

Part 2

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Date: 24 May 2009

Preacher: Derek Lamont

[0 : 0 0] Before turning back to, well not one of the passages we read but to Exodus, because to turn to Exodus, for those of you who weren't here this morning, James introduced a short series on the Ten Commandments, on the moral law rather of God, and we're taking it as we look at the Ten Commandments, and we'll just be doing that morning and evening up till the summer, it should take us roughly up to July, and we want to look at that subject.

Now because I wasn't here this morning, then you may find there's one or two things that I say will be a repetition of what James says, hope not, but if so then I'm sure it will be a repeating just for a little while.

Exodus chapter 20, I think James looked at verses 1 and 2, I'll just read them again, on page 77, and God spoke all these words, I'm the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, and then the first commandment is, you shall have no other gods before me.

Who cares, who cares about law? I think we do live in a generation, a day that doesn't really care about law, and especially in the church where we think, well, or maybe we think about Christianity, and think, well it's just all about laws, and it's all about do's and don'ts, and we want to get away from that, and we want to just focus on love, and we want to move away from the whole idea about law.

I don't like law, I like being lawless, I like being someone who's not governed, and so we find a law as a kind of dirty term today, in many quarters, maybe not in the company here, but certainly as we live in the world, there's a resistance to Christianity because people think that it's all about laws, and clipping our wings, and it's all about a restriction of freedom, and living in a certain way.

[2 : 0 5] Who cares about law? Well, the reality is that all of us know about laws, and all of us are governed by one thing or another, every one of us.

You know, when we say, well, it's what I believe, I believe is right, and what I believe is what I'm going to do, that's us being governed, but we're being governed by our own laws, by our own thinking.

If you as a parent get a phone call in the middle of the night one night to say that someone has moaned, a drunk driver has moaned down your daughter, then the law matters to you at that point.

The law of the land is tremendously important, as the law of God is also. If I'm standing here suspended, or I'm not suspended, but if I'm just standing here, and above me suspended is a grand piano, and there's someone with a big thick heavy scissor about to cut the string that's holding it, then the law of gravity is something that I absolutely respect, and I get out of the way quickly, because not only are our lives governed by laws, but our nature, the world around us is governed by laws as well.

I imagine even an anarchist march has laws. I'm going to go first, and you can come in behind me, and then we'll turn right down this road here, and there is governed, it's controlled, because we just naturally have law.

[3 : 34] Now for my sins, I need to confess, well actually I'm blaming Amy, because it's Amy's fault, is that Amy watches wife swap, and sometimes I am in the room, I'm usually reading my Bible, but I have to put it aside for a moment, and it's on the television, and people, they swap houses, so there's a wife goes to another family, and vice versa, and you know it's always amazing, not always, I don't know, because I never always watch it, and the one occasion that I did see it, what is amazing is that after one week, they're asked to make laws to govern the management of the house.

Now sometimes they're very radically different from one another, but isn't it interesting, that in society, in the home, in the church, in our lives, there's laws that govern everything, and absolutely all that we do.

And so we come back to God's word, and find God's 10 words. That's what He gives us, that is His moral law, and these 10 words sum up everything that He requires of us, everything that He's looking for, everything that governs humanity, and God in this universe are summed up in what are called as 10 words, the moral law.

And of course in the New Testament, which we read in Matthew's Gospel, Christ summed that up, summed that up for all of humanity. What is the law? The law of God is that we love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.

Now that sums up the 10 words, the 10 commandments. That's what happens. We find these 10 commandments are just expressing for us how we love God, and how we love our neighbour.

[5 : 27] And these 10 words that He gives us, they point us to Christ. But Christ is the only one who has ever lived these laws perfectly and satisfied divine justice. He's the only one that has never failed God by breaking any of these commandments.

They point us to Christ, he's the only one who lives them, but they also point us to our need for Christ. Because maybe sometimes you think, well, I'm not really a sinner.

Maybe your friends outside think the same way, well, we're not really sinners. Well, we're not perfect, but we do our best. I'm as good as the next person. And so these words expose our failure, not in comparison with one another, but as we look at our lives before God, and what His requirement is.

So we see we fail, and it drives us to the Saviour for forgiveness and for new life. And when we come to Christ for life, and I think James talked about this this morning, then out of gratitude, this is how we live, and this is how we want to live, and this is how we aspire to live.

So I want to look at this first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. There's only two things really that I want to focus about. One is glory, and one is desire.

[6 : 52] You shall have no other gods before me. And what it speaks of first is the glory of God. It's an outrageous demand.

Have you ever thought about that before? Oh, you know, we know the Ten Commandments. Have you ever thought how outrageous it is what God says? That He has the temerity, the arrogance, the uniqueness to say, you will have no other gods before me in front of me.

I am the one who is sovereign over all of life and over you. And I'm saying you are to have no one else in preeminent place.

I am the only God. He's not saying there's lots of gods, but I want to be the first God. That's not what He's saying. What He's saying is that wherever we choose to put first in our hearts, becomes our God.

And He says, I will have none of it. I will have none of it. Whether it's relationship, whether it's ambition, whatever it happens to be, I don't want to go into that at the moment, but it's this outrageous command about who rules in our life, who is Lord of our life, who is King of our life.

[8 : 18] So who rules? Today, the Scotsman or the Glasgow Herald would say, humanity rules, probably. Or nature rules, possibly.

Or nobody rules. It's random. It's just whoever happens to be around in the throne at the time. But God's saying, I rule. I am Lord. I am sovereign.

And I demand that place of preeminence because of who I am. You're to live out your Christianity in the church with me, that is God, on the throne.

And you're to declare that when you have every opportunity in the world in which we live. That it's not just, oh God rules in St. Columbus, or God rules in my heart because I'm a Christian.

But it is claim is much greater than that, whether people recognize it or not. It's that He's saying to the universe, you shall have no other gods before me because I am God. There is no other. And this is my demand.

[9 : 28] He's speaking about His glory and we have done everything to denude God of His glory. We have drained Him of His glory and of His uniqueness and of His majesty.

The way of God, it's speaking about His way. There's no other God, you see. And that's an astonishing reality. There is one God.

An astonishing reality of how great God is and so He says nothing should be before Him. He's reminding us there that He's omnipresent and we should put nothing in our lives that displace Him or replace Him.

He's bigger than modernity. He's bigger than secular thinking. He's bigger than your intellect and mind. He's bigger than history. He's bigger than the future. You know, we're here. How long are we here? A few short years.

Even if we live three, scoring ten, what's that, seventy years? It's not long. It's just like that. But we're the center of our universe while we're here so often. And we think the world revolves around us.

[10 : 34] But God's saying you shall have no other gods before me because I am the infinite and eternal and the glorious God. He subsumed all of time. I'm infinite in my being.

And He's revealed Himself, revealed Himself in His Word, in the Bible. It was very unpopular. But He's revealed Himself.

And I just wonder, is He unable to preserve that truth? Is He so small that He got it all wrong? Did He get it wrong with everything so that He needs modern glasses with which to read His own Word so that it can be right?

Is that the case? Is our God so small? Does He always need reinterpretation in the light of our moment, in the light of our particular time in life?

Does He submit to us? At what point do we submit ourselves to Him? At what point do we recognize this command, you shall have no other gods before me in our lives?

[11 : 46] He doesn't want us to parade whatever particular desire of our heart in His presence. He doesn't want to worship other things. He doesn't want us to put ourselves at the center of our lives by replacing Him or ignoring Him.

He is omnipresent. He is always there. He is the living God. We'll go on to say a little bit more about His love. But He is God, God who sustains and who has made and sustains and keeps this universe, who has gifted you your being.

It's great weight to Him, great glory to Him. We find that concept, I think, very difficult. I find it very difficult to express, to get across.

I think we need prayer, you know, and I think we need the Holy Spirit of God to help us understand that more. But it speaks about Him in His glory and within that, and I'm a bit tentative in using this terminology, but I think it's helpful.

I think there's a divine banning order within this command. When He talks about His glory, you shall have no other gods before Me. Other commands are expressed negatively. That doesn't mean that they're negative. Well, it does.

[13 : 06] But it means there's always a positive element. They are expressed negatively, but of course the positive element of this command is who God is. But He says we are not to have any other God before Him, and there's a divine banning order within that, I think, that involves a banning of showmanship.

Now, I've used that word just because I think you go to sleep if I speak about hypocrisy, because you know that word so well. But showmanship maybe is a bit more modern, and sometimes we can be a bit shoy with our understanding of God.

In other words, we'll act as if God's important to us, as long as other people see us doing it. But then when He's, you know, no one's around, then we're not so worried about Him.

But He says, look, you should have no other gods before Me. I'm always in your presence. I can always see what you're doing. And I know your hearts, and I know your thoughts, and I know your concerns, and He says, wherever you are, you shall have no other gods before Me.

It's a ban, it's a banning order against hypocrisy or showmanship. And that's why Jesus so powerfully, you know, in the New Testament, speaks about hypocrisy, He really hates it.

[14 : 23] He can't stand hypocrisy. He can't stand us kind of rubbing the back of God when other people are around and saying, there, there, you're very significant and important.

But when no one is around, that we blaspheme Him and ignore Him and reject Him. And we have idols in our hearts. He's not at the very core of our being. No showmanship acting for God only when He can be seen, when we can be seen.

But I think also no entry signs, and these are all kind of mixed up together, I think, that may be slightly different emphasis. Where we, the command speaks about not, you shall have no other gods before Me, and I think often we give God His place, maybe in our soul, or in the religious bit of our life.

Or when we need spiritual security, or when particular troubles hit us, we call out on God. But there's lots of no entry signs in our heart where God, we don't allow Him access.

Because we're not submissive there, whether it's in my day-to-day living, or in my morality, or my ethics, or my relationships, or my workplace. God doesn't, He's got no place there. You know, the privatisation of my faith that the society is always telling us to do, you keep your God in your home.

[15 : 54] Keep your God in your handbag. Don't bring Him out into the public place. There's no entry there for Him. And we maybe have these no entry signs where God is not welcome, where we have other gods that take first place.

But God isn't there, He says, you shall have no other gods before Me. And maybe I slightly, you know, as I was doing it, I was thinking, well maybe this is the same point. No spiritual pie charts.

I mean, that would just mean where we choose to divide up our lives into compartments, and there's parts of our lives.

Maybe we don't ban God, or we don't submit to God, but where we just think He's irrelevant. Where we simply think He's not irrelevant. So our life is like a pie chart, and we've got bits where I'm, and my will is absolutely sovereign, and where it's relevant, where God has no place.

And then we have another bit of a cheese of our pie chart where we give to God, and we compartmentalize our lives so there's bits without God, because He's irrelevant.

[17 : 08] Maybe not that we're not submissive to Him, or we don't think about, but He's just simply irrelevant. And maybe someone would challenge you one day about your faith and about your relationship with God in a certain area, and you say, wait a minute, God has no place in that part of my life.

Well, I'm sovereign there. It's my choice, my decisions, my will. You know, I mean that we leave God out, and He has no place, so other gods at that point are more significant.

He's not relevant there. But we believe, the Bible teaches, that God is sovereign over every aspect of our lives, over the good times, and the bad times, the light times, and the dark times, the youth of your life, the ambition that you have, the choices you make, the drinks you drink, the food you eat.

Every aspect, the breath that you breathe is all under God's sovereignty, is under His Lordship. Because unless that is the case, if that is not the case, then we're saying there are areas of this world in which God is not sovereign, that He has no place.

Who's sovereign there? Because if there's someone sovereign there, then we should worship them. God has that place of unique and significant Lordship, and it does make us wonder about the way we treat God, and the way we think about God, and the way we theologise about God today.

[18 : 57] Which seems to be increasingly that He must fit in with our modern understanding of humanity. As if the Bible's out of date, that God got it wrong when He made us, and when He decided, and when He reveals our hearts.

I'm not really like that, that it's just a mishmash of people's thinking over a long period of time, that God really wasn't exposing our need and our hearts. So He is glorious.

But also this commandment speaks about, and must speak about, desire. Not just about glory, but it also speaks about desire.

I'm just going to ask you to look up and just to shake the cobwebs away a little bit. Deuteronomy chapter 6 verses 4 and 5.

Right in the middle of the miserable old bleak harsh grim old testament. Deuteronomy 6 verse 4, Hero Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[20 : 12] Love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

There God is reminding us of the reality behind the command. Not only a revelation of His character in His glory, but the importance of desire and of love.

James was speaking this morning about the context of these moral laws, and they are given as the word is given in the context of salvation, of redemption, of love, of the character of God, from beginning to end.

That He, in all that He is, is love. It's simply we can't grasp that, because we aren't like that.

And yet this is who God is. Everything that He does, everything that He is, is an expression of His love. And we see that primarily at the cross.

[21 : 27] And so from the beginning His laws are there for us to express our love for Him, and Jesus reflected that in the way He lived. He lived these commands.

He lived loving God, giving God preeminence, having no other gods before Him, and loving His neighbour also.

The temptation in our lives is to desire other things rather than God. Now I would recommend everyone read a book called You Can Change, and I've recommended it here before. Superbook.

I've actually recommended it in the monthly record as well. And I use it when some of us are using it in our mentoring relationships with each other, going through the book. It's very practical, it's very down to earth, and it's very, very, very real and biblical.

And there's a fantastic chapter that we were just looking at this week, on really just about very fittingly with this passage about our desires and what we desire.

[22 : 44] And it comes to the very root of our relationship with God. And on page 113, the author whose name escapes me for the moment, but we'll come back to him at some point, probably at three in the morning, is, he says, It is not usually the things that we want that are wrong, but that we want them more than God. Now that will not always be the case. Some of the things we want are wrong.

But very ordinarily, it's not so much the things that we do want that are wrong. In other words, they can be perfectly legitimate what we want, family, friends, relationships, good living, enough money to get by, all these kind of things.

But very often, it's the fact that we want them more than we want God, so that they become first in our lives, and they replace God, and that's what we desire.

You see, what you treasure most in your heart is what controls your life. Is that not right? And that's very challenging to us. What you treasure most in your heart is what controls your life.

And that is a challenge to us about our Christianity. Is it God who says you shall have no other gods before me? Is he the desire of our heart? Because if he is, then he will control our life, and the good and the bad times.

[24 : 22] It's all about our choices and our desires. And salvation is about recognising that we don't desire the right things, and that our heart isn't right, and that we look at this command and we just collapse in a heap, because we can't for a moment begin to love him as we should.

With all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Give me a break, God. I love you on a Sunday. I love you my best when I try. But things are so hard, and nobody else understands.

And so we know that we fall short, and that is really why we come to Christ, because we need Christ to change our hearts, to give us that desire for Him.

It's what we treasure most in our hearts. It's what controls our lives. It's only in Christ that we see that God isn't the key to a good life, and a bit like a lucky charm in other words.

It's not that we come to God and say, well, if I come to God and if I submit to God, then He'll give me a good life. But rather in Christ we see that God is the good life. He is the good life.

[25 : 49] That's not to say the easy life. It's not to say the life without doubt and without darkness and without tragedy in this life, but He is the good life.

Because He is redeeming us, and He is bringing us back into relationship with Him as we were intended to be, and He promises that one day the tears will be wiped away in glory with Him.

So we recognise the temptation to desire lots of other things before God, and to desire things to replace God.

And can you see where the difference between that is and the kind of Christianity we often have, which is a Christianity of duty, mere duty, and a Christianity of fear, and a Christianity of repression.

Is that the kind of Christianity you have, driven by fear or oppression, or even maybe a desire to be accepted?

[26 : 58] Or is it a recognition of this command among others, of who God is, and of His love, and of our broken relationship with Him, because of sin and of His salvation through Jesus Christ?

Because these commands are brought to us to expose our need. And I hope you see, if you don't sense any need tonight, having looked at this command, I think then your brain is blamange.

I don't know what's going on. There's, there's, even if everything else up to now has been completely dull and boring for you. If this command doesn't expose a sense of need within you, if it doesn't drive us to our knees, then what are we playing at?

What is our faith about? If it doesn't drive us to repentance and to renewed faith. See, the Gospel is just so much bigger than just changing our behaviour, than just changing our thinking.

It's primarily giving us a new heart, being new people, or renewed people should I say, and giving us spiritual life which, without Christ we cannot have.

[28 : 28] Which is why so much of what's happening just now in the ecclesiastical world just makes, we want to tear the little hair that I have left out. Because it's all about just about ethics and morality and about lifestyle and about things that God doesn't anywhere near it.

It's about institutions and it's about buildings. And it's about nonsense like that, whereas God is so much greater because we're speaking about a new life in Him.

That daily reality of God revealing Himself to us and us turning our lives over to Him saying, we don't know. We don't understand. We fall short.

But Lord God, give me the desire. Give me the heart. Give me the change. In that chapter, and you can change surely, one it must be, it certainly, I think, it's one of the greatest quotes ever.

It's quoted from Martin Luther on the subject of repentance and it says, to progress. And I presume that means in our Christian faith, to progress is always to begin again.

[29 : 40] I shouted hallelujah when I read that because people say to progress today is always to become sophisticated, is to move beyond the cross, is to move into different, deeper, newer understandings of God.

And here's Martin Luther saying to progress is always to begin again. And my Christian life's always about beginning again. It's always about starting at the, it's like snakes and ladders.

Always seem to be going down ladders, starting again. But maybe at the same time, some of the ladders aren't so long. We start further up the race of life.

And yet the reality is we are always starting. Repentance always takes us back to square one with Christ in a glorious, refreshing, renewed way. Do you know that?

When was the last time that we cried before God for His forgiveness and felt Lord, I'm starting again? How many times have you asked Jesus into your heart?

[30 : 44] Is that necessarily that bad? Is it that wrong? We start again. I'm not saying that each time we're doing that we're becoming converted again, but sometimes we just sense our need for making a fresh start.

Because we're children before our Father. And we don't understand. We don't know. And so we start again. And His word brings us to that's what repentance is, starting afresh.

Is that so old fashioned? Is it so out of date? Are you embarrassed by that concept of starting again, of turning again to your heavenly Father? Or is repentance something that is something that you're just simply too cool to do?

It often feels like that, as I think of my own heart. Because it's not only repentance, but it's also faith, isn't it? Living that life of reliance on Him.

You shall have no other gods before me. We're entrusting ourselves to Him when it's impossible to do so. When everyone around us says you're an idiot to do so.

[31 : 52] When all the arguments are laid down in front of us, and we still say we will put our faith in Him. Where we see that to love Him is to obey Him by faith.

To come to Him and to recognise that that is His gift. To live the impossible life. I'm tired. I'm tired of living a manageable human Christian life.

We need to start living by faith, and the impossibility of faith. I'm tired of God in a box, with hemmed in, by our own understanding and knowledge.

Proudly looking around at everyone else as if they don't know anything. I'm tired that we've just shrunk Him so much. And we need faith to believe and to trust in the impossible God.

To take us back to last Sunday morning. To do immeasurably more than we can ask. Or even imagine. God's given us a great imagination.

[33 : 08] God's gift. And yet He's saying, I will do for you more than you can even imagine. When you place yourself at my disposal. Don't settle for a lie.

Don't settle for simply being separated from His love. For which you were created to luxuriate in.

And which He allows us to enjoy by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. And please don't think that you don't need Christ.

I know we all do all the time. Maybe if you're not a Christian you just don't think you need Christ. And God is saying here, you shall have no other gods before me.

And that says you need Christ. You need Christ to enable you to see that and to recognize that. And to live that and to enjoy that.

[34 : 15] And may it be that as we study these 10 commandments. That we will see through fresh eyes and that you will pray about it. That you will pray in preparation.

That you will pray for the word to be opened up. That you'll come ready to listen and respond to participate spiritually. And that it will change all of us as we look over it in the next few weeks.

May God bless us in so doing. May God bless our heads in prayer. Heavenly Father we do ask and pray for your guiding hand. We do feel very ordinary and very small in this big world.

We feel very insignificant and unimportant. And we often feel our worship is very plain and dull and ordinary.

And our preaching is. And our lives are. But may we not decry these things. But may we find extraordinary and miraculous reality being breathed into them.

[35 : 22] As we depend on you. Give us that childlike faith. Forgive us when we have no entry signs. Where God is not allowed and his lordship is resisted.

And indeed hated. Forgive us when we think there are areas of our lives that there is no place for you in an irrelevance. This modern sophisticated world that God is outdated and old fashioned.

Forgive us for being slow to repent in a relational way. Wipe away our tears.

And help us to understand the type of relationship you look for with us. And the majesty and the greatness of our God.

Please help us to see Lord. Because our sin and our nature blinds us. Help us to see and help us to live. With desire and with freedom.

[36 : 30] And with longing for you. In Jesus name. Amen.