

Billy Graham Answers 8 Questions About Satan and Idols

Recent news headlines remind us that idol worship is not a thing of the past. People all over the world worship false gods and some even worship Satan. But there is only one true God, and He has never taken idolatry lightly.

Jesus called Satan a “murderer” and the “father of lies” (Matt. 8:44) who comes to “steal, kill and destroy” (John 10:10). While the devil lies and kills, the Bible tells us Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6).

So why would anyone worship Satan? And is it really a big deal to dabble in idolatry or the occult? These eight time-tested answers from Billy Graham seek to answer those questions and more.

Who Is Satan? Is He a Fallen Angel?

No, Satan is not imaginary; he isn't something people dreamed up just to try to explain the existence of evil. Satan is real, and the Bible makes it clear that he is a powerful (and evil) spiritual being who is absolutely opposed to God and His goodness.

The Bible doesn't give us a detailed account of Satan's origin but it does indicate that Satan originally was one of God's angels, created by Him to carry out His will. But apparently Satan became filled with jealousy and pride, and he decided that he would lead a rebellion against God so he could take God's place as the ruler of all creation. The Bible says, “You said in your heart ... ‘I will make myself like the Most High’” (Is. 14:13-14).

But Satan's rebellion failed, and he was cast out of heaven. Now Satan and those who followed him are fallen angels—no longer part of God's heavenly army, but separated from heaven's glory forever. He still is powerful, however, and he still does everything he can to block God's plan for our lives. Don't be deceived; Satan is your enemy, and he will do everything he can to keep you from God.

The greatest truth about Satan, however, is this: He is a defeated foe! By His death and resurrection Jesus Christ conquered the forces of sin and death and hell and Satan. Are you on Christ's side? Make sure, by turning to Christ in repentance and faith and by committing your life to Him for your salvation.

Does Satan Actually Exist, and Is He a Threat?

It's often been said that one of the devil's greatest tricks is to convince people that he doesn't really exist—and it's true.

But Satan really does exist—just as surely as God exists. And he isn't just a vague, impersonal force; he is a real person—that is, he has a real personality. Just as you and I can think and make decisions and act, so Satan can think and make decisions and act. The difference is that everything he does is evil—without exception—because he is totally opposed to God.

But don't think of him as just an evil person in a red suit and a forked tail; he is much, much greater than that. Satan is a powerful, spiritual being whose goal is to turn us away from God. He isn't equal with God—but in ways that are largely hidden from us, he is engaged in a constant cosmic battle against God. Don't take Satan lightly—for he is your enemy! The Bible says, "Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against ... the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12).

The most important fact you need to know about Satan, however, is that he is a defeated foe! By His death and resurrection Jesus Christ overcame all the powers of death and evil, and some day His victory will be complete. On whose side are you? Don't turn your back on what Christ has done for you, but by faith put your life into His hands today.

Isn't the Devil Just an Idea People Dreamed Up to Explain Evil?

Let me ask you a question: How do you explain the existence of evil, if there is no evil spiritual force working behind the scenes of this world?

After all, evil isn't just an absence of good; evil is real, and evil is aggressive and destructive. Can you come up with a better explanation than the existence of Satan, as he is portrayed in the Bible? I doubt it. The Bible calls him "The great dragon ... who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9). Jesus called him "a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. ... He is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

It has been said that one of the devil's greatest tricks is to make people believe he doesn't exist—and that's true. When we deny his existence, we become blinded to the reality of evil, and we fall for his lies about God and about ourselves. But Satan is real; our headlines scream it every day.

The most important truth, however, about the devil is this: He is a defeated foe! By His death Jesus overcame Satan's charges against us, and by His resurrection Jesus conquered Satan's rule of death. And some day Christ's victory over Satan will be complete, and Satan and his demons will be banished forever. Don't be deceived, but turn to Jesus Christ and build your life on His truth. He alone can give us hope, both now and forever.

What Is an Idol? Is It a Physical Object, or Can It Be

Something Like Wealth or Fame?

An idol is any object that people worship—so yes, he was right to label things like that as modern idols. Some people today worship their money or social position or possessions just as devoutly as people in the ancient world worshipped an image made of gold or wood or stone.

The difference, of course, is that most people don't think of money (for example) as an idol, or as something they worship. In reality, however, many people do; their whole lives are focused on money, and they serve it just as faithfully as other people serve an actual idol. In fact, money has become their master, and they have become its servants. In other words, money has taken the place of God in their lives. Jesus warned, "No one can serve two masters. ... You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt. 6:24).

The Bible gives us two important warnings about idols (whatever form they take). First, it warns us that they are false; only God can meet our deepest moral and spiritual needs. Second, it warns us that nothing should take God's place in our lives. The Bible says, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything" (Ex. 20:4).

Are there any idols in your life—things that you have allowed to take God's rightful place? Face them ... repent of them ... and then make Christ alone the center of your life.

What's the Big Deal About Getting Involved With the Occult?

Let me ask you a question: Do you think the devil would like for you to get involved in these practices? The answer is yes—and that should be a solemn warning to you.

The Bible is very clear: If we want to please God, we will avoid everything that has anything to do with the occult (even if it seems innocent or harmless on the surface). The reason is because occult practices of any kind could involve you with

spiritual forces that are opposed to God and are, in fact, in league with the devil.

I know that is a strong statement—but I can't emphasize strongly enough how spiritually dangerous it is to follow Satan's way rather than God's way. When the Ephesians who had practiced the occult became Christians, they "brought their (magic) scrolls together and burned them publicly" (Acts 19:19). They knew there could be no compromise between their old way of living and God's way.

Don't try to resist the "pull" you feel toward the occult in your own strength. Instead, by faith turn to Christ and ask Him to come into your life and give you the strength of His Holy Spirit. Don't be deceived, but come to Christ, who alone is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

Do People Really Worship the Devil? Why?

This isn't common, but occasionally I've met someone or received letters from people who clearly stated they deliberately worshipped the devil instead of God. I had no reason to doubt their statements, although I always prayed God would change their minds and hearts.

Why would anyone do this? I agree it isn't logical, but in their minds it did make sense because they believed Satan would help them and give them special powers. Some also didn't want anyone (especially God) telling them how to live, and by worshipping Satan they felt they were now free to live any way they wanted. Tragically, history tells us that people who deliberately follow Satan often end up doing great evil, both to others and to themselves.

The tragedy in all of this is that Satan never delivers what he promises. He promises freedom and happiness, but delivers only slavery and sorrow. He promises power and new life, but delivers only weakness and death. Never forget: Satan is a

liar! The Bible warns, “The way of the unfaithful leads to their destruction” (Prov. 13:15).

Sadly, many today follow Satan without even realizing it. They ignore God and never give a thought to eternity, living instead by the self-centered values Satan approves. Don’t let that happen to you. Instead, by faith put your life into Christ’s hands, and make Him the center and the foundation of your life. Jesus said, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matt. 4:10).

What Does Satan Look Like?

For centuries people have tried to picture what Satan must look like, and I find it interesting that he’s almost always portrayed as something repulsive, evil and violent. Anything that pictures him as cute or harmless is misleading—for he’s anything but that.

In reality, however, the Bible doesn’t tell us what Satan looks like—and with good reason, for he’s not limited to any physical form or image. Instead, Satan is a powerful spiritual force that pervades the whole creation, far greater than any person or beast or other creature. He is not as powerful as God, nor is he eternal like God; someday his power will come to an end. But don’t limit him to the mental image you may have of a pitchfork-carrying person in a red suit.

At the same time, the Bible indicates that at times Satan and his demons may take on human form. In his attempts to deceive us, the Bible says, he may even seem like a messenger from God: “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14). If our lives are built on Christ and His Word, however, we will not be deceived.

Satan’s goal is to keep us from Christ—because he knows only Christ can deliver us from hell and take us safely to heaven. Is your faith and hope in Him? “Salvation is found in no one

else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Why Do Some People Say Satan Is Not Really Evil but Good?

Don't think Satan is an out-of-date superstition; even a casual glance at the headlines in your newspaper should convince you that Satan is alive and well. How else could we possibly explain all the horrific things that are happening in the world?

But Satan is very clever in the way he disguises himself. When something evil happens, he seldom boldly proclaims, "I am Satan, and I did this!" Instead, he often works behind the scenes so people don't realize just how active he really is. Or, he may deceive people (such as this group) into thinking his way is best, and that he alone can give them the happiness and success they seek. The Bible even says that at times "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14).

The tragedy is that many people serve the devil—without even realizing it. They don't worship Satan; they may not even believe in him. But God is not important to them, nor do they thank Him for His gifts—and as a result their lives are aligned with Satan's plans instead of God's. The Bible says that Satan "has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts" (John 12:40).

The most important fact about Satan, however, is that he is a defeated foe! By His death and resurrection Jesus overcame Satan's power—and some day His victory will be complete. Don't be deceived, but build your life solely on Jesus Christ—both for this life, and for eternity.