
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

LECTURE 9: SINAI

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

30 LECTURES

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21 CHAPTERS OLD TESTAMENT · 9 CHAPTERS NEW TESTAMENT

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Lecture 9

SINAI

Lecture Theme:

God gives his law to his chosen and redeemed people to reveal his own character, to bring them under his rule and to inform them how to live in holiness according to his will.

Text:

“Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good . . . For we know that the law is spiritual . . . For I delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Romans 7:12, 14, 22).

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 9

When children first learn to write, they’re often given a model of the shape of the letters or characters and told to trace the examples provided. In studying the model, they become more skilled in writing words themselves. This helps illustrate the topic of this lecture. Every true Christian has a keen interest in the pursuit of godliness, but what is it? Godliness means God-likeness, and God has summarized the revelation of His own character in the Moral Law summarized in the 10 Commandments. In Christ’s earthly ministry, He conformed His own life to this perfect pattern, obeying completely the will of God. In the pursuit of godliness, the Holy Spirit progressively transforms the believer into the likeness of Christ. God’s Moral Law, therefore, provides the pattern of God’s holiness that is traced out in the gospel holiness of the believer.

We can ask ourselves some questions. What is God like? How does Who God is relate to what He requires of His creatures? Is the God of Sinai the same as the God of the New Testament? Does His moral requirement change or remain the same from the Old Testament to the New Testament? Is Sinai a detour from God’s covenant with Abraham, or does it continue to build on the same promises? How do we distinguish between the different parts of the law, and how does the law relate to the contemporary Christian? Should every believer now say, “Oh, how I love thy law” (Psalm 119:97)?

The law of Moses informed Israel how their redeemed relationship with God should be molded by holiness and wisdom. God’s law would also serve as a light to all the nations of the world, displaying the glory of God to all. We read in Deuteronomy 4 verses 6 and 8 these important words. “Keep therefore and do them,” referring to the law, “for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes and say, ‘Surely, this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for.

What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgment so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?"

The law would reveal Who God is to His people, but that same law was to be set before all of the people and all of the nations of the world. Well, we need to begin in this lecture, first of all, by understanding the relationship of Sinai to Redemption and the Covenant of Grace. You may recall that while Moses was serving as a shepherd in the land of Midian, he encountered the Lord in the burning bush. This theophany occurred at Mount Horeb, which is another title for Mount Sinai, two words for the same mountain. The bush burned but was not consumed. Here, God revealed Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and informed Moses that he was God's chosen man to be sent to Pharaoh to deliver His chosen people out of Egyptian bondage and to bring them into the Promised Land. He promised Moses that He, God, would be with him.

Notice that He instructed him to bring His people, once delivered from Egypt, back to this mountain, Mount Horeb or Mount Sinai. Why? To serve or worship God upon this mountain, Exodus 3 verse 12 tells us. So, God's command to go and get His people and to bring them to worship Him at Sinai brings us to consider the significance of what transpired at this important place. It's so significant that we're actually going to consider it in this lecture and three more lectures to follow. Now, we need to be clear on some important connections because there are some Christians that have wrongly set the covenant with Abraham and the covenant with Moses in opposition to one another. They see the pattern with Abraham as gracious [but] Moses as a disruption of that pattern, forming harsh terms based on human merit. They make the same mistake in opposing Moses in the New Testament.

This is not what the Bible teaches, as I intend to prove. The continuity that we have observed so far in the unfolding of God's Covenant of Grace continues. The Mosaic Covenant being one more development in the history of revelation that connects Genesis 3:15 ultimately to the new covenant. To be clear, the Mosaic Covenant is part of the Covenant of Grace. This is important for understanding the relationship of the Old and New Testament, the Law and the Gospel, and understanding the work of Christ and the place of the law in the life of contemporary Christians.

Well, let me demonstrate to you, from the Scriptures themselves, how Sinai and the giving of the Law is set within the context of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace. We'll notice a handful of things here. First of all, God's first words at Sinai convey a message of redemption and the Covenant of Grace. In Exodus 19 verses 4 and 5, we read, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you onto myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people." You see the connection of Redemption and the Covenant?

Secondly, God communicates the same emphasis of Gospel Redemption in giving the 10 Commandments. Immediately before the 10 Commandments, we read in Exodus 20 verse 2, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." He is their God, the God Who saved and delivered them. As we saw in the lecture on Exodus, redemption from the bondage of Egypt foreshadowed the saving work of the coming Christ. Furthermore, the Law itself is also full of the message of the Gospel and Christ as Savior. As we will come to see in the next three lectures on the tabernacles, sacrifices, and the priesthood, all of these symbols convey wonderful theology about God's provision for forgiveness and reconciliation and fellowship with God. For that reason, I like to speak of the book of Leviticus as the gospel according to Leviticus.

Fourthly, we see that the law will constantly remind God's people of their inability to conform to God's standards of holiness and to love Him comprehensibly. Well, the conviction of sin is always a mercy; but notice, it is the law that also teaches them to avail themselves of the sacrifice as they repent and cast themselves on God's mercy. Next, do you remember the core of the Covenant of Grace? The words that we highlighted in previous lectures? Well, we see it repeated in the Mosaic Covenant. For example, in Leviticus 26 verse 12, "And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people." There it is. It's traced through the Mosaic Covenant in a few places.

In addition, in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 27 and 28, we see a greater revelation of the blessings and curses of the covenant. Covenant-breaking through unbelief and disobedience results in disqualification from the blessings and certain reaping of the curses, but even here, if Israel repents and turns back to the Lord, then they will again know the blessings of the covenant. We're told so in, for example, Leviticus 26 verses 40 to 45. Now, this is fundamental. This is essential, this whole notion of the relationship of God's people and

covenant with Him to the blessings and curses of the covenant. It's essential for understanding the later prophets. It's also important for understanding the background for the New Testament.

Do not make the mistake of thinking that this element is absent from the New Testament. Remember Ananias and Sapphira. Remember the grave warnings given in 1 Corinthians 11 about unworthy participation in the Lord's Supper, new covenant meal. Remember the language that is found in Hebrews, for example, chapter 6, 10 and 12, and remember the startling threats that Christ gave to the seven churches of Asia in Revelation 2 and 3. This is just to mention a few examples. Our understanding of the covenant blessings and curses provides the background for these New Testament passages. Well, there are many, many, many more connections that could be drawn to highlight the relationship of Sinai to Redemption and to the Covenant of Grace, but you'll have to pursue those in your further studies. Let me give you just one more example: Christ's words at the Institution of the Lord's Supper when He said, "For this is my blood of the New Testament," or the new covenant.

That's found in Matthew 26:28. That language is taken not from the Passover like you might have thought but rather from Mount Sinai. You see it in Exodus 24 verse 8. Well, this has interesting implications, but you'll discover many more connections in your future studies. We're only providing the basic building blocks in these lectures.

Under this first point, we see that the call to holiness and obedience comes within the context of redemption. God's covenant faithfulness to them in the Exodus is reinforced by revealing the details of God's Word that they must obey. They are still called upon to live by faith in the promises of God as they live under His rule and follow His pattern of Gospel holiness. This supplies continuity which carries over and continues into the New Testament.

Secondly, we need to consider the revelation of God Himself at Sinai. In this, we see further benefits to the development of God's revelation under Moses. We see a further revelation with regards to His name. You'll remember from the last lecture the significance of the name of God. It's a revelation of Who He is. It summarizes all the ways that God reveals Himself. We noted in the last lecture that God reveals a new name to Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were unaware of. He showed Himself to be Jehovah. This is significant for the further disclosure of His glory as the God of the covenant. This name, capital L-O-R-D or Jehovah. It's printed in English Bibles with a capital L-O-R-D. This name Jehovah becomes the dominant name in the remainder of the Old Testament. Interestingly, when we come to the New Testament, Jesus will cite Old Testament passages, speaking about Jehovah, and will say that they have their fulfillment in Him, that they were in fact references to Him, leading us to the conclusion that Jesus is Jehovah. We'll develop that further when we come to the New Testament.

Unlike any other nation, God spoke to Israel directly out of fire for the first time in history. You see this in Deuteronomy 4. We also note some things about the revelation of God's character. I said at the beginning that the law reveals Who God is and what God requires. In both cases, it reveals, for example, His holiness. Remember the fire on the mount, on Mount Sinai, as well as at the bush. Moses is told, "You are on holy ground," at the bush. He tells His people at Sinai, "Do not come near or touch this mountain." The law reveals the character of God and His will for mankind. He says, "Be ye holy as I am holy." Now, this remains the standard into the New Testament as is seen in 1 Peter 1 verse 16. Peter quotes this Old Testament passage, "Be ye holy; for I am holy," and shows that it applies to the New Testament Christian.

Holiness is one of the most prominent words in the Bible to express the character of God. You think of that scene given to us in Isaiah 6:1-3 where the heavens are opened, and he sees the Lord upon His throne. What are the angels saying? They're saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty." What is holiness? Well, it consists of at least two parts. The first one is the one we often associate with holiness. That is purity. Holiness carries with it the idea of purity, of being without blemish or blame, of being sinless, but equally important is the concept of separation. Holiness is to be separate, so we will refer to the Bible as the Holy Bible. It's separate from all other books. We'll refer to the Lord's Supper as a Holy Supper, separated from all other meals, or the Sabbath as God's Holy Day. It's separated from the other six [days]. God's people even are called a holy people. They're separated from the rest of the world. So, God is separate from creation, from His people, from sin; and He is pure. God is holy. He redeemed His people to make them a holy people.

The law provides us a transcript, if you will, of God's holy character to guide the lives of His redeemed people. The laws of holiness emphasize the difference between a holy God and a sinful people. The redeemed are called to share in God's holiness by being separate and different from the rest of humanity. God alone, of course, has the

authority to define sin. When we refuse to call something sin that God calls sin, or when we call something sin that God does not call sin, we are usurping God's authority and taking it for ourselves.

Another revelation of God's character is His love. Now, this may come as a surprise to some of you, but it shouldn't. God is love, and we see His love in the law. We see His promise of love. Notice the words, "I am the Lord thy God." These words are found sprinkled throughout the 10 Commandments. Especially, you see them in the first four commandments, what we call the First Table of the Law. This is a promise of love: "I am the Lord thy God." How so? Well, what can He give more than Himself? This is an expression of love. Just as the promise is a promise of love, so His precepts are precepts of love. He says, for example, "Thou shall have no other gods before me." It's a call to have exclusive love for the Lord above and beyond all others. Rather than an antithesis between law and love, there is an inextricable connection between them. The New Testament bears this out.

In Romans 13 verse 10, we're told that "love is the fulfilling of the law." We're told that love, elsewhere, is expressed by obedience to the law. Jesus says, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). John repeats that in 1 John 5. Then, Jesus summarizes the entire law in terms of love. He says, "You want to understand all of the law and the prophets? It comes down to this. Love God. Love your neighbor" (Matthew 22:35-40): the law summarized in terms of love. This love is connected to another revelation of God's character: His jealousy. He is a jealous God. He describes Himself as the "Lord thy God." This is, as I say, repeated through the First Table of the Law. Notice in the second commandment the reference to Himself as a jealous God set within the context of making no graven images. There should be no competitors. Nothing and no one else that is to share the place that He has. We're only to worship Him as He has prescribed. God puts His name and claim on Jacob's seed: "thou art Mine."

Jealousy is the fire of love. Think of the words of the Song of Solomon in chapter 8 verses 6 and 7: "Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath the most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would be utterly condemned." In summary, under this point, imagine the scene, God revealing His glory. In coming to the mountain, it burned with fire, we are told. Notice the words in Deuteronomy 5 verse 24: "Behold, the LORD our God hath showed us," what? "Hath showed us His glory and His greatness." The people feared, of course. They were scared the fire would consume them.

Hebrews 12 [refers] to this. It says in verse 21 that even Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake," but Hebrews 12 goes on. It says, "But ye are come to Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God." Well, what does that mean? Does that lessen the fear of God that New Testament Christians are supposed to have? No. The chapter ends with verses 28 and 29 saying, "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire."

In our next point, we need to consider the categories of the law. Understanding the different categories of law will help you make sense of the points of continuity and discontinuity between the Law and the New Testament. Some laws are permanent, and others are temporary at Sinai. You should realize, even the Old Testament believers understood these categories and distinctions. You'll find it in the book of Psalms where it speaks about not desiring sacrifice (Psalm 40:6; 51:16). You'll find it in historical books where obedience is more important than sacrifice, many, many places. Well, the church down through the ages has distinguished [among] three primary categories within the Law: Moral Law, Civil or Judicial Law, and Ceremonial Law. Let's consider them very briefly. First of all, we have the Moral Law. God's will is summarized in the Moral Law. The Moral Law is summarized in the 10 Commandments. Adam had the whole Moral Law when he was in the garden. Indeed, he broke it. All of those that followed him also had the Moral Law, but it is summarized and ratified, in writing, for the first time within the 10 Commandments.

This law is perpetual. It is permanent. It is the reflection of the character of God, and therefore, it cannot change. It applies to all men in all countries, in all ages. The Moral Law was reinforced and expounded in the New Testament by Christ and Paul and the other New Testament writers in many places. We'll consider the Moral Law more fully in a moment. The second category is Judicial Law, the civil case laws or political economic laws of Israel. These were sociopolitical laws applied to Israel's theocracy as a unique nation. The Westminster

Confession of Faith states that they expired with the State of Israel and are only obligatory as far as, “The general equity thereof may require.”

The third category is Ceremonial Law. This refers to all of the clean and unclean laws, the separation and purity laws. It refers to the laws governing the temple and the tabernacle worship, the priests and the sacrificial system, and so forth. These Ceremonial Laws pointed forward as shadows to the Person and work of Christ, and the results of that work in the New Testament. We’ll be expounding some of these ceremonial institutions and ordinances in the next three lectures, but you need to understand from the onset that these Ceremonial Laws have been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are completely expired. They have been abrogated in the New Testament with Christ’s coming. We see this in many places throughout the New Testament, and we’ll look at it further in the lectures to follow, but let’s consider a little more fully what we learn about the Moral Law summarized in the 10 Commandments. This is primary, if you will. This is distinct from the rest of the Law.

John Owen says, “Heavenly teaching, the knowledge of God, had been gradually revealed and expanded on various occasions since the foundation of the universe, and now at length, it was brought together and systematized into one general and stable method of worship and obedience and presented to the church as a body of unified truth.” The 10 Commandments are called, in the Bible, “the 10 words.” See this, for example, in Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 4, Deuteronomy 10: 10 words. That’s where we get the English word “decalog.” Decalog means 10 words. You’ll note that these 10 Commandments are written with the Lord’s finger on tables of stone (Deuteronomy 9:10). That itself shows something of their permanence and primacy. We’re also told that they’re set apart. Notice in Deuteronomy 5 verse 22, “These words, the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.”

As we see elsewhere, at a deeper level, those 10 words, the 10 Commandments, were the Covenant and testimony itself. That’s how they’re referred to in a few places in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Of course, those two tables of stone are placed inside the ark beneath, as it were, the feet of God. The 10 Commandments are divided into two basic portions. You have the First Table, Commandments 1–4, and the Second Table, commandments five to ten. The First Table refers to our duties as they relate to God, our duties to God. The Second Table, Commandments 5–10, speak to our duties toward man, to our fellow humans. You’ll notice that in the First Table, it all revolves around worship. In the first commandment, we’re told Who to worship. In the second commandment, we’re told how to worship Him. We’re only to worship Him as He has commanded or prescribed, not according to our own innovation. In the third commandment, we’re told why it is that we worship Him: we are to sanctify His name. Then, in the fourth commandment, we’re told when to worship Him: on His appointed Sabbath Day.

When Jesus in the gospel summarizes these 10 Commandments, He summarizes them as love to God and love to the neighbor, but notice that He says that the first and great commandment is our love to God (Matthew 22:37–38). He’s saying that the first four commandments are the first priority. They are to be given first place, as the first things in the Christian’s mind. While we cannot expound in detail here the 10 Commandments, instead, I refer you to the lectures by Reverend A.T. Vergunst on the 10 Commandments. I encourage you to listen to them.

Before we pass on from this point, notice the reference, again, to the finger of God in Exodus 31 and elsewhere. John Owen says, “Once the mind of God had been reduced to writing, each mortal and individual man to whom the Scriptures may come has God speaking to them no less directly than if he were hearing God speaking with His own voice to them, exactly as did Adam when he heard the voice of the Lord in the garden.”

Lastly, we need to consider the relevance of the law for today in order to connect the dots and help you situate the Moral Law within the big picture. We’ll lastly consider a few theological implications of the Moral Law for today. First of all, something about Christ and the law. What we discover is that the Lord Jesus Christ upheld and fulfilled the law. He reinforced the fact that the Moral Law was permanent and that He did not come to abrogate it. Notice the words of Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, verses 17 to 19. Jesus says, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. 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. Whosoever therefore shall break one of the least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.’”

Then, in that same chapter, Jesus goes on to expound the 10 Commandments and to refute the Pharisees' distortion, their version of the law, but notice that He does not lessen the demands of the law. He strengthens them by showing that the original and right intention of the law applied to the heart, and not just the hand. It applies to our secret thoughts and motives, not just our outward actions. Christ, after all, was the Law-giver. He's the one at Mount Sinai Who's giving the Law to His people. The Lord Jesus Christ is the One who comes and keeps the law during His earthly ministry. Indeed, Christ subjects Himself to the curse of the law on behalf of His people, or we could say much more. But the law makes Christ more precious to us. He perfectly and fully obeyed all the Law's precepts for His people. We are united to Him Who did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

In the New Testament, Jesus and Paul confront the distortions of the use of the Moral Law. They're defending and upholding the right use of it. So, Paul, after refuting the use of the law as a means of justification, the idea that if I obey the law I can earn favor with God, wants us to be clear that we don't throw the law out altogether. He says in Romans 3 verse 31, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law." That brings us to consider the Christian and the Moral Law. We see something in the Bible of the believer's love for the Law of God.

In the Old Testament, the psalmist says, "Oh, how I love thy law. It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97). We read in Psalm 1, "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night." We read, "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success." Those are God's words to Joshua in chapter 1.

Well, it's no wonder, if the law is showing us about God, and if the law is the pattern that God is shaping us into, of course, His people will delight in it; and so, it's no surprise we find the identical language in the New Testament. Paul writing in Romans 7 says, "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (verse 12). He goes on later, "For we know that the law is spiritual" (verse 14), and again, "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (verse 22). He sounds like the psalmist. Elsewhere, we read in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 1 verse 8, "But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully." John speaks to this in 1 John 5 verse 3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to review very quickly the uses of the law. Historically, the church has identified three primary uses. The first use of the Moral Law of God is in restraining wickedness and maintaining order in the world. This is referred to as the civil use of the law. The proclamation of the law serves as a restraining influence against sin and the world. The second use of the law is in God revealing sin and terrifying the conscience. He awakens us to our neediness and drives us to Christ. This is referred to as the theological use of the law. This brings man under conviction of sin and makes him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of God's law. Thus, the law is, in Paul's words, the tutor, a school master to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). This continues to be true for the believer in his sanctification, as well as for the unbeliever in [his] conversion.

The third use of the law is given to instruct believers, those who are redeemed, and how to live a life of godliness out of love and gratitude for their redemption. This is referred to as the rule of life for the believer. This directs us to our duties as well as to the sins which we must put to death and avoid. It shows us what righteous living looks like. Our motivation for loving and keeping the law is one of gratitude and love for the redemption we have in the Lord Jesus. That love is demonstrated by obedience, and the standard of obedience is God's character as seen in the law. The law is a restrainer. The law is a revealer of sin, and the law is a rule of life. It does all of these things and more for us. It helps you understand, doesn't it, the relationship of law and gospel?

The law drives us to Christ in the Gospel, and then, the Gospel drives us back to the law as a rule of life for the believer. Both Law and Gospel are a means of grace in the Scriptures. Obedience to the law was never a means of justification. The law and the gospel work together, and they must not be separated. Well, in conclusion, we have seen that the giving of the Law at Sinai came within the context of Redemption: God revealing to His chosen people both Himself and the pattern for living according to His holiness. In the next lecture, we will turn to consider the instructions God gave at Sinai regarding the tabernacle. What we will discover is a treasure trove of gospel truth.