw their answers in the thought bubbles.

- Do they daydream about their future?
- Do they daydream about things they'd like to buy?
- Do they daydream about people?

Tell the children that reflecting on their daydreams can sometimes reveal something about their hearts.

Introduce Question 17: "What is idolatry?" Explain to the children that idolatry is loving something more than God. An idol is something that takes the place of God in our lives. It is something or someone we look to for joy and satisfaction, instead of our great Creator God. We all have idols, whether we realize it or not.

Analyzing our daydreams can sometimes help us to identify the things that we're tempted to love and trust more than God. Most of the time, idols are not bad things. They only harm us when they go from their proper place into God's place.

**Activity**

Gather a selection of things that people are tempted to turn into idols. This activity will work well with a selection of miniature toy things. For example, you could use a toy car or some clothes made for a Barbie. Find things to represent:

Money	Celebrities
Adventure	Education
Cars	Technology
Food	Fashion
House	Sports
Romance	Travel
Friends	

Give each child a piece of paper and a marker.

Explain to the children that this activity will help them to think about some modern-day potential idols.



Place the representative items on a tray or table under a cover. Invite the children to come and look at the items on the table for thirty seconds. Then cover the items up on the table again. Have the children write down as many things as they can remember in a set period of time.

Uncover the items again, and see how many items the children remembered. Highlight to the children that these items represent some of the things that people idolize (or put before God) in the world today. Comment that the people who idolize these things would never forget them though, because they love them and mistakenly trust them to bring lasting happiness. Things that are loved so much can never be far from a person's mind.

(Explain that none of these things are wrong in and of themselves. They become a problem when they take the place of God in our lives.)

**Teaching Outline**

Begin the teaching time by asking for God's help. Ask that the lesson would be taught faithfully and that the children might listen well.

Explain to the children 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. Highlight to the children that nowadays people may not worship things like a golden calf, but they still are predisposed to worship something created rather than the Creator.

Clarify for the children that we are all worshipers. We are made to worship, and if we're not worshipping God as number one in





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our lives, we will be worshipping something or someone else.

Ask the children to identify ways that the prevailing culture may tempt them to idolatry.

Explain to the children 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.

Tell the children that everyone directs their love and loyalty toward someone or something, but clearly remind them that 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!

Read Romans 1:18–23. Provide Bibles for the children to read along with you.

Ask the children whether they remember who Paul was and to whom he wrote letters.

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.

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.

Remind the children that 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 children 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.

Finish the teaching time by helping the children commit Question 17 and the answer to memory.

(These notes are just for guidance. Please expand or amend to suit your own children and context.

Write out your talk in your own words and include illustrations and applications that you know will connect with your children).

**Activity**

One way to figure out what our idols are is to ask what makes us angry if it is taken away. Do they fight with their siblings over toys? Do they fight with friends at school over another person? These may be clues to potential idols.



Print out a Comic Strip Template for each child (RB). Have the children draw a comic-style story in which someone gets into a fight and then realizes he or she has made something or someone an idol.

**Discussion and Question Time**

Some of the questions that might arise include:

? Have you mentioned all the things that can become idols?

No. Explain to the children that there isn't an exhaustive list of idols anywhere, and that is why it's important for them to consider their own hearts and discern whether they're loving something more than God.

? What does finding joy and satisfaction in God mean?

Help the children to remember that 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.

? Does God punish idolatry?

Remind the children that God longs to be number one in everyone's life and that 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.

Also use this opportunity to help the children to think about their own lives and how this question and answer affects them personally.

- Have they grasped the fact that idols will always disappoint?
- Do they need to consider what it means to love God wholeheartedly?
- How might they 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.”

Rehearse for the children all the ways and places that the world suggests we will find joy and happiness. Ask the children to identify where joy comes from and who alone gives joy as you read Romans 15:13 again.



Ask the children 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?

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Memory Activity

Write the memory verse or catechism answer on sticky notes, one word per note. Make sure there are enough sticky notes with words on them for each child. You may need to make multiple sets if you have a big group of children.

Give each child a sticky note, and then ask everyone to stick them to their foreheads. Help the children to work out the verse or answer and get themselves in the right order. Have them shout out their words individually, and then have the group say it together.

Closing Prayer Time

Encourage the children to ask God to help them to love him above all things and for God to help them to see where they may be tempted to worship idols.

