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# VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

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## LECTURE 3: PARADISE AND 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*

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## **TEN COMMANDMENTS**

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***REV. A.T. VERGUNST***

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## Lecture 3

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# PARADISE AND THE LAW

No words can picture the beauty and joy Adam and Eve experienced in Paradise. But likewise, no words can describe the destruction caused by the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God. It has ruptured the core of our being and distorted every view of God and ourselves as well as of God's law. This fall of mankind was no accidental slip. It was the conscious and wicked rejection of God's holy and perfect law. But did Adam and Eve then know the Ten Commandments as we now have them? How did they know God's law? These questions will be explored in this third module about the Law of God.

### TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 3

Dear friends, what do you think of this statement? *To sin is to give God a slap in His face.* When I was young and I heard that statement, I felt that was a rather strong expression of defining sin. Yet, that has changed after I have explored the relationship between God and the law, and we have seen that they are inseparable. The law of God is the reflection of His very personhood, of Who He is, and therefore any transgression of His law is a personal disdain and dishonoring of His person. And therefore, think again. That statement in itself, though it is a little bit matter-of-fact, has a very good definition to it. Therefore, all sin is serious. All sin is offensive and grievous because it dishonors our great, majestic lawgiver in Who He essentially is. There is therefore no sin that you could define as a small sin, and Jesus brings this out very clearly in the Sermon on the Mount when He defines the commandments in a degree that was astonishing to his hearers. "Thou shalt not kill" is not just "you shall not murder," but "thou shalt not kill" also means you don't belittle someone by crushing his spirits and by spitting out angry words that destroy the person's mindset. So, the reverse is also true.

The reverse is that the smallest acts of devotional love are God-glorifying. If you take a street sweeper in a large city who daily, joyfully and faithfully, does his or her task in sweeping the streets, and he or she does it in a devotion to his neighbor's good, out of a heart full of love, then he is glorifying God in that simple act because he's honoring the person Who has given us the law. God looks at the heart. He looks at the motive. He looks at the purpose that moves the hand or that feeds the tongue. That is to Him the essential of law-keeping.

Today, we will take our thoughts to the law in the context of Paradise, the law in relationship to Adam and Eve. So, as we look at this subject, there are a couple questions that we could ask. What is the knowledge of the law as we know it? To Adam and Eve? To what level, to what extent, did they know the 10 Commandments as we know [them]? Or was the law for them limited to, well, 'be fruitful and multiply; dress the garden; replenish the earth; subdue, or fulfill, and develop it; or don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'? Or, was there more to their law knowledge than those few direct commandments that they have received? Was the law of God written on their hearts?

Now, to explore that question, let's make a quick mental trip to Athens, Mars Hill. Today on the Mars Hill, you can still see the magnificent remnants of the temple [that] Paul stood next to when he preached a sermon, the Areopagus. Now from an architectural viewpoint, this temple building was a magnificent accomplishment. Today, it's a ruin. Why this detour? From the ruins today, we can see something of the glory of the past. That's with that temple. That's also with you and me. Let's apply that principle to the question about Adam and Eve and the law of God.

When we look at men today, we look at the ruin of what we once were. We all know we don't live in Paradise. Open a newspaper or open a news site, and we hear every day the report of the factual evidences of what went wrong in Genesis 3 when mankind rebelled against the law of God. Men kill, steal, break promises, commit adultery, curse God, and die every day. And yet, though this world is in a terrible condition, it's still not hell. There are still many good and kind people in this world doing nice, beautiful things, even non-Christians, even those who don't know the Bible. Even those who do not have any relationship to God often live by *ought to*, or *I should do*, or even to a certain extent *I want to do good*. Where does that come from?

When we listen to the apostle Paul in Romans 2:14–15, he also noticed that non-Christian who don't know the law of God, never heard any part of the revealed will of God, yet are living with a sense of right and wrong, honor and dishonor. They have a conscience that is accusing them or excusing them. Sure, it's distorted. Sure, it is inconsistent. Yet, the ruins of today are a little clue about the glorious beauty of the past. So, what was the point in our human history that we weren't ruins, that we had a perfect knowledge, that we did reflect the law of God in perfection, without flaw?

Now clearly, in your Scriptures, that is before Genesis chapter 3, when we look at Genesis 1 and 2 in the picture that God there paints of Adam and Eve in Paradise. Let's turn to Genesis 1:26–27. We are described there by the author of Genesis as having been made in the likeness or the image of God. Let me read it, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." We are the crowning piece of God's creative work. We are unique. We were preceded by divine counsel, and we of all the creation were reflective of God's image.

So, what does that mean that we are created in His image and in His likeness? That means we are divinely designed to reflect or to mirror something of our Creator. Since God is a Spirit, therefore it's not our physical being that is in itself reflective of God's glory as the Creator. That's also clear from the fact that both male and female are made in the same image of God, and physically we are distinct, yet we bear the same image. So then, what is that image? What is that likeness of God in us? Simply, friends, we reflected God's character, [His] nature. In every aspect of our personhood, we reflected His law.

That's a deep thought that we need to capture. Adam and Eve were made in the image of God. Our spirituality, our morality, our rationality, our creativity, our ability to relate to God and to others all reflected devotional love in beautiful perfection. So, what were Adam and Eve then specifically like before they fell morally and ethically? That is now only the aspect I want to highlight in this lecture about the law.

Now, I can learn more details about Adam and Eve from the New Testament, in which the new creature is described in the apostle Paul's writings to the Ephesians and Colossians. Let me quote from Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10. "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). "And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10). Now, did you notice the three aspects? Knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And, all three words relate to the law of God. [These three aspects are the focus of God's recreating work for] restoring means. That's what it originally was. So, let's explore these three words for a moment: knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

God created us with the ability to know Him and His will: knowledge. God created us with the ability to serve in all what we purpose, think, and do: that's the word righteousness. Thirdly, God created us with the ability to love with a devotional intensity: that is holiness. So, to sum it up, we were designed to reflect our Creator in our being and in our doing: being who we were, doing what he asked us to do. We were equipped, we were adorned, we were enabled to be the communication, or the channel, to all creation of the love and the devotion and the goodness of the Creator according to God's law. We were, I may simply say, the hand and the feet of the law of God, and we were to distribute that, or to act it out and to live it out, in the creation as His representative.

So, how do they know this law then? There is no record in Genesis 1 and 2 that God gave them a lecture about the 10 Commandments, did He? No. We must conclude that God had written on their hearts the law of God as He promises to do again in the regenerating work that He does in His people spiritually. So, if the law was written on their heart, what law was written on their heart?

Let's listen to the words of the Lord Jesus again in Matthew 22:37–40 when He is confronted by the lawyer and is asked to give what is the greatest commandment. Here is His answer. He says, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord," that's a confession, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." And then He concludes, 'There is none other commandment greater than these: love.' Now notice how Jesus gave the answer to the lawyer about what is the greatest commandment.

There are some people who would say what Jesus gave in Matthew 22 [and Mark 12] is the summary of the ten commandments. Maybe you thought that too. I used to think that as well: it's a short version of Exodus 20. That's not correct. It is the original law that Jesus verbalizes that was given in Paradise to Adam and Eve. The 10 Commandments, friends, are a brief exposition of the original law: thou shalt love God, and thou shalt love thy neighbor. The law that Adam and Eve received in Paradise is expounded briefly in the 10 Commandments.

Now the Lord Jesus ended this remarkable statement and answer about the law of God to the lawyer with these words, "on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). Today we would include all the New Testament as well, but when Jesus spoke that obviously only, at that stage, the Old Testament was in existence. So, what does it mean, that statement? That means this: everything in the Scripture from the law of Moses to the prophetic sections into the New Testament is built upon, is anchored in, the original law of God that God gave to Adam and Eve, wrote on their heart, in Paradise. The Jews have an old saying that all the prophets stood at Mount Sinai and that all their prophecies are anchored into that law of Mount Sinai. Perhaps we can expand that statement and say that all mankind once stood in Paradise, in Adam, knowing the original law of our Creator.

Let's go back to Paradise. How did this law now function in the life of Adam and Eve? Well, when you read through the first chapters of Genesis, it brought perfect joy, harmony, peace. Why was that? Why was that character of Paradise defined in these three words? It's because they lived in a total obedience to the law of God. They were devoted in love to God with the great intensity of their being. Every fiber of their being was devoted to love God. Every imagination of that creative and genius mind was to love God. Every ounce of their physical strength was devoted to love God. Every minute of their waking hours was spent in loving God above all. And of course, that flowed out into their relationships to one another. Naturally, they loved each other with the most self-denying love. They served each other day and night, enjoyed the beauty of their relationship in a spiritual way, in a social way, in an emotional way, in a physical way, in a sexual way. All of that gave expression to "thou shalt love your neighbor as yourself." By doing this and by being like this, they abode in God's love, as Jesus brings out in John 15:10.

Let's meditate for a moment on these words of Jesus. He says, "If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." Notice Jesus abides in the love of His Father by keeping His commandments. Always those two are related, connected, from beginning to the end in the holy Scriptures. To *be* loving and to *do* loving is to live the law of God. Then we could ask a quick question, "But what about the test commandment in Genesis 2:16–17 not to eat of the tree?" This commandment, as well as the other commandments that are given in the context of Genesis 1 and 2 about being fruitful and multiply, keep the garden, manage and expand and develop the earth, they were indeed specific commandments, but we must not separate those from the original law of God to love Him and [our] neighbor.

The "don't eat from the tree" command (let's take that one specifically) was specifically designed as a symbolic reminder to Adam and Eve that they were bound to the law of God. It was to remind them that their authority was subject to the authority of God and that their liberty was also subject to the law of God. When Satan comes around on the scene, he tempts them. And, the essence of the temptation is 'if you eat of the tree, you shall be like God; you have the supreme authority, and you have the supreme liberty; you are no more limited by any commandments of the authority of God.' And indeed, they did. In the act of eating, they grasp for more

power and liberty than God had given them. They attempted, in essence, to rewrite the law according to their own authority. And by doing that, they made an attempt to dethrone the God of heaven and earth.

Yet, we may go one step further. Their obedience to this one symbolic command *not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil* was in essence the breaking of the entire spirit of the original law of God. And Adam and Eve broke, with that one deed, all ten commandments of the law as given on Mount Sinai.

Let me illustrate that briefly in conclusion. They broke the first in choosing to trust and honor a false god above the Lord God, their own Creator. In the second commandment, they broke the second commandment by honoring Satan's misrepresentation of God as being untrustful and unwilling to make them supremely happy and to worship Him according as God had commanded. They broke the third in breaking the covenant vow to God, and in doing so, they desecrated His holy name and His image in which they were created. They broke the fourth as they shattered the Sabbath day rest, or the rest symbolized on the Sabbath day that existed in the relationship between God and them. They broke the fifth when they dishonored their heavenly Parent in casting off His authority. And what was the result? Their days were not prolonged in the land of the living. They broke the sixth in massacring the entire human race when Adam indeed, as the representative of us all, acted in rebellion. As well, they committed spiritual suicide. They broke the seventh by committing spiritual adultery with God's adversary as well as destroying the beauty of their own relationship as husband and wife, as can be clearly seen in Genesis 3. They broke the eighth by stealing from the tree that God had forbidden them to eat from. They broke the ninth by indirectly bearing false witness against God as they believed the devil's lie to be the truth above God's word. And clearly, they broke the tenth when they coveted a new position to be like God, rather than to be satisfied and content with the position God had given them as the head of the creation and the stewards of the earth.

So, let's reflect one more moment with a lingering looking back at this beautiful, glorious beginning. The chief beauty of Adam and Eve, dear friends, was their beauty of holiness. Their life shone with the glory of love in everything they did, every act, every word, every motive was a ray of the glorious love of God shining through their very being. There was no impurity of thought. There was no misspoken word. There was never miscommunication causing friction. There was no straining their relationship due to selfishness or sinful anger, or pride, or unwillingness. That was a supreme happiness. Their experience with God and with each other was beautiful beyond description. Why? Because they lived as holy, devoted, obedient humans in relationship with God and each other.

The call to honor God was not a heavy task for Adam and Eve. Their conscience had nothing to do but to approve every deed they did and feast upon their obedience unto God's law. They knew no shame. They knew no fear. They knew no sorrow. They didn't need a blushing in their face. They lived a life of pure delight and unsullied pleasure in the context of the holy beauty of loving God and loving each other. Their greatest pleasure was not the surrounding Paradise. The greatest pleasure of this original couple of mankind was [that] they walked with God and with each other in the total beauty of harmony, relationship of love. We need to deeply reflect on the stately beginning of us men.

If you compare that brilliant beginning to the ruins of today, that ought to make us blush. That ought to humble us. That ought to shame us, what we have done with God's glorious beginning. The facts are facts. We caused our own ruin. There was no design flaw in us to lead us into our fall. Fact is fact. Besides, what we ruined, we cannot repair. However, let's not make the wrong conclusion. Though we have disabled ourselves today to obey the law of God perfectly, that doesn't mean that God has canceled the law. He has not taken that law away. It endures forever, and if the Bible would end here, where we are today, then it would be a hopeless reality.

But, praise God, our fall became the occasion for God to reveal more of His greatness as He unfolds the gospel message in Jesus Christ, the last Adam. And, I then propose that in the next session we will look first at this last Adam and His relationship to the law of God. Thank you.