
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

LECTURE 18: THE LAW IN ETERNITY

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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

REV. A.T. VERGUNST

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Lecture 18

THE LAW IN ETERNITY

And God spake all these words, saying... That's how the Ten Commandments begin as recorded by Moses. After the majestic proclamation, from the top of a smoking mountain, God wrote the TEN Himself upon two stone tablets. Though the stone tablets today are lost, the significance better not be lost on us. They were meant to be permanent. They are still the reflection of God's perfect will and Being. They declare how love really is to look like in our devotion to God and our fellow man. But what will be place and content of the law when Jesus will usher in the new world under a new heaven? Will Mt. Sinai's law be history?

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 18

Welcome, dear friends, to the last lecture in our series on the law of God. It's going to be on the title, *The Law of God in Eternity*. In our journey to study the law of God, I hope you recall that we started out with looking [at] and considering the glory of the lawgiver and the relationship of Him to the law. And we discovered that God's glory is revealed to us not only in the creation, the material world, but also in a moral way in the beauty of His holy law, in the Scriptures often celebrated as the beauty of His holiness (I Chronicles 16:29, Psalm 96:9).

As we finally came to consider the law itself, we noticed that even in the lawbook, rather uncommon for lawbooks, the glory of God was shining through at various points. It already begins at the preamble when the Lord reminds us of the gracious context in which He has given us the law. In the second commandment that comes through in that word *mercy*, in which He promises mercy even though we don't perfectly keep the law. No one does. In the fifth commandment it spoke about the promise of a prolonged and a blessed life when we honor the fifth.

So, we learned from that to see that God's law is not just a rigid rule book of the do's and [don'ts] of a sovereign King telling us, 'This is how I want you to live.' No, we've seen that the law is the rulebook to guard the relationship between God and us and between us and others. That was the original intent of the holy law of God. They are also to define our relationship with each other. God's laws, therefore, are not just simply to be obeyed for the sake of obedience or submission. In the law He declared His love and concern and reveals how that we can live in this earth, enjoying the beauty of life and the beauty of our existence within His universe. Jesus put it very briefly in one short statement in John 13, when after one of His beautiful examples of His devotional love, he writes 'happy, or blessed, if ye know these things; happy are ye when ye do them' (verse 17).

These things that Jesus speaks about was the devotional love He showed to His disciples when He washed their feet, not only of His devoted disciples but also the feet of Judas Iscariot. Blessed are we if we do these things. And that ties in with what we learned about God's holiness, not only to define it as sinlessness, though that's a good definition. Holiness is more than that. It's the word to describe the devotional love of God that is pure and

exclusive and that is intense and permanent. And this character of God's devotional love is the essence of His being and also is in a sense the essence of the law. As Jesus taught us, the law is summed up in one word, all 10 Commandments: love.

Now none loved as perfectly and none loved as devotionally as the Lord Jesus Christ. But there we see the extent of what love means. Loving God devotionally meant that He took His Father's cup and drank it to the bottom, and loving your neighbor as yourself meant that He lay down His life and chose hell above heaven to show the extent of the devotion. And so, let's remind ourselves again and again that what we learned is that love is the essence. Jesus reminded the Pharisees [of that], and we learned that in one of our lectures, when He [implied that] loving our neighbor and loving God is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices, [as one of the scribes inferred from His earlier teachings] (Mark 12:33), more than every expression of religion.

So after we considered in some depth, the lawgiver, we have thought about the first humans in Paradise. We saw they knew God's law, the original one, as written in their heart. And we concluded that, from what we read in Romans chapter 2 where Paul writes about man, fallen man that is, even in these fallen conditions and even without the knowledge of the law of Scripture, mankind reveals the imprints or the glimmering remnants of what previously was there. We can read it in Romans 2:14 when Paul refers to the Gentiles which don't have the law and yet do the things that are written in the law to a certain extent, thereby showing the work of the law written in their hearts. Even their consciences are bothering them about things that they do or don't do.

That first lecture about the first Adam brought us to consider the last Adam, Jesus Christ. He came as a sinless being in the world, and He taught that He didn't come to destroy or cancel or change or rewrite the law, but He came to fulfill it. So we studied, as we looked at Jesus's life, what fulfilling the law looked like. And there are various aspects to that word, but what is most [relevant] for this discussion today, [is] the aspect that He fulfilled the law in living out the details in the obedience and service to His Father and to His neighbor. And that connection for your own personal devotions, if you go to I Corinthians 13, the great chapter about the love or charity, read it once and substitute for the word *charity* the word *Jesus*, and you get the most complete portrait of love as Jesus was and as we ought to be.

Now in this last lecture, I want to explore now what that law means in eternity. What will the status be of God's law when He has gathered His elect into a new heaven and new earth? Is God going to replace the law then? Is it going to be rewritten or adjusted to a new world, or will the original law still be in place? My conclusion is after studying the Word of God on this question that the original law that was written on the heart of Adam and Eve and lived out briefly in the time of perfection in Paradise will still be the law that will govern humanity, redeemed and renewed, in a new earth. That law that was rewritten at least in its beginning stages in the heart of God's children in regeneration and sanctification, that will be the law in perfection as God brings His people in the new world. And so, in my conclusion, I want to support with seven evidences this law in eternity as the abiding and eternal law for God's redeemed people. What are these evidences?

I have seven, and the first goes back to that simple statement that God wrote with His own finger the law on two tables of stone. Friends, no part of the Scripture has ever been written with God's personal finger on two tables of stone. He didn't delegate it. He didn't allow anybody else to do that. He did it Himself to declare the importance, undoubtedly also to declare symbolically the permanence, of the law of God. Moses passed away; Aaron passed away, and the Israelites that stood around Mount Sinai passed away, but the law of God today abides forever. It is not without reason, I think, that in the holy Scriptures we find seven times recorded that God wrote the 10 Commandments with His own fingers in two tables of stone. That's my first argument.

My second evidence for this hope, or for this conviction, that the law in eternity will be the same is that God's Word records His covenant promise to His elect church in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Without reading the entire passage let me lift out at least a few statements. God says, 'I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and Judah, not according to the covenant that He made with their fathers, which they break, but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. Saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts. I will write it on their hearts. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest.'

Now what law would that be? What law will God write in the latter days on the hearts of His people? Will it be a different law than He wrote on the heart of Adam and Eve? We considered that already as we looked at God's

law and the saint. Now friends, would God then write the law of the 10 Commandments on this people here to rewrite or to change that on His people when they have gone to glory, really undo what He wrote on their hearts here when we have arrived in the eternal habitation? No. The Scriptures record that faith will pass, and hope will end, no more needed, but charity abides forever, and charity is the sum and substance of the law of God.

The third support is that God's Word records Jesus's emphatic teaching about the permanency of the law of God in Matthew 5:18. He says there, "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." How unreasonable for us to conclude that after the present heaven and earth literally have passed, then also God's law would pass away. That implies a change in God's character. That implies a change in the reflection of the law of God, and that is not needed nor possible. So therefore, we can only conclude that that same law will also be beyond this heaven and earth, and that brings me to my fourth supporting evidence: God's Word prophesies the coming of a new heaven and a new earth.

In the book of II Peter [and] in the book of Revelation, prophecies were given about a new heaven and a new earth. Now the word *new* in the Greek has the meaning of something renewing, something made new that is decayed or weak or old, not brand-new and replaced by something totally differently new, but something that was there and is renewed. One illustration that will make the word clear is referring to our regeneration when God gives us a new heart. That new heart is not a totally new person. It is a heart and a person that He regenerates, He renews. He removes the sin, and He removes the results of the Fall, and we will be the same person without sin. And that's the word *new* referring to the new earth and the new heaven.

Peter adds that in that new earth and new heaven, which is this place renewed, dwelleth righteousness. Now, righteousness is a key word in the Old and New Testament. It means to be right and to do right. It is [to be] conformed to a standard of right, and that right is nothing else but the law of God. That was the righteousness of Jesus Christ that He obeyed the law in everything He was and everything He did. Is it reasonable to define the word *righteousness* which will dwell, inhabit, will be the environment of the new heaven and a new earth to be a different righteousness than the one that we are reading about in the New Testament teaching about the work of grace?

God's Word in the fifth place gives us more about the condition of the new earth and the new world in a beautiful and a moving prophecy in Isaiah 11:6-9. Let me take a moment to read these well-known words about the wolf that shall dwell with the lamb. [That is] unusual. 'The leopard [will] lie down with the kid.' It's not happening today. 'The calf and the young lion and the fatling [will be] together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed, and [their] young [ones] shall lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox, and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand in a cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt, nor destroy [in all] my holy mountain. For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.'

Now, this beautiful prophecy is not speaking about a heavenly zoo, but it's speaking about the condition that will be there when God has renewed the earth. The animals must be considered as pictures of different characters, different people, different personalities. The differences today are often the cause of friction in our sinful world. The strong dominate the weaker ones. The bold intimidate the timid ones. [There is] destructive behavior, foul competition, stinging backbiting. It hurts. It destroys. In heavenly glory, there shall be none of that.

No one shall ever complain of having too little or being too small. There will be a contentment. There will be a togetherness. None shall hurt, nor destroy in my holy mountain. What sadly sometimes today disfigures the people of God in the church when brethren cannot dwell together shall not to be the case there. And the wolf and the lamb shall dwell together. And why? Because knowledge of God shall fill everyone as the waters cover the sea. And what knowledge is that? That's not only the knowledge about God, the knowledge of His Person or of His glory, but consider also the knowledge of His law reflected in the devotional love to one another.

And that brings me to my sixth evidence. God's Word defines the final purpose of salvation to be complete holiness. In I Peter 1:15-16, God's saints get the direction, 'Be ye holy as I am holy, in all manner of conversation.' Jesus commands His disciples, "Be ye perfect," not just act perfect, but *be* perfect, in your inner being as we saw in the previous tenth commandment. Well, that is unattainable in this life, but it is not unattainable in the life to come. Why not? Because God promised that He will finally accomplish the full end of the work of salvation.

And what is that? Romans 8 tells us, ‘Those he foreknew he also predestinated to be conformed to the image of God’ (verse 29). The final purpose of God’s restoring work is to restore what there was in Paradise in a perfect conformity [and] reflection to God, and God will so renew His children in the total conformity to the Son of God as seen in Jesus Christ. Again, Ephesians 1:4 supports this when he says, “According as he has chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” There’s that word *love* again, the devotional reflection of God’s glory.

My last evidence, friends, is that God’s Word records that Jesus is today exalted as the Head of His Church. Paul writes His church “is his body, which the fullness of him filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:23). The whole church is united to the Head, Jesus Christ. This Head, Who fulfilled the law of God on earth, will He not fulfill it in the heavenly glory? To suggest anything contrary to that is blasphemous. But if He is the Head, will He be united to a body that is also not perfect in the reflection of the glory of God? Shall there be disunity between the Head and the body? Listen to the words of Christ in the prayer of John 17 when He says, “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified [through] the truth...that they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, and that they also may be one in us” (verses 19 & 21). Can that be perceived without being one in the reflection of the glory of God as seen in the law?

Friends, when arrived in glory, all God’s saints will have reached the perfection the apostle Paul so earnestly longed for when he says, ‘My conversation is in heaven from whence I look and wait. I expect the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change my vile body that it may be fashioned like unto his’ (Philippians 3:20–21). And how will that [be] accomplished? According to the working, His working, whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself. And then Paul will never have to say again, “Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

Well, these seven evidences support the view that the law of God will abide forever to be the law in the new world. The redeemed in this new world will forever display the truth and the revelation of the beauty of the holiness of God. Heaven begins where sin ends, and sin ends where we are conformed to the image of God, the lawgiver. Grace is glory begun, and glory is grace perfected. Or to say it differently, grace is the lowest degree of glory, and glory is the highest degree of grace.

And that brings us to a close, not only to this lecture but to all of our lectures on the law of God. My prayer has been that these lectures may be used in you as God has used them to me, has increased my admiration and my adoration of God as He has revealed His loveliness, His beauty of holiness in His law. It has also deepened my understanding of the main intent of obedience that God calls us to, [and that] is to love like Him, like Jesus. It has also more than ever convinced me again of how impossible it is for us to be saved by our own doing. We need the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, let me conclude then by directing you to two answers in the Heidelberg Catechism. And the first one is Answer 114 that asks, ‘Can those that are saved keep the commandments of God perfectly?’ The answer is pastoral and biblical. They say, “No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live, not only according to some, but to all the commandments of God.” That’s a pastoral and a scriptural answer. ‘But why then,’ that’s the next question, ‘must we study the commandments?’ Why must we deepen our knowledge of the law as we’ve done in these last lectures on the law of God and the prior ones leading up to it? Here’s the Answer 115 of the Heidelberg Catechism. The reason to study and to search, even though we can’t keep [them] is that “first, all of our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the forgiveness of sin and righteousness in Christ; and likewise, that we constantly [endeavor] and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, until we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in the life to come.”

And all I desire to say, friends, on these words of the summary of the teaching on the Heidelberg Catechism and on all the previous teaching of this lecture, is amen and amen. May God bless you.