
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

LECTURE 1: INTRODUCTION

Lecture Presenter: Rev. A.T. Vergunst



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Rev. A.T. Vergunst is minister of the Gospel and plans to serve the Reformed Congregation of Carterton, New Zealand, June 2020. Currently he serves the Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Waupun, WI, USA.

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Module

TEN COMMANDMENTS

18 LECTURES

REV. A.T. VERGUNST

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Lecture 1

INTRODUCTION

To see the highest mountain of the world is impressive. To fly over a near endless ocean makes you feel small. To peer into the universe of billions of stars is dazzling. Yet, far more inspiring is it to see the glory of Him Who not only made these things out of nothing but also set all in motion according to His divine laws!

In this first module on the Law of God, we will explore what we hope to study in this course on the law of God. Our full and final purpose of these studies is that we would echo the poet's confession in Psalm 119:72, "The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 1

Dear friends, I hope you have a love for traveling, or at least the love to discover some new aspects of the truth of God's Word, because I plan to take you on a journey of thinking about the glory of God in connection with His holy law. It's been a great pleasure for me to prepare this series of lectures and to discover new aspects of the truth of the law of the Lord, and I hope that I may be able to pass on some of the beauties that I have discovered to you in this series of lectures. We begin today with a story as I met, a couple of years ago, a young woman probably in her mid-30s, a successful, young businesswoman, and as we were talking together she shared her story with me. She grew up in a very religious family. Both her parents were strict adherents to different religions. And so, her words to me were, "I don't want anything to do with religion anymore. I am beyond that."

As I reflected on that thought, I desired to get into a deeper conversation with her, so I asked her, "Do you still believe in God?" "Yes. Yes, I do," she answered, "but I don't want [anything] to do with these rules of God. I've had enough of rules. I want to live my life. I want to have freedom. I want to enjoy my life according to my rules." So in my answer, I tried to sympathize with her. I said, "Yeah, I understand it was not easy for you to grow up with all these rules from both parents from different religions, and to serve a God Who only is do's and don'ts is not very attractive. I must agree with you on that. But, let me just think it through with you a little bit farther. What is now really religion? Is religion keeping rules to somehow please the deity, or to keep him from being angry, or to pacify him? How about you think about religion as a relationship? A relationship with your God, your Creator, your Maker. And, in missing out on that relationship, which we in essence have lost, we are losing the beauty of life. We miss out [on] the joy and satisfaction, the pleasure of living because we are separated from our God. Let me liken it to [a] marriage relationship. A good marriage is not just two people living together, keeping the rules. A good marriage is two people who love each other, who honor each other, who respect each other, who live in a tender, close, intimate, harmonious, growing relationship. However, to keep that relationship in that quality, we are to honor the rules of the relationship. There are some guidelines,

some rules, some expectations, some do's, some don'ts to keep the relationship healthy and beautiful. It will blossom in that context."

Now, I want to use this story as our starting point for our series [of] lectures on God's law, and my purpose in this study is to show you the glory of our God as He has revealed it in the law that He has given to us. Today's lecture, consider it as a bird's eye view over the entire length of this series of lectures, perhaps a little appetizer. So, where do we begin? Let me begin with this question, what do you think about when you think about the glory of God? What comes to your mind? Undoubtedly, some of you are thinking creation, the universe, the majestic beauty of all that God has created. I agree. That's a beautiful aspect of God's glory. Maybe somebody else thought the gospel, that incredible story of the love of God that He didn't spare His own Son but gave Him for rebels. I agree. It is a story of God's glory that exceeds the beauty of creation.

However, let me suggest another answer about the law, the holy law of God. Perhaps you must admit that that didn't come naturally to our mind when we think about the glory of God, and yet the truth is that the glory of God is also beautifully revealed in the law that He has given to us, stronger yet. Before the creation was the law of God. Even before the announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ was the law of God. God has always been God Who existed in a relationship as a Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and in that relationship, They were governed by Their own law of how to keep also Their relationship in the harmony, in the beauty, in the intimacy, in the honoring and respecting and loving of One Another. Now, that's an important truth to capture, friends. As we go forward in our journey, let's hold onto this basic foundational statement, that the glory of God is shown in the law, because that already will help us to answer, perhaps, the question, "Are the law and the gospel opposite, or are they together complementary?" or the other question that often Christians struggle with around us is, "Is the law Old Testament material, and therefore not relevant to us today in the New Testament?"

You'll notice that a number of Christians around us hold the view that the law of God is no more important. It's all about love today, not about law. And therefore, rarely do churches teach a course as we are going to explore together about the law of God and especially the Ten Commandments. That direction of neglecting the law of God is neither healthy, nor is it scriptural. Why is it not healthy? Well, think of your own body. No exercise, no good diet, what does it do to us physically? It makes us flabby, fat, unhealthy. Now think of spiritually, if we are cutting out the instruction of the law of God, the moral qualities of our life, we become Christians that are morally flabby, fat, unhealthy, and more, un-Christlike. It's also not scriptural to cut out teaching on the law because listen to Jesus. In John 13:34, He says, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." So, love. But in John 14:15, He adds, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." So, you notice that the Savior emphasizes love and law, commandments, nearly in the same context of those chapters.

So, let's get this bird off the ground, let's see where we go in this series on the law of God. What is it that we want to cover? So, the first question I struggled with and have to share with you is, "Where do we start? I am the teacher, of course, on the law of God, the 10 Commandments. Where do we start? It seems logical to go to Exodus 20 and to listen to the thunder of the voice of God on Mount Sinai, but is that the point to start? Or, shall we start perhaps in Genesis 1:1, where the Bible starts? I propose neither as our starting points. I propose that we go to John 1:1. Let me read that to you. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In these few words, John sketches a reality, friends, that is beyond words. He points us to the relationship of God. The words "and the Word was with God" in the Greek [have] a suggestion that They were face-to-face with Each Other, communion, fellowship, living together in this holy Trinity from all eternity already; and God dwelled together in this sweet communion, living according to His own holy standards. So, I have chosen to begin our teaching on the law of God with first looking at the God of the law.

So before we analyze the law, let's focus our thoughts on the Lawgiver Himself, and then move to see what He is saying to us in His holy law. Thinking about that perhaps brings us also to answer some of the questions of "what now really is the function of law?" and "was the law of God a gift to us, or is it God's will to make us behave the right way?" or "is the law given to hinder my freedom, or is it, on the other hand, given to protect my freedom?" So, that's our first stopping place: the God of the law.

What next? Well, we open up to Exodus 20. It seems logical. Well, that's clearly where God's law and the 10 Commandments [are] stated explicitly. However, if we jumped all the way to Exodus 20, realize we are skipping

2500 to 3000 years of history of the world already. So, what about the law of God in that period of time? Therefore, I propose that we go back to Paradise, and our topic will be Adam, the first Adam, and the law of God. And so, as we think about Adam and Eve, what law did they have? Did they know the 10 Commandments? And if they did, how did they know the 10 Commandments? And if they didn't, what law did they live by? For that will be our second stopping place, the law in relationship to Adam and Eve in Paradise.

After that, I propose that we are going to seek to understand the law in relationship to the last Adam: Jesus Christ. We all know from the gospel story that Jesus Christ honored the law as no human ever did. He came not to destroy the law, He says, but to fulfill the law (Matthew 5:17). So, it seems to be for us the best exposition of the law of God to study briefly the relationship between Jesus Christ, the last Adam, and the law of God. So, let's think about questions. How did Jesus honor the law? And what is that relationship between Him and the gospel that He preached? And certainly, we come then for a moment to the question, already, "since the Savior took the curse as the suffering Savior, did He then also cancel the law for His followers, since He took the curse?"

Next, let me take you to consider the law in relationship to us sinners. Jesus dealt much with the Pharisees in His ministry on earth, and you understand that the Pharisees were people who were erring [in] their thoughts [on] how to be saved. Their main thought was that by law-keeping, we will be saved. So in a certain way, they thought too much of law-keeping as a sinner in relationship to God. And that error, of course, is still very much around in our heart, and therefore it is good for us all to stop together to consider, "what is the relationship of the law to the sinner?" And questions I will try to answer [in] this study [are] "how does the law of God function in our hearts by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the unregenerate state? How does the Holy Spirit use the law to convict and to bring us to the gospel?"

And then, we will certainly deal with the error of legalism. From that point, let's consider the law in connection to *saint*. After someone is saved, the Scripture refers to him or her as a saint. We would love to think that once a person has come to faith and has experienced God's grace all issues of sin [are] over, but we know that is not the case. Reality proves that the struggle and the wrestling with sin remain a struggle for all God's children. So, let's imagine for a moment salvation to be that narrow path that Jesus refers to (Matthew 7:14), but let's picture that narrow path on a ledge, on a ledge with steep sides to the left and to the right. We can fall on either side as we're trying to walk that ledge. We can fall on the side of legalism, which is making too much of law-keeping as if that is helping us to be saved, but we can also fall upon the left side. We refer to that as *antinomianism*, and those are the ones who say, "Ah, we do not have to at all worry about the law of God. We are no more under the law for we are under grace, as Romans 6:14 says." So, the question indeed is: Does a believer still have to be concerned about law-keeping, or are we simply saying like Romans 13:8 suggests, 'owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another has fulfilled the law? So, it's only about love, no more about law.

Finally, after this, we are going to head out to Mount Sinai. Exodus 20 records an event that doesn't have its equal within any part of the Scripture. God revealed Himself in the majesty that did not only make all of Israel tremble, [but] even Moses said, "I exceedingly tremble" when he saw the glory of the majesty of God. Now to understand Exodus 20, please begin to read and meditate already in your mind on the following questions, before we even get there. For example, what's the context of Exodus 20? There are chapters before it that will help us to understand why Exodus 20 is in Exodus 20, why God gave the law at that moment in the history of Israel. So, think about that. A certain question that also is important to think about is: Now why did God choose to reveal Himself in such an awesome majesty? Why this display of power and thunder and lightning when He reveals and speaks the law of God from the mountain? And what is the meaning of that preamble, "I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt?" Is that more than an historical statement? Is there more in that than just a reference to what has taken place? Obviously, we are going to stick around Mount Sinai for a little while because each of the 10 Commandments we will examine in a separate lecture, so that will be at least 10 lectures.

As a picture, consider the 10 Commandments as a building, God's building. Each commandment is an essential part of this building. In other words, all ten belong together. None can be taken out. If we take any of those ten out, that would not only weaken the entire structure of the building, it [would] also dishonor the Builder, as if He added too much. Besides, also none can be added. That [would] again mean that the Builder had designed the law of God poorly and would have to add something to it. So the ten, they all belong together.

A couple of questions to guide us on each of the commandments already, and that is what we will further explore, [are] why did God state nearly all of them, nine of them, in the negative, “thou shalt not”? Why? Why this negative starting point on each one of the commandments? Secondly, the question we can ask is this: David writes that the law is exceedingly broad; Paul writes that the law is spiritual. So, is there more to the surface of the law? And we already know the answer: Jesus Himself expounds the law on the Sermon on the Mount, and He shows us that “Thou shalt not kill” is far more than literally murdering your neighbor. So, we need to go and look at each commandment in a spiritual way and what it means. And of course, as we study the ten, we hope to make many applications to our daily lives as we are to live before God and men.

And then, before we end our study, I ask you to join me one more time on the subject “the law and eternity.” We notice that the law did not begin at Sinai. We also notice that the law did not begin at Paradise. The law of God, as you’ll see in our second lecture, begins with God. So, then the question is, “what will the status of the law be?” In the new world Jesus will create upon the final judgment of the earth, will God’s law have a permanent feature or authority in that new world? Will the redeemed humanity honor the same 10 Commandments that were given on Mount Sinai? Undoubtedly, many aspects of the new world remain hidden for us, but perhaps it’s possible for us to establish a few guidelines or principles on the question whether the law of God will be considered in eternity as the same law that we have now in the holy Scriptures.

So, friends, it’s time for me to land this bird, as we’ve explored this journey from the bird’s eye view, and become the worm and to begin to look at these aspects in slow, searching, thinking-through topic by topic. And, I hope that as we dig out the details of the glories of God that you also find this to be a subject that will fill us more and more with admiration and joy in the God of the law. Let me remind you in closing, our main purpose here is not to increase knowledge. The main purpose is to increase devotion. How wonderful if the end result will be that we join David on a deeper and more personal level as he says in Psalm 19, in the celebration of the law of God, “the law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” And then, he comes to this amazing confession, “more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.” So, may God bless these words and make us a source of blessing to others. Thank you.