

Worshipping Mental Gods

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. Do not have other gods besides Me. Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. You must not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the fathers' sin, to the third and fourth [generations] of those who hate Me, but showing faithful love to a thousand [generations] of those who love Me and keep My commands. - Exodus 20:1-6 HCSB

The above text speaks right to where we live today, saying basically two things: (1) Don't idolize anything or anyone and (2) worship only God.

What is an idol? An idol is anything that takes our focus off God and puts it on something else.¹ Upon what is your life centered? What is your primary focus?

Our shrines may not be the ones found in the homes of those who live in other parts of the world, which are made of wood, stone, clay or metal. We build mental rather than metal images. Our shrine in America may be the little box called the TV. On it, we watch and worship images of sex, money and violence.

An idol doesn't have to be an evil thing; we can idolize a good thing. Some people park their idols in their garage, or at the marina. Some idols remain in safe deposit boxes.

Archaeologists tell us that in every culture throughout history there have been idols: statues of little gods or goddesses. In Bible times and lands, there were three primary idols. There was Baal whose female counter part was Ashtorah. Baal was the god of sex. Mammon was the god of money. And there was Molech who was the god of violence. Sex, money, violence – sound familiar?

For some reason, Humanity has a desire to turn people or things into objects of worship. God does not like that. As a matter of fact, He hates it! Idol worship is a serious thing. Look at verse 5, where the last phrase ends by saying, “..of those who hate me.” God is a jealous God and desires our exclusive worship. As our Groom, He wants us to be faithful to our relationship with Him.² Putting anything else ahead of Him is to hate Him.

But why does He want this? Is He like a jealous teenage boyfriend? Not at all. The Good News translation puts it, “For your own good, don't sin by making an idol in any form at all.”³ The emphasis is on “For your own good.” He knows that to move away from Him is to move away from spiritual health.⁴ Remain far enough away and you are spiritually dead.

¹ Romans 1:22-23

² Isaiah 44:6-22; Leviticus 17:7;

³ Deuteronomy 4:15-16

⁴ John 17:1-3; Proverbs 8:36