

# Exclusive Loyalty To The Only God Who Saved You

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[ 0 : 00 ]     some very strong words and helpful good words to ponder on there. It's worth letting that sink in.

Well, now as we come to Exodus chapter 20, we're going to be focusing on verses 1 to 6. So let me read that again. Exodus chapter 20, verses 1 to 6.

And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.

For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[ 1 : 36 ]     Lord our God, we pray that you would occupy our lowly hearts, that you would conquer any rebel powers within us.

Speak to us, Lord. By your Spirit in this moment, this very day, speak to our hearts, that we might love you and worship you and know you, and that you might be the only God in our hearts. Amen.

Well, now we have reached the halfway point of Exodus in our series that began right about this time last year.

And it's an important point, a very important point, not simply because it's the Ten Commandments, but because Israel have arrived at the mountain of God.

And this was a sign that was given to Moses way back at the burning bush in chapter 3, verse 12. Back in chapter 3, verse 12, when Moses first met God, Moses said, Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?

[ 3 : 05 ]     And God said, I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

And so now we are at the point of this being fulfilled. Moses has brought the people out of Egypt, and he's led them all the way back to the mountain where he first met God. Remember, we were talking about this with Jethro.

Moses went on that journey, and now Israel go on that journey. We go on the same journey. And so earlier in Exodus, we explored this, that Moses' experience is a foreshadow of Israel's experience.

As Moses was saved through the water among the reeds, so too Israel were brought through the reed sea. Similarly, just as Moses met God on this mountain, and God spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, out of flames, now God will speak to the nation from this mountain, and this time the whole mountain will be burning.

And we see this earlier in chapter 19, verse 18. It says, Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because Yahweh descended on it in fire.

[ 4 : 25 ] And so it's the same thing as what Moses had, except in a far more intense way. And so you'll remember in chapter 3 when Moses saw the burning bush and God spoke to him.

Remember what he had to do before he approached the bush. Take off your shoes. This is holy ground. You are coming into the proximity of a holy God.

And David explored that last week, chapter 19. The nation have had to carefully consecrate themselves before coming in close proximity to God on this mountain.

So it's an important point of the book, not just because of the Ten Commandments, because they've come to the mountain and they will hear from God themselves. Just like Moses was chosen and called at this mountain, so now God is calling the entire nation into a covenant relationship with himself.

Important thing to think about these Ten Words, Ten Commandments. It's not just about rules. Isn't that just how the world views this?

[ 5 : 31 ] It's just a book of rules. Commandments, it's just rules. But a better way to think about this is actually vows. These are vows. This is a holy ceremony.

This is a covenant agreement being made. In fact, we see this, don't we? When we get to the stone tablets, you have this picture of probably like the McDonald's archies where they're joined together, and you've got five on one side and five on the other.

But that's most likely not how it was. And we've got ancient examples that what it probably most likely was with two tablets was a complete copy.

One for the nation. Two copies for the two parties that are entering into agreement. It's like when you're at a shop and you get a receipt and they sign it on that paper that's got the kind of blue imprint.

And so this is a covenant agreement between God and this people. It's like marriage vows, a holy ceremony.

[ 6 : 40 ] And there's a few different ways to arrange. Maybe you don't know this. I didn't really know about this. But there are a few different ways to arrange the Ten Commandments. Big denominations or scholars are in disagreement and have been for centuries about how this is arranged.

But we're not going to get into how these are arranged in the letter of the law. Not saying that's not important, but when we get overly focused on that, we can often miss the actual heart of it.

And so what is the law actually meant for? Why was it given? And at the end of the day, we can argue about how it's to be arranged, but do we actually do it? And that was the problem in Jesus' day.

They were too busy arguing about it. They weren't actually doing it. So we see this. And maybe if you've seen this in the New Testament and you've wondered about it, Jesus gives what seems like a different take on the Ten Commandments, on the law to the Pharisees.

And when he gives his teaching on the law, and it seems different from what the Pharisees are teaching, he's not actually doing something different. But he is reading the law as it was always intended to be read.

[ 8 : 00 ] So, for instance, you'll know about the Beatitudes. So when Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5, when he says, well, you've heard you shall not murder, but when you hate your brother, when you're angry with your brother, when you insult your brother, you are not keeping the heart of that law.

Likewise, Jesus goes on to say, it's not like the line is drawn at physically committing adultery. He says, if you have lust in your heart, then you've missed the heart of that law.

And so when Jesus says these things, it's important to know that Jesus isn't taking what was there and raising the bar. Jesus isn't raising the bar to something that it wasn't already.

He's actually using the law as it was initially supposed to be read. See, the problem with the Pharisees was, in Jesus' day, they saw the law, the letter of the law, as the final word, the last word on the matter.

And the problem is, it should have been the first word. See, when you see it as the last word, it becomes about every jot and tittle, and keeping it to the letter.

[ 9 : 12 ] As if it was given for pure legislation. But Jesus, when he uses it, Jesus was pointing to the fact that it was given as the first word, and it's supposed to be meditated on.

If you meditate and dwell on this word, as the Psalms, and as the law itself says, then it will lead you to wisdom. And that's what it's supposed to do.

It's not about God telling us everything that we need to know. It's about Him telling us enough to lead us to wisdom. And so, a wee illustration. I remember, not too long ago, my brother, he's not a Christian, and he messaged me, and he says, you'll never guess what I'm reading.

He says, well, he's not reading. He was listening to an audio book, and he was listening to the Bible audio, and he was actually listening to it in the King James. And I thought, oh, why are you listening to it?

Why are you doing that? As someone who's unfamiliar with the Bible, I thought, is that the best? But he's been going through some medieval books and stuff, so he quite likes that language.

[ 10 : 19 ] And so I said, oh, how are you getting on with it? And he says, oh, man, there's so many sacrifices in Leviticus. And I said, ah, I says, yeah, it can be confusing, especially when you read it like you read every other book.

And that's the thing. And I said, I said to my brother, I says, I says, see if the, see if the Bible was a drink, if the Torah, particularly, if the Torah was a drink, it would perhaps be more like whiskey.

Now, I'm not a whiskey drinker, but it would be a sipping drink, not something you're supposed to just gulp back, but something you're supposed to smell, savour, take your time.

So, I don't know if any of you have drank whiskey. If you drink it fast, what does it do to your throat? Does it burn it? At least you're probably not going to get the tones and the notes of flavour if you just down it.

And so, I said to my brother, I says, this is supposed to be read slowly and meditated upon. And if we gulp it down and hurry to finish it, then it's more likely to burn us than it is for us to get a sense of the tone and flavour of it.

[ 11 : 35 ] And so, drinking it too fast is not good. And that's true. You know, and the very first psalm in the book of Psalms, the very first psalm says, blessed is the man who delights in the law of Yahweh, who meditates on it day and night.

And this is why King David said in Psalm 119, he said, oh, how I love your law. It's my meditation all the day. Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for it is ever with me.

I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth.

Now, this was a guy who got it wrong so many times. He made many mistakes, but he took his time with the Word of God. He tasted and savoured God's Word long enough to know how good it is and how it led to wisdom.

And that is why, compared to his son, Solomon, that's why God said of David, he is a man after my own heart. You see, although David made many mistakes, this first, central, foundational commandment, David never forsook.

[ 12 : 53 ] He never forgot, nor did he forsake his God. He did many other things, but he didn't do that. He meditated on this command that we're looking at, this covenant, this vow.

This was the difference between David and Solomon. For all the wisdom that Solomon had, he didn't have the heart that his father David had. For all the mistakes that David made, he didn't forget or forsake Yahweh.

And so, for all the wisdom that Solomon had, Solomon turned away from Yahweh and made idols and served other gods. As soon as we dwell into the commandments, we will see why this is right at the top of first importance.

A headline command, if you will, or perhaps it's better to say it's a foundation to the entire law. It's a foundation to the entire covenant. So, I want to have a quick wee question for you to answer in your minds, but give it a go.

Honestly, answer this and just see how you get on just in your mind. Can you recite the Ten Commandments? Have a go in your mind. Now, imagine many of you can.

[ 14 : 18 ] Some of you may have done this. I imagine that the way that we remember, and I wasn't brought up in church, so I've got a different experience.

But, often the way that it's been presented is perhaps more about memorization, how to remember and recite these, than it is about getting to the heart of it.

It's not bad to memorize things, I'm not saying that. But if you were to go outside, right, it's like that TV show Family Fortunes, if you were to go outside and ask 100 people to recite the Ten Commandments, I wonder how many of them would start this way, right?

Their first words, recite the Ten Commandments, they would say, thou shall not, right? I don't know if any of you did that in your head, but certainly that's the way we're taught to memorize them.

But the important thing, never to miss, the covenant begins with God saying, I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

[ 15 : 24 ] You see, how many people that recite the Ten Commandments start with that? And as soon as we lose that, we lose the entire context for the entire law.

And so perhaps part of the problem is how we frame it. Ten Commandments, ten rules, but it's actually never called that as we saw earlier, Exodus 34, when these are written in stone.

Yahweh says to Moses, write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. And so Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights.

He never ate bread or drank water, and he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten words. These words are what the rest of the law elaborate on, and these in particular are the only ones written by the finger of God.

We'll explore when we get to chapter thirty-one. These words are also particularly referred to as a covenant, and that's why these stone tablets of these ten words are placed in the ark of the, it's not the ark of the rule book, it's not the ark of the commandments, but it's the ark of the covenant, because it was a covenant made.

[ 16 : 45 ] And so when we think of them purely as commandments, we can often view them in a legislative way, there's actually more than ten imperatives in these ten words, more than ten commandments, but they're not merely about universal moral principles.

There's a major indicative, you know the indicative imperative, there's a major indicative that starts the whole of this off, and that is that God has already rescued Israel.

prior to giving the law, God has already rescued them. So we must first view these as a covenant agreement. It's like vows in the marriage covenant.

They form the basis of God's relationship with Israel, and right at the front is how God has redeemed them for this relationship. They were not saved by the law. The law was never given to save us, never.

It was never given for Israel to find salvation through keeping the law because they were saved prior to the law. They were saved for the covenant relationship, and the laws showed them how to live.

[ 17 : 56 ] And one of the ways that this is illustrated much later on, when Israel continually breaks the covenant, and God sends prophets, the work of the prophets was largely to point back to the covenant agreement that was made with Israel, and what would happen if they broke it, and what God promised to keep, the nature of the covenant is illustrated through the prophets, and you see this in a poor prophet like Hosea.

So here's an illustration from the Bible itself. God told Hosea to redeem a prostitute. Hosea was to pay the price for her freedom and take her as his wife and enter a covenant relationship, where he would be her husband and she would be his wife.

She was not to go off with other men, she was not to go back to the slavery of prostitution, and they would only lead her into her own destruction, whereas life with Hosea would be a life where she would flourish.

And coming to these ten words, this covenant, we must see it like this kind of covenant relationship. It's the foundation of a relationship, that Yahweh has brought them out of slavery.

Yahweh has brought them out of something like what Hosea's wife came from. Yahweh rescued them from under the gods of Egypt, gods who would only enslave them and ensure their destruction.

[ 19 : 33 ] And so Yahweh has brought them out, made a covenant, and Yahweh will be with them as their God and give them everything they need to live and flourish. So Israel was not saved merely for themselves, but for the whole world.

Last week, in chapter 19, we saw God calling them a kingdom of priests in a holy nation. And what use is this unless they are priests to the other nations?

They were to be a light to the nations around them. And we see this, again, if you want to know the purpose of the law and this covenant, in Deuteronomy chapter 4, Moses says, keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples.

And when they hear all of these statutes, when all of these nations hear these statutes, they will say, surely this great nation is wise and an understanding people.

For what great nation is there that has a God so near to them as Yahweh our God is to us? Isn't that wonderful? What great nation is there that has a God so near to them as Yahweh our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?

[ 20 : 57 ] And what great nation is there, out there, same today as it was back in Moses' day, what great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I've set before you today?

We don't often think of it like that, but think about it. And I was doing this in the high school, talking to these young Christians and saying, have confidence in God's word that has not changed one bit in thousands of years, but I'll tell you what does change every decade.

Culture changes. What is true in culture changes. The truth of our culture changes about every decade. Legislation changes all the time.

Laws change all the time. What great nation is there that has statutes and rules so righteous as all of these in the law? It's amazing.

No wonder David says, I love this. It is sweeter than honey. It's my meditation all the day and all the night. And so I hope that gives some context to the law, why it's so important that it begins not merely thou shall not, but it begins with who God is and what God has done.

[ 22 : 16 ] When that is the foundation of the covenant relationship, we can see why having no other God is key. It's key to the whole thing. Imagine Hosea's wife, right?

Imagine Hosea and his house, and he's redeemed his wife. He's paid the price of her freedom. He's entered a covenant relationship with her. He gives her everything. Everything.

Imagine her putting around the family home pictures of all her other lovers, and going around those pictures every day right in front of Hosea's face, and just ruminating on these other lovers.

You see, it's not just, have no other gods. Have no other gods before me. And that isn't talking about priority. It's also talking about proximity.

You see, sometimes this verse, verse 3, is taken separate from verse 4, that you should have no other gods before me, and then a separate thing is to not make carved images.

[ 23 : 21 ] But there's, I'm in the camp that takes these carved images to be relating to the gods of verse 3. So the carved images in verse 4 are relating to the gods, the other gods, of verse 3.

One of the reasons is, if you look at verse 4, verse 4 is in the singular, to make a carved image. But then in verse 5, it's in the plural. You shall not bow down to them.

And so that's hearkening back to verse 3. The them of verse 5 is the gods that these carved images represent. And so this is further clarified in verse 23.

If you've got a Bible, look at verse 23 of chapter 20. Verse 23, and the Lord said to Moses, you shall not make gods of silver to be with me.

Isn't that interesting? Don't make gods of silver to be with me. Don't put your gods alongside me in the temple, is what it's pointing towards.

[ 24 : 32 ] Don't have gods right in front of me. And so these carved images represent both other gods and also the proximity of these idols to the one true God, Yahweh.

And this is what ends up happening. This is precisely what happens when they turn to idolatry. They begin to place idols, they make carved images, and they put them in the temple before God.

It's like right in front of his face, they're worshipping other gods. They bow down to them, as it were, right in front of Yahweh's face.

And they will soon do this in Exodus with the golden calf. And so these other gods in verse 3, these carved images in verse 4, this bowing down in verse 5, it's all intertwined.

And notice the carved images. I don't know if you've ever thought this or heard this, but sometimes it's argued about being a prohibition against making an image of the true God, but that's not what it's saying here.

[ 25 : 40 ] Now, it is wrong to make an image of the true God, but that's not what it's saying. What it's saying is that we shouldn't make an image of created things that are either in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.

We shouldn't make an image of the things that God has created. That's not saying it's not true that we shouldn't make an image of God. What could we possibly make anyway?

God has no form. God has already set his image on us. We were made in the image of God. We are the images of God. And furthermore, the one who ultimately came, God's Son, was the exact image of the invisible God.

But notice how in these carved images, notice the realms that it talks about. It's interesting. Anything that is in heaven above, that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, does that remind you of anything if you've been through this journey in Exodus?

This was something we've seen during the plagues. You see, when we went through all the plagues, we first started in the water, and then we started, then we went to the land, and then we went to the sky.

[ 27 : 00 ] And God was one by one dismantling the gods of Egypt that covered all of these realms, these three spheres, where people had made images of things that were in the sea, of things that were on the land, and of things that were in the air.

You can go and look up these images that they made. And they represented these gods over all these spheres. And throughout the plagues, God dismantled them one by one. They had gods over the water.

They had gods over the land. They had gods over the sea. They had gods over the sky. Each of them were fashioned into the likeness of things in those spheres. And it's not just that Yahweh is better than these gods and superior.

It's not just that this god here, the god of Israel, is superior and stronger than all of these other gods, so he can beat them down. No, this also harkens all the way back to Genesis chapter 1.

Because who was it that made the heavens and the earth and the sea? It was no other god but Yahweh. No other god made the heavens, the earth, and the sea.

[ 28 : 13 ] And who was it that filled the heavens and the earth and the sea? It was no other god but Yahweh. And everything that inhabits those spheres was made by Yahweh.

He's the creator of all things. And so it's about taking something that the creator has made, making an image of it, and worshipping the god and other god through that image in front of Yahweh's face.

This is what Israel do in Exodus 32. We see that, this golden calf. When they make the golden calf, it's not an image of Yahweh that they're making. Because when Moses is away up the mountain, the people say this to Aaron.

They say, make us gods. Make us gods who will go before us. As for this Moses who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we don't know what's become of him. And then when they made the golden calf, they said to the people, these are your gods, O Israel.

These are your gods who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Think of that. Think of what they're doing and saying at the foot of the mountain of God, right in front of Yahweh's face.

[ 29 : 26 ] Not only are they breaking verse 4, making a carved statue, they're breaking verse 5, bowing down to it. They're breaking verse 3, it's other gods, and they're doing it right before Yahweh, at the foot of the mountain in front of his face.

And as if all of that wasn't bad enough, they're attributing verse 2 to these other gods. As if they brought Israel out of Egypt when it was Yahweh alone.

Again, let me illustrate with Hosea. It would be like Hosea's wife, after having been redeemed and released from her slavery, taking another lover into the marriage bed on the night of the wedding, in the presence of Hosea.

I know that's a strong image, but that's basically what they do. Except that's an infinitely weaker illustration when you consider who God is and what He has done.

And so I want to give you just one last illustration, one final illustration, and then I'll finish briefly by looking at why this foundational command is like what King David says. When it's your meditation, you love it, it makes you wiser than your enemies, more understanding than your teachers, sweeter than honey and more precious than gold.

[ 30 : 44 ] So let me give you one final illustration. You can think of this like a marriage covenant. You can also think of it like adoption papers.

It's like God is saying, first and foremost, you are part of this family now. You've been rescued. Imagine an orphan child slave.

Right? Picture that, an orphan child slave. And imagine they were trapped in a place where they were battered, bruised, and abused. And then a good and strong and righteous man came in and rescued that child and brought them to safety, provided food, provided clothes, and promised to give them a home and a family and says to them, says to this child, I will be your dad and you will be my child.

Now you are safe. Now you are home. Now you are part of this family. All of that is verse 2. That's what front loads the entire law, is that.

And in verse 3 and following, is like saying to that child, child, now, after we have rescued you and brought you into this family, child, if you ever see a man who is out there and he offers you a sweetie, you know this.

[ 32 : 14 ] Child, if you see a man and he offers you a nice, sparkly, shiny sweetie, and he asks you to go with him, don't go. Don't go. No other gods. That sweet might look shiny and tasty.

The man might look harmless. He might even seem good. But you will only end up a slave again. You will be battered and bruised and abused.

He doesn't care for you. He didn't rescue you. Don't go with him. He's not your father. He didn't do any of this for you. He didn't feed you. He didn't clothe you. He didn't protect you.

He didn't give you a home. He didn't give you a family. I am your dad. You are my child. This is your family now. And where you are, and you are with me, you are safe.

I will protect you. I will love you. I will show you steadfast love. And with me, you will have life. That's how to understand this.

[ 33 : 14 ] I am Yahweh, your God, who brought you out of the hand of Egypt, the land of Egypt, and out of the house of slavery. So don't have any other gods. They've got no interest in you, and you should have no interest in them.

Why should Israel love and serve Yahweh alone? Why should they have no other gods before him, and why should they not make images and bow down to those false gods? Simple. Because no other god is their creator.

Who made them in the first place? No other god rescued them out of Egypt. No other god could defeat the great pharaoh in the mighty Egypt. No other god could overcome the grip of the false gods.

No other god would look upon these slaves with such mercy and kindness as Yahweh. No other god could crush the serpent from of old. No other god is faithful like Yahweh is.

No other god is able like Yahweh is. No other god will love like Yahweh does. No other god can lead like Yahweh will. No other god can provide like Yahweh does.



[ 34 : 24 ] And no other god holds your future like Yahweh does. Who else are you going to go to? You see, these commandments are not rules to make life less fun and more burdensome.

They were never given as a standard to reach in order to be saved. Israel was already rescued. Their salvation came before the law. This is a covenant with imperatives that don't enslave us.

They actually keep us free from slavery because they are from the god who has freed us from slavery. No other god has done this.

And beyond this, beyond this god, this one god, there is only slavery waiting with every other god.

And so let me say a final word on why. Why, oh why, if this law is so, so good, why did Israel fail so colossally? And Israel's not alone.

[ 35 : 26 ] Each and every single person sitting and in this room has failed the same way. Why, if this law is so good, have we failed in such a way?

I feel like someone doesn't want me to say the next bit. This is why.

Because their slavery in Egypt, though it was real and it was horrendous, it was but a picture of something far darker and more gripping. And that is the slavery of the human heart to sin.

And if you want proof of that slavery to sin, if you want proof that it's a very real thing, then look outside, look into the world that we live.

And then the second thing to do is look within and you will know that this slavery to sin exists. We all know if we're willing to admit it, but what can we do?

[ 36 : 27 ] See, Paul goes through this in Romans, the law is not bad. The law is not bad, but it was never given to save us in the first place, and it's not able to save us. The law didn't save us.

Yahweh did. We don't need a law to save us. We need a God to save us. And there's only one God who can offer that. And the Exodus was pointing towards when that God would be fully revealed through Christ.

His perfect righteousness showed whose son he was. His words and actions were things that only Yahweh does. His death was the offering of the spotless lamb.

And that was what it took. David said this. That was what it took. The cross of Christ was what it took to redeem each and every person from this kind of slavery to sin.

And so Peter says this in John chapter 6. Lord, to whom shall we go? There's no one else offering this. You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and come to know that you are the Holy One of God.

[ 37 : 36 ] Colossians 1 says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He's the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created. By him. In heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

Thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

And so why would we ever worship something less when everything else was made by him and for him? He's the Lord of lords and the King of kings. He's the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last.

He is our rescuer and redeemer, our salvation and our life. Who is there like Jesus who has the name above all names? Why bow down to anyone else when every knee shall bow to him?

Why go after any other when he is the only one able to free us from our slavery? Why have no other gods but Jesus? Well, brothers and sisters, let me ask you this.

[ 38 : 42 ] Who else has given their life for you on a cross? Who else could possibly repay the debt that you and I have racked up against God? Who else could pay the price of our ransom to ransom our soul?

Who else could free us from the darkness that we feel? Who else can forgive our sin?  
Who else will keep his word to deliver us?

Who else can bring us into the eternal kingdom? And who else can give us eternal life?  
Who else can give us a place in the Father's house? No other gods.

But Jesus. Amen. Well, let us sing.