

WHAT'S OUR REAL PROBLEM...REALLY?

EXODUS 20 (NIV, '84)

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

What is an idol? It is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give.

A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life, that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving "face" and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry....An idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, "If I have that, then I'll feel my life has meaning, then I'll know I have value, then I'll feel significant and secure." There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*.

For example, physical beauty is a pleasant thing, but if you "deify" it, if you make it the most important thing in a person's life or a culture's life, then you have Aphrodite, not just beauty. You have people, and an entire culture, constantly agonizing over appearance, spending inordinate amounts of time and money on it, and foolishly evaluating character on the basis of it. If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol.

Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

① From Exodus 20, what do you think the terms, "idols," "worship" and "jealous" mean?

② Why do you think God seems to make such a big deal about not worshipping idols in Exodus 20?

③ From the excerpt (at left) by Keller, what is most meaningful to you? Why?

④ With which of the four "idols" discussed at the right can you most identify in your everyday life? Can you think of a specific example (that you're willing to share)?

⑤ Which questions below seem most "exposing" (sorry about that) to you about what may be "idols" in your life right now?

KELLER'S "4 PRIMARY IDOLS:"

Ⓐ Idol: COMFORT

(a.k.a., Privacy, lack of stress, freedom)
Price We Will Pay: Reduced productivity
Greatest Nightmare: Stress, demands
Others Often Feel: Hurt
Problem Emotion: Boredom

Ⓑ Idol: APPROVAL

(a.k.a., Affirmation, love, relationship)
Price We Will Pay: Less independence
Greatest Nightmare: Rejection
Others Often Feel: Smothered
Problem Emotion: Cowardice

Ⓒ Idol: CONTROL

(a.k.a., Self-discipline, certainty, standards)
Price We Will Pay: Loneliness; spontaneity
Greatest Nightmare: Uncertainty
Others Often Feel: Condemned
Problem Emotion: Worry

Ⓓ Idol: POWER

(a.k.a., Success, winning, influence)
Price We Will Pay: Burdened; responsibility
Greatest Nightmare: Humiliation
Others Often Feel: Used
Problem Emotion: Anger

Above from: http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/index.cfm?page=keller_blog

Below (adapted) from: *Seeing With New Eyes*, David Powlison, ©2003, P&R Publishing

OF MINOR PROPHETS & THEIR PROSTITUTE WIVES

all the time you were burning my letters
you were only acting the part
you think without me you'll get on much better
but you dont even know your own heart
come home, darling
come home quickly
come home, darling
all is forgiven, so come home quickly

i treated you as if you were a princess
you treated me like a cop
i gave you boundaries to save you from certain death
dangling from the end of the rope

come home, darling
come home quickly
come home, darling

all is forgiven, so come home quickly

but your still playing for a love you'll never find
outside of these arms of mine

the whole town is one step behind you
with the hang man on call
they've got the judge and you're convicted without a
plea

darling, they will listen to me
darling, they will listen to me
darling, they will listen to me

[Pedro the Lion, ©2004]

SOME MORE UNCOMFORTABLE QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU UNEARTH SOME POTENTIAL IDOLS:

1. What are you most afraid of (if you say "clowns," you need to think a bit deeper)? About what do you most worry? What do you fear losing so much that you think your life might be over, pointless, not worth living, if you lost it?
2. To what does your mind wander when in idle (OK, besides sex, guys...although that says something, doesn't it)? What most preoccupies your thoughts?
3. Whose approval matters most to you? From whom do you most fear rejection? Whose opinion of you most counts?
4. What would bring you the greatest pleasure, happiness and delight? What would bring the most misery and pain?
5. What characterize your fantasies, your daydreams? Around what do your night dreams and nightmares most revolve?