

Ten Commandments of Bible Interpretation

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Fully revised and updated, 1999

Introduction

Every Christian should agree that the splintering of the church into warring factions is not the Lord's idea. How can it be stopped? How can it be reversed?

A popular answer today is "Deeds, not creeds! Doctrines divide!" Be nice if it worked. Unfortunately, as the sainted Dr. Siegbert Becker of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary remarked,

What happens in the ecumenical movement is that they emphasize everything they agree on, which is almost nothing, and de-emphasize everything they disagree on, which is almost everything, until the sum total of their beliefs can be stated in two sentences: "Love thy neighbor and be kind to animals."

God's answer is that the source of division is not creeds, but false creeds — false doctrine. The source of false doctrine is Bible misinterpretation. To aid the church toward a true ecumenical movement, I offer the Ten Commandments of Bible Interpretation. You may look at that ambitious title and think: "This clown thinks he's found Mount Sinai!" But read them and see for yourself whether they are not only Biblical, but so obviously true that even an atheist would probably agree that this is the way to read the Bible if you want to know what the Bible — rather than a human theologian — has to say. Read them and see for your self whether these methods of interpretation are not the methods the Bible itself, and Jesus Himself, use.

The First Commandment

Thou shalt not take out of context.

Members of my first church told the story about how some Jehovah's Witnesses came around to see them while their pastor was at the house. He listened to the way they ripped Bible passages out of context and left them with the entrails hanging, and said, "Give me that Bible." He opened it and read, "Judas went and hanged himself, Mt. 27:5 Go and do thou likewise, Lk. 10:37 And what thou doest, do quickly! — John 13:27."

This shows that you can prove anything by taking passages out of context. Charles H. Spurgeon, for instance, was guilty of this one: When he disapproved of the fashionable “topknot” hairstyle, he preached on part of Matthew 27:17: “Topknot, come down!” The entire verse reads, “Let him who is on the house top not come down to take anything out of his house.” Other classics misuse are Ps. 14:1, “There is no God,”¹

Mt. 5:43, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy,”² and Php. 2:12, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”³

It should be obvious that God does not want His words twisted in this manner. If you did it to anyone else but the Lord, you would be risking a black eye. In any case, you twist the words “to your own destruction,” 1 Peter 3:16.

Speaking of taking things out of context — these hot summer nights I need about a quart of really cold vodka to sleep. Yes sir, I keep it in a hot-water bottle in the freezer and put it into my pillow. Otherwise my pillow gets soaked; it’s the only way I can sleep. But how would it sound if you went around telling people, “Pastor K. can’t sleep at night without a quart of cold vodka!”?

Some religious bodies raise money by promising that the more we give to God the more He must give back, Malachi 3:8–10. Checking the nearer and wider context and the idioms of the language shows that God here promises only to make it rain and give us such great opportunities to work that we won’t be able to do it all. Besides which this promise was spoken to the Jews, not to the Christian church.

Mormons add to their blasphemies the teaching that Jesus was a polygamist on the basis of John 11:5 which says that He loved Mary and Martha. The same sentence says “and Lazarus.” Case closed; the Mormons are false prophets.

The Second Commandment

Thou shalt not take passages in isolation.

In the winter of 1980, TV stations showed a demonstrator picketing mass murderer Stephen Judy’s prison with a sign that said, “Thou Shalt Not Kill” to protest his execution. To refresh your memory, Judy tricked a kind-hearted woman into stopping to help him with faked car trouble. He raped and murdered her in front of her three small children, then held each child under water until they drowned. This was only the last of his many sex crimes. He was never the least bit sorry.

The picketers made the mistake of taking passages in isolation. They ignored Genesis 9:6, “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed,” the fact that “a man after God’s own heart” killed Goliath, and St. Paul’s agreement that some sins are worthy of death, Acts 25:11. We are even commanded to

¹The fool said in his heart, there is no God.

²You have heard it said by them of old time, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy.” But I say unto you, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that spitefully use you and persecute you.

³Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

support governments that “bear the sword,” Romans 13:4. They are called “servants of God.” Roman swords were not very useful as billy clubs. Their main use was in stabbing. Case closed.

To understand a doctrine, collect all the passages that speak about it. Just read through the Bible and write them down. Then you can organize them in the proper order. If you don’t have the time, sell your TV. If you don’t have the ability, then spend a few bucks on the book that has already done most of the work for you. Luther’s Catechism has gathered all the passages on all the chief doctrines of Scripture, stirred them together, and boiled them down to their essence. In my seminary library there were, at last count, some 30,000 books to help us understand the Bible. All of them put together are not worth as much as the Small Catechism. Far better than all other religious books, the Catechism gives a balanced presentation of Scripture. Each doctrine is presented there in just the right order exactly its proper weight and emphasis as found in the Bible. Lutherans don’t use Luther’s Catechism because it is Luther’s. We use it because it’s the best.

The Third Commandment

The Third Commandment stems from the second, and is like unto it: **Thou Shalt let the Bible interpret the Bible.** (*Scriptura sui ipso interpret*, one of Luther’s main contributions to theology.) Let’s look at that word “interpret” for a minute.

To “interpret” means to explain the meaning of a statement. (Such as, for instance, “I saw a one-legged man begging on the street, so I gave him a good sock.”) Some statements need no interpretation: “You Thief!” has an obvious meaning, but “He’s a good man” means different things depending on whether a wife, a boss, a neighbor, or a theologian is talking, and needs interpretation to be clear. Another example: “I’m sure the next pastor won’t be as good as you are.” Meaning: “Every pastor we’ve had here has been worse than the previous one.”

Some people insert their own interpretations into Scripture, as for instance the Jewish socialist whose interpretation of several stories from Genesis was “You can never trust an employer.”

Likewise, there are some Bible passages that need no interpreting. They interpret themselves. They are so crystal clear that it is impossible to twist them into meaning something else. now, when I say “clear,” I do not mean “easy to understand.” I mean “impossible to *mis*-understand.” All the “interpretation necessary is to say: “It means what it says.” For example, “No man, nor an angel from heaven, knows when the Son of Man will return.” Only the height of theological arrogance could have led someone to write a book like “88 Reasons why the World will End in 1988.” Even Christ Himself, without using His divine nature, did not know when the world would come to an end, but Jehovah’s Witnesses have predicted the end four different times.

On the other hand, many passages are not so clear. They can be explained

in two or more ways. My third Commandment just says that a related clear passage is the only thing that can decide which of several meanings an unclear passage can have, by ruling out wrong interpretations.

Unfortunately, most Christians reject this Commandment. The Roman Catholic equivalent — ignoring 2 Pt. 1:21, which tells us that “No Scripture is of any private interpretation,” (KJV) — would be, “Thou shalt let the Pope interpret the Bible.” This deserves much attention, so permit an excursus.

Years ago the Wall Street Journal condensed the career of the typical great man into a single sentence: He creates an original concept and devotes his life to working out its implications into the furthest nooks and crannies of his area of influence.

Very well. I’m certainly not a great man — too erratic — but can do greater work than otherwise by emulating great men. And here in my midlife I discovered the original concept that is helping the Ukrainian Lutheran Church become one of the fastest growing Lutheran missions in this century.

Of course all I can offer is a slight improvement on a single one of Luther’s great concepts. But I think it is indeed an improvement on Luther, at least in our situation; and I think he would have applauded and used it himself had it applied to his situation.

Luther said “*Scriptura sui ipso interpret,*” which is just the Latin original for “You shall interpret Scripture by Scripture itself.” And by Scripture alone!

I could not have improved on that as long as I lived in the West.

But coming to Eastern Europe, that is one of the first things you notice is that the pope doesn’t cut near as much ice here as he does in the West. Here, you hear more about the Patriarch. (The fact that there are several lesser patriarchs doesn’t change the equation. They essentially speak with one voice, and the Patriarch of Istanbul is only first among equals.)

The Interpreter: Pope, Patriarch, or Paper?

Pope and Patriarch have the same religious functions: to govern the church, and to be the official interpreter of Scripture. We can disregard church governance in this essay; Luther was willing to allow to the pope outward governance of the church as a visible institution if only he wouldn’t insist on interpreting Scripture against itself and obscuring the Gospel. So the pope’s essential function is as official interpreter of Holy Writ. On his own authority, he tells you what God had in mind.

For centuries, people in this part of the world have been divided over the question of whom to accept as official interpreter of Scripture and answerer of religious questions. Pope or Patriarch? Who to believe? Who to obey?

Is there a purgatory or not? The pope says yes. The patriarch does not, although Orthodox also pray for the dead. Whom to believe? Who has the authority? Pope or Patriarch?

Moving to the East changed the way I think.

As long as the question is, “Shall we believe the Pope or not?” it was an easy one to answer.

As soon as the question becomes, “Shall we believe Pope or Patriarch,” the question changes radically.

Because, as Isaac Asimov pointed out in his coruscatingly brilliant sci-fi novel *The Gods Themselves*, once you leave singularity and admit a second possibility you have to ask whether there is a third. Or a fourth... or a tenth or a hundredth or a thousandth.

This is when a fundamental flash of insight struck me:

John Paul II is pope for Roman Catholicism,
the Patriarch is pope for the Orthodox,
John Calvin is pope for the classical Presbyterian,
John Wesley is pope for the Methodists,
Roger Williams is pope for the Baptists,

and the founder of every Protestant sect is pope for his confession. His system of theology or his theological peculiarity interpret Scripture for his followers.

Among Pentecostals, practically every pastor is pope of his congregation. Some Pentecostals, and all liberals, are pope in the shrine of their own sovereign hearts.

But this brings up the inevitable question: Is Martin Luther pope of the Lutherans?

No one who has read much of Luther could answer yes to that question. Neither he nor the system of theology he formulated authoritatively interpret what the Bible means.

Note that word “authoritatively.”

The only authority in Lutheranism is the authority of the Word itself. Luther’s principles of interpretation are derived from Scripture, not imposed on it. My own “Ten Commandments of Bible Interpretation” were taken from specific instances where Christ used a principle of interpretation to interpret Scripture.

In other words, Luther’s teachings had meaning for his followers only because Luther came up with convincing Scriptures to demonstrate his points.

Likewise today, no Lutheran pastor, professor, theologian, bishop, college president, synod president, seminary rector or publisher or editor has any spiritual authority other than the authority to speak first and last and quote Scripture in between. If the Scripture he quotes is unconvincing, or if he has no Scripture to quote, everyone else is free to disregard him.

Is Luther the pope of the Lutherans?

No.

Who then is?

You might think, “The Lutheran confessions.”

Not so.

Please permit an illustration at this point.

Where you have a pope, you have a railroad track. Scripture is one rail and the pope is the other and although the pope says “I go in the same direction as

Scripture,” in fact Scripture must and will be bent to go in the same direction as the pope, because the Pope has a voice and the Scripture has to be read. Every pope, Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant, therefore directs and is thus above Scripture. Every pope claims to be parallel and equal to Scripture, but in fact he is superior to it, because it must follow where he leads.

The Lutheran Confessions, however, do not relate to Scripture as one railroad rail relates to another.

The Lutheran Confessions relate to Scripture as a balustrade relates to a staircase. The stairs were there first. The stairs can carry you upwards; the balustrade can not. The sole function of the balustrade is to *keep you on the stairs*. And that they do.

So the Lutheran Confessions are not our pope. Nor is Luther.

Who then is?

Here is my slight improvement on Luther. I quote it almost on a daily basis as I teach my students and parishioners. “The Bible is its own pope.” Or, if you’d rather have it in this form, “The Word of God is all the pope we need.” Or, “God is His own pope.”

During the debates between Luther and Eck, Eck castigated Luther for the “black pope” of ink on paper that Luther was proposing. Professor Kurt Marquart quoted him as saying, “Give us a fine, a living pope!”

Ever since that time Lutherans have been running scared from the charge that we have made of the Bible a paper pope. This charge is quoted in Pieper’s Dogmatics, and a refutation is therein attempted. Several of my fellow seminarians wrote papers on the topic, in which they attempted to prove that the Bible was not a paper pope.

That was a matter of judgment. I think that they were mistaken, and so was Pieper.

We *do* have a paper pope. Or, rather, we have a *certain* pope. Rome has a highly uncertain and changeable pope, which the many contradictions between popes amply demonstrate. Praise the Lord that John Paul II has rejected the heresy that St. Mary be venerated as Co-Redemptrix; but who’s to say that some future pope won’t reverse John Paul? It’s happened before! Even though John Paul II is right, he’s right for the wrong reason, and it reinforces the bad precedent of papal infallibility. So even when he’s right he’s wrong, and the next pope may do to Mary what John Paul couldn’t.

Likewise, the bellicose Patriarch of Athens may find himself locked in controversy soon with the Patriarch of Istanbul over Greco-Turkish politics. The patriarchs of Kiev and Moscow don’t always see eye to eye. And pope and Patriarch have contradicted each other often enough.

But our certain, definite, paper pope never contradicts itself. Nor can it; because all its “papal pronouncements” have already been made and time-tested for self-consistency. They are not constantly added to by new bulls, decrees and rulings. They exist in a single book of 1200 chapters which has been complete and consistent for nineteen centuries. During that same period millions have sought in vain for untruth, self-contradictions and internal or external inconsistency.

Accepting the Bible as our paper pope, rather than fleeing from the charge as somehow discreditable, enables us to present our faith to the world as something completely unique in Christendom:

Lutherans, and only Lutherans — in fact, only confessional Lutherans — have a *closed system of theology*.

All other confessions have open systems. All other confessions allow some human being the authority to tell us what God must have had in mind. Only Lutherans have a closed system of theology in which only God is allowed to do so.

Now, mind you — our system of proving what one part of Scripture means by adducing another part of Scripture is not unique. All denominations use it at least part of the time, because it is so obviously the correct one. Nobody, for example, denies that Peter was one of the Twelve.

Some denominations use it most of the time and only lay it aside when it teaches something that human reason just can't swallow, such as the Real Presence of Christ in Holy Communion. By doing this, of course they show that their pope is the human reason of their founder.

But confessional Lutheranism attempts to let the Bible be its own pope all the time, and the purest Lutheranism will be that synod of Lutheranism that does this most consistently.

Whenever my students ask a difficult question, I gain time to think by reciting the formula, "Well, let's let the Bible be its own pope." Sometimes this leads me to completely new but heretofore hidden Biblical knowledge, for instance, that Thomas doubted because he had an identical twin brother. (This knowledge was not lost in the East, where Thomas is not called "Didymus" but "the Twin." It stems from the fact that his name is "Twin" in both languages and is translated from language to language, rather than transliterated. Names don't translate. Nicknames, however, can be carried from language to language. His experience as a twin led him to be more suspicious than the others of cases of uncertain identity, and to demand tactile and not just visual evidence.)

Usually it just leads us to the treasures of our Lutheran heritage.

In any case, the philosophical consistency and elegant simplicity of this system of theology is enormously appealing to Ukrainians, who are not strange foreigners with barbarous ways but the genteel poor — mostly educated, neatly-dressed, extremely polite and cultured people who are looking for divine verities and increasingly find them in the Ukrainian Lutheran Church.

Most churches are satisfied not to be shrinking and delighted with a straight-line graph of growth. Our growth graph was straight-line at first but has since become exponential.

When I was here alone, we added a worshiper a week to our attendance. When Joel Rakos took over my parish in Ternopil to give me more time for the seminary, the other parish I founded started to grow at one per week and the Ternopil parish continued to grow at one per week. And when in the incredibly short time of five years and nine months the first Ukrainian pastors were graduated from St. Sophia Seminary, which was founded one day without forethought, growth approximately doubled again. We are now adding four or

five worshipers a week to the total in the dozen cities we serve. When these congregations send young men to the seminary, that growth curve should continue to move exponentially, to the greater glory of God.

Is this an improvement on Luther?

If we are saying exactly what he said, but saying it better in our circumstances, then yes.

And this improvement is based on one simple proposition: The word of God (which teaches the Gospel of Christ) is all the pope we need. No human need apply.

Protestants make the founder of their particular sect their pope. His system of Bible interpretation and his or her peculiar teachings are allowed to interpret and even overrule clear Scripture, as in the Adventist attempt to re-establish the Sabbath despite Colossians 2:16–17. Adventists are good people — there are none better and many not as good — but their Sabbath doctrine is untenable and is only taught because Ellen G. White is their pope.

Protestants generally also make man the supreme pope over Scripture; their only disagreement is on which man, and they usually interpret the Scriptures as the founder of their particular sect did. For many people, the equivalent rule would be, “Thou shalt let thy reason interpret the Bible.” The Election Controversy illustrates Protestant interpretation.

One finds oneself disagreeing with the highest human authorities when one accepts this Commandment. There is more theology in the ten-volume Theological Dictionary of the New Testament than I could get into my head if I spent the rest of my life studying it, and yet they are clearly in error on a key passage. Jesus prophesied that the Gospel would be preached in the whole world (οἰκουμένη) and then would the end come. The T.D.N.T. says that in all other passages, οἰκουμένη means the known world, the Mediterranean area and its environs, but in this passage it must mean the earth. Nope. Sorry. The word means what it means and what it means is that as soon as the Word got around the known world of the time, the Lord was perfectly capable of returning. And this is how the early church understood it; this is why the Thessalonians were quitting their jobs and lying around waiting like Millerites for the Lord to return. They knew that as soon as the Gospel had gotten around the Mediterranean Basin the Lord could return at any time. His return does not hang on finding every isolated tribe still lost in the Stone Age and telling them about Jesus.

Reason And Logic As Pope: Calvin and Arminius

There are basically two kinds of Protestants: Calvinist and Arminian. Calvin found all the Scriptures that say if you go to heaven, it is because God chose you. He concluded, logically, that if you do not go to heaven, it is because God did not choose you. This makes God responsible for damnation, and so horrifies most people that few Calvinists believe it anymore.

Arminius went at it from the opposite direction. Arminius found all the Scriptures that say if you go to hell, it is because you choose to do evil. He

concluded, logically, that if you do not go to hell, it is because you did not choose to do evil, that is, you did not reject Christ.

Logically speaking, you either have to be a Calvinist or an Arminian. On the doctrine of election there is no other reasonable alternative. Lutheran doctrine is unreasonable and logically impossible. Lutheran doctrine is half Calvinist, half Arminian — it ignores the logical conclusions and sticks with the Scriptures that each collected. Lutheranism accepts the paradox.

So Lutherans conclude that if a man goes to heaven, it is because God chose him; but if a man goes to hell, it is because man chose to do evil. If you tried to run the Lutheran doctrine through a computer, you'd burn out the logic circuits. We are unreasonable; we are illogical — but we are trying to be Scriptural. We take Calvin's Scriptures and Arminius' Scriptures and let both stand. God has no part in man's choice of damnation; man has no part in God's choice for salvation. We interpret Scripture by Scripture — not by human reason, not by human authority. The conservative Lutheran could describe his church as "The Church of the naked Bible." No human reason or human authority is allowed to cover it. However, we will say that God's judgment is not arbitrary or evil, because those who chose to do evil would want to continue to do evil for all eternity. Those who cry out to Jesus like the Thief on the Cross were thereby saying that they want nothing more for all eternity than the ability to do good and serve God. It is not arbitrary when God saves someone in view of an eternity of future good works.

From this Commandment, we draw three corollaries. First, *we find our doctrines in the clear passages*. In the *Christian News Encyclopedia* (Volume II, p. 1315), I tried to demonstrate that the number 144,000 in Revelation does not mean that only 144,000 are going to heaven. Rather, it means "Whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved, but whoever does not believe shall be damned." However, I did not find that doctrine of salvation by faith alone in Revelation; I found it in Mark 16, Ephesians 2, and Romans 3.

Secondly, *we find our doctrines in the passages that were written to reveal those doctrines*. We call such passages the "seats of doctrine." The seat of doctrine for the Vicarious Atonement is Isaiah 53, not some parable that might mean one of a dozen things. The seat of doctrine for the Humiliation and Exaltation of Christ is Philippians 2, not the scattered unclear one-liners like "The Father is greater than I" (Jn. 14:28) that Jehovah's Witnesses are so fond of. In that case Philippians 2 is the foundation, Jn. 14:28 is the trim. If you put the trim in place before the foundation is firm, someone who walks into your house will fall through a hole in the floor and break his neck.

The fifth corollary of this Commandment: *Let the Bible say what it wants to say!* In other words, if the passage wants to be taken literally, take it literally. But if it wants to be taken as picture language, take it as picture language. And don't mix up the two.

For instance, there isn't a hint in any of the Last Supper texts that Jesus is using picture language. When He says "This *is* My body," we can't interpret that to mean "This represents My body," unless you want the freedom to change is into represents anyplace you feel like it. Then the Bible would fall into a mass

of contradictions and human opinions.

Contradictions? Yes, contradictions. Because when a Protestant “interprets” the words “This is My body,” he says “This is my body” means “This is not my body.”

Yep. “This is” means “This is not.”

That’s not interpretation. That’s denial. And it explains why Protestantism has splintered so badly over the centuries. Where that much freedom to “interpret” is allowed, virtually any teaching, including cultic teaching, is possible.

Similarly, you can’t change picture language to literal language just because it suits you. Revelation 20 drips with picture language. Many Protestants want to take the thousand years literally. But if they do that, then they have to take every thing else literally. They have to believe that there is a literal bottomless pit here on earth and that the angel got a literal chain, padlock, and key, maybe from Sears Roebuck, to tie up Satan with. Since a spirit can pass through walls and solid rock, that’s a good trick. If we let the Bible say what it wants to say we will see that the thousand years does not mean a thousand years. Just as the chain and lock are spiritual, so the thousand years are spiritual. They mean a period of perfection (the proof can be found in the article The 144,000 mentioned above) and represents the Church age, from Pentecost to Judgment Day. Fundamentalist rhetoric about a “literal interpretation of the Bible” sounds good, but you can’t interpret picture language literally. If you do, you have to believe that Jesus, the True Vine (Jn. 15:1) has leaves and tendrils. And grapes.

Many stories about the great saints of Scripture are unclear, i.e., have two possible meanings. Luther correctly pointed out that the patriarchs deserve the benefit of the doubt. So, for instance, when you wonder whether Joseph was using good judgment to tell his brothers his prophetic dreams about the day when they would all bow down before him, the answer is emphatically “Yes.” He had the word of God and had an obligation to proclaim it. Even Saul may have repented in the end, and suicided not as a final act of unbelief but to spare Israel the terrible political costs of having their anointed king in Philistine hands, and to get out of David’s way.

Fourth corollary: *Where two interpretations seem equally likely you choose the one that doesn’t need outside information.* For example, it is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Are we to believe unsupported allegations by synergistic theologians that there once was a low gate in the Jerusalem wall called “the Needle’s Eye”? It is far better to choose the interpretation that it is impossible for *anyone*, rich or poor, to enter the kingdom of God without God’s grace, because that makes excellent sense, fits the context, and doesn’t require that we believe some historian who may have postulated something that never happened. “The camel was the largest animal in Palestine. Jesus used the vivid contrast between the largest animal and the smallest opening to illustrate the impossibility for those who trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. Salvation comes only through dependence on God.” (The Plain Truth, January 1996, p 29.)

If arguments seem to be of equal weight on both sides, try interpreting the passage both ways and see where it leads you. A good example is Psalm 121,

where we don't know whether the opening thought is a question or a statement — the original has no punctuation. "I will lift mine eyes up unto the hills. From whence cometh my help?" There are several hills and mountains in the Holy Land that cause us fear. The Psalm was Psalm of Degrees and sun on the way up to Jerusalem, through mountains that could have hidden a thousand bandits such as those whose dirty work the Good Samaritan undid. Other mountains lead us to seek help, such as Mount Sinai which condemns us. And then there is Mount Moriah, where Abraham was at first told the price of sin was the life of his own son by his own hand. And then the moral laws of the Sermon on the Mount condemn my sins and myself. Maybe Ps. 121:1 should have a question mark.

There are other "hills from whence my help cometh." First is Mount Carmel, where the Lord is shown to be God and the majority is shown to be nothing. On the Mount of Transfiguration we learn that instead of the Law and the Prophets, we are to listen to Jesus. On the Mount of Olives we find Someone who would drink the bitterest cup to the dregs for us. Mount Zion lifted up the Temple and the Most Holy Place where atonement could be acquired. Back to Mount Moriah where we first see the principle of substitution allowing an innocent victim to take our place on the altar of slaughter. And some scholars suggest that Mount Moriah was later known as Mount Calvary, where that same principle was most perfectly carried out.

The original Hebrews knew how to punctuate it. But maybe the Lord knew that the church would forget whether this passage was a question or a statement, and arranged it so that preachers could have a good sermon outline whether they interpret Psalm 121 as a question, as a statement, or — most usefully — both.

Similarly, all the centurions mentioned in the four Gospels must be either one man or two. Since the Bible doesn't settle the issue we can interpret it either way and see where it leads us. About the only time that I can say a sermon held an audience spellbound was when I interpreted it the former way, so I naturally favor it. But I would not hereticize the interpreter who maintains that there were two as long as he cut me the same slack. I'm not the pope.

Some questions have to remain open. Did Judas participate in the Lord's Supper or not? We don't know. Therefore, we can't use Judas as a reason to close Communion to those we know to be secret hypocrites. Better perhaps to greet them as they come forward, not with "Take, eat," but with "Friend, wherefore art thou come?"

The Fourth Commandment

The Fourth Commandment stems from the third. If we let Scripture interpret Scripture by letting the clear passages determine which of several meanings an unclear passage may bear, then it follows that **Thou shalt not find contradictions in the Bible**. God is not the author of confusion, 1 Cor. 14:33. Therefore, if you think you have found a contradiction, all that proves is that you haven't understood one or both of the passages. This answers questions

such as, Were there pairs of animals or sevens of them on the Ark? Two angels at the grave of Christ, or one?

The pattern for Bible “contradictions” is found in Proverbs 26:4-5. “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” Now, if those two sentences were recorded in separate Bible books, they would seem to be a clear case of contradiction. But their nearness to each other tells us instead that the sacred writer wants us to draw some extremely fine distinctions, in his case, telling us when and when not to speak up before egotistic know-it-alls.

The process of solving apparent contradictions is the way in which we find much hidden truth. God has loaded His 1200 chapters with more material than 1200 libraries have any right to contain. I have gotten some of my best sermons out of solving apparent contradictions. For instance: The two accounts of the Cleansing of the Temple seem to contradict each other. Did Jesus say, “Make not My Father’s house a house of merchandise,” Jn. 2:16, or did He say, “My house shall be called the house of prayer but you made it a den of thieves,” Mt. 21:13? In fact, He said both — once at the beginning of His ministry, as a warning; once at the end, as an announcement of God’s judgment.

One of the surest ways of proving a doctrine false is by showing that it makes the Bible contradict itself.

It should be self-evident that when the Old and New Testaments disagree, the New Testament must prevail. Think of the Old Testament as you think of the American Articles of Confederation, in force between 1777 and 1789. Our Constitution developed on the Articles as a foundation and contains some of their material. But where the Constitution contradicts the Articles the Articles must give way. So it is with the Old and New Testaments. Later revelation is more exact than earlier, just as high school physics had more authority than grade school science, just as the prophecies of Christ became ever clearer with time.

What should you do when you find a contradiction? Almost always, you will find that that contradiction is not between one Scripture and another but between a Scripture and *your theology*.

Most theologians act like I did when I was repairing my motorcycle. I took the blasted thing almost completely apart before I found the problem and fixed it, then had to put it back together. When I was done I had several parts left over. In stead of taking the motorcycle apart and making them fit, I quite naturally, in my arrogance, assumed that I knew more than a bunch of “Jap” engineers and simply threw the pieces in the bolt bucket. Apparently those pieces weren’t essential, because the motorcycle worked until I sold it. But the word of God isn’t a Honda. When you find a single Scripture that contradicts your theology, it’s essential to tear your theology completely apart and rebuild it from the ground up until you can make that Scripture fit. If your theology contradicts a single Scripture, start over! So if, for example, you are a Baptist like Kenneth Taylor translating the Living Bible, and you find that “these are they who believe for awhile, and then in time of temptation fall away,” accept that fact and throw out your Calvinist theology. Don’t translate the passage

“These are they that sort of believe for awhile.” If they “sort of believe” they’ll only “sort of” be damned and you’ll need to re-invent Purgatory and Limbo.

The Fifth Commandment

Thou shalt remember that the Bible was written in foreign languages. This should be self-evident, and yet when Herbert W. Armstrong was alive he attempted to equate Saxons with Isaac’s-sons (pronounced beNEY yitzKHAAK in Hebrew) and to find the name Armstrong in Ps. 89:10.

Your translation is not the Bible. This is forgotten by those dear ignoramuses who call their Bible the “Saint James Version” and not the “King James Version.” We pity them when they fail to see that “Jesus” is actually Joshua in Hebrews 4:8. They do not realize that by elevating the King James Version to canonical status they are doing what they condemn Roman Catholicism for doing: letting its “authorized translation,” the Vulgate, over rule the original Greek and Hebrew.

The original Greek and Hebrew are the Bible. But you say, I can’t read Greek or Hebrew. How can I be sure?

Just remember that a translation is a witness. If you want to be sure of anything, ask two or three witnesses. Although I read both Greek and Hebrew, I can get almost as much information — sometimes more — out of a four column Bible. You should however, try to find a church body where the original languages are carefully studied. After all, the pastor is a man of the Book. He should be an expert in that Book. Take for example the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. You don’t have to agree with their theology to see that their Biblical-languages program is outstanding. Most of its pastors have studied Greek for seven years and Hebrew for five. This is a little different from the Jehovah’s Witness policy training their “ministers” in seven words of Greek and five of Hebrew to confuse simple Christians with.

Since translations are witnesses, choose reliable ones. For example: The Living Bible makes a nice story book for children, but I wish I could trust it as far as I can throw it. (I threw mine quite some distance once, when Kenneth Taylor translated “Those who believe for awhile” as “Those who sort of believe for awhile.” I suppose they’ll sort of be damned.) Then there is the Revised Standard Version. It is a first class ...uh ...counterfeit. It is completely accurate, except where it counts, namely in prophecy, Messianic prophecy and the deity of Christ. In these areas it is as bad as the Jehovah’s Witness translation, otherwise known as the “reversed sub-standard perversion.”

The King James is time-tested. Unfortunately, it is also time-worn. During my last year at the seminary, one of my fellow-students, who had spent twenty years in Lutheran schools and has studied Elizabethan English, made it obvious that there were parts of the KJV that even he didn’t understand; I doubt that most laymen will do better. The language of King James is rapidly becoming a foreign dialect, just as Chaucer’s English is to us Americans. There are words in the King James Version that now mean nearly the opposite of what they used to, words like meat, prevent, brass, and naughty. Hundreds of words are

misleading: in Ac. 28:13, we read “From there we fetched a compass and came to Rhegium.” In 1611, “fetched a compass” meant “made a circle, circled around.” In 1611 you kept your purse in your wallet, and it was mostly men who carried purses. Today a wallet is kept in a purse, and only real and would-be women carry purses.

The Good News Bible is bad news in all its incarnations. It has nice drawings. It is simple. And it is cheap. But since the NIV is just as cheap and Beck’s AAT is just as simple, and both are more faithful, I’d say leave it in the store.

Most conservative Christians would endorse these recommendations: Dr. Beck’s AAT is “a Living Bible you can trust,” and the NIV is what you’d get — both strengths and weaknesses — if the King James translators with all their strengths and weaknesses were alive today. The NASB is accurate but wooden. The Amplified gives more of the flavor of the Greek. I recommend getting the AAT for personal and devotional use and Zondervan’s Comparative Study Bible for serious study — it is a four-column whole Bible that contains the KJV, NASB, NIV, and Amplified. With the AAT on the side you almost don’t need the original languages.

The Sixth Commandment

Thou shalt remember that the Bible is an old book.

Can the Word of God mean one thing today and the opposite tomorrow? Obviously not. Therefore, the meaning of a Bible passage is not what you understand it to be, but what the original writers meant and the original readers understood. Did Jesus rise on Sunday or Monday? Europeans think “the first day of the week,” John 20:1, is a Monday, but the original readers understood it to be Sunday.

If there is an argument about what the original readers actually believed, remember what Charles Hodge said:

We must distinguish between what the sacred writers themselves thought or believed, and what they teach. They may have believed that the sun moves round the earth, but they do not so teach. (Systematic Theology, page 170. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.)

The reason the Bible does not change its meaning as words change their meaning is that the meaning is what God intended, not what the original writer understood, and certainly not what today’s reader understands.

For another instance, in Jn. 13:14–15 you would think that Jesus meant that foot-washing is a sacrament for all time, necessary for salvation. But it didn’t mean that to the Apostles. To them, foot-washing was a necessary but menial service which you either did for yourself or accepted from the lowest slave on the totem pole. Therefore when a host offered his slave he offered a great courtesy, and when he provided water so people could wash their feet he was enabling them to freshen up, look their best and be comfortable at his dinner table. (Where, incidentally, the feet would be visible to all — Da Vinci was more of

a painter than a theologian, and at the Last Supper the Twelve reclined like banqueting Romans. They did not sit on chairs and neither Mary of Bethany nor Jesus went crawling under the table to do their foot-washing.)

Christians should be willing to do such things, if necessary, for the brethren. (Brethren? But what about the sisteren? Don't be silly, the cistern is where we pour the dirty water. But in Bible times it wasn't — it was where they kept their fresh water between rainfalls.)

So to us also that passage means — not that we wash each other's feet, which would be an embarrassing annoyance and an unpleasant inconvenience — but that we be willing to do necessary menial services out of courtesy. If you want to do me a necessary menial service, leave my feet alone and volunteer to do my photocopying.

In similar fashion, we no longer “greet the brethren with a holy kiss” because that's not how brethren greet each other. In our culture, we obey Romans 16:16 by shaking hands.

We take historical context into account wherever possible, but remember that internal Biblical information is always more reliable than external historical records. A lot of history, as H. L. Mencken is reputed to have said, is bunk, self-serving propaganda, or downright lies.

In 1 Corinthians 11, St. Paul says it is a shame for a man to have long hair. How long is long? Why didn't Paul just give a maximum length? The reason is that Paul never intended to condemn hair of a certain length. He meant to condemn effeminate men. What his hearers understood him to say was that a man should look like a man to the people around him, and a woman like a woman. Among Americans, braids look feminine. To American Indians, the Vikings, and the Chinese, braids were a masculine hairstyle. Cutting his hair to my length would perhaps have made Cochise look womanish to his people — affected and feminine. And some of today's female hairstyles are shorter than mine, but yet there's no doubt the wearer is a woman, from any angle or distance. Once when a college co-ed with a butch hairstyle bumped my fender and said “I suppose you want my phone number,” I answered her nasty tone of voice with an equally nasty “I probably would, if you looked anything like a woman.” And I heard a girl tell a guy that she thinks long pony tails make a man look like . . . never mind.

Another area where you can get in lots of trouble by forgetting this Sixth Commandment is in time-reckoning. I almost got sucked into Herbert W. Armstrong's heresies because of this. He got a lot of mileage out of the fact that Good Friday to Easter Sunday doesn't add up to the “three days and three nights” required by Mt. 12:40. Well, as a matter of fact, yes it does. Please consider the following exercise in interpretation.

Mt. 12:38. Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.” He answered, A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

To us, “three days and three nights” would be from sunrise one day to sunrise 72 hours later. But to a Hebrew, each day starts with the evening before (Genesis 1:5).

That should shake you up a bit. Let’s shake you up some more. In Esther 4:16 we read that Esther commanded the people to fast and pray for her for three days and three nights before her visit to the king. But in chapter 5 we read that she went to see him on the third day — that is 48 hours later or what WE would call TWO days and TWO nights. This is neither because Esther couldn’t wait any longer nor because the people got too hungry. It’s because the Jews count time differently. It’s because the Jews count any part of a day as the whole thing. It’s because the Jews call any day or any part of a day “a day and a night.” And we can see from the fact that there were only TWO dark periods in the 48-hour stretch which she calls “three days and three nights” that the Jews extended their time-reckoning back to the sunset preceding the first daylight.

So if you will let the Bible interpret the Bible (see “The Third Commandment of Bible Interpretation,”) and remember that the Bible is an old book, you will see that Jesus *did* spend “three days and three nights” in the tomb. The three days were Friday, Saturday, and a tiny part of Sunday. The three nights were Friday night, Saturday night, and also the Thursday night which the Jews include as a part of Friday. Do not let your reason overrule these clear Scriptures. It is merely a matter of language and culture. The Hebrews would be just a puzzled by our insistence that George Bush was president for only four years, when by their time-reckoning they would call it five.

Exercise for the reader: Look up all passages that speak of and prohibit “usury.” See whether the word doesn’t really mean “interest that exploits the poor in time of need.”

Be careful to distinguish between what the ancient writers taught and what they thought. They evidently thought of a woman as a garden, passively receiving seed from the man, perhaps in the form of microscopic manikins. But they did not so teach. They may have thought that the world was a flat disk around which the sun revolved. But that isn’t what they taught.

Unfortunately, this Sixth Commandment is used as a “license to kill” by the majority of modern ministers and Bible scholars (comparable to what the Bible calls “scribes and Pharisees.”) Because it is an old book, modernist believe they can treat it as a *human* old book. Because many of the ancients believed myths and superstitions, they think the Bible is also full of myths and superstitions. Because some ancient writers made up faked speeches that great men might have spoken, modernists believe that the words of Jesus are faked speeches which the church thought He might have spoken. This form of unbelief goes by various names: Higher criticism, religious liberalism, modernism, “the best results of modern scholarship,” demythologizing, the New Hermeneutic, neo-orthodoxy. . . . All of them come down to one basic idea. That the Bible does not mean what it says; it means what some man *says* it means. And in so doing, modernists break the Third, Fourth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Commandments of this article. More important, they answer the serpents question

“Did God really say” (Gn. 3:1) with a resounding, “Of course not!”

The essence of modernism is to take a Bible passage — say the ones that prohibit fornication — and say, “Ancient man believed that women were men’s chattels and thus it was injuring some man if a woman had extramarital relations, but we don’t believe that anymore.” Unfortunately, every year they do that to a few more chapters of the Bible. Soon it becomes, “Ancient man believed that the gods came down to earth, but we don’t believe that anymore.” Eventually, everything in the Bible becomes something that “we don’t believe anymore.” Liberalism is unbelief in embryo. Eventually their “interpretation” of Holy Scripture winds up as Lenski described it in *The Interpretation of Hebrews* and James (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1966), page 516.

Modernists regard the whole Bible as outmoded Jewish literature and pick and choose from its contents what they need for their moralizing lectures.

By their fruits ye shall know them, as Jesus said. While individual liberals may be Christians, after a generation or two they are reduced to do-goodism. And even their do-goodism enters the service of evil as they support immoral sex education, the “rights” of pornographers and homosexuals, abortion, revolution, Communist regimes, and the socialist scheme to replace God and heaven as man’s *greatest good* with the welfare state.

The Seventh Commandment

Thou shalt remember that the Bible is a lamp unto thy feet and a light unto thy path. (Ps. 119:105) In other words, the Bible is your lamp-post. Now, there are two ways you can use lamp-posts. Most people use them for illumination. Drunkards use them for support. So it is with the Scriptures. Some people get their opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs from Scripture. Others — most notably cultists and liberals — have decided what they believe before they ever open a Bible. All they want from the Bible is support for the opinions they already hold.

It distresses many Christians when cultists seem to know the Bible so much better than we. It distresses us even more because we sometimes fear they might be right. How can they use the same Bible and yet believe exactly the opposite? Let me illustrate.

Suppose you are building a hot rod in your back yard. You ordered a kit from Ford and have followed their shop manual down to the last washer. Everything is complete and up to specs. Now it’s time to set in the transmission. Just before you put it in place, a man taps you on the shoulder and says, “You have it backwards.” You stare at him in disbelief. “Who are you?” you ask. “Henry Ford III,” he replies. Well. Who are you to argue with Henry Ford? So you put it in as he tells you to, start the engine, put it in gear, let out the clutch — and tear off in the wrong direction. Even with 100% factory parts and instructions, you went backwards. The problem is the phony who convinced you he was an

expert and told you to ignore the plain words of the shop manual and trust him instead.

This is what all cultists do. They are told before they ever open a Bible that they will not find the Trinity there, or the vicarious atonement, or the resurrection of the body, or a heavenly afterlife. They are told that they will find a millennium, and that Jesus is only man. So it shouldn't surprise us when they do find those things.

As a matter of **fact**, though, following this Commandment will greatly strengthen your faith. The last time JWs came around to cast mud on the deity of Christ, I decided to search the Scriptures with an open mind before the next time they came. So I sat down with my Bible, started with Genesis, and copied down every single passage that said in plain English, "Jesus is God." I had expected to find a couple dozen passages. Instead, I copied 125 pages of passages — and another 125 pages of passages that prove the Holy Spirit is a Person rather than a force, which is what JWs teach.

Mormons do the same thing. They find in Scripture what they are told to find. They also use Scripture as a drunkard uses a light post; but Mormons do one thing more, which brings up the Eighth commandment:

The Eighth Commandment

Thou shalt not add to, subtract from, or change the words of Scripture. Mormons have a second Bible, the Book of Mormon. They also have an armful of other books and revelations to change any doctrines they find inconvenient (like the doctrine of polygamy a century ago, or racism today). Against such "revelations" the Bible stations four watchdogs:

Dt. 4:2. Don't add anything to what I order you to do or take anything away from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I order you to keep. (AAT)

Dt. 12:32. Be careful to do everything I order without adding to it or taking anything from it.

Pr. 30:5–6. Everything God said has proved to be true. He's a Shield to those who come to Him for protection. Don't add anything to what he says or He will correct you, and you will be found a liar.

Rv. 22:18–19. I warn everyone who hears what the prophecy of this book tells him: If you add anything to this, God will add to you the plagues written in this book. And if you take away any words in this book of prophecy, God will take away your share in the tree of life and in the holy city that are described in this book.

The Revelation passage above does not mean that taking one word out of Scripture is a particularly damnable sin, just that people who start out by fiddling with the Scriptures always end up cutting out the Gospel of Christ. The Bible is a seamless garment, and just as one hole in a pair of pantyhose means they are as good as rags, so the slightest deletion from Scripture turns

that sacred Book into “holy rags.” The Gospel of Christ will eventually be taken out. Without him we are lost. I once had an old parishioner who denied a single Scripture. I went to him with an old Bible and a pair of scissors. I cut the offending passage out but then proceeded to cut out everything implied by the offending passage. Then I offered him the Bible. Funny, he didn’t want it. Neither did I.

Some cultists claim their second Bibles are just another Testament. Very interesting! An unpredicted Testament that contradicts everything in both Old and New!

The Ninth Commandment

Thou shalt not major in minors. It is soooooo tempting to get caught up in the “interesting” parts of Scripture, like Daniel and Revelation, or the non-Messianic prophecies, or alleged predictions of today’s scientific discoveries, or numerology. But one risks being the most knowledge able Bible scholar in hell, if one knows everything about Bible numbers and nothing about the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. We call such an error “majoring in minors.” By that we refer to the fact that a college student has a major subject, perhaps mathematics, and a minor, perhaps French. If he gets barely passing grades in math, but converses brilliantly in French, he is majoring in minors and is likely to get sent home from college as a failure. In college you can always switch majors. In Bible, however, it’s a pass/fail course, and we all have to major in the same thing, Salvation 101.

An examination of each denomination’s teachings will show that some of them do in fact major in minors.

The Adventist’s chief emphasis is on Old Testament laws. Roman Catholics emphasize the Sacraments. The Calvinist elevates the majesty of God to center stage, while holy living is the heart and soul of a Methodist’s religion. Some churches push missions week after week; others, prayer and the apostolic succession; and at least three major denominations (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians) are kept apart mainly by insisting on one of the three forms of church government found (but not commanded) in the Bible.

Well, all these things are fine, and all of them are important. But are they most important? Did *Jesus* come to preach sanctification — or prayer — or church government — or religious liberty? All these things have their place. The fault with most denominations is that they take them out of their proper place. What is most important is that every doctrine be given its proper weight and be used at the proper time.

And for a balanced view of Holy Scripture, just you try to do better than Luther’s catechism. Just read the Table of Contents once. Does it or does it not cover all the teachings of Scripture, each in its proper order, place, and weight? You will not find a Lutheran preacher spending the whole summer on numerology or end-time prophecy. Nor should a true Lutheran pastor ever let anyone walk out of church on Sunday without telling him the way to be saved.

One thing I'd advise you: Find out the day when you're going to die, and the Sunday before that go to a Lutheran church. (Conservative, of course.) Because this is what the Lutheran strives for: that he would be good to have any sermon he preached be the last or only sermon a man ever heard. The true Lutheran always explains the critical issues, the important things, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whenever he mounts his pulpit.

The Tenth Commandment

And the Tenth Commandment, closely connected to the Ninth: **Thou shalt distinguish properly between Law and Gospel.** A soul is either estranged from God — under the Law — or reconciled with Him by the Gospel. The very worst thing you can do to a man is give him the wrong part of the Bible at the wrong time. A murderer and a suicide need to hear different Scriptures (the suicide needs hope, not hopelessness, condemnation and further strait jacketing of his options — he needs to hear about the love of God, not the fires of hell.)

When a man is indifferent to the state of his soul or secure in his sins, then the flames must roar and hell burn hot beneath him. But when he has been crushed by the sledge of the Law, and his conscience is in agony, then the fire must be put out, or he will either die in despair like Judas or harden his conscience against such terrors. At that time Jesus, the Healer, must come forth to bind up his wounds and speak to him tenderly of the love of God. He who can distinguish between the Law and the Gospel deserves the doctor's gown, as Luther says.

At this time you cannot do better to follow the Tenth Commandment than reading Walther's *Law and Gospel*, available from any Lutheran bookstore or from Northwestern Publishing House, PO Box 26975, Milwaukee WI 53226-0975. You may think, "That's just another book and I don't have time to read the books I own already." That's what I used to think. But one of my classmates at the seminary told me, "If you don't read *Law and Gospel*, you don't belong in a Lutheran pulpit." I thought that was an overly strong statement at the time. Then I read *Law and Gospel*. He was wrong. Unless you have read *Law and Gospel*, you don't belong in *any* pulpit, of *any* denomination. Because knowing the difference between law and Gospel is the essential difference between Christianity and paganism.

All religions except that of Christ boil down to the same formula: "Keep the rules, and you will be rewarded." It doesn't matter what religion you are talking about, all promise some kind of reward for keeping the rules. The only difference lies in what the rules are and what the reward is. Moslems worship on Friday for entrance to a hashish harem; Jews on Saturday for possession of Palestine, and misinformed "Christians" think their keeping of Sunday is a rule that guarantees them a place in heaven. All three are equally wrong.

Oh, yes, Christians have their rules. And while I believe those rules are superior to the rules in other religions, we don't keep them for a reward. In fact, we have barely kept them at all, and are threatened with a righteous

punishment for that, rather than any sort of reward. That's the doctrine of the law.

The Gospel is not found in any other religion. This is the message of God's love, a love so great that it sent someone else to be our Substitute in punishment for failure to keep the rules. His sweat and his blood are put on our account; He filled what we can rightfully call the Treasury of Merit, properly understood; therefore He was punished and we are rewarded, for no other reason than the kind heart of God.

Where is the rule-keeping, then? We don't do it for a reward. We do it out of gratitude to God and Christ, who loved us and did so much to help us.

Nor is this a mere squabble about terms, even though some readers may think that Christianity is like the others, having rule keeping on one side and benefits on another. That's almost like saying prostitution and marriage are a mere squabble about terms, just because a transfer of money and sexual relations are involved in both. In prostitution as in worldly religions, the transactions are essentially selfish ones. In Christianity as in marriage, the transactions arise out of love.

To summarize, then:

The Law tells us what we must do to be saved; it shows us our sin and the wrath of God. Keeping the Law cannot save us no matter how much we try to keep it. It demands that we be perfectly righteous, but gives us no strength for leading a godly life.

The Gospel, on the contrary, tells us what God has done through Christ to save us. It shows us our Savior and the grace of God. It therefore saves us by grace through faith. It declares us righteous juridically before God, and then gives us strength to increase our actual, personal righteousness by living a godly life.

Table 1 should help make it clear. The brilliant idea of separating the two columns with a Cross comes from the sainted Siegbert W. Becker, late of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

The Conclusion Of These Commandments

Theology is a system of logical thought, built on certain assumptions. These assumptions are rarely exposed to critical view. If the assumptions underlying many systems of theology were exposed, they would be seen as the house of cards they are. Then, perhaps, the church bodies built on those assumptions would merge with other church bodies and would build a Biblical system of thought, to the glory of God, the expansion of the church, and the confusion of the church's critics. Let it be so! Amen.

The Law	The Gospel
In the heart by nature	Known only by Scripture
Identifies sin	Proclaims grace
Commands obedience	Forgives disobedience
Demands	Promises
Says we are unrighteous	Declares us righteous
Justifies doers of good	Justifies without the Law
Frightens and terrifies	Quiets and comforts
Threatens	Assures and reassures
Afflicts the comfortable	Comforts the afflicted
Condemns and curses	Acquits and blesses
Anger, wrath and outrage!	Kindness, pity and love
Imprisons	Frees
Says what we must do	Says what Christ has done
Says you are guilty	Says you are not guilty
Prepares ground for seed	Sows and is the good seed
Takes	Gives
Cannot save	Saves to the uttermost
Reveals God's wrath	Proclaims God's mercy
Says that God hates sin	Proclaims God's love
Provokes further sin	Motivates fruits of gratitude
Gives no strength	Strengthens and motivates
Punishes	Forgives
Despair instead of hope	Hope instead of despair
Brings death	Gives life
Provokes man to sin	Moves to deeds of gratitude
Uncovers hell beneath	Opens heaven above
Sends to hell	Takes to heaven

Table 1: A Comparison of Law and Gospel