

# Our Exclusive God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, the other day, my daughter showed her love for Michelle by making some perfume for her. She got some flower petals from our rose garden out the front, squashed them together, added some water, put it in a little spray bottle.

I think she added something else because it came out with a rather interesting aroma, right? And then she also said to Michelle, look, I want to do your makeup for you as well to show her love for Michelle.

And so she did it. And Michelle showed a love towards Megan by letting her do it. Because if you look at the next slide, this is how it came out. And Michelle shows love towards me right now by letting me show you that photo because it's embarrassing.

You see, we showed love towards people by actions, don't we? And it's the same with God. He showed love towards us in an action by giving his one and only son, Jesus, to die for us on a cross, take the punishment for our sins so that we could be forgiven and given membership in his family. And so in response to his love, we in turn are to love God in action. As Jesus said last week, as we saw, we are to love God with all our heart, soul and strength and mind.

[ 1 : 21 ] And we are to love our neighbor as ourself. For us as Christians, these are the two great commandments, says Jesus. Though last week we saw that God's Old Testament law is still helpful to show us how to love God and how to love others.

So let me just recap what we saw last week because we've got a few people who weren't with us and it'll be helpful to reinforce it nonetheless. So last week I showed you that Christ has come to fulfill the law, Matthew 5, 17.

And that means we're now free from having to obey it. And yet in that same verse, Matthew 5, 17, Christ said he has not come to abolish the law either. In other words, there's still a place for it.

And the place it has is to teach us. And so on the next slide, I said that the law, the Old Testament law still teaches us three things. It helps us to better understand Christ.

You know, his work of being a sacrifice for sin from the Old Testament categories, a priest and so on. It helps us to understand God's character better. But it also helps us to love God and others more.

[ 2 : 30 ] And when we focus on that last one, number C, when we come to the Old Testament laws, which might appear random to us, but are about relating to God or each other, we can still ask some questions that will help us get application from it.

And so the questions are listed there on the slide. And we'll keep that slide up for a moment. And so we worked through those questions. And I gave you a couple of examples you might remember. They were from the end of chapter 22.

But we missed the very last verse of chapter 22. We ran out of time. And so I thought just by way of reinforcement, we'd do it now. So turn in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 22, where we've got all these random laws that we'd normally just skip over.

We looked at some examples from verse 21 to 27 about not taking advantage of the needy. And then we looked at verses 29 to 30 about giving God our best, the firstborn idea.

And then verse 31, the last verse, again seems somewhat random. It says, You are to be my holy people, so do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts.

[ 3 : 39 ] Throw it to the dogs. Okay. What are we to do with that? Well, we can apply our four questions. So question one, who is it helping us to love?

Well, God says you are to be my holy people. So it's a command for the people about how they're to relate to God rather than others. So the first question, helping us love God. What principle of love is it showing?

Well, it's talking about not doing something so that we are holy. The word holy means not just purity, but being set apart, being different, set apart from the nations for God. And so this is not really about health. I mean, if the animal was off, not even the nations would carve it up for some T-bone steaks or anything like that. Rather, they would leave it as well. They probably wouldn't even give it to the dogs if it was off. Rather, the law is about holiness, as the first part of the verse says. And so the principle of loving God means being holy. [ 4 : 46 ] It's being set apart from the world for God. It may not mean we have to worry about a deceased cow along Church Road or something like that. I doubt that will happen. But we can still apply this principle.

And so we go to question three. Does the New Testament give us any application of this principle? Well, it does. On the next slide. So keep going to 1 Peter, Tina. So there we are.

1 Peter 1 says, As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, you know, when you lived as non-Christians. But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct.

Since it is written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. And so once we've seen that, we can go, OK, well, this Old Testament law still helps us to love God by being different from the world, by not giving in to our earthly passions, by not having the conduct of the world, but being set apart from the world for God.

And so to give you an example of what this might look like, well, I think I've mentioned before to you that my father used to work in a public school and in the staff room at lunchtime, the teachers would often tell very crude and mean jokes about students and the like.

[ 6 : 06 ] And whenever that happened, my father would just turn around and walk out of the staff room. He was actually known for doing that. They'd even, when he entered, start a rude joke just to see him walk out again.

But you see, here he is applying this principle of loving God. He's being holy, he's being set apart from the world, from that staff room for God to live God's way.

That's what it might look like. But the point is, this is how we understand God's law. Yes, we are not bound to obey it, but nor should we ignore it. Because it's still God's word to us and it gives us principles to help us love God and others in action.

Of course, when we come to the actual Ten Commandments, which we'll do today, they're much easier to work out and apply. And so let's look at the first one. So come with me back to chapter 20, verse 1.

Chapter 20, verse 1, with point 1 in the outline. God spoke all these words, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

[ 7 : 11 ] Now, clearly, the first commandment is helping us to love God. That's easy. And even the principle is quite easy to work out. It's by having no other gods but the Lord.

In other words, it's by having God as our exclusive God. The word before me, as Jeff alluded to in his kids' talk, doesn't mean that God is to be the first of many gods, you know, as long as there's no other God before him.

No, there's a footnote in your Bible, which probably has a better translation. It's having no other gods besides him. Like us, Israel lived in a world where there are many so-called gods, where nations worship multiple gods.

But Israel was to have only one God. They were to give the Lord their exclusive allegiance and loyalty, as Ali was talking about at the start of the service.

They couldn't have a bit of the Canaanite gods of Baal or Moloch, and then a bit of God. No, no, God was to be their exclusive God. Why? Well, partly because he is the one who has just saved them and made them his people.

[ 8 : 19 ] He's already put them in an exclusive relationship with them. Do you remember verse 2? I am the Lord, your God. See, there's already that personal relationship.

God is their God, and they are his people. And so they are to maintain that exclusive relationship by having no other gods but the Lord. And it's, as I said, an easy principle for us to apply to ourselves. And to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is to ensure that he alone is our only God, our exclusive God. And again, we see this in the New Testament. So on the next slide, from Matthew chapter 4, when the devil was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he showed him all these kingdoms and said, I'll give it to you if you bow down and worship me.

And notice Jesus' response, Away from me, Satan, for it is written, Worship the Lord your God and serve him. What? Only. Only. On the next slide, Jesus said later on in Matthew chapter 6, you cannot serve two masters, two gods.

And then he applies it and says, you cannot serve both God and money. We ought to have one God, you see. Well, what might this look like for us today? I mean, I doubt we'd be tempted to pursue the gods of the Canaanites, you know, the statues of Baal or Moloch and the like, which were around in Israel's day.

[ 9 : 43 ] But for us, there are many good things in this world that we can turn into gods, aren't there? You see, a God, as Jeff said, is something that controls us, that we serve above all else, that shapes our desires, our priorities and our lives.

And in today's world, the big gods, as someone once said, are body, brains and bucks. Our world is obsessed with the body, how we look, our health, our exercise, sex, all things associated with the body.

And then there's the brains or education, such that parents push and push their children, not to do their best, but to get the best result. And of course, they do all that so they can get a job and earn lots of bucks, money.

But I suspect there's more than just those three gods, because why do people want to have a good job and earn lots of money? So that life is cruisy, comfort.

Comfort is a big God, I think. And so is family. So in Australia, alongside body, brains and bucks, there's the God of comfort and family and perhaps even sport.

[ 10 : 56 ] These are the things, good things, that we can quickly turn into God things. There's nothing wrong with looking after your body and earning money and wanting good education for your children or grandchildren, but it's when they shape our lives more than God shapes our lives that it becomes a problem.

It's when we serve them more than we serve God that it becomes a problem, because it means they have now actually become a God in our lives.

And yet, to love the Lord means having no other gods in our relationship with Him, except Him. I remember a parent at a Bible study group one time praying for a child who was doing VCE.

It's that time of year, isn't it? And someone in the group this while ago, they said, we should pray that your child gets a really good mark.

And they didn't. They're just trying to be nice about it. But the parent actually said, oh, well, actually, it'd be great if you just pray they do their best and depend on God. You see the difference? This parent did not have education or even their child as their God.

[ 12 : 10 ] They had the Lord as their God. And it changed how they prayed. Oh, I'll take another family at our church. This, again, is going a while back when we had the 4 p.m. church service in the Hudson Taylor room.

I still remember clearly that they arrived home from holidays and everything. The car was still packed, full of luggage. I think they got about 3.45. And instead of just saying, oh, look, we're back from holidays.

We're too tired. We've got to unpack everything. We'll skip church. They just parked the car and came to church knowing they'd have to do it all later instead of having a relaxing evening. Who was their God?

Well, not comfort and relaxation. It was the Lord. I know many people here, actually, who, you know, have got little kids or health issues, and yet you don't serve the God of comfort.

You serve the Lord. And so you push through it and come to church. It's really encouraging. Or take a person from 5 p.m. church. They, not long ago, finished university and they were looking for work and they said to Mark, Mark told me this, they said, look, I decided not to pray for a good paying job but a job with good hours so that I can still serve at church.

[ 13 : 19 ] And in the end, God gave them both, actually. God won't always do that, by the way, just to be clear. But the point is, he loved God by ensuring that God and not money was his exclusive God.

If you want to know who is God in your life, then ask yourself, could I give this thing up, whether it's family, money, work, or whatever, if God asked me to? Or put differently, is this thing in my life shaping my priorities more than God is?

And if it is, then perhaps you've got more than one God in your relationship. We're to love God by having God as our only God. Second, we're to love God by having no idols or images.

Point to verse 4. He says, You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above, on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, he says.

And now the word for image here means idol, like a statue. In the ancient world, they would make statues in the likeness of a bird or an animal or a person to represent their God in the heavens somewhere.

[14:34] So for example, in Egypt, which is where Israel just spent the last 400 years, one of their gods was the sun god, Ra. Now the Egyptians could not see Ra, but they could see birds and humans.

And so here on the slide here, what they do is they made an idol of Ra using what they could see, you know, the body of a human, the head of a bird, a falcon, I think it is, and the yellow circle on top, what do you think that represents?

Sun god? Yeah, sun. So that's what they did. And this idol would represent the god and then be used to worship the god. And so while the first commandment is about having no other gods, the second commandment expands and builds on that by saying, and that includes not having their idols or images as well.

But I suspect the second commandment is actually going further and what it's really getting at is ensuring Israel does not make an idol of even their own god, Yahweh.

You see, as I said, Israel had spent 400 years in Egypt and they'd been seeing Egyptians worship their gods through those statues and idols and so they would be very tempted to think, well, we've got our own god now, let's make an idol or a statue to represent our god, like an animal or something and we can worship God through this statue.

[15:56] And we know that's what they were probably thinking because that's exactly what they end up doing. A few chapters later, they make a statue in the likeness of a calf to represent God.

And so on the next slide, we read this from Exodus 32. Aaron makes the golden statue and then he says he built an altar in front of the calf and announced to all of Israel, tomorrow there will be a festival to, notice, not another god, not to the calf, but to the Lord.

See what they've done? They've done what the nations have done. They've made an idol in the likeness of an animal to represent God and to use in their worship of God. But that's not how God wants them or us to worship him.

And so the second commandment is about loving God really by worshipping God his way, not the nation's way, not with idols. And that's because there are three main problems with idols.

First, they cannot truly represent God. No idol or image can capture God's greatness, you know, his power, his wisdom, his love, his glory. And if an idol cannot fully represent God, then by default, it's missing something about God.

[17:12] It's a misrepresentation of God. That's why on the next slide, Isaiah the prophet says this to Israel. He says, to whom then will you compare God?

What image will you use to compare him to? That's a rhetorical question, but the answer is no image because there is no image that can fully capture who God is.

He's too big for a statue, too great for canvas, too mighty for a stained glass window. So in the end, images simply misrepresent him.

It suggests that he is something less than he truly is and that's offensive. I mean, how would you like to be represented by a cow as the Israelites did for God?

So it's on the next slide. Meet Vijay Henderson. I'm offended for him, you know. An idol doesn't work because it can't fully represent the person it's supposed to, or God in this case.

[18:15] A second reason God says no idols is because he has represented himself already by his word in the Old Testament. That's how he wants to be worshipped. Not by idols, but by his word.

So again, on the next slide, Moses says in Deuteronomy, where he, just before he gives the Ten Commandments again, he reminds of what happened back here in Exodus. And he says, look, when God first gave you the Ten Commandments, when the Lord spoke to you out of the fire, you heard the sound of words, but saw no form.

There was only a voice, a word. And he says, therefore, watch yourselves very carefully so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourself an idol or an image of any shape, whether form like a

man or a woman or like any animal and so on.

You see, God was not to be represented by an image, but by his word. But the third reason for no idols is because the idols end up becoming God.

They end up being worshipped in the end and replacing God, which means we're back to breaking the first commandment. I remember back in 2008, I was living in Sydney and it was World Catholic Youth Day and they had this 1.6 metre image of Jesus, which is on the next slide.

[ 19 : 37 ] And here it is in Hyde Park outside St. Mary's Cathedral and this image would travel the world with the Pope. And it was made out of like a glass mosaic. So on the next slide is a closer picture of it so you can see all the glass mosaic and because of it, people called it the mirror ball Jesus or the disco Jesus because of the disco ball kind of effect.

but on the next slide is an article from the Sydney Morning Herald and the title is In Glass They Trust. And you can't read it but let me read it for you.

The writer says, people kiss him, that is the statue, pray to him, light candles at his feet and leave gifts including a bunch of roses.

Now do you see what's happened? They've ended up worshipping the image of Jesus rather than the person of Jesus. The idol ends up replacing God the Son sealing people's affection and worship from him.

But that's what idols do. They end up replacing the God they're supposed to represent. And so they become a rival to God which as I said means we're breaking the first commandment.

[ 20 : 46 ] And so what is the loving principle here? Well, as I said it's to avoid idols that replace God and instead worship God by his word. It's to avoid idols that replace God and instead worship God by his word.

Now I need to say that doesn't mean we are to smash the stained glass window up here and you're not allowed to use children's Bibles with pictures of Jesus in it and so on. No, no. The second commandment is about not worshipping those things.

So if there are people after church who are coming down and bowing to this image up here or praying to it then I would do something about it. Don't worry wardens I wouldn't smash it I'd probably just cover it up to start with or something like that.

But you see the pictures of the kids people aren't worshipping those it's not against that. And when we come to the New Testament we see the same thing. So on the next slide we are told to flee from idols and idols can be anything that we worship like money and so at the bottom reference there greed greed is called idolatry because greed chases after and worships money instead of God. Money has replaced God. And as we look at the New Testament we also see that God is to be worshipped not with idols but by his word. And who is called the word in the New Testament?

[ 22 : 03 ] The word become flesh starts with G's ends with S it's Jesus. So on the next slide I think it is 1 John 1 in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God the word became flesh that's Jesus and made his dwelling among us.

And what's more Jesus is not only the perfect word of God he's the perfect image of the invisible God or down the bottom the exact representation of God. And so now we are to worship God not with idols but through Jesus the word who reveals God the image the perfect representation of God. We are to worship God through Christ and what's more the spirit also works primarily through the Bible which is also the word of God. And so when it comes to loving God with his second commandment it's make no idols that replace him and worship him through Jesus the word become flesh and by his word in the scripture.

That's what we're to do. Now I doubt we're tempted to make physical idols to represent God rather I think the temptation for us is to create our own version of God in our minds you know a mental image or idol of God if you like which is different to the Bible's picture of God.

Let me explain so when it comes to the Bible's teaching on marriage or sexuality or Jesus being the only way to God I've heard Christians say well I don't believe God really says that or wants that for us today.

[ 23 : 37 ] I believe in a different God and so what they've done is they've created this image of a different God in their heads this idol and they start following that God do you see what happens their mental image their version of God ends up replacing the God of the Bible that's what Christians attempted to do and in fact are doing in many churches today.

you see idols end up replacing God or becoming another God in the relationship and God would not tolerate that why? Well because he's jealous for us and doesn't want to share us point three chapter 20 verse five have a look there he says that no other gods don't make an idol for yourself halfway through verse five for or because I am the Lord your God am a jealous God punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments see God is a jealous God and this is the big reason and not just for this second commandment but the first one as well in fact on the next slide Moses will say later on do not worship any other God why?

well because the Lord whose name is jealous is a jealous God see we have to have no other gods commandment one and we're not to make idols commandment two because God is a jealous God but what does that mean?

I mean when we think jealousy we think that's a bad thing and often it is if we are jealous of someone or of something then it means we envy and we want what they have but there is also a good type of jealousy where we are not jealous of someone but for someone let me give you an example I am jealous for my wife which means I do not want to share her with another man she's my wife I'm her husband so if I saw another guy flirting with her or trying to pick her up or whatever then I would be rightly jealous for her you see and so also with God he's not jealous of his people but he's jealous for his people and to put it differently he's zealous for us and doesn't want to share us with another God whether it's an idol even an idol of him for he saved us and made us his people we're to be exclusively his people and he exclusively ours

God and such as his loyalty to us that if Israel cheats on him with another God or even an idol then he will punish them verse 5 of course when we read verse 5 it sounds like that God is out to get our kids and grandkids down to the third and fourth generation as well but that's not quite what it's saying rather it's talking about the effects of the punishment on the parents that will flow on and be felt down to the third and fourth generation because our sin often impacts others let me see if I can illustrate Michelle's great great grandfather I should have checked with her I think that's right was the first person to have colour printing in England as I understand and he was rich I'm told that there are even parts of England that are named after him but his idol was money and he loved money and wanted more of it even though he was rich he was greedy and so God gave him over to his idols you want to worship money that's fine you worship money but it's going to come with certain consequences and those consequences included gambling because he wanted more money quick which then turned into an addiction which then led to bankruptcy and those consequences were then felt not only by him but by his children by his grandchildren down to the first third and fourth generation to

[ 27 : 28 ] Michelle and me we could have been rich you see that's what God is talking about our sin affects others if we replace him with an idol or worship other gods then he'll give us over to them and the consequences that come with it and that affects people but notice verse six while the effects of sin are felt to the third and fourth generation the effects of love God's love is felt to a thousand generations notice the contrast in other words love and mercy is what God really delights in he does not delight in punishment in fact the Bible speaks about God's punishment as he's alien or strange workers it's not what comes naturally to him rather it's love and mercy that's his natural disposition that's what he delights in that's what's on offer to a thousand generations even the third and fourth generation even the even the first generation who sinned God's love is still on offer to every generation and again as we come to the new testament we can see this in Christ can't we remember the famous verse

John 3 16 can you remember that verse for God so loved the world and he did it with an action he gave his one and only son so that just the first generation who believes so that whoever anyone from any generation who believes will not perish but have everlasting life you see God's love is for every generation who believes and so the question for us this morning is have we put our trust in Jesus do we believe because we have all at some time or other worshipped other gods whether it's a God of body brains or bucks or comfort family or sport we've all created images of God that were less than God in our minds and yet if we turn to Christ trust in him God will forgive us and bring us into his family have you done that have you put your trust in Jesus for us who have then we can still do the same thing we can still fall back into worshipping the gods of this world can't we perhaps this year more than any other year the biggest God here in

Melbourne is the God it's controversial I guess but the God of political correctness such that we are pressured to think its way rather than God's way if you still haven't voted the marriage thing I'm told you've got until this Friday but I'm still surprised about how many how many Christians have voted yes because they're brought into the world's logic and followed the God of political correctness or their own image in their minds of God rather than God revealed in his word you see we can all forepray to the doing this can't we and so come with me to our final passage to our second reading we'll finish here so page 1218 James chapter 4 here James as readers were having a you know worshipping God but also worshipping the world and notice what he says in verse number 4 so James 4 verse 4 page 1218 look what he calls them he says you adulterous people don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God therefore anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God do you see what he's saying we can only have one God and if we have other gods in the relationship then it's like we're committing adultery on God it kind of elevates the seriousness of it and how incredibly unloving it is to God doesn't it and what's more verse 5 God will not tolerate that he says or do you think scripture says without reason that he jealously longs for the spirit he calls to dwell in us in other words God is jealous for us he doesn't want to share us with another God and if we have been worshipping other gods then James's solution is God's love and grace to a thousand generations see verse 6 but he gives us more grace that is why scripture says God opposes the prayer but shows grace to the humble submit yourselves then to God as your only God resist the devil and he will flee from you come near to God and he will come near to you wash your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double-minded grieve mourn and wail change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom in other words repent verse 10 humble yourselves before the Lord and he will restore the relationship he will lift you up you see we have to love God by having no other gods but him and no idols to worship him by but rather worship him by his word the Lord Jesus in his word the Bible let's pray gracious father we thank you for this Old Testament law which shows us how we are to now love you and our neighbor and father we do pray that you would help us in this I thank you so much for the many people here who do follow you as their only God but it's not always easy so we pray that you'd help us to have no other gods but you and to not turn the things of this world into idols but to worship you by your word through the Lord Jesus help us in this we pray that we may truly love you with all our heart soul mind and strength because you first loved us we ask it in Jesus name amen you