

Golden Calf Worshipers

When the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who will go before us because this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt--we don't know what has happened to him!" Then Aaron replied to them, "Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me." So all the people took off the gold rings that were on their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took the gold from their hands, fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made it into an image of a calf. Then they said, "Israel, this is your God, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!" When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; then he made an announcement: "There will be a festival to the LORD tomorrow." - Exodus 32:1-5 HCSB

Most commentators seem to think that the people of Israel were returning to the worship of one of the Egyptian gods in this incidence. I would like to beg to differ. Notice that they were not questioning the departure of God, but of Moses. They were looking for some kind of visible figure head. If anything, Aaron should have been disappointed and angered in that no one seemed to consider him a potential candidate. Apparently, he was considered less worthy than a metal lump!

Aaron seemed to be implying that the people would still be following Yahweh through the use of this external focal point when he said, "This is your God, who brought you up out of Egypt." Not only did he identify the deity as the one who had just rescued them, but the word he used for God was "Elohim", the name always used for the one true God.

"Why is this distinction important?" you may ask. I think that it is important because it warns us of a much different and more dangerous, subtle form of idolatry. Most of us would instinctively shy from pagan idolatry. However, I am afraid that many "Christian" churches today get so focused on the external forms of their worship that they are no longer Ransomed.

We need to be aware of the danger of the cult of personality. No human should be the focal point of a church. No single spiritual gift should become so important that everyone's salvation is judged by whether they have it or not (i.e. speaking in tongues).

We need to be cautious that the FORM of worship does not take precedence over the One worshipped. Whether our congregation is highly liturgical, or free-wheeling and post-modern is irrelevant. Are we still worshipping Christ and obeying His teachings? There is only one standard, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.¹ Anything else is just so much cow dung.²

¹ Ephesians 4:4-6

² Philippians 3:8 – Paul considered it all just "skubalon" (Strong's #4657) i.e. dung or crap; for its use cp Isaiah 36:12; 1 Kings 14:10; 2 Kings 18:27