

One Lord, One Love

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[0 : 0 0] The reading today is taken from the book of Deuteronomy and we're looking at chapter 6 and we're going to be reading verses 1 to 15 and it can be found on page 181, it's 181 in the Bibles on your chairs.

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the rules that the Lord your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over to possess it, that you may fear the Lord your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you.

All the days of your life and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you in a land flowing with milk and honey.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk to them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise.

[1 : 5 5] You shall bind them as a sign on your hands. And they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

And when the Lord your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob to give you, with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant.

And when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve, and by his name you shall swear. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you.

For the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God, lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.

[3 : 1 9] Well may I thank you very much for your welcome. Thank Fiona for reading. I hope that you'll keep that Bible passage open, page 181.

I'm going to be speaking just from two verses from that passage, verses 4 and 5. We've prayed, so let me start straight in. I wonder if you ever wake up in the morning and wonder how you're going to get through the day.

Sometimes I do. I wake up and I think I've got so many different things to do today, and I feel like a rabbit caught in the headlights. I know I've got to do something, but I really don't know what I'm going to do.

Or perhaps at the end of the day, you sometimes say to yourself, my day seemed to go in all sorts of different directions. Or maybe worse than that, maybe sometimes you think my whole world is falling apart.

What ought I to do? Corporately we sometimes say that, don't we? Sometimes somebody says, my company is falling apart. It's being torn apart by strife or personality differences or whatever.

[4 : 25] Sometimes in the pain of breakdown of a relationship or of a divorce, people say, my family is falling apart. We say it nationally, don't we, sometimes? We say of Iraq, at the moment it seems to be falling apart, torn apart, disintegrating.

I want to bring to this question of disintegration, this sense of I don't know quite where we're going, two of the most important verses in the whole of human history.

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Just before the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks a religious leader, what does the Bible tell you to do to inherit eternal life?

And he answered from this verse, And Jesus said, that's right. And on another occasion when they asked Jesus the same question, he answered from this verse, what is the fundamental obligation of every human being?

[5 : 35] It is to love God with all that we've got. Now these words were first spoken by Moses, and we find them here in the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book in the Bible.

And Deuteronomy is set on the edge of the Promised Land. The people of Israel have come out of Egypt at what we call the Exodus, and forty or so years later they're on the edge of the Promised Land.

They're just the other side of the River Jordan. Moses is about to die, and he preaches his heart out, final sermons to the people. The book comes in three main sections.

The first section, roughly chapters one to four, and then the long middle section is roughly chapter five through to chapter 26. And the middle section begins with the Ten Commandments in chapter five.

And chapters five through eleven really preach the importance of keeping these Ten Commandments. And in chapter six, verses four and five, Moses puts in a nutshell what the Ten Commandments are.

[6 : 38] So that's the context here. Now I want to unpack them like this. I want to take two things from these verses, a foundation and an obligation.

And I'm going to spend about half our time on the foundation, because it's so important. And then I want to take two other Bible truths from elsewhere in the Bible and relate them to these verses, the problem and the invitation.

You've got, incidentally, on the back of the service sheet, there are headings there, if you'd find that helpful. So let's start with this foundation. Moses begins with a statement in verse four.

Here, O Israel, the Lord, and the Lord in capital letters means what's sometimes called Yahweh. It's the covenant name of God. It means really the God of the Bible.

So he says the Lord, the God of the Bible, our God, because he's the God of the covenant, he's the God who's related to the people, the Lord is one.

[7 : 42] There are only four words in the original. The Lord is the first word. Our God is the second word. The Lord is the third word. And one is the fourth word. And that's the emphatic one.

The Lord our God, the Lord one. We've said at Freddie's baptism, we believe and trust in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, you know, on a website, you get a sort of concentration of hyperlinks. Do you know that bit on a website where suddenly you've got hyperlinks everywhere, sort of shooting off elsewhere on the internet?

And these four words in the Bible are like a sort of concentration of hyperlinks, that from here it sort of shoots off to the rest of the Bible. It's such a crucial little statement here.

And I want to unpack this in three ways. The Lord our God, the Lord is one. First of all, it means that he is one reality.

[8 : 40] Let me explain what I mean. By that I mean that human beings have always had gods. Gods, if you like, with a little g, gods or goddesses.

Whether we call them gods and goddesses, as in religions, or whether they're just projects or loves or aims in life. We've always had them.

But the point of this statement is that although these gods, these projects, it may be my career, it may be my religion, it may be my family, although of course they exist in our subjectivities, they exist in the imaginations of our hearts and in our desires, these gods and projects have no objective, real existence outside of us.

And this statement is saying that the Lord our God, the Lord, is the only one, the only God, who has an objective, real, substantial existence outside of us.

So when Paul alludes to this verse in his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 8, he says we know that an idol, that is a false god, has no real existence.

[9 : 56] And there is no God but one. And the point is that other so-called gods, to whom or to which I devote my energy and my devotion, maybe may well be my career or my family, they cannot help me because they have no existence outside of me.

They cannot help me when I'm in need. I call to them but they have no ear to hear my call. I cry to them and they have no hand with which to reach out and help me.

They are unreal in that sense. A few weeks ago I was preaching at a church in Bournemouth and a young woman called Julia told us her story. And she said I was brought up in a Christian home and then I went to university and she read geography at university.

And in her words she said I was taught that there is no one reality. That of course is very characteristic of the spirit of the age.

That there is no one reality. I have a reality that is real for me. You have a reality that is real for you. He or she has a reality that is real for them. That is the spirit of the age. There is no one reality.

[11 : 03] And so she said not surprisingly I got very confused. Which characterises our age. Because if there is no one reality what do I hold on to? And it was only when she came back to the roots of her Christian upbringing to understand that the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

The one reality objectively at the heart of the universe that she came back to a place of stability. In his old age Michelangelo wrote of how he had made his art into an idol.

It had been for him if you like his reality. But he said now in his old age he realised that and I quote neither painting nor sculpture can any longer quieten my soul which is turned now to the love of God.

So there is the first truth here that this one God, the God of the Bible is the one God who is objectively substantially real. Second, this truth means that he is the one God who holds the world together.

He is the source of one morality. He is the God who holds the world together so that there is objectively right and wrong. The world is fundamentally a coherent place because it's made by one real God.

[12 : 26] It's not the playground of competing moralities. That's how we tend to think of it like Iraq or the Balkans or an anarchic school playground or a jungle where the weakest go to the wall.

I have right and wrong that's true for me you have right and wrong that's true for you and we can just fight over who's stronger. But the Bible teaches that the world is as it were placed on pillars.

I'm speaking poetically. It's placed on foundations. It is a solid place. It's not finally a chaotic place. It is a place that's held together by order.

Incidentally, that's why it's worth doing science. I don't know if you've thought about this. One of the reasons why science has so many of its roots in Christian faith, which it does historically, is because there's no point doing science unless the world is made by one God and it's an ordered place.

And a scientist knows that he or she is not trying to invent order and impose it on the world. A scientist is discerning the order that is already there because it's been placed there by the Creator.

[13 : 36] And the Bible teaches that this order is not just in the material aspect of the world, the physical sciences and so on. There is also order in the moral aspect of the world.

There is right and there is wrong. Now, of course, many people deny this in theory. Many people say that in theory, you know, they think that right is a subjective thing and wrong is a subjective thing.

I haven't yet met anyone who really believes that. I've never yet met anyone who, when a paedophile murders a child, is happy with the person who says, well, that must have been right for him.

I haven't yet met anyone like that. I've never met anyone who's actually prepared to live by that creed. And the Bible teaches that there is one God and therefore there is objectively right and objectively wrong one morality.

Third, this one God is the source of one's security. The clearest echo of this verse in the rest of the Old Testament comes in the second last book of the Bible.

[14 : 46] You could look it up later if you like, in the Prophet Zechariah, where the Prophet Zechariah is looking forward to the future. And he says, That is to say, he will be acknowledged to be the one king above all other kings, king of kings and lord of lords.

And that means that the world is finally a secure place. Now, of course, many people deny this as well. I don't know if you've come across this idea, but many people say that if you say there is one God who rules the world, that is a recipe for tyranny and totalitarianism.

And so many people say, what we need is not one God, not the one, but the many. We need pluralism, we need many gods, because that's a recipe, they say, for freedom.

The paradox is that they are precisely wrong. that if there are many competing gods, powers, forces in the world, and the world is fundamentally an anarchic playground, then might is right.

Because I can't be more right than you and you can't be more right than me. So it's just a question of which of us is stronger and who's going to come out on top in the battle. But the God of the Bible is the God who's the supreme God, and he's the God who, especially in Deuteronomy here, is the God who rescues from slavery.

[16 : 19] In Egypt, he's the God who brought them out of slavery. And actually, the only hope for human beings when they are oppressed by Pharaoh, as it were, in Egypt, or any other oppressive power, any tyranny, the only hope for human beings is that there is a higher throne.

The one God who is the redeemer, the rescuer, the other. So when Moses says, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, he's making a tremendous statement.

He's saying, at the heart of the universe, there is one objective, real, substantial God, that he's placed a real morality in the world, there is objectively right and wrong, and therefore he rules the world with the highest throne, and the world is finally a safe place.

It follows, therefore, verse 5, that if we don't want to disintegrate, we must hold on to him.

I want us to see how verse 5 builds on verse 4. Verse 4, the Lord our God, the Lord is one, and therefore, verse 5, you shall love him, that is, be fiercely loyal to him.

[17 : 35] That's what love there means. It's not so much a feeling as a commitment. So, if this one God is the one God, the only God, who holds the world together, who makes the world a coherent place, then if I myself am not to disintegrate, if I myself am finally not to be torn in different directions, I must hold on to him.

So, he says, you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, and the Hebrew word heart covers what we would call heart and mind. It's more than feelings, it's commitment.

And all your soul, and your soul is not an immaterial part of you, your soul is your being, and all your strength or might.

And my strength or my might is all that I am as a living being with agency. Let me put it like this, every one of us here, every man and woman here, has the ability to make a difference in the world.

All of us have got breath, we've got some strength, we've got some energy, we've got some gifts and talents, we've got some money, we've got some time, and therefore, we have it in our power to make a difference to the world.

[18 : 48] That is our might or our strength. It covers my wallet, it covers my diary, it covers the influence I have over other people, it covers everything that I can do or say.

And Moses says that we have an obligation to love the God of the Bible, the creator God, the only God who made the world, with everything that we've got.

Now just a word to clarify this. I've put on the handout one obligation, not two. And if you know Jesus' teaching in the New Testament, you may remember that when in Mark chapter 12 and Matthew chapter 22, Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment in the law, he's asked a singular question, which is the greatest commandment.

And he appears to give a plural answer. That is to say, he says, which is the greatest commandment in the law? One, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.

And he quotes this verse in Deuteronomy. And, you shall love your neighbour as yourself, which is quoting another verse from the Old Testament, from the book of Leviticus, chapter 19.

[20 : 05] And then he says, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Now, question, is Jesus saying there are two things human beings must do or is there one thing human beings must do?

It's not a trivial question, it's a very important question. Many people think that he was saying there are two things human beings must do. We must love God on the one hand, that's the religious bit, and we must love our neighbour on the other hand, that's the social and practical bit.

And so many people think that what Jesus was saying is that life is a difficult balancing act, in which we mustn't just love our neighbour because we've got to remember to leave some time for loving God, but if we love God all the time then we won't be any use to anybody else.

Have you come across that idea? Sort of balance? It's hopeless. If that were the case we really would be lost. The Danish writer Soren Kierkegaard wrote that hardly could a more frightful thing be conceived than that there might be a collision between love for God and love for persons.

After all, how can we love God with heart, mind, soul and strength for everything that we've got if we're also meant to leave some of our heart, mind, soul and strength for loving people? And so we need to understand that what Jesus was saying, he's not saying there's two demands, he's saying there's one demand.

[21 : 25] We must love God with everything we've got. God and our love for our neighbour is the practical outworking and expression of love for God.

So if there's a husband here you're called to love your wife as an expression of your love for God. It's not a diversion from your love for God, it's an expression of it. We're called to love our fellow human beings as an expression of love for God.

so that when we wake up in the morning and feel like a rabbit in the headlights every one of us can say quite clearly in the morning to ourselves there is one thing we are called to do today.

It's true tomorrow morning, Monday morning. There is one thing I'm called to do and you're called to do and that is to love God with everything I've got. So fundamentally there is one obligation on every human being.

And it's very important to realise this is not an obligation just on Christians. That's the point of verse 4. Because the Lord is one, there is one God who made the world, there's one God who's the only reality, he's the source of the only morality, he's the one ruler of the world.

[22 : 39] It follows that the only thing that makes it worth a human being living and breathing is to love God with all that I've got. That's true of everybody. I don't know most of you, I don't know if you're Christians believer or not, if you're not it's wonderful to have you here this morning.

We're very glad about that. But I do want us to understand that this is what the Bible teaches. So it's not that I'm going to love my neighbour and I'm going to leave my religious friend to love God.

It's that if I'm a human being I am called to love God with all that I've got. Now the problem is this, the problem is that I will not and cannot do this by nature.

In Mark chapter 12 a religious scholar asked Jesus which commandment is the most important of all and Jesus said hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and 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.

The second is this you shall love your neighbour as yourself there is no other commandment greater than these and the scribe said to Jesus you are right teacher you have truly said that he is one and that there is no other besides him and to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength and to love one's neighbour as oneself is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices and when Jesus saw that he answered wisely he said to him you are not far from the kingdom of God not far but not in and I imagine that religious teacher was gutted see the religious teacher thought here is an amateur here is an amateur teacher here this man from Nazareth this Galilean and I have asked him which commandment is the most important of all and he has given a good answer and so I imagine the religious leader said slightly patronisingly well done you know patting him on the head well done that was a good answer let me just expand on it for you and just explain that you have got it absolutely right and then this amateur turns around to the professional and says to him well done you are not far from the kingdom of God and I imagine he was gutted and the question is why didn't Jesus say to him well done you are obviously in the kingdom of God you have understood the truth the man had understood the truth he had understood that this one God he had understood one reality one morality one security one ruler and I must love him he had understood that in his head so why wasn't he in well we find the answer in Luke chapter 10 when another lawyer another professional put Jesus to the test and said teacher what shall I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus said to him well what does the law tell you to do and he said you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength and your neighbour as yourself and Jesus said well done do this and you will live and this man understood that it wasn't as easy as it sounded and so desiring to justify himself he said to Jesus who is my neighbour and Jesus told him the story the parable of the good Samaritan at which point the man realised when Jesus said go and do likewise he realised the whole point is that I can't and I won't by nature do that not if love for God means that and our problem is that we live in a world that is as Martin Luther in the 16th century famously put it we live in worlds that are curved in on themselves and that by nature

[26 : 55] I am at the centre of my little world and the world revolves around me that's how I am by nature and I can't break out of that let me tell you about a goal setting seminar this was run last July by 30 former head girls of some independent girls schools this goal setting seminar was held at a club in Mayfair which seemed to me somehow more appropriate than the old Kent Road for that kind of setting in terms of the Monopoly Board it was entitled Get a Vision and the girls were told this take yourself way into the future maybe 20 years and get a vision of exactly what you want it to look like who are you where are you who are the people that surround you and they were encouraged to dream dreams of and I quote fast cars high powered careers and marital bliss which they could achieve through the skill of efficient goal setting dream on but the point is that they were all futures that centred on me

I was at the middle of the dream and that's how I am by nature so I don't know Freddie I imagine he's absolutely delightful handsome and talented like his parents but I do know this about him that he won't by nature love God with all his heart any more than the rest of us that's why we needed in his baptism to have an outward sign of the hope of the gospel in Jesus Christ and so let me finish with the invitation the invitation is this I must hold on to the God of the Bible it's the only hope for any human being I won't hold on to the God of the Bible by nature but there is a mediator there is one who is God himself who will reach out his hand and draw me to him and in Paul's first letter to Timothy he says in chapter two there is one God and one mediator between God and people who gave himself as a ransom for all people there is one who on the cross paid the penalty for my rebellion for my self-centeredness for my obsession with myself and because he paid the penalty on the cross for that he is the mediator

God himself reaching out in the person of his son to bring me to the one God who's at the heart of the universe and that's why the Christian faith is good news if the Christian faith was just saying there's one God and we must love him full stop the Christian faith would be bad news because it would be saying to me I must do something that I will not do and cannot do by nature but the Christian faith is good news because it is the news not only of the one God but of the one God who is himself in the person of his son the mediator as Christians came to understand later this one God is father son and holy spirit and the son is the mediator who brings men and women to God so I want to say to you if you're not a Christian believer this morning I want to invite you if you've begun to grasp or maybe you've understood for a while that there is one

God one reality and that it's vital to be connected to him and to be loyal to him and you know that you can't and you know that you won't by nature none of us do I want to invite you to take the hand of the mediator the Lord Jesus Christ and to let that mediator bring you into the presence of this one God which he will do that's what he offers in the gospel of Christ and if you are a Christian I want to say to you as I say to myself when you wake up in the morning say to yourself whatever your name is today I am called to do one thing I am called to love to be fiercely loyal to this one true living God in the Lord Jesus Christ and when I feel that my life is being pulled in different directions to remember that at any moment of any day or any night if I ask the question what ought I to do I don't need to look at my palm pilot the question is always answered

I need to love God now that is the fundamental calling of every human being I'm going to stop there we'll have a moment of quiet I'll say a prayer and then there's an opportunity for questions if you would like to ask them that would be fine let's be quiet for a moment and then we'll pray there is one God and there is one mediator between God and people Lord Jesus Christ we praise you that you came to this earth to die on the cross as our ransom that you might be the mediator to bring us into relationship with the one

[32 : 39] God at the heart of the universe many of us here want to thank you and praise you for that and ask that our lives might increasingly be single hearted and single minded and for those who have not yet found this joy of walking with you we pray that in your goodness you would draw them to and be for them the mediator we ask it in your namesake for your namesake Amen