

“Idolatry”

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Psalm 115:1–8 (ESV)

- ¹ *Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory,
for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!*
- ² *Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”*
- ³ *Our God is in the heavens;
he does all that he pleases.*
- 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.¹*

This week, while I was online, I happened to see a headline about a woman who had six ribs removed in order to look more like Jessica Rabbit, the cartoon character from the 1988 movie, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* This woman, Pixee Fox (I’m guessing that’s not her birth name), has had at least 15 plastic surgeries, which have cost over \$119,000, so she can look like a cartoon character.² Besides the money and time all of this has cost, this last surgery caused a lot of pain. We might say she sacrificed money, time, and comfort in order to resemble her idol.

There are actually multiple people who had had many expensive plastic surgeries to look like Barbie and Ken.³ One man has had over 190 surgeries and has spent over \$200,000 to look

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² Siofra Brenna, “Model Spends \$120,000 on 15 Surgeries and Has SIX RIBS Removed in Her Quest for a 14-inch Waist - Because She Wants to Look Like a Cartoon Character,” *Daily Mail*, November 25, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3333707/Pixee-Fox-spends-120k-15-surgeries-6-RIBS-removed-look-like-Jessica-Rabit.html>.

³ See, for example, News Dog Media, “Couple Spend over \$320K on Plastic Surgery to Become Real-life Barbie and Ken Dolls,” *Daily News*, October 21, 2015, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/plastic-surgery-lovers-barbie-ken-dolls-article-1.2405516>.

like Ken.⁴ One of those surgeries was to remove veins from his forehead, which he didn't like because they would "pop out" when he smiled. He could have lost his eyesight if that surgery went wrong, but he was willing to sacrifice his sight just to achieve what he considers the perfect look.

Lest we think people only have such surgeries to look like fictional characters, there are plenty of people who have had surgeries to look like celebrities. For example, a British woman has spent \$30,000 on plastic surgery to look like her idol, Kim Kardashian.⁵ Not to be outdone, a British *man* has spent well over \$100,000 to look like Kim Kardashian.⁶

These cases are rather extreme, of course. But we should still ask the question, Why would people sacrifice so much money to look like figures they adore? It would be easy to write these people off as crazy. But I don't think they're crazy. They have acted irrationally, but that's something different. The reason they are acting irrationally is because they are worshiping idols. Their behavior is explained by an important biblical principle: We become like what we worship.

In the passage that was just read, we are told that those who make idols become like them. In that passage, we are told that people make statues of silver or gold. Those idols have mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, and feet, but they can't speak, see, hear, smell, feel, or walk. They are literally senseless. And the people who make them and trust in them become senseless, too. They become mute and dumb. People who make themselves to look like Barbie become plastic. I'm guessing that they are not the deepest people, or the most interesting conversationalists.

Why do we become like the thing we worship? Because we are imaging creatures. When we began this series on the story, or plot, of the Bible, I said that God made people in his image. That means we were made to reflect what he is like. But our problem is that we turn from the Creator to worship things in creation, and when we do that, we reflect them, not God. Greg Beale, one of my favorite biblical scholars, writes this: "God has made humans to reflect him,

⁴ Ruth Styles, "Man Who Has Had 191 Surgeries in a Bid to Become a Human Ken Doll Goes under the Knife Yet Again... to Get a Set of Angel's WINGS," *Daily Mail*, May 27, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3099324/Man-spent-150-000-bid-human-Ken-doll-goes-knife-set-WINGS.html>.

⁵ Beth Stebner, "Kim Kardashian Look-alike Shells out \$30,000 on Plastic Surgery to Emulate Reality Star," *Daily News*, July 15, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/life-style/kim-kardashian-look-alike-shells-30k-emulate-reality-star-article-1.1867396>.

⁶ Jess Wilson, "Kim Kardashian Wannabe Jordan James Parke Refused MORE Surgery on New TV Show Botched," *Mirror*, May 13, 2015, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-wannabe-jordan-james-5689491>.

but if they do not commit themselves to him, they will not reflect him, but something else in creation. At the core of our beings we are imaging creatures. It is not possible to be neutral on this issue: we either reflect the Creator or something in creation.”⁷ Because God made us to reflect something, we are going to do that. That’s not something we can choose. The only issue is whether we will choose to worship God and reflect him, or to reflect something else. As Greg Beale says, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration.”⁸

To help us understand this principle better, imagine this: Imagine that each one of us wore a suit covered in the front with mirrored panels. Whatever we looked at would be reflected on those little mirrors. So if we look at God, by worshiping him, reading his word, praying, thinking about him, and so on, we reflect who he is to everyone and everything around us. But if we spend our time looking at something else—longing after it, daydreaming about it, pursuing it—we will reflect that thing. That’s simply what we do.

Idolatry has been a problem for all people of all times. It’s the sin behind the sin. It’s the underlying desire that causes us to do things contrary to God’s will. It’s really a matter of worship. We all tend to make someone or something the ultimate one or thing in our lives. We put our trust in it. We love it. We sacrifice in order to get it. We obey its rules, so to speak. We look to it for our security, our happiness, and our identity. When we worship anything other than God, our senses become dull, our thinking becomes futile. We become foolish. We exchange truth for a lie. That’s why we do irrational things. People spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to get plastic surgery are perhaps a little extreme, but everyone outside of Christ does something irrational in the pursuit of an idol. If a man makes an idol of his work, he might sacrifice his family and his health in order to work long hours. If someone idolizes a person, that someone may sacrifice all kinds of things and may act irrationally in order to gain acceptance from a person.

Idolatry is the major problem in the entire Bible. It’s clearly a problem in the Old Testament. And it was certainly the major problem in the history of Israel. A few weeks ago, when I talked about the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, I said that Aaron, Moses’s brother and the first high priest, made a golden calf and the Israelites worshiped it. Last week, I mentioned that at the end of Solomon’s life, he had worshiped false gods. So we read this in 1 Kings 11:1-8:

⁷ G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 16.

⁸ *Ibid.*

¹ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, “You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. ³ He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. ⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. ⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods.

God had blessed Solomon, the son of David and the King of Israel, with wisdom, wealth, and a peaceful reign. God even spoke directly to him (1 Kgs. 3:5; 6:11; 9:3). But that wasn't enough for Solomon. He gathered a great amount of wealth, and horses, and women, all in violation of Deuteronomy 17:16-17. We see here that he clung to these foreign women, and they turned his heart away from God.⁹ He loved these women more than he loved God. And because he loved them so much, he worshiped their gods.

I should say something about these false gods. “The Canaanites explained nature by reference to their gods. Each god represented some force of nature.”¹⁰ So if you wanted your crops to grow, to avoid famine in the land, and so forth, you had to worship various gods. That's what they believed, anyway. Many of these false gods were related to fertility, since people relied so heavily and directly on agriculture.

Ashtoreth was the Canaanite goddess of fertility. She was also a goddess of sex and war. She was believed to be the wife of Baal, the Canaanite storm god who brought rain. Apparently

⁹ We may wonder how Solomon could have 1,000 women, but we should remember Wilt Chamberlain's claim that he slept with 20,000 women. Over ten years ago, when I was living in Austin, I was involved in a Christian mentoring program in a juvenile detention center. We held a special evangelistic event in this center. For this event, we brought in a guest speaker, a former NBA player named McCoy McClemore. I picked him up at an airport hotel in Austin and drove him to the detention center in San Marcos. During the ride, I asked him about playing with Chamberlain, since they both played for the San Francisco Warriors, during McClemore's rookie season. I asked him if Chamberlain's claim could be possibly be true. I can't remember what his exact words were, but he acknowledged that Chamberlain “loved his women.” That was his way of indicating that Chamberlain's claim could be true. If a man like Chamberlain could have 20,000 women, it seems very likely that a powerful and wealthy man like Solomon, who reigned for forty years, could have 1,000 women.

¹⁰ Elmer B. Smick, “Canaanite Deities and Religion,” in Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 411.

the Canaanites believed that she had sex with Baal on a yearly cycle, and this accounted for the abundance of crops. There was something called cult prostitution that was practiced by people in the countries that surrounded Israel. (It's forbidden in Deut. 23:17-18; see also 1 Kgs. 14:24; 15:12; 2 Kgs. 23:7.) People would go to the temple of a false god and have sex with a prostitute, and this was thought to guarantee fertility. In other words, if you want to make sure your crops grow and your animals breed, you better take part in this type of worship.

Milcom and Molech may be the same god. Molech was associated with child sacrifice (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; 2 Kgs. 23:10; Jer. 32:35). He may have been the god of the underworld.¹¹ If that is true, it's possible that he was associated with the cult of the dead. In the ancient Near East, there was a belief that the dead lived on and needed to be fed and taken care of. In some beliefs, the dead were locked in the underworld so they wouldn't come back to life and do harm to the living. "The dead needed feeding and commemorative rites at regular intervals thereafter or they might return to do damage."¹² So those who worshiped Molech may have sacrificed their children to appease the dead.

I bring this up not just because it's interesting, and not just because it helps us understand what's going on. These rituals show us that worshiping false gods leads to wicked behavior. And the fact that people would do such evil things to worship these gods shows that they actually trusted these gods. They actually thought that Ashtoreth could bring them abundant crops and that Molech could take care of the dead. They also believed that Baal actually brought rain that watered the crops. In a society that was so directly connected to harvesting crops, what this meant is that these people trusted these gods to sustain their lives. We could literally say that to people worshiping these gods, their worship was a matter of life and death. These people didn't realize that Yahweh, the God of Israel, was the Creator of the universe and the only one who has power over life and death.

Solomon, son of David, and a king of peace, worshiped false gods on the Mount of Olives, the mountain east of Jerusalem, the very place where Jesus was arrested. We might say that Jesus succeeded in the garden of Gethsemane by doing God's will, whereas Solomon failed in the garden, like Adam, because he didn't trust God.

¹¹ John Day, "Molech, Moloch," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006-2009), 4: 129.

¹² Alan F. Segal, "Dead, Abode of The," ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006-2009), 64.

After Solomon, the kingdom of Israel was divided. The northern kingdom was known as Israel and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. Generally, Israel was more idolatrous than Judah, but they both had their share of wicked kings and idolatry. The first king of the northern kingdom was Jeroboam, who made not one, but two golden calves (1 Kgs. 12:28). He made temples and appointed priests who were not Levites, the tribe of priests (1 Kgs. 12:31). We're told that he held a festival "in the month that he had devised from his own heart" (1 Kgs. 12:33). He didn't listen to God's word. He didn't pay attention to what God had revealed. He just made things up and did what he wanted.

This pattern of idolatry continued for many years. We see it in the time of Ahab, king of the northern kingdom, who married a foreign woman named Jezebel. He led the nation to worship Baal. But God showed that Baal wasn't in control of the rain. He stopped the rain for three years, during the time of the prophet Elijah. Elijah had a very famous contest between himself and the prophets of Baal. When they called upon their god, nothing happened. But God responded to Elijah (1 Kgs. 18). Still, most people didn't turn to God. They didn't put their faith in him. Ahab and Jezebel wanted to kill Elijah, and he ran away and told God that he wanted to die. Though things looked bleak, God told Elijah that he wasn't alone. There were still seven thousand people in Israel who hadn't bent their knee to Baal. I don't know what the population of Israel was at that time, but it must have been at least several hundred thousand people. Out of that many people, only seven thousand were not worshiping idols. That's how bad things were.

Eventually, because of idolatry, God let world powers bring judgment upon Israel and Judah. Assyria brought judgment upon Israel in 722 BC. Later, Babylon, the world's super power at that time, brought judgment upon Judah in 586 BC. In both cases, people were exiled. Israelites were brought to Assyria, and Jews were brought to Babylon. When Babylon attacked Judah, they destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. The Jews were exiled for almost seventy years. They started coming back to Judah only after the Persian Empire replaced Babylon as the reigning super power.

The passage that shows why Israel experienced this judgment is 2 Kings 17. I want to begin reading this chapter in verse 6. Verse 6 tells us what happened:

⁶In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, and he carried the Israelites away to Assyria and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

So Assyria conquered Israel, the northern kingdom, and they took the Israelites to Assyria. The verses that follow tell us *why* that happened.

⁷ And this occurred because the people of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods ⁸ and walked in the customs of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel, and in the customs that the kings of Israel had practiced. ⁹ And the people of Israel did secretly against the LORD their God things that were not right. They built for themselves high places in all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city.

¹⁰ They set up for themselves pillars and Asherim on every high hill and under every green tree, ¹¹ and there they made offerings on all the high places, as the nations did whom the LORD carried away before them. And they did wicked things, provoking the LORD to anger, ¹² and they served idols, of which the LORD had said to them, “You shall not do this.” ¹³ Yet the LORD warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, “Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the Law that I commanded your fathers, and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets.”

¹⁴ But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the LORD their God. ¹⁵ They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them. ¹⁶ And they abandoned all the commandments of the LORD their God, and made for themselves metal images of two calves; and they made an Asherah and worshiped all the host of heaven and served Baal. ¹⁷ And they burned their sons and their daughters as offerings and used divination and omens and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger. ¹⁸ Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight. None was left but the tribe of Judah only.

¹⁹ Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs that Israel had introduced. ²⁰ And the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and gave them into the hand of plunderers, until he had cast them out of his sight.

²¹ When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king. And Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD and made them commit great sin. ²² The people of Israel walked in all the sins that Jeroboam did. They did not depart from them, ²³ until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had spoken by all his servants the prophets. So Israel was exiled from their own land to Assyria until this day.

There's a lot there, obviously. But I want to make a few points. One, though God had rescued Israel out of Egypt, and though he gave Israel his word, they turned away from him. God had warned them many times by sending prophets to tell them about their idolatry. But they ignored these prophets. They refused to listen to them. They had ears, but they could not hear.

They had eyes, but they had become spiritually blind. Their idolatry had rendered them senseless. And by refusing to listen to God’s prophets, they were refusing to listen to God. Why didn’t they listen to God? Because they were stubborn and they didn’t believe in God. They didn’t believe. In fact, the passage says (in v. 15), “They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them.” People who hate God’s word don’t believe in God. They don’t trust him. Frequently, they take bits and pieces of the Bible that they like and reject the rest. But if we only take parts of the Bible, we’re making a god in our own image, one fashioned to suit our desires.

Two, their rejection of God and their worship of false Gods had a profound effect on the Israelites. “They went after false idols and became false” (v. 15). The NIV says, “They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless.” The Hebrew word translated as “false” can also mean “empty” or “meaningless.”¹³ Idols are empty, worthless, and meaningless.¹⁴ Isaiah says they “are nothing” and their “work is less than nothing” (Isa. 41:24). These false gods cannot provide for them or save them. These false gods cannot give life.

As I said earlier, people become like the thing they worship. The Israelites became false because they worshiped false gods. Some people become empty and plastic because they worship cartoon characters or dolls. The person who worships sports will end up being competitive, perhaps, but he’ll be empty. He won’t have much to talk about. He can’t think about the most important things in life. The same thing is true of people who worship entertainment. (The person who spends hours in front of the boob tube becomes a . . .) What you look at the most is the thing you will reflect, and we will never rise above the thing that we worship.

The third point that comes out in this text is that when people worship false gods, they do wicked things. The Israelites made wooden poles called Asherim, which were supposed to represent the goddess Asherah. She was supposed to be the mother of all gods, the mother of all living. Her statue was like a tree, perhaps echoing the tree of life. But she didn’t give life. Actually, idol worship led the Israelites into death. They even sacrificed children.

¹³ The Hebrew word is אִבָּל. This is also the word used often in Ecclesiastes: “Vanity of vanities. . . . All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).

¹⁴ On one hand, the Bible says that idols are demons (Deut. 32:15). On the other hand, the Bible says that idols don’t really exist (1 Cor. 8:4; 10:19). I think that means that false gods are certainly not divine, and if there’s any reality behind them, it’s an evil one. But the overall point is that false gods are worthless.

I said this two weeks ago, but it bears repeating. We can look at the stories of the Old Testament and think that they depict primitive people. We can say, “Oh, those people were so ignorant and foolish!” We can think that we’ve made so much progress. We have made technological progress. And where a Christian influence has been strong, there has been some real progress.¹⁵ But the human condition apart from Christ has not progressed much at all. People are still sacrificing children. Roughly a million unborn children are aborted each year in America. In the past forty-two-plus-years, since *Roe v. Wade*, there have been about 57 million abortions. Many of the reasons why women have abortions have nothing to do with health issues or rape. Most of the reasons that women give for having abortions concern timing and finances. In one study, from the pro-choice Guttmacher Institute, 74 percent of women who had abortions said, “Having a baby would dramatically change my life.” 73 percent said they “[c]an’t afford a baby now.” 48 percent said they didn’t want to be a single mother or were having relationship problems.¹⁶ A couple of years ago, *Time* magazine published an article on abortion. In it, there was a description of a woman who came to an abortion clinic in Fargo, North Dakota:

A 24-year-old patient who drove 80 miles (130 km) alone to reach the clinic says she and her boyfriend decided together not to continue her pregnancy, which was six weeks along. “Neither of us is anywhere near baby time right now. We argue over who will take the dog out some days, so I don’t think the diaper changing would go much better.”¹⁷

Apparently, a dog has more of a right to live than a baby. We could say that children are sacrificed on the altars of selfishness, money, and convenience—false gods, all of them.

In the rest of 2 Kings 17, we are told that after the Assyrians took the Israelites out of the land of Samaria, they replaced them with people from other nations. And these people from other nations all served their own gods. But they also were taught about the true God, the God of Israel. So they tried to have it both ways—worship the true God and also serve false gods. We’re told that these people also did wicked things like sacrificing children (v. 31). The narrator ironically tells us that these people “feared the LORD but also served their own gods” (v. 33; also

¹⁵ Some things that have come directly out of a Christian worldview: the concept of charity, orphanages, hospitals, universities, the concept of human rights, the abolition of slavery, and even significant advances in the early days of modern science. See Alvin J. Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

¹⁶ Lawrence B. Finer, Lori F. Frohwirth, Lindsay A. Dauphinee, Susheela Singh, and Ann M. Moore, “Reasons U.S. Women Have Abortions: Quantitative and Qualitative Perspectives,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, 2005 37 (3): 110-118, <https://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/journals/3711005.pdf>.

¹⁷ Kate Pickert, “What Choice? Abortion-rights activists won an epic victory in *Roe v. Wade*. They’ve been losing ever since,” *Time*, January 14, 2013: 46.

v. 41). But the reality is that, according to verse 34, “They do not fear the LORD.” God wants all our worship. He will not share his glory with any false gods.

Yet people today try to combine worship with God with other things that are contrary to God. The combination of worshipping different gods is called syncretism. People want to have Jesus and also have other gods. Some people want to say they worship Jesus and then they hold beliefs that are completely contradictory to the Bible. God is not fooled by this. Some people want to have Jesus and money, or Jesus and politics, or Jesus and sports. Now, it’s not wrong to have money, or to have political views, or to play or watch sports. But when these things dominate your lives—when you’re spending more time and money on these things than on Jesus—they are idols.

Just last night I read an article in the *New York Times* that wondered whether CrossFit—the high-intensity gym—has become another religion. In that article, the author tries to determine whether things like sports can actually be considered religions. He writes, “Yet consider football. Religion scholars have noted that it brings people together in large crowds to ‘worship,’ and has a weekly holy day and even annual holidays, like N.F.L. draft day and, of course, the Super Bowl.”¹⁸ With respect to football, I can say this: the first time I felt like I was in a real worship experience was when I went to graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin. The first two years I was in Austin, I went to every home football game except for one. I was sort of overwhelmed the first time I went. I was among 80,000 pilgrims who cheered the Longhorns. I felt like I was visiting the sacred space of a foreign religion. The congregants performed a sacred liturgy of chants that I didn’t recognize. And we could say this about football, and rock concerts, and many other things. We all worship something, and many people in America try to worship the true God and lesser gods.

In the story of the Bible, God judged the Israelites because of their idolatry. They wanted to be like other nations. They desired the gods of other nations. So God gave them over to their desires. They wanted so much to be like other nations that God let them be ruled by other nations.

And God judges idolatry today. God often punishes people by giving them over to their desires. That’s what Paul says in Romans 1. That’s why we have to be careful about our desires.

¹⁸ Mark Oppenheimer, “When Some Turn to Church, Others Go to CrossFit,” *New York Times*, November 27, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/28/us/some-turn-to-church-others-to-crossfit.html?_r=1.

If we follow them, they can lead us away from God. Before we know it, we're doing irrational things that are harmful and even self-destructive. And there can be a point when it's too late to turn from those desires. In fact, the concept of hell is God giving people over to their desires: They don't want God in their lives, so God gives them an eternal reality without himself, and without anything good.

This is all bad news. Where is the good news? The good news is that God sent his Son, Jesus, into the world. Jesus is the true image of God (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). He perfectly images the Father because he perfectly glorifies the Father. He always looks to the Father and does his will, so when we see Jesus, we see God. Athanasius, an early and very important theologian, said that sin corrupted the image of God in us.¹⁹ We are still made in God's image, but that image has become stained. The only way to renew that image is Jesus. The Father sent the Son into the world to die for our sins on the cross, but also to show us what it's like be God's image bearer.

The apostle Paul says, "For those whom he [the Father] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). He says that Christians "are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another," and this image is Jesus (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:4). If you are a Christian, you are being renewed in the image of God. You are being restored. You are coming to your senses (see also Col. 3:10). If you look to Jesus, you will become more loving, more gracious, more holy, more true. If you look to Jesus, you will become less selfish and more honorable. You will love good and hate evil. You will pursue truth. You will find life everlasting. Idols won't die for you. No politician or celebrity can pay for your sins. No one but Jesus can restore a relationship with God.

Regardless of where you stand today, think about what you are reflecting in your life. What are you spending the most time looking at? What do you desire? What do you daydream about? What do you spend your time, money, passions, and energy on? Whatever it is, you will become more like that. What are you becoming like?

If you look to Jesus, you will become like him. And you will reflect God's glory in the world that he made. You will show others, by your words and deeds, what God is like. You will begin to live out the reason why you were created.

What are we worshipping?

¹⁹ See his important work, *On the Incarnation*.