

What Is An Abomination?

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The English word "abomination" has become somewhat antiquated nowadays, losing its usage in today's secular culture. Its value in modern language has diminished because of the Western world's massive rejection of God's truth, the one place that defines what abominations are. Why continue to use the term when most of society ignores God's standards and utterly rejects the idea of sin?

Does it matter whether something is an abomination or not? Even though God calls some things an abomination, does He really care whether we do abominable things? Is an abomination a sin?

1. What is an abomination?

Comment: God calls numerous objects and actions "abominations." Most have a common trait that indicates why they are abominable. *Webster's Dictionary* provides the secular meaning of the word: "something worthy of or causing extreme disgust or hatred," and its synonyms are "abhorrence," "anathema," "detestation," "evil," "hatred," "horror," "loathing," "shame."

Is the biblical meaning any different? *The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* defines it as: "Something that excites disgust and hatred. The term is applied to heathen gods, idolatry and various pagan practices." The secular and biblical meanings are similar, but the biblical meaning adds the religious element, applying it directly to anti-Christian gods, idols, and sins.

2. What Hebrew words are used for "abomination"?

Comment: Five Hebrew words are translated into the word "abominable" or "abomination," all expressive of God's greatest disdain. First, *za'am* is used once (Micah 6:10) and means "to be indignant" or "to account abominable." Second, *ba'ash*, also used once (I Samuel 13:4), meaning "to become odious." Third, *piggul* appears four times (Leviticus 7:18; 19:7; Isaiah 65:4; Ezekiel 4:14) and relates to impurity and uncleanness: "a foul thing; refuse."

The final two words appear the most. Fourth, *sheqets*, used 11 times, means "a detestable or unclean thing." It is primarily used in contexts concerning idolatry or to refer to things that may not be touched, eaten, or worshipped. Fifth, *to'ebah* is the Old Testament's primary word for "abomination," being used 117 times. It defines something or someone as "dangerous," "sinister," and "repulsive." It is easy to see how this came to be connected with idolatry and its practices, things that are morally disgusting or abhorrent and spiritually dangerous.

3. Are only idolatrous things abominable?

Comment: Things referred to as "abominations" are consistently associated with idolatry. However, God's Word shows that many other human actions are abominable:

uncleanness, unjust weights and measures, incest, adultery, homosexuality, sodomy, lying, stealing, offerings to pagan gods, sacrifice of children, sorcery, the hire of a prostitute, and eating of unclean meat. Proverbs 16:5 mentions even the proud as being abominable, indicating that pride constitutes idolatry in the human heart.

An abomination is anything we place before God, that is, idolatry. If God tells us not to do something, and we do it anyway, we have committed a sin, which is an abomination. All sin is an abomination to God. Some sin, however, is suggestive of a greater degree of depravity and rebellion (I John 3:4, Isaiah 59:1-2). We must remember God does not always see things as man does (Luke 16:14-15).

4. What is the Greek equivalent of these Hebrew words?

Comment: In the New Testament, the writers used Greek *bdelygma* to describe abomination. Its root, *bdeo*, means simply “to stink.” *Bdelygma* primarily means “that which is reprehensible or detestable,” and in the New Testament, it usually refers to a form of idolatry.

The New Testament writers indicate that what is too highly valued by people constitutes idolatry in a person’s mind. Christ says to the Pharisees, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15). Anything—ourselves, our house, our car, our job—that we hold to be more important than God can be considered as an idol.

People can be abominable too. Paul writes in Titus 1:16, “They profess to know God, but in works they deny him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.” Here the word suggests being “loathsome” and “detestable”; their hypocrisy made them horrible and disgusting. A person becomes abominable when living a sinful way of life.

In Revelation 21:8, we see the seriousness of being abominable: “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” God does not take this lightly. The abominable—those who sin, especially by idolatry—will receive the Lake of Fire rather than salvation.

The foregoing references are often not appreciated today. “You are judgmental and too intolerant,” we hear. However, God’s Word remains true, whether we like it or not! Man may laugh at the idea of abominations, but to do such things is a stench in the nostrils of God. Briefly, “abominations” are anything we make a higher priority than God. They can also be any detestable thing we say, think, or do against others. Abominations show a rejection of God’s way of life and acceptance of Satan’s.