

No Other Gods

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[0 : 00] The scripture reader comes from Deuteronomy chapter 5. Please follow along on the screen. And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn them and be careful to do them.

The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord.

For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. This is the word of God. Great.

So, welcome again to everyone who's watching on the live stream. My name's Chris. I'm one of the leaders here at Watermark. And we are going through what I think is a really exciting series looking at the Ten Commandments, which last week we said were the Ten Words in Hebrew.

[1 : 25] And we saw that these words, these commandments, are meant to be for abundant life. That's why we've called our series Ten Words for Abundant Life. And God's commands are not just some kind of legalistic set of rules that we've got a burden, that we've got to obey for him to be pleased with us.

But rather, the Ten Commandments, it starts with, I'm the Lord your God, who rescued you, who delivered you out of the house of slavery in Egypt. In other words, I've set you free, and now these commands are for you to learn how to live free in your life.

And so last week we looked at four things that these commands do to help us live abundantly. They're a revelation of God. They're showing us that we have a relational God who gives us relational commands.

We've also saw that they are wisdom to live abundantly. They're for our good always. We saw that they are a lifestyle for missional living. They are to shape our community so that people will see the light shining from our community all around and be drawn to our Savior.

And also they are a window on the heart to show us how much we need Jesus in our lives to save us from ourselves. And so today we're going to kind of move on to start looking at the first commandment.

[2 : 44] And just before we look into that, we just have to say everyone agrees there are ten words, but not everyone agrees exactly on the order of those ten words. So this first command, Catholics and Jews count as one command with the second command as well together because they think of it as having no gods and making idols as the same thing.

Catholics make up the ten by splitting the last command into two. Most Protestant Christians see them as two commands. And this is how we're going to be looking at them over this next couple of weeks, of who we worship and then how we worship.

Okay? So we're going to look at, you shall have no other gods before me. So before we kind of really dive into that command, we've got to think about an objection, which is, isn't this command intolerant?

Isn't it intolerant? Because this command is saying, it's not saying, follow the Christian God and everyone else can have their gods and that's fine. It's not saying, the Christian God is the best God out of a whole load of other options.

It's saying that God of the Bible is the one and only, the only path to God. Not many gods, not many paths to God, only one God.

[4 : 01] He's the redeeming, slavery-releasing God of Israel. And so that's actually pretty exclusive. And many of my friends will say, from that command, if that's true, well, God is very intolerant.

And if you follow that command, then people who follow it will become intolerant themselves. It leads to division. It leads to war. It leads to hatred. Why can't you not have more tolerance? Because obviously there's the Crusades, there's the wars of religion, there's 9-11, there's all these things in history. Why can't you just be a little bit more tolerant of other faiths so we can all live in harmony, we can all be nice to each other.

Why do we need this rule? Some other people will say, well, okay, granted, let's say there is only one God, but Islam also says there's only one God.

Other religions say the same. And isn't the God of the Bible and of Christianity and the God of Islam the same God? You say Jesus, he says Allah, you say tomato, I say tomato, same, same, isn't it?

[5 : 07] Well, we think that both Allah, Baal, and Yahweh, God, sounds more tolerant than either Baal, either Allah or Yahweh, the God of the Bible.

But if you view things only in that way, then you're actually thinking more like the pagan religion, where the gods are either just man-made creations or they're disinterested spirits in the sky.

But when we realize what we said last week about the 10 words, that this is part of a covenant from a relational God, it's more like a ridiculous marriage ceremony between not just one God out of many, but the creator God, the source of life himself.

Everyone else is a fake copycat. We're the, as human beings, we're the unattractive outcast in the corner. He's not just one out of many powerful nice guys.

He's our wildest dream. He's the source of life. He's our one and only. And he moves past all the other suitors to come to us and say, I want you to be mine.

[6 : 16] You know, I had a friend in the UK whose dad once came back home one day and said to his wife, hey, I've got a friend called Samantha who's going to be moving into our home.

And we're going to be spending quite a bit of time together. And don't get too offended if she kind of moves in. In fact, she's going to be in my room and I want you to move out to the spare room.

Okay, it's okay. I still love you. I still love the kids. I'll spend a little bit of time with you at weekends. But I just want us to have kind of an open relationship. And actually, the wife, out of fear, just gave in.

And my friend had to go for counseling because of just the mess that they lived with in his life. But if the wife had put her foot down and said, no way, no way, would you say she was being intolerant? Would you not rather say her jealousy for an exclusive relationship, it's not intolerance, it's love.

And God says, have no other gods before me, literally in front of my face, because of his passion for us.

[7 : 30] He won't share us with any other imitations or disinterested fakes. But what if it's actually all the same God? Well, if I'm in a conversation about my wife, and you say, oh, yeah, I know your wife.

She's got eyes, got nose, she's got a mouth. And she's six foot two, loves playing football, and is a great wrestler. I'm going to go to you and say, listen, you may think we're talking about the same person, but you don't really know my wife.

Because most religions have similarities in some of their moral teaching. You know, be good, don't kill your granny, a whole load of good, healthy commands. But at the core of them, there is an utter difference in who their God is and what he's like.

And if that's different, then we have to say, the God of the Bible who has revealed himself to us, if anyone says anything different, we have to say, I don't think you know him.

But he wants you to know him. That's why he's passionate for a relationship with him. He doesn't accept imitations. This is not an intolerant God.

[8 : 43] So let's kind of look on. My second point, which is not just this is more about love, not about intolerance. This is actually, if we break this command, we will become like Gollum.

Let me explain. When God created the world, he made human beings in his image to reflect his goodness, his character, his love, his rule.

At the very heart of being human is to be a worshiper. You know, Bob Dylan once had a song, he said, which went, you've got to serve somebody. And it's true.

Every culture worships. Everyone has a God. Your God is what you give glory to. It's what you serve. It's what controls your life. You know, it's your precious.

Like, if you've seen Lord of the Rings, you will know that there was a hobbit called Schmeagel whose character changes when he finds a ring. It's a ring of power. And it begins to consume his thinking, his actions, his life until he becomes changed into a character called Gollum.

[9 : 52] His ring was his God. In ancient times, they worshipped idols in shrines and statues. For us, our idols can be success.

They can be relationships. They can be food. They can be people's opinions. But what happens if you break the command to only worship God alone? Well, Psalm 115 is this incredible psalm. It's, I know it's one of Kevin's favorite psalms. It's one of mine too. It says this, Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory. He's saying you alone are God.

You alone are the one who deserves glory and honor and worship. No one else. And he says, Why should the nations say, where is their God? Our God is in the heavens.

He does all that he pleases. And then he says this, Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak.

[10 : 53] Eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear. Noses, but do not smell. Hands, but do not feel. Feet, but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throat. Now, here's the punchline.

Those who make them become like them. So do all who trust in them. What he's saying is this. He's saying we become like what we worship.

N.T. Wright, who is a famous theologian, said this. You become like what you worship. When you gaze in awe, admiration, and wonder at something or someone, you begin to take on something of the character of the object of your worship.

The psalmist looks at these man-made idols and he says, If you bow down to that thing, it has no feeling.

It has no senses. It's inhuman. It can't relate to you. It's lifeless. It's a nothing. And that's what you'll become if you worship idols.

[11 : 58] Gollum desires this ring to give him control to get what he wants for himself. But instead, the ring begins to control him and twists and distorts him until he's this pale shadow of what he used to be and what he was made to be.

How does that work with us? I mean, Harvey Weinstein doesn't have a sex drive problem. He has a worship problem.

His precious power of success and control can twist him. But we are no different. If you make career success your precious, you'll see everyone else as your rival.

You'll trample on others to get promotion. You'll steal great ideas and pass them off as your own.

You'll neglect the relationships. You'll be present with your loved ones in body but not in spirit.

Your mind will get consumed with your work. And when your precious is threatened, you'll become a stress-filled, worry-consumed ogre turned inward, losing sense and feeling and love and humanity enslaved to your idol.

[13 : 16] That's idolatry. Worship your kids. You'll become a controlling demon or a lenient pushover. Worship your reputation. You'll become a face-saving fake or a fearful coward.

Worship your plans and you'll become a monster to anyone who gets in your way. That's what the idols are like and we'll become like our idols if we worship them. But it's not just that.

It's also we become Hevel when we worship and break this command. What's that? 2 Kings 17 describes Israel's history of continually disobeying this command.

And there's such a powerful statement it makes in 2 Kings 17. It says, And that word for worthless is the word Hevel.

It literally means vapor or mist. It's something. It looks real, but it's got no substance. You try and grab hold of it. And every time you try and grab it, it just escapes your grasp.

[14 : 19] That's what a life of worshipping idols is like. You know, Oscar-winning actor Anthony Hopkins, he said this. He said, I meet young people and they want to act and to be famous.

And I tell them, when you get to the top of the tree, there's nothing up there. Most of this is nonsense. Most of this is a lie. Always chasing, never satisfied.

It's Hevel. It's Hevel. Now, we become like what we worship. We'll become this vapor or mist when we were made to be so much more.

But also, if we break the first command, that will lead to breaking all the other commands. Any command we break always starts with breaking the first command.

Here's what Martin Luther said. He said, He's saying, All the commands flow out of this command. [15:28] Worship is the call of every command God gives us. And worship stands behind the breaking of every command that we have. You know, in Scripture, King Saul, he had this idol of reputation.

He wanted to be liked by people more than anything. And God gives him this command to wipe out the enemy and keep nothing from them. But some of his soldiers wanted to keep some things. And he didn't want the conflict. So he gave in. He broke God's command. He then gets confronted by Samuel, the prophet, who says, Why didn't you destroy everything?

And then he lies to cover himself. He keeps shoving God into the spare room. And the whole of the book of 1 Samuel is this spiral that all started back at that point of worship, of his desperate grasp to keep on to his position and his reputation as David, who is to become king, comes along.

And it leads to jealousy, attempted murder, witchcraft, insanity, death, breaking every command. And all of that started with an unchecked idol of reputation and seeking honor for himself.

[16:43] Why do you look at porn? It's not because you have a sex drive problem. You have a worship problem. You're looking to an idol to satisfy you. Why are you a workaholic? It's not because you're a driven personality.

It's because success means more to you than God does. Why can we never say no to anyone? It's because other people's opinions matter more to us than God's. We have a worship problem.

All our sin is a worship issue. Worship anything other than God himself, the glorious God, and you'll become a mediocre sludge, a worm, a grimy toad of a human, enslaved and ashamed, when you and I were made to be prince and princesses of the great king.

That is why this first command is here. Because we become like what we worship. And we were made to worship someone glorious, not an idol.

I want you to take a minute or two, just by yourself, to reflect and discuss with the person next to you, if you're with someone, or by yourself, get a pen and paper.

[17:57] And I want you just to think of these two questions. Right now, what am I afraid of losing? About what do I say I'll be happy if?

And what does that show you about what your heart is worshipping? So take a couple of minutes just to reflect on that for you right now. And we'll come back and look at our third point afterwards. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

So we've looked at really the bad news of actually what we become when we don't obey the first commandment. But I want to move on to actually looking at the third point, which is how do we become glorious?

[20:04] You know, the whole story of Israel could be summed up in the words of the song, Oops, we did it again. Worshipped idols.

Broke the commandments. Became an unjust, unfeeling, unloving people. And if we're honest, deep down, we know we're all the same. Idolaters again and again.

We know we're more unacceptable than we wish we were. And this law and our experience shows us we can't fix ourselves. If God is not the true God, then all we are left with are our oppressive idols.

They look good, but they disappoint every time. We'll be alone, used, victimized, fearful. Our idols don't look out for us.

It's all up to us to fix ourselves. And we can't. But here's why the worship of God is so good for us.

[21:06] Because if we become like what we worship, then if we worshipped our way into sin, only the worship of a glorious God can lead us out of sin. I want us to see who this God really is that we say we worship.

Psalms 115, it says, God is the one who is in the heavens and he does what he pleases. He is sovereign and great and all-powerful.

Nothing escapes his grasp. But the God of Islam also says that he can do what he pleases. But we don't know whether what he pleases or not will be good for us.

That's just up to him. But the Christian God is not like that. Here's what God of the Bible, here's what the God of these commandments tells us.

He's a God who moves towards us, not a God who moves away from us. Because at Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given, God came down the mountain in fire, in cloud, in

smoke, in darkness.

[22 : 10] But God tells the people, you can't come up the mountain. You are too sinful. You'll die if you do. The only person who could come up and meet face-to-face was Moses.

In verse 5 of chapter 5, it says, Moses, I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of God. Somebody needed to stand in the gap between God and sinful human beings. Most religions tell you to pray hard, be good, give to charity, and you'll get up the mountain. Only the Christian God tells you that no matter how hard you try, you're not worthy to get up. But what pleased Yahweh, the God of Israel, was not to do social distancing, even though that was totally appropriate.

John 1.14 says this, The word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only, full of grace and truth.

[23 : 16] Where we couldn't go up, he came down. He dwelt among us. That word dwell is the word tabernacle, which is the Old Testament meeting place of God and his people together.

He's saying, In Jesus Christ, God has come down in human form to idolaters and adulterers like you and me to bridge the unbridgeable gap through his life and through his death to draw us to himself.

And Jesus says, If you've seen me, you've seen the Father. No one comes to the Father except through me. I and the Father are one. Jesus is this God, this one and only.

You want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus. See his sacrificial love. To worship Jesus is to worship the one true creator God.

Not to worship him as Savior and Lord is to break the first commandment. God has moved, though, towards us in Christ, though we don't deserve it.

[24 : 25] That's the first thing. The second thing that we see about this God, this God brings justice with tenderness and compassion. I love this.

This is amazing. You know, Lech Walesa, who led Poland out of communist rule, he said this, he said, Power is to be used in the service of the powerless.

Around the world, most all-powerful rulers and dictators use their power to increase their own bank accounts, build their own empires, and to oppress people.

Here's, in Matthew 12, 20, what God says about, what the word of God says about Christ. It says this, Behold my servant who I'm chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is pleased.

I will put my spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory.

[25 : 28] And in his name the Gentiles will hope. God proclaims that in Jesus, justice will come. And justice isn't, that word in scripture is not just about a law court, and a sentence coming on people.

It's actually about bringing about a place of flourishing and abundant life. But to get to that place of abundant life is where idols and their worshippers who dehumanize themselves and other people are wiped out and love reigns.

God doesn't tolerate being shoved into the spare room of our lives. He will bring justice to bear. But here's what I love. Verse 20 says, A bruised reed he will not break.

You know, a bruised reed is a wounded, weak, broken person. Wounded by their own idolatry. Wounded by others' sin.

Bent over, useless, havel. A smoldering wick is a candle whose flame is just about to go out. God, who has every right to judge us, doesn't snuff out idolaters, like you and me, but he's tender and gentle with us, reaching down to us to bring us healing and restoration back to himself.

[26 : 59] You know, I remember seeing on TV once this huge burly farmer whose field was just completely overgrown with long grass.

And he was on one of those kind of massive tractors with huge kind of cutting blades to just get rid of all the grass on the field. And he was bombing down this field. The grass was just being leveled everywhere, right and left.

And he was tearing along. And then suddenly he pulls up really sharply. He gets out of his cab and he walks around in front of the tractor. It's just about two inches in front of his tractor.

And there was this little tiny bird with a broken wing. And he reaches down and he picks up the bird and he carries it back into the tractor with him.

He then brings out some seed and starts feeding the bird and he does everything he can to just protect that bird with him. He finds some cloth. And afterwards, he went back to his farmhouse and he looked and he cared for that bird.

[28 : 06] You see, that is how some of us are like. Some of us are like that chick. We are bruised reeds. Our own sin has wounded us. We feel wounded and used by others.

We sometimes feel useless. Sometimes feel broken. Sometimes feel shamed, doubting, wondering if God's going to snuff us out. Wonder if our faith is going to die.

And it's to people like you and me that God comes. We often think that God is like the God of the pagans that he'll just drive over us in his power.

But Jesus is the one who is all-powerful, who will bring justice, and yet he sees you. And he reaches out to bruised reeds.

He doesn't break them. He picks them up and he carries you extra tenderly. He has compassion. He has compassion. He takes useless haveal, idolaters like you and me, and he restores us.

[29 : 09] I've just seen that in my life, the poor choices that I've made in so many ways, which have caused so much havoc, and yet Jesus has never given up. He's always reaching out.

And that is such good news. Your boss will never do that for you. Porn will never do that for you. Education will never do that for you. Only a glorious God and the glory of Jesus will do that for you. And if we worship him, then that is where we get released from our slavery to find freedom in Christ. We become like what we worship. If we worship this tender, powerful, gracious God who moves towards us, we will become a community of greater compassion, tenderness, moving towards, not away from people who hurt us, disagree or offend us.

You see, that's not intolerance. That's a community of love. The last thing I want to say is how do serial idolaters like you and me learn to reorient our worship to this God of incredible love?

Let me make this very practical for us. Our idols are like con artists. They're always promising, always offering samples which taste really good.

[30 : 37] And then we give in because they're so persuasive. But then once we've signed on the dotted line, they deliver us nothing. Havel, emptiness.

But the little tastes they give us just keep us chasing and chasing and chasing, giving more and more of ourselves until we're exhausted and we're wasting our lives. But God has given us a shotgun.

I call it the shotgun of the spirit. The Bible calls it the sword of the spirit. This is modern days. It's his word. It's his promises that you every morning need to load up with gospel bullets into your shotgun. Because if financial security is your idol and that salesman, that con artist knocks on your door in the day and says, you're not going to have enough in this crisis.

Chase me. Follow me. Buy from me. You need to follow what I'm going to tell you. I can give you security. You need to get your shotgun out. Loaded with Philippians 4.19.

[31 : 40] My God will supply all of my needs according to his riches in glory. And you just shoot that sucker. And you do that enough times every day.

When you hear him knocking on your door, you'll say, okay, God's word. Here we go. Make my day. Because if in your day, though, you go in with nothing in your shotgun, that salesman's going to come and he's going to have you for breakfast.

But God has given us his word so that as we worship, we gaze on God through his word daily so that we can worship him in the trenches of ordinary life.

And as we come to see his glory in the very practical everyday things of life, we will become more free and more the people we were made to be because of who he is, that he alone is to be worshipped.

No other gods. That's what these ten words are about. Let me pray. Father, I want to pray for those of us who we know that we just give in again and again to the promises that our idols tell us.

[33 : 09] They seem so attractive and some of us feel so trapped. We don't know how we can ever get out. But I pray that you would lift our eyes up this morning.

I pray that you would open our eyes to see that you're a God who doesn't stand in a corner condemning us but you're a God who moves towards us, who wants to pick us up, who wants to draw us back, who gives us your word to strengthen us, to feed us so that we can gaze on you and see how beautiful you are.

Lord, I pray for each one of us, Lord, that you'd help us each day, Lord, to remember who you are. You are so good to us.

Forgive us where we look elsewhere. Forgive us where we look to the good gifts that you give us and we fail to see the giver of those gifts. I pray that you would help us to hate our idols, Lord, to hate the very things which turn us away from you, which break our marriages, which break our families, which break our, even our own sense of who we are.

Bring us shame. Lift us out of that, Father, I pray, that we would see that you are the one who is worthy of all of our worship in our lives.

[34 : 30] Thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you for your grace to us. Thank you that you are so tender with us. Change us, we pray, that we would have no other gods before you. In Jesus' name, Amen.