

Understanding our Relationship with God

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[0 : 00] I'm going to send this morning to the last message in this series, which is, lest we forget the God we worship. As we do, we return back to the commandment, but instead of looking at the fourth commandment in particular, we'll have a look at the first three into the fourth, and why it makes sense that they were written that way.

Anyway, the moment God says, I am the Lord your God, it should strike a chord with each and every one of us.

God is declaring something. The Ten Commandments begin with, I am the Lord your God, but it raises quite an important question, and that is, how do we actually know that God is our God?

God says, I am the Lord your God. How do we actually get to find out that God is our God? God is saying here, I am the Lord your God.

In other words, it's a declaration. God is telling you that he is your God. And why does he have to tell us? Well, quite simply because you couldn't find it out on your own.

[1 : 22] The only way you can know that God is God is if God decides to reveal that to you. So the very fact that you hear those few words, I am the Lord your God, it is the most gracious words that you could ever hear.

Everything should start flooding to your mind the moment you hear those words, I am the Lord your God. Forgiveness, grace, mercy, a future, a hope, a position in God's kingdom.

You see, it's not just I am the Lord your God, let's move on to the next thing. No, there's just so much more being said here. I am the Lord your God, he says to his people.

So God has to reveal himself in order for anybody to know him. God has to make himself known to us in order for us to know him even personally.

But this raises quite an important question. And that is, now that you know him, how do you relate to him? It seems to me that in the church that there are not just different Christians, but there seems to be a different way of living Christianity.

[2 : 42] Now that's puzzling. I can understand how there can be different Christians because there are different personalities, there are different characters. I struggle with how there can be different versions of Christianity.

And the answer is, there can't be. We're individual, yes. We have our own personality, yes. We have our own character, yes. But it is the same God.

And therefore it must be the same type of Christianity. In other words, either our relationship with God is the same or it isn't. And if it isn't, then the only distinction is, is either you're with God or you're not with God.

There doesn't seem to be many differences. The Ten Commandments help us to understand how we are to relate to God. Don't think of them as an impersonal standard.

Don't think of them as a list of laws. Think of them rather as a means of understanding how you are to relate to the Almighty. Think of them as, these are sort of the ground rules or even the marriage rules for understanding your relationship with God.

[4 : 05] God is holy. And that means he's different than you. He's different from you. He's different from any single one of us. But his holiness is something that he wants us to participate in.

He made this day holy so that we could participate in this day with him. He set this day apart so that we could participate in this day with him.

Do you want to do something else? Do you want to be somewhere else? Well, that's a test of your relationship with God, isn't it? It's not about whether or not you can keep a law.

It may come across like that. But actually, it's more to do with the fact your relationship's being tested. how is your relationship with God in other words the Ten Commandments are deeply personal they're intrusive into your relationship with God they are not a set of rules as such a set of laws as such they go much much deeper than that so are we to have a relationship with God yes we're to have a relationship with God but God is so different from us in so many different ways how are we to relate to him well God says there is one way in particular and that is be holy for I am holy holiness is the joiner between you and God yeah there are certain things about God that will never be true about you and there are certain things that are true about you that will never be true about God but holiness is something that you will come to share in as your relationship with God grows in other words you can only be holy by belonging to God and God says this day is holy now why is this day holy and tomorrow not?

we see why was the ground that Moses walked on holy when the ground that he walked on to get to that point was not holy there is only one answer to it and that is God makes it holy why is it holy?

[6 : 26] God makes it holy it still doesn't answer it God makes it holy because that's where his presence is his presence was in the burning bush as Moses spoke to God his presence was not necessarily as such as Moses made his way up there but the moment he came into the presence of God the place became holy why is this day holy?

well what do you think God is saying to us by making this day holy? well what do you think God is trying to communicate? or is communicating? is it not that his presence here on this day is unlike any other day?

that's why he set it apart that's why he made it holy in other words your relationship with God today will differ from your relationship with God tomorrow it won't be the same because you don't have the time to make it the same this time has been set apart it's been made holy by God so here's how you ought to think of the Ten Commandments at least the first four in particular how to keep your relationship with God healthy what a healthy relationship with God looks like or rather what a faithful relationship with God looks like so when you break one of God's commandments let's say the Sabbath day don't look at it as breaking an impersonal law look at it as being unfaithful in a relationship that's the point the point here is not I just break one of God's rules and I'm going to get a slap over the hand for it's much more serious than that you're in a relationship with God and God wants to keep that relationship together so spend time with him be where he is do the things that he wants to do with you you don't think of it as

I'm going to get a slap over the hand because you know I've broken the law that's impersonal that's like an impersonal standard this now this is these are relationship issues this is what God wants you to understand the Ten Commandments the first four in particular is about how to maintain a faithful relationship the fourth day in particular the reason to keep this day holy well it's a bit like spending time with God because in the rest of the week you can't do it in the same type of way and God knows that that's why he only asked for one day rather than six God knows that he's given you stuff to get on with God knows he you have to live in this world but God also knows you need the closeness you need the intimacy of a relationship with God it's like I said a couple of weeks ago in the evening now if you're not benefited by communion if you don't receive the spiritual benefit that comes from communion then you will see no need for making communion once every week as it should be because you're not benefiting by it in the times that you take it anyway so why increase something that doesn't benefit you well it's the same for the Sabbath if you're not intimate with God if you're not being drawn close to God yeah you're not going to see any great need to keep it because it's not really of a great benefit to you now you can let one here or there miss let it go yeah I can put God you know

God's a good friend and so I can just pass him over just this one time for somebody else you know something's wrong here isn't it in other words God has been drawn down into a partnership it appears it's equal now God is holy we have a relationship with God who's holy so far set apart from us and so it takes us the first four to get us to understand it here's the first one here's how you get to understand the God that you're in relationship with I am the Lord your God I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt who brought you out of slavery Romans 12 consider the mercies of God what type of God do we belong to well Genesis Exodus is saying and Paul's saying in Romans the type of God that you belong to is one who puts his love for you at the very centre of the relationship I am the Lord your God who brought you out of sin destruction

[11:12] I am the Lord your God who has forgiven you I am the Lord your God who's going to bring you into eternity with blessing and joy I am the Lord your God at the very centre of the relationship is God's love for you everything that God does for you is motivated by his love for you that's the type of God that's asking you to spend time or calling you to spend time with him this very day I am the Lord your God that's the type of God that you have a relationship the one who puts love for you at the very centre of the relationship not love for anything else or anyone else any other creature doesn't love the lions more than you doesn't love the sea more than you or the tree no you are the very prize of his creation the very centre of his relationship with you is his love for you you're the very pinnacle the second commandment so don't make any idols don't go and spoil that relationship by loving something else don't go and ruin the relationship by trusting in someone else or desiring something else or putting your love into something other than the one true God are you breaking the law yeah you're breaking the law but you're damaging the relationship that's the point that God is trying to make here now there are a couple of ways of creating idols

I can guarantee that maybe some of you don't do it this way but I can almost guarantee that we all do it at times the other way here's what I mean you can make idols the moment you love something else or someone else more than God the moment you've done that you've created an idol it could be your children it could be your husband it could be your job it could be anything the moment you love desire and trust or want something more than anything else in the world that's not God you've created for yourself the idol there it is maybe you've done that so by simply loving something more than God by simply trusting in something more than God your heart has become an idol factory every day you go to work creating yourself a brand new idol because you're desiring something more than God do you think that's healthy for your relationship with God is there another way yeah there's another way of how to make idols and that is this is the more serious one well actually they're both serious but this is the more subtle one but incredibly serious and that is you can have false ideas about the one true God and that is you can actually come here this morning wanting to believe in the real God but you have false ideas about God perhaps even it's about God's grace what God is graceful he would allow that or do that you've made for yourself an idol why because you've not understood the one true God you are taking the one true God and reimagining him in your own image in your own thoughts so there are two ways to create idols one to love something else more than God two to have your own version of the one true God to have false beliefs concerning the one true God that's idolatry so here's the question does God let us get away with it no never lets us get away with it how long would you allow for a relationship that you're in that you have noticed to be unfaithful on the other side to actually get away with it and not very long why because it damages you it damages the relationship it damages the other person well can I be forgiven yeah of course you can because with God there's always forgiveness

God is God is the master of mending broken relationships especially yours with him so is it possible that we've made idols is it possible that we've got yeah of course it is is God going to forgive us of course he will that's who God is he is holy remember the first commandment at the very centre of his relationship with us is his love for us so yeah we may have wondered but we're always going to be brought back why because love chases after the one that where it's placed in other words God is going to come and get you why because you're his God is going to fight for you why because you're his God is not going to allow your heart to be overtaken by something that can ultimately not just take you away from him but just just destroy you why because you're his remember the first commandment I am the Lord your God the very centre of his relationship with you is the fact that he loves you so don't go make any idols don't go loving something else it's not good for the relationship so thirdly how are we to communicate with God all relationships involve communication bad relationships involve no communication a relationship going downhill is the one where communication begins to fail over time how are we to speak about God well don't take his name in vain third commandment don't speak about God in a way that doesn't address God as God

God is holy remember God is holy in the sense that he's he's different from us he's not like us he is so far above us so far beyond us it's not an equal relationship that you have with God God is not your equal is it a real relationship yeah it's the relationship you have with God is super real but is it equal no it's not equal for a moment God is holy gracious wonderful and he brings you into this relationship making you what he is holy which you can only be by being in relationship with God so don't go and take his name in vain but what is what is vain what is vanity well vanity is meaninglessness in other words don't speak about God in meaningless ways don't speak don't bring God in on say perhaps a promise don't do that to God

God God is you know I remember do you remember there was a there was a film once and it was a it was a I think it was a film called Sister Act at the very end they've got this gospel choir competition and they're all gospel choirs and it's very interesting because one of them says pray for God to be on airside but it's a gospel choir God's on everybody's side that's the point don't think that God can be bent to your will don't take his name in vain don't speak about this in a meaningless way God is remember God is holy God is not meaningless and cannot be addressed in meaningless ways reverently the fourth commandment then at the very center of your relationship with God is his love for you God is God going to protect that relationship yeah so he's going to destroy every idol you make is God going to want to talk with you and make sure yeah don't take his name in vain but is

[19 : 44] God going to want to spend time with you yeah where does he do it here he sets a whole day apart for you he's made the day holy does God make demands upon our heart absolutely why does God make those demands upon our heart well quite simply because he wants to protect the relationship that he has with you he doesn't want anything to spoil it and this day like any other day is a day where you can just forget about everything else if it is possible and to say Lord help me help me understand the relationship that I have with you help me to be brought back in to the holiness that you have created for this day not only have you set me apart you've made me holy you set this day apart so that

I can be holy with you in this day in other words everything set apart for God this day is it difficult yeah is it demanding yeah why is it demanding because in your heart there is sin you are going to want to do other things you are going to want to sort of even walk out on this relationship at times even though God is gracious and he is loving never underestimate the power of sin in your own life never underestimate just how evil temptation can be to take you away from the God who loves you so is it demanding yes but it's demanding in order to protect the relationship so don't look at these commandments as an impersonal standard don't look at when you break a commandment as simply breaking the law is it that yeah of course it's that sin but it's actually the way that we become unfaithful within the relationship that's what sin is isn't it sin is me being unfaithful within my relationship with

God it's saying no to God is it breaking the law but it's saying no to God it's a relationship issue so what type of relationship is it then well it's a holy one point number one God's gonna say if you love me it'll protect you why because when you love God first you'll stay away from idols you'll stay away from speaking in vain terms and you're going to be able to spend time with God why well just like you spend time with anyone that you love because you love them it's not a chore it's not it's not difficult because you love and that love is of first importance that's what God is saying that you love for me really does need to go before anyone else which it does you really do you know husbands and wives here this morning do you need to love

God more than your husband and wife yeah absolutely you do parents do you need to love your God before your children yep everybody do you need to love God even more than yourself yes you need to love God way more than yourself I mean isn't that what Jesus says you know don't don't fear him you know who can just sort of damage the body but fear him who can throw both body and soul into hell we're not dealing with a God with whom we can get away with things here how many of us push our luck with God luck in a very loose term it's a it's a holy relationship God's going to protect the relationship so here's a question how much room and attention do you give to

God today or any day especially when God makes demands upon your heart simply because he loves you simply because he wants to protect the relationship here's another way of thinking about it which I think this sort of touches on all of us here it goes something like this think about it in terms of plans and desires but not just from one point of view as we normally do here's the question for instance what are my desires what is one way of finding out by asking myself what are my desires what about this question what are my plans what is my will well they are ways of finding out about what I want but let's turn it over what about this question what are God's plans for me what is

[25 : 06] God's will for me what is God's desire for me you see the trouble is with those questions is that they're still looking at the relationship from a one sided point of view they still concern me any of you who have ever been in a relationship will understand that there's a whole different set of questions that need to be asked and it's these what is God's will period what are God's plans period why well here's why because the moment you get into a relationship with somebody else who has their own will and has their own plans and has their own desires we can end up in a place that we never thought we'd be why because their will has taken us there their plans have taken us there see so often we're concerned about what are my desires or even what are God's desires for my life what are God's plans for my life it so much revolves around you forget about you for a minute what are

God's will period what are God's plans period because if I'm in a relationship with God which I am it matters because God's will just might be to go over there and if I'm in a relationship with him guess who's going with him everyone in a relationship with God that's why it matters that's the type of relationship you have because God has plans and wills all of his own so you end up in a place where you never thought you'd be and you end up in a situation where you'd never thought of being but there you are why because you're in a relationship with someone who has their own will their own plan and their own desires it's a it's a holy relationship and therefore you're caught up in someone else's will the relationship is a holy one it's one of purity it's one of holiness it's one where you are set apart set apart from the world but you're set apart by being brought to

God so here's the exhortation whatever we love the most will direct our life period whatever we love the most will direct our life but it's slightly more complicated than that and here's why because when we love God and God has made us his own and we should love God first and then we begin to love something else more than God our life begins to take a different direction and as I said before God will not tolerate rivals perhaps you've never thought of God as a relationship breaker upper if there's ever such a word or phrase but that's the business that God is in how long do you think you can go on loving something else other than

God and God not do something about it not long God is going to bring you back to him so understand the first four commandments in particular that they are dealing with your relationship with God just like the last six of the ten commandments deal with your relationship with everybody else the first four are about how you relate to the holy God that you belong to don't think of them as an impersonal standard think of them as how you are to be faithful in the relationship you have with God how you are to be faithful in your relationship with God is the first four how you are to be faithful in your relationship with each other is the last six are they laws yeah but look at them more carefully and you'll see they're all about relationship so how many of us actually look at the commandments as they should be understood perhaps not many perhaps not many think of it this way

I am the Lord your God you've now been brought into a brand new relationship with God and you need to get to know each other but you're dealing with God and so God knows everything God knows what you think what you dream about what your desires are what you will are so this conversation is going to be somewhat one sided because God already knows everything about don't take my name in vain and let's spend time together on the Sabbath day what is God doing he's saying look I'm laying out how this relationship is going to work in the best possible ways that it can this is who I am this is what I like this is what we will do together how many of us understand the first four commandments in those ways yeah not many laws and they're Old Testament laws so why bother with them they're explaining the relationship that we have with

[30 : 36] God so here's a final thought the first four commandments could they be the very thing in your relationship with God that you don't talk about I mean how is your relationship with God and are the first four commandments the ones that you know we don't talk about that why every time we talk about that we end up with an argument right that tells me there's something wrong and how many of us in any kind of relationship avoid talking about certain things because it leads to that argumentative end how many of us are in a relationship where we long that the other person doesn't bring something up that we don't want brought up how often does that happen well here we are with God and we think oh Lord I hope you don't bring it up I mean that's like telling the

Lord I hope you don't bring guess what take time take a lot of time to think about how God relates with his people and what you'll find is at the center of the relationship is his love for you everything that he does everything of his will is an act of love concerning you so take time why why less you forget the God who you belong to take time less you forget the God who you are to worship it's not like any other type of relationship it's not an equal relationship it doesn't work like other relationships it requires different things it sets demands upon your heart you are set apart for God in a way that no other relationship can do that so take time go away from here this morning remembering to take time take a lot of time in your relationship with

God lest you forget who you are to worship Amen