

# You will have no other gods before Me

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lord, I pray that you would write in our hearts your law, that we would be inclined to serve you, to love you with all of our being. And Lord, as we hear your word, would you open our hearts to know your word and to remember your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

You may be seated. So, many people think that in order to be a Christian, you need to give up your autonomy and your sense of personal identity.

And it makes it quite uncomfortable when we think of laws that really dig deep inside of us, that shape all of our life. And so, is that true? Is that what the Bible is saying about Christianity?

Is it really something that removes our autonomy, our sense of identity? Well, if you have your Bibles with you, we'll turn to Exodus, chapter 20, and we'll look at verses 1 to 3.

So, Exodus, chapter 20, verses 1 to 3. 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.

[ 1 : 10 ] You shall have no other gods before me. See, when we read this in our culture, and even some Christians might, you know, go into this line of thinking after walking with the Lord for a long time, we might hear the words when we read this, And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land to oppress you and to make you my slave.

See, when we think of the story here, doesn't it seem like, you know, God is saving a people, he's bringing them out of Egypt so that they can be God's slaves?

See, weren't they just doing what the Pharaoh told them, and now they're going to go do what God told them? Like, isn't that a bit strange? Isn't that like a bit of a contradiction? Well, it's hard to accept a religion and a worldview in our day and age that invades our whole life.

When we tend to think in terms of simply adding a little bit of this and a little bit of that to our lives, maybe a little bit of church going, or maybe a little bit of yoga, or a little bit of prayer to angels, or a little bit of New Age, it won't hurt if we just do a little bit at a time, right?

As long as we do everything in moderation, and we try to keep a good balance. See, this is today's Canadian philosophy of pluralism. We don't want to give ourselves up entirely to something.

[ 2 : 31 ] And when we hear words like this in the First Commandment, when it says, you shall have no other gods before me, that seems kind of un-Canadian. That seems a bit too much, a bit extreme, that we should say no to all the other religions and say yes to this God.

Why should we do that to this God? Why should we say yes to this God only? So the question is, why does God command such strict allegiance to him?

Why can't he be like my co-worker, who, you know, he's so suave, and so, you know, he's so outgoing, and just does a little bit of everything, and seems to be enjoying life a lot.

Why does God have to be so strict? He shall only have one God. Well, let's look again at this text. Let's see what it says. So the commandment says, you shall have no other gods before me.

And to understand that, just a bit of an aside, if you've grown in the church for a long time, you grew up in the church and you heard the Ten Commandments said over and over again, you might have seen the plaque on the side with the Ten Commandments.

[ 3 : 35 ] Oftentimes, we think of the Ten Commandments out of their context. We think of them as rules. This is what you must do to be in relationship with God. So let's look at the context.

If you can, turn with me to Exodus 19, and we'll read verses 4 to 9. So Exodus 19, verses 4 to 9. So God here is commanding.

Moses to speak to Israel these words. And so we continue. So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all the words that the Lord had commanded him.

All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken, we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.

So in reading this, we get a bit of a glimpse that there's a relationship going on. God saved the people from slavery, 400 years of slavery, and now he wants to give them a new life.

[ 5 : 12 ] So if we can have our first point. Second point, actually.

Thanks. God's intention through Israel's salvation is to create a new human race who will live in freedom like in the Garden of Eden. So this is what's happening here.

And let's look back at verse 4 to 9. Here it says, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

So God carried them almost like an eagle would carry the little baby eagles on their wings, on their back, and carry them to safety. And he says that he brought you to myself.

God brought Israel to himself. And now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. So just pause here.

[ 6 : 14 ] The word treasured possession is not God saying, Israel, you will be my little sweetheart. You will be my little cupcake. Treasured possession. It's actually saying something a little bit deeper than that.

In the ancient days, the word treasured possession is something that a god would say to the king of a nation. It would say to that king in having a relationship that the king would be personally chosen, blessed, and protected by God.

So it's interesting that this is the language that's communicated between a god and a king. And here we have God, the Lord, Yahweh, who's speaking to Israel.

So Israel is like a king, essentially, what it's trying to say. And what do kings do in the ancient days? They rule. They have dominion over the earth. And so if that's starting to ring a bell, that's a good thing.

This is language that is kind of communicating that we're going back to the Garden of Eden. We're going to have dominion over the earth. And then kingdom of priests. The kingdom of priests refers to those who serve in the presence of God and the holy nation.

[ 7 : 24 ] God calls them a holy nation. And that's for those who carry out God's likeness or God's image in all the earth. So we see that God's relationship with them is quite special.

God's intention through Israel's salvation is to create a new human race who will live in freedom like in the Garden of Eden. If I can have the second point, Andrew.

So false gods are selected by broken people because they claim to bring power and success. God mercifully gathers broken people to restore them to life.

So there's a big difference here. The way that false gods operate and the way that the God of Israel, the creator of all the earth, operates. And so God commands his people to not have other gods because if they do that, they'll go back into slavery.

And it's tempting because they promise success and they promise power. But the God of Israel, God mercifully gathers broken people to restore them to life.

[ 8 : 34 ] So we see here that God gives Israel a similar mission as he gave Adam. And I just want to point out one more thing here. It says, Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

For all the earth is mine. If you remember, we just did a series in Genesis, one to the beginning of chapter 12. And in Genesis 1, the great commission that is in Genesis 1, or we call it the creation mandate, is that human beings are to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

And here, God is gathering a people. He's giving them a land so that they can be image bearers in his land. But his plan is beyond the land. He says, All the earth is mine.

So God's plan is to fill the earth. Again, just like in Genesis 1. Okay, so we have this relationship happening between Israel and God, and now God wants them to obey him.

And that may not seem to sit very easily with us. So maybe an analogy will help. A few months ago, I got engaged. And I promise I don't read the whole Bible in light of marriage, but this is something that I think is relevant, is that before we got engaged, we had a conversation something like, I'm just paraphrasing here, and this is not word for word, but, you know, we share a mutual affection for one another.

[ 10 : 09 ] And, you know, we love Jesus, and we want to serve Jesus together for the rest of our lives. And we both agree on this, and this is likely to look like vocational ministry.

Are you okay with that? Yes, I am. Okay. And then we talk about, you know, I asked Renee if she would want to marry me, and she said yes. Okay. So we have this illustration.

Let's look at verses 4 to 6 again from chapter 19. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. So we see here that God is having this relationship. He's establishing a clarity about what the relationship is going to look like with Israel.

[ 11 : 11 ] Okay. So God is going to be king, and Israel is going to be the holy nation, the kingdom of priests. And so they're establishing clarity here and expectations, what this relationship will look like.

Okay, and then we continue. What is Israel's response? Let's look at verse 8. It says, all the people, all of Israel, answered together and said in one voice, all that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

And Moses reported these words of the people to the Lord. So we see God makes a proposal to Israel. Israel says, yes, we will do it. We will be your people and you will be our God.

And so this is the kind of engagement picture, and then we move to Exodus 20. So let's turn there, Exodus 20, and we're on the wedding day, so to speak.

So let's read here. 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. So just pause here in verse 2.

[ 12 : 18 ] We see that God is mentioning the two people who are part of this relationship. It says, I am the Lord, your God, and you, referring to Israel.

So he's communicating this is what's going to happen. This is what I did. This is our relationship. This is the nature of our relationship. And this is quite similar to when on my wedding day with Renee, I'm going to say, I, Jonathan, take you, Renee, to be my lawfully wedded wife and vice versa.

And so we're establishing that covenant. We're saying, these are the parties that are involved in this relationship. But now back to the text here. In verse 3, we see, you shall have no other gods before me.

And this is a stipulation. This is God's expectation in the relationship. And on our wedding day, we're going to say something similar like, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

And those are the promises, the vows that we're making to one another to establish our relationship. So, this text is talking about having no other gods before me.

[ 13 : 30 ] And this is a stipulation. But what does God mean exactly by no other gods before me? Like, does he mean instead of me? Or does he mean ahead of me? Or next to me?

Think of it this way. you who are husbands in the room, if your wife would come to you at the end of the day and would say, honey, there's this man who, you know, that I met at work or at the mall or something and he wants to be my husband as well, would he be okay if he was my husband instead of you?

And the answer would be no. Could he be my husband ahead of you? No. Could he be my husband next to you? No. So the answer is no. There is no other husband in the picture.

I am your husband. You are my wife. We are together. And this is our covenant. This is what we've established. Okay. So, okay, so we're talking about gods here.

And in our modern age, like, we understand that there were gods back then. And there are other religions today. But, like, how does this work in our day and age? Other gods before me.

[ 14 : 39 ] and in our relationship with God. Well, there are all sorts of different gods these days that we don't necessarily call gods.

But we refer to them as gods because they have a certain power and a certain promise. Whether it's the god in our modern day of success that if we do certain exercises or we do certain vows to certain people, we follow certain rich people, we will be rich as well, we will be successful or the god of sexuality or the god of power, of influence, or of convenience.

And we live by them and God calls us to a strict devotion to him for our good. So, you might be thinking despite the fact that God says, or the Bible says, that we are being saved from slavery into freedom, it still doesn't really make sense that freedom involves following commandments.

I'm not too sure I follow. Okay, so let's just look at this. Maybe I can give an analogy that will help. If I were to babysit one of my little nephews, I were to bring him to the park, we would arrive at the park and we're there to go play in the park, right?

So, we get there and I would say, okay, little nephew, don't run in the rose bush, watch for the beehive, don't get bit by the dog, et cetera, et cetera, right?

[ 16 : 08 ] Because we're there to play in the park, we're there to enjoy the park and we won't enjoy the park if we have to go to the hospital because the bees and the dogs bit you and all that, right?

So, for maximum performance in the park, we want to have fun, we want to take advantage of these 30 minutes that we're going to spend in the park or maybe hour, let's just make sure we play in the park and we don't go outside of the park where it's dangerous.

Okay, good. And we're good? Okay, so, what this is saying is that when we sin, we sort of lose touch with the purpose of life.

We sort of lose touch with the purpose of life and we need proper boundaries because our inner explorer will be drawn to all sorts of other things around the park or in the peripheries of life that just want to destroy us.

And so, here's the point of God giving us commandments. God provides us moral perimeters to live by but the question remains, what is the purpose of life?

[ 17 : 19 ] Can we have the next slide, Andrew? We like to think we can create our own purpose in life apart from God's will but we will run away from his commandments towards our re-enslavement.

We like to think we can create our own purpose in life apart from God's will but we run away from his commandments towards re-enslavement. A little while back I watched a video on email, it's one of those chain emails that gets sent around and I try to watch them because some of them are actually really funny.

Anyway, this video, there was a cheetah who was stuck in this life trap. I think it was the paw that was stuck in the trap and the cat was just going everywhere and there were these two forest rangers or safari park rangers that were trying to free the cheetah and they had these poles and they were just kind of holding around the neck, holding on this leg until they can get the trap open so that the cat can be free.

Now, I was thinking like, oh my goodness, this cat is angry. This cat is going to like shred these guys with the claws and these guys are done with if the cat is set free. Like, what are they doing?

And so anyway, they get closer and closer and as soon as they get the trap open, the cat is ready to be released except that they still have the poles around their necks and I'm just, I'm kind of losing it.

[ 18 : 43 ] And anyway, the cat is just furious and they finally get the poles with the little straps around off the neck, off the paw and we're ready for action.

And I would think that people would try to poke the cat and say like, go away, go away, don't attack us. But the reality is that they didn't need to do that. The cheetah just ran for dear life. The cheetah went and, well, the video didn't really show what the cheetah did but I assume that the cheetah went to go be a cheetah again.

You know, go around the pond, drink some water, eat some food, do a bit of hunting, hang around with other cats and that's kind of what I assumed out of the picture. But here's why I bring up this illustration.

Unlike the cheetah, we don't run towards doing what God frees us to do. See, if it was just us, we would just be set free and then we'd probably stick around, you know, smell the trap and hang around with the forest rangers.

The Bible uses words like enslavement, modern terms, we talk about addiction. For people who are walking to be set free from different addictions, whether it's from alcohol or drugs or sex or money, it's not as simple as just being told that you're set free.

[ 20 : 08 ] We always run back. We have these desires within us that are shaped by things of this world and God wants to set us free from the things that captivate us, things that hold us in bondage.

Okay, so in the biblical narrative as we've seen so far, the problem is that the Israelites' freedom from Egypt is not sufficient. They're saved by God but they still need to know how to live.

And so, can we have the next slide? Is there a slide before that? Okay, I might have missed it.

So, I'll just say it. God's command, God's commandments reflect his character whereby only God can fulfill the law. The question is not what will help me but who will help me?

See, in the nature of God's command, God gives Israel his commandments and Israel is not, you know, better than everyone else. God saves them because he's merciful, not because they're good.

[ 21 : 23 ] And that is a picture, Israel is a picture of the whole world that whatever Israel does, we would, anyone who's outside of Israel would do the same. Israel sins, anyone else would sin at God's commandments.

So, God gives us commandments that reflect him. They kind of articulate his character for us because his commandments are holy and they're so holy that only God can fulfill them.

So, the question is not what will help me but who will help me? See, we are creatures who are driven by desire, by love and we find those things in things that don't fulfill us and the Bible will make the claim that because we're made in the image of God, only God can fulfill us, only God can satisfy us, only God because God is personal and, you know, art is not, sciences are not, mathematics are not, those things are great.

They can be false gods who will drive us into slavery and make us more empty unless God is there to save us. So, God's commandments reflect his character whereby only he can fulfill the law.

The question is not what will help me but who will help me? Now, what do I mean by this? When we look at the law, we look beyond the law to the law giver and that is God.

[ 22 : 51 ] God is the law giver and we look to a God of grace who sets us free and gives us parameters to stay free to continue in freedom and so God's laws are grace to us yet we can't follow through.

We can't do them perfectly. We still fall short and so for this reason we need a Messiah. We need a God man, someone who is a human yet has God's zeal for holiness and so God sends his son Jesus for us to live the life that we should have lived but we couldn't because we are too sinful.

Jesus comes, he lives a perfect life and he walks perfectly in holiness before God fulfilling all of his commandments and he also taught us the first commandment that we're looking at today though the words here say you shall have no other gods before me.

Andrew, can we have the next slide? Jesus taught us the most important commandment is hear Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and you shall have no other God or you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

See, Jesus having lived this life he also taught this commandment but taught the positive implication of the commandment to love God not just avoid other gods but to have God that's what the commandment is implied to love God and so how can we love God?

[ 24 : 20 ] Well, we just look at him we think of God we think of his acts we think of what he has done for us see God has done everything possible for us to be in a right relationship with him when we could not God does it and God provides pardon through his son on the cross that when we believe in him we are forgiven our sins and he also gives us power to live a life a new life that reflects his holiness he pours out his Holy Spirit to those who trust in Jesus and so this is our hope the hope is that Jesus has done it all that we look to Jesus we fall in love with Jesus because he loved us first we follow Jesus because of the power that he imparts to us so now if you're a Christian here and you might be wondering why we teach the Ten Commandments we just started a series today we're going to go for the next ten weeks looking at the Ten Commandments and you might be wondering like why the Ten Commandments like I'm a spiritual Christian I'm not a law Christian Andrew can we have the next slide can we say this together whoever keeps his commandments abides in God and God in him but sorry okay what this is saying is that when we're in a relationship with God when we love God we reflect him and by this we know that when we follow him that his spirit is the spirit who is working in and through us and so to be a spiritual Christian is to be a Christian who follows God who follows his laws not to be in right relationship with him but because we're in right relationship with him so I would invite you to stand at this point and we're going to have a closing prayer so please stand so some of you might not have given your life to Jesus yet but you want to there's something today that really interests you this could be a conversion prayer for you and either way this is a prayer for Christians as we walk with God on a daily basis so let's pray this together or let's say this together

Lord though your word commands me to love you with all my being you know the propensity of my heart is to leave you out of my life in your mercy write your law upon my heart turn me to Jesus the one whom the law directs me to worship pour out your Holy Spirit upon so that I may be inclined to keep it all the days of my life through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen just remaining standing Father we're thankful for your grace that you've shown Lord you've given us your son so that we may be made right with you so that we may continue in this commission that you've created human beings to be a part of to fill the earth to be creative and to do your will and to reflect you and to enjoy you Lord would you teach us that today would you teach us that in Jesus name Amen