

Carved in Stone

Embracing God's Value System

Teen Lesson Four

Getting Rid of the Idols

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God (Exodus 20:4-5, NRSV).

*An extraordinary thing happened to me today... I saw Christ in a man.
—John Gammie*

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:4-5
- Exodus 32:1-10
- John 15:1-5, 8

WHAT YOU NEED

- List of names of famous people for charades
- Bibles
- A copy of Handout #4.1 for each student
- "Lord, Be Glorified" song

PURPOSE

To know: God cannot be manipulated, replicated, or even fully understood.

To value: We cannot allow anything to come between or take the place of our relationship with God.

To apply: The question we need to ask first is not, "What must I do?," but "How does the reality of who God is shape my life?"

WHAT'S GOING ON?

A common practice in ancient Israel was to construct monuments to represent the gods. These monuments were the places where sacrifices were offered and prayers were prayed. The worshippers believed they could manipulate the gods by performing certain rituals and practices.

The first three commandments make one single point: God has a unique claim on this group of people. They are to be separate as he is separate. Everything in the first three commandments is centered on the issue of identity. The identity of the people is in relation to God, therefore, they are to live out that reality in very specific ways. Before those ways are specified, however, the people are reminded who they are.

There are three problems with idols. First, God is distinct from other gods and must not



be approached as the other gods are approached. Second, God is not to be domesticated. Maybe even more important than concern for rival deities is the emphasis that God is greater than anything we could use to represent him. The text wants to make it clear that God is distinct from other gods and so the people must not worship the deities of the other people groups. The text is also concerned that we do not associate God with things of this earth. The insistence that statues not be erected in God's honor is an attempt to acknowledge that while God has chosen to journey and abide with his people, he cannot be contained or even represented by anything within this world. Finally, another issue with idols is that over time the lines begin to blur between the idol and what it represents. The deity becomes so associated with the idol that they are basically one in the same. But God is a god who is always moving and creating. He is alive and victorious. He leads the people by fire and by cloud. Any attempt to create an idol is seen as an attempt to box God in.

WHAT'S IT SAYING?

Attempting to box God in. There is an old song that is sometimes used at church camps. One of the lines says, "If I had a little white box to put my Jesus in, I'd take him out and (the singer gestures with a kissing motion and sound) and put him back again." While that song is innocent and intends nothing disrespectful, it depicts one of the biggest problems we face in Christianity. Today we do not construct wooden idols or golden calves, but we sometimes attempt to control God. I think that if I can just do this right or jump through that hoop then maybe God will give me what I want. There are a lot of books that argue that if you follow these simple steps then God will bless you. If you can just say the right words or do the right thing then God will respond the way you are hoping. The image of the vending machine is fitting. We see something we want and put our quarter in hoping that God will deliver. The second commandment is an effort to get rid of this mentality within the people of God. God is God. His ways are above ours and he cannot be bound, neither by a wooden stature nor the "little box" that we try to keep him in.

The image of God in the world is within his people. While the reflection of God cannot be found in wooden statues or golden calves, it can be found within his people. From the beginning it is clear that the way God has chosen to reveal himself is through his people. The commandments are an effort to align the people with God in such a way that they can reveal to the world the very nature of who God is. The question that we are confronted with is, Does our life adequately reflect who God is? Can people know what God is like by spending time with me?

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Before beginning this week's lesson, spend a few moments dialoguing about last week's topic. Remind the students of the material covered and ask them to share how it impacted them throughout the week. Ask **What impact did Romans 12:1-2 have on you this week?**

Begin this week's lesson by playing a few rounds of charades. Prepare a few small pieces of paper with the names of heroes and/or popular icons that most of the students can identify. Putting one name per piece of paper, these persons can include famous athletes, singers, or actors. Ask a student to draw a name, then act out the speech and gestures of the particular person while members of the class attempt to guess who he or she is impersonating.

When you have used all of your names, spend a few moments talking about these people. Ask **What do they have in common? What are they most known for? Why do people look up to them so much? Do you think these heroes can become idols? Does**

an idol have to be a person? What is an idol? At what point does the admiration of an individual or lifestyle become an idol?

Idolatry takes on different forms in different cultures. It is safe to say that the problem with idolatry is as serious in our culture as it has ever been. Teens are taught very early to find their identity in material possessions and positions of power. Ball players and young singers are worshipped because they "have it all." Money, fame, power, and the envy of other people are the hallmarks of a life well lived. While the people in the Old Testament stories worshipped other deities in hopes of securing their existence, our culture worships money and fame in hopes of securing meaning and purpose.

One of the major issues you will need to highlight in talking about current idols is the nature of worship. Ask **What is worship? To what or whom do you ascribe worthiness? Where do you get your identity and sense of purpose?** Say **As we look at the second commandment and talk about the nature of idolatry, let's keep the issue of worship at the forefront of the conversation.**

DIG IT

Have someone read Exodus 32:1-6. Ask **Why do you think these people wanted to make idols? What were they hoping for in this golden calf? Why didn't they trust God to provide for their needs?** Say **Let's read Exodus 32:7-10 to see God's response.** After reading the paragraph, ask **What was God's response? What can we learn from this text? When God is slow to answer and we are unsure that he even hears us or cares, what should be our response? How can we fight the temptation to find our meaning and purpose in things we can see and control?** This is at the heart of idolatry!

Revisit the question **What are the idols in our lives?** Anything can become an idol: sports, people, jobs, and even church can take the place of God if we are not careful. **What are the idols that you see teens worshipping?** Read Exodus 20:4-5. Ask **Does this commandment apply to our idols like it did to the Golden Calf?**

Transition from the discussion of idols to talk about the relationship God wants to have with his people. Read John 15:1-5. Compare and contrast the vision of John 15 to the situation in Exodus 32. **How significant is a divided allegiance to God?** The image of John 15 portrays God molding his children from the inside-out. (See also Jeremiah 18 for the potter and clay metaphor.)

Read John 15:8. Say **When we abide in Christ, then we are equipped to reflect the glory of God.** Distribute Handout 4.1, The Divine Reflection. As a class, decide on seven characteristics of God and write them in the seven spaces in the left column. In groups of three or four, ask the students to fill in the boxes in the right column with ways they can reflect each characteristic of God. This is to help them begin thinking about what their lives are saying about God. Conclude this activity by talking about what the groups have written.

TAKE OUT

Use The Image Of God In The World Is Within His People section above to begin the closing section. Emphasize that individually and as a church, we are to show God to the world. The Ten Commandments were given to provide direction for us to live in such a way as to honor God.

Ask the teens to look at the worksheet they've been working on. Ask them to circle one thing in the right column that they will do this week to more clearly show their allegiance to the Lord God Almighty.

Sing "Lord, Be Glorified."

Close with prayer.

The Divine Reflection

<u>Characteristics of God</u>	<u>HOW MIGHT YOU REFLECT THAT CHARACTERISTIC OF GOD THIS WEEK?</u>