
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

LECTURE 2: THE GOD OF THE LAW

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

TEN COMMANDMENTS

18 LECTURES

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Lecture 2

THE GOD OF THE LAW

From our earliest childhood days, we resist someone else's will when it counters ours. This internal attitude doesn't change by getting older for we don't like to be subject to the laws of God and men and neither can be. Do you still feel this way? Do you still look at the law as the lists of things you are forbidden or commanded, hindering your freedom to soar or explore?

In this second module we will be challenged to review this view of God's law. As often, discovering new aspects of a familiar truth may lead to deeper appreciation and admiration of what is truly beautiful.

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 2

Welcome, dear friends, to our second lecture on the law of God. It's always exciting to go on a new journey, and [there're] ways for you and me to increase our excitement of discovering new territory. Imagine two people walking through the forest. The one is just taking in the sights, enjoying the sounds and the smell. The other one next to him, he's also enjoying it, but as he hears the sound, he knows what [bird] it is. When he looks at the plants, he [knows] what plant it is. He looks at the geological features, and he knows what this is all about. The second person will enjoy the journey much more. So, I encourage you to go back, occasionally perhaps, to the first lecture and to think about the questions I ask about every stopping place in the journey we hope to consider. It would be good if you pre-meditate on these questions to prepare yourself somewhat for the subject we're looking at.

Now, a second advice is from the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 12:27 says, "The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting: but the substance of the diligent man is precious." Often times we lose the great benefit of listening to a lecture or a sermon or a personal reading when we don't do something with what we have collected, just as this proverb speaks about a hunter who fails to roast the animal that he hunted. It will rot. It will do no good. So, please be encouraged to take the lecture a little farther than what you have just heard and go back to the Scriptures, meditate, speak, discuss with each other about what you have heard.

Well, let's turn to our topic of today and let us begin with listening to David. In various places in the Psalms, he says wonderful things about the law. At one point he says they're 'more to be desired than fine gold, yea than honey from the honeycomb' (Psalm 19:10). He has a very elevated view of the law of God. Let's ask ourselves honestly, Does that echo your and my feelings, appreciation, admiration, love for the law of God? Can we sing honestly, "Oh, how love I thy law," as he does in one of the psalms (Psalm 119:97)? Maybe you're like me, at least many years ago.

I wondered what I was missing. I was wondering where I was going wrong. What is so delightful about the do's and don'ts of the law? Why love a law that seems to limit your freedom? I mean, didn't David feel in his own

heart that prick in his conscience that the law would always give a sinner? Didn't David have sometimes a feeling he wanted to overreach to what was forbidden? Well, we know he did, and we know he felt, and we know from the psalms that he had the same struggles as we do because sometimes he asked, "Lord, turn my eyes away from vanity and incline my heart to the testimony of thy law" (Psalm 119:36-37). So we know he was also having those struggles, and yet he says, "Oh, how love I thy law! It is my meditation day and night." How do we answer this? Why did David have this so high esteem of the law of God? The reason is that David relished the law of God because he knew and loved the God of the law.

Friends, the law is much more [than] about a list of do's and don'ts, a list of commandments and boundaries. The law is about God. The law tells me about the lawgiver. We often overlook that before there is a law, there is a lawgiver. And now even worse, of course, in the situation that we are today with our blinded eyes spiritually in our fallenness, we look at the law negatively, and we consider the lawgiver negatively. And that's why today we start this lecture by looking closely first at the lawgiver before we consider the law. So, let's be honest. When we think about God's law, we feel unease. We may feel a certain fright or conviction. We may have the tremor that we feel when a law authority man, police, judge is after us, or we may feel a restraining power that we resent or that we resist or worse that we rebel against. And, that's because we feel that the law hinders. The law restricts. And do you see what happens next?

When we consider the law that way, we make the application about the lawgiver. He must be harsh. He must be unjust. He must just do this because He likes to. He is somewhat against me. And you know, the reason that that is is what Paul sums up for us in Romans 8:7-8. Let me read that. He says, "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God." In our fallen state, we have a completely twisted, warped understanding of the law and of the lawgiver.

If you're an older person listening to me today, do you remember how you used to think about your parents when you were young? Those curfews, those family rules, those house rules, those boundaries, those things that they imposed upon us? We all perhaps had somewhat of a negative feeling about these parents until we're older, and now we appreciate it. Now we look back, and the same rules that were then in place we now do appreciate. And why? Because now we understand, as we've grown up, that behind these family rules, there was a devotional love of a mom and a dad who want to protect us, who want to provide us with a safe, healthy, joyful living environment. That is my hope that as we look today at the lawgiver that you and I also would have deeper understanding and appreciation for the law of God, and that we will join Paul in Romans 7:12 when he says, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, and just, and good."

So, I invite you to join me in thinking about three questions today. First, Who is our lawgiver? Second, what is the relationship of God to the law? And thirdly, what is the intent? The first is going to take most of our time. The second and the third, really, will be much easier to answer once we have looked at the first one in detail. So, Who is the lawgiver? Let's think about four things in our lawgiver.

The first one [is that] our lawgiver is love. Notice, I didn't say that our lawgiver is the greatest lover. That's also true, but I said, "He is love." I John 4:16 informs us that God is love. Yes, He's loving, but He *is* love. Someone who is a lover can become a hater, but that's not possible with God. His character, His being *is* love, unchanging. God's love didn't begin when He started to create the universe. God's love has been eternal. Far before time, He existed as a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in a loving relationship.

In the essence of love, They communed. The sacred Three loved Each Other absolutely, purely, exclusively. [They] intensely devoted Themselves to Each Other, and They dwelt in that sweet communion with Each Other in a divine-size love, a relationship of love. And They honored Each Other, and They served Each Other, They glorified Each Other in that relationship. And how do we know that? Well, we know that from the Scriptures because in the Scriptures Each Person honors, Each Person glorifies the Others. And They do that because there is love in the Godhead.

So, ponder about this: love is the essential attribute of God around which all other attributes revolve like planets around the sun. It's a poor picture, but it's a picture nonetheless to try for us to visualize God in His essence: love. Some of our theologians in days gone by have defined God's love in His other attributes. That means His other attributes, His moral ones particularly, are an expression of His love. Think of it this way. His omnipotence is the action of love, the power of love. His omniscience is the eye of love. His omnipresence is the presence of

love. His justice is the impartiality and the execution of love. God's anger, often seen as a negative attribute—it's very positive—is the jealousy of His love. Wisdom [is] the counsel of love. Truth [is] the faithfulness of love. And then, we come yet to the word *holiness*, and I will take a little more time to define that. [Holiness] is also an expression of the essential glory of God's love.

So, let's take away this: our lawgiver, Who wrote the laws, Who revealed them to us, is a God of essential love. So, He did not just give us arbitrary rules to live by simply because He wants it so. Rather, He gave us His laws so that by observing them, we would enjoy the joy of our relationship with Him and with each other as He is enjoying, in a divine way, the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our lawgiver is love.

The second thing, our lawgiver is holy. Now, holy is the attribute of beauty. *Worship God in the beauty of holiness* is an often recurring phrase and description. Holiness is the attribute that is as a shine on all the other attributes. It is holiness that is the beauty of God. What is holiness, and how does that reveal itself in the holy law of God? Now, usually we approach holiness from a negative viewpoint. It is without sin. It is no sinfulness. It is sinlessness. And good—that is what it is. Holiness is God's total separation from sin, from any defect, any flaw as we know as creatures today, as sinners, [that] we have. So in holiness, God stands infinitely apart from all of us and even from His creation. That's His beauty. That's His astonishing beauty as He reveals Himself, and obviously then God's law deals with purity. God's law deals with living in obedience of heart and of head and of deed and of word.

Yet, there's something more to holiness than sinless perfection. Forefathers have described holiness as the intensity of God's love. The intensity of the love of God is His holiness. And to understand that, let me take you for a moment to Isaiah 6:1, 2, and 3. If you have your Bibles, find it and read along with me. In that passage, Isaiah sees a vision of the angels, seraphims, surrounding the throne of the Lord. They are singing to each other, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD." Isaiah receives a glimpse of that so sacred scene in the heavens. Now notice how this vision affected Isaiah.

All of the sudden, this prophet cries out, "Woe is me! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." And why does he feel this way? Because his eyes have seen the King in His glory, the Lord of hosts. What did he feel unclean about? His lips. What about his lips? What do you do with those lips? You go read chapter 5. He preached a sermon. He feels unclean about that all of a sudden. Hold on to that thought for a moment. Let's look at the angels.

What do the angels say when they stand in that same presence of God, even closer than Isaiah ever is? They do not call "Woe is us." Obviously not because they're not sinful. They're perfect beings. But yet, what do they do? They cover themselves in the presence of God with two of their wings. Now what is the purpose that they cover themselves? Perhaps they were ashamed. Perhaps what they see is too intense. What did they see? Well, let's listen to what they say: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD." And then they say, "The whole earth is filled with the glory of the Lord," the whole earth.

What was Isaiah's earth like at that moment? That was a scene sickening, a world of rebellion, a world of violence and hatred and disdain and unthankfulness, and that wasn't only the world around Israel. It was Israel too! And what did the angels see? What is God doing? He is devoting Himself to this world. The whole earth is filled with the glory of the Lord. What glory? The glory of the love, the devotion. He's maintaining the place, and He is unfolding—What?—the devotion of His love. And the book of Isaiah introduces to us how far that devotion goes when the servant of the Lord is come out of the book pages, the Jehovah Himself come to this earth. What a glory!

Remember Isaiah felt unclean about preaching. Why? Well you read chapter 5. He had just preached six times "Woe" to the people of Israel. Maybe he didn't do it with the devotion of love that he should have. Maybe there was more anger in his message than there was love motivating it. Now he feels unclean. When he sees this devotional love of God, he feels unclean. Holiness, friends, is the devotion of God's love and this description of holiness as the intensity of God's love is supported by Jesus's words in Matthew 22:35–40. He gets to answer a lawyer who challenges Him to give him the greatest commandment.

And Jesus indeed answers that there is none greater than the other. They're all great. They're all the same. The whole summary of the holy law is love. Love God and love your neighbor. No, not just love God. Love God with

all devotional intensity, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. Don't just love your neighbor. Love your neighbor with all the intensity, love him as you love yourself.

In John 13:34–35, Jesus deepens that one step further. Listen to how He put that: “A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another.” Is that so new? Wasn't that Old Testament? Yeah, the new part of that is this, “as *I* have loved you, so that ye love one another.” That's new. That degree, that level of devotion, that intensity of love, now that is holiness, the devotion, intense devotion, of the love of God. Isn't that beautiful? Doesn't this shed a totally different view on the law of God? Let me go on to a third aspect of the lawgiver.

Our lawgiver is sovereign. Many of us have a bad taste about the word *sovereignty*. It's one of the attributes that we, fallen man, have the most difficulty with. To accept and submit to the sovereignty of God, we think it is harsh or perhaps selfish, or we think maybe dictatorial. But, that's a totally unworthy presentation of God's sovereignty. For sure, God's sovereignty means He has all the authority to command as He pleases to command. He has that divine right to legislate whatever serves His interest and whatever carries out His decree. He has a totally divine right to require a total submission of us to Him.

Yet, friends, never interpret the lawgiver's sovereignty in isolation to His other attributes. That would be fearful. When we read the history of our world, we know we've had many people who were sovereigns, who had a divine right, so-called, who abused their authority, who used their sovereign power to serve themselves at the expense of their subjects. That is true. That's horrid, but that is not what our sovereign lawgiver ever has been like. You must never separate the sovereignty of our lawgiver from His other attributes: goodness, justice, love, holiness. They're always together. And therefore, this sovereign lawgiver didn't make His laws just because He loves making laws.

In His sovereignty, He established sovereign laws to make our living environment as much like His: orderly, beautiful, relational, holy, loving. As we think about the sovereign laws in nature, gravity, magnetism, the migration of the birds, the seasonal changes, the rotational and the revolution of the earth, those are sovereign laws that He put in nature all to make this a beautiful living place. So look at the moral laws of God, all put in place to make our living environment as happy and beautiful as His. That brings me to my last point about the lawgiver.

Our lawgiver is just, righteous, fair. His laws are just laws, good laws. Again, this attribute is usually experienced as a negative attribute because, of course, of our innate sinfulness that we have, and we are sinners, and we must face a just God, and that creates a certain sense of unease and conviction. But, is God's justice negative? No. It's a gloriously positive attribute. God's justice is a comforting attribute. Read through the psalms. Take Psalm 18 once, and read through it and see how David found comfort in God's justice that He would do [righteously]. He is pursued by Saul, accused and slandered of things he's never done. He has no power to defend himself or to vindicate himself, but he commits it to the just God Who will judge righteously. He knows he can count on God.

In my pastoral ministry, friends, I often may lead those who've been suffering, oppressed, who [have] been dealt with falsely, to the comfort of the justice of God, that there comes a day that the Judge of heaven and earth will do right when He makes all things right. We can count on God. He keeps His laws. He doesn't stand above His laws. He lives and rules and reigns according to His own laws. Listen to II Chronicles 19:7, “There is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts.” He's not to be bribed. He doesn't show favoritism. He always stays with the laws He made.

Now, the most vivid example of that is when we think about Golgotha, where Jesus Christ, His only beloved Son, hangs suffering under the wrath of God. He did not withhold from Him one drop. That's how just, how inflexible, how fair, His justice is. How great is our lawgiver? Loving? No. Love. Holy, sovereign, and just. And if you agree with me that that is the great glory of our lawgiver, then if we experience His law as negative or as limiting or prohibiting, then the problem is with us, not with the lawgiver, and not with His law. His law is just, good, and powerful.

Now that brings me to the second. What is the law in relationship to God Himself? We don't have to spend much time on this. The law is the mirror, or the reflection, of God Himself. We're all familiar with that thought when we think about creation. Creation mirrors, reflects, the glory of God in a physical and material way. We see His wisdom, His power, His goodness in the earth around us and in every detail of the universe in which we live. Think of Paul's words in Romans 1:20, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and his Godhead; so that they are without excuse.” So we see God's glory reflected materially, physically, in creation. So it is with the law.

The law reflects the glory of our Creator in a moral and an ethical way. It's His mirror of Who He is. It reflects God's love, holiness, goodness, righteousness, justice in the moral and ethical reflection that we see in the law of God. Therefore, we can think of the law as the transcript of God's very being, the mirror of His glorious being, and David indeed saw that when he writes in Psalm 19 about the law of the Lord. Notice the words he uses: perfect, pure, sure, right, true, righteous. All of them are descriptive of the glory of God, and since love is the essential glory of God, therefore the whole law is summed up in love. As Paul writes in Romans 13:10, "For therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." However, a mirror has limits.

Consider looking at me, you next to me, we both look at the mirror. You see yourself, and you see me. What you don't see of me is my inside, my motives, my thoughts, what lies behind the outward appearance. So, the mirror is a limited reflection. So it is also with God's law. There's infinitely more to God than what He has revealed to us in the law of the 10 Commandments. That infinitely more is revealed to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's listen to what John observes in John 1:18, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him." So only when we see the fullness of Christ and the life and walk and words visual in the person of Jesus Christ, will we see the fullness of God.

And that then answers the question that we asked in our first lecture. Are the law and the gospel opposite? They're not opposite. They're complemented. The gospel doesn't cancel the law. It's better to say that the gospel expounds the law in a depth I would have never known. Listen to how Paul puts it, "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:7). Or John 3:16, "God so loved the world." That little word *so* that sums up the entire fullness of God in the smallest word in the Bible, *so loved*. The law is expounded in the gospel. How far did the devotional love of this holy God go? That He spared not His only begotten Son. That is the lawgiver. Now, the law is also God's revelation of His will for us.

Besides the mirror, let's think of the image of the ruler. God dictates in the law His will for us. The lawgiver and the lawmaker has not only determined the physical laws of the world by which we are to live (and if we don't honor those we get sick, we get hurt, we get accidents), but He has also determined the moral laws of our living environments as the rule for us to live by. And again, the absolute right as the moral governor of heaven and earth is not to be disputed. God says in Deuteronomy 10:14, "Behold, the heaven and the heavens of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, and all that therein is." In Genesis 17:1, God speaks to Abram. He says, "Abram, I am the Almighty God; walk before me. Be thou perfect." So, friends, there [are] none of us that can dispute that the natural laws have stood unchanged since the beginning of the world. God does not change any of those natural laws that rule the creation. Would it be different with God's moral laws?

The laws that stipulate for us the will, His will, for how we are to live, would they have changed over time? The laws that speak about our relationship to Him or our relationship to each other, have they changed? No. We know that God's moral law was carved into stone with His own finger. You know that's the only portion of Scripture that God did not allow anyone else to write first. He wrote it with His own finger in stone. What would the significance of that be? That means indeed that this is a symbolic act by which God has said, 'These don't change.' And now you know why they won't change. If the law is a reflection of our lawgiver, [then] if laws change our lawgiver must change. And He's eternal, the unchangeable. His law, therefore, is always unchanging.

I have to admit before I saw God as negative, restrictive, and prohibitive. Now I see them as reflective of Himself, and this is a beautiful thought for you and me to meditate further on. Do you know that God doesn't require from us anything different than what is according to His own character? He lives by His own standards of love. He lives by His own devotional love. So, what He commands us is merely a reflection of what He does Himself. Think of that. God requires that we love our enemies. Why? If you do, you reflect Him for He loves His enemies. If God requires us to overcome evil with good, why? Because He overcomes evil with good. We are to reflect Him as we live out the glory of His law. And Jesus's teaching supports that: "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Or, Luke 6, "Be ye therefore merciful as your Father which is in heaven is merciful" (verse 36). That brings me to my last question. Why did God give us His law?

I don't think that this question is hard to answer anymore. After having looked at the lawgiver, having looked at the reflection of the law as God's reflection, then the answer on this third question is simple. He published the law to promote and to protect our happiness. His laws are not just arbitrary rules by which He says, 'You live like

this because I say so.’ As the great parent of the universe, God sets out His laws to protect us and to provide us the best living environment possible. Those laws were not given to protect Himself, friends. God does not have to secure His position with issuing laws like other, maybe earthly, rulers have to do. He as the Almighty is seated on the throne. No one causes Him stress or fear like earthly rulers will have to encounter, and therefore perhaps publish various laws. No one can invade or destroy God and His divine realm of ruling. No, instead He has put the laws in stone to protect the gifts He’s given us.

Consider laws as the boundaries of God. Consider the law of God as the loving fence that a mom and dad put around the yard to protect the children playing in the yard, to protect them from the strangers outside, and to protect them from wandering out into the dangers. Those fences are His protection. They are meant to increase our happiness. Just as those little children will understand and feel that law as limiting, that fence as limiting, and feel that fence as inhibiting them to go beyond, so we think of the law. But, perish that thought. Begin to think of God’s law [positively], His way of protecting us, maintaining us, and maintaining the quality of our relationship with Him, our relationship with others, our relationship with the world around us.

That’s all really very beautifully summed up in one verse of Proverbs. Proverbs 13:14 says, “The law of the wise is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.” So God’s law, God’s Torah, God’s instruction, is the law of wisdom which ends up to be a fountain of life for us to depart from the snares of death. And how beautifully this can be seen, for example, in the first books of Moses. I’m sure the people in Moses’s days didn’t quite understand why they could not eat those animals, only the clean ones, and why that they had to wash their clothes, and why that they could not eat the food upon which they found a dead mouse or dead rat, and they *could* use the seed to sow but *not* to bake bread. They probably didn’t understand lots of those laws, but we do today. Why? Well, because we know today that there are bacteria and viruses. We didn’t discover that till maybe 300 years ago. They didn’t know, but the lawgiver did, and so He created all these laws to protect His people. Love, devotional love, [is] expressed in the law.

Our lawgiver is great. We begin to see why David says, “Thy law is better than thousands of gold and silver” (Psalm 119:72). All the gold and silver can’t buy you happiness, cannot open the door to the heart of God. But that is possible only when we honor the law of God. Sadly, we didn’t. But that’s where we’re going to take up the story of the law next week, the Lord willing. Thank you.