

## **God's Word as Double-Edged: The Ten Commandments as a Christian's Best Friend**

*“Jesus’ command to love God is an invitation to believe in Him who Himself is love, and on that account God can be approached only in love rather than with fear over impending wrath for our transgressions.”*

~ David P. Scaer, *Law and Gospel and the Means of Grace*

### **Lutheranism's Lie: The False Law/Gospel Dichotomy**

*“All Scripture should be divided into these two chief doctrines, the law and the promises.” (Ap IV 5)*

The great lie promulgated by the modern Lutheran church is that the word of God contains “parts” rather than “doctrines,” or “teachings.” If Scripture contains parts, each part may be separated from the other, further broken down, and compartmentalized. The current understanding of law and gospel as incongruous parts of Scripture has resulted in an unfortunate misunderstanding of the Ten Commandments, and, indeed, of Scripture as a whole.

The truth of Lutheranism as intended by the Reformers was to emphasize the holistic nature of Scripture. Law and gospel must exist together not as separate parts of Scripture, but as the interconnected whole of Scripture. To this end, is imperative to understand that every word may be used two ways (cf., Heb 4:12–16; Rev 1:12–16; 2:12–16). Consider the following examples:

- Gen 3:22–24
- Eccl 12:13
- Isa 11:4
- Matt 27:45–50

Luther speaks of the Ten Commandments in this way:

Now, as we said before, these words [i.e., the Ten Commandments] contain both a wrathful threat and a friendly promise, not only to terrify and warn us but also to attract and allure us. These words, therefore, ought to be received and esteemed as a serious matter to God because he himself here declares how important the commandments are to him and how strictly he will watch over them, fearfully and terribly punishing all who despise and transgress his commandments and again, how richly he will reward, bless, and bestow all good things on those who prize them and gladly act and live in accordance with them. . . . It is useful and necessary always to teach, admonish, and remind young people of all this so that they may be brought up, not only with blows and compulsion, like cattle, but in the fear and reverence of God. (LC I 322–330)

### **Love and Obedience: What is the Difference? – 1 John 4**

*Discipline? Oh, I have none. Do you ask yourself when you breathe, why and how are you taking a breath? No. For me, it's normal. . . . So in that way, I'm not disciplined at all. It's not something I have to fight for. I'm just pleased with what I'm doing, and I'm lucky to do it in great conditions and with people I like. I don't have to battle with*

*anybody, and everybody does exactly what I want them to. Perhaps that is my suggestion: If you do something that you love, you won't need to force yourself to do it. Love and discipline: Are they that different? ~ Karl Lagerfeld, Wall Street Journal Editorial*

In Eden, there were no “Commandments,” nor was there law or gospel. Rather, there was only the Word (John 1). Adam and Eve lived according to the word of God and were not to turn from it, because apart from the word there is no life. The fullness of the word is made manifest after the fall in the Word: the flesh of Jesus. Thus, the Christian continues to live according to the Word that is his crucified Lord in joy.

The Christian loves Jesus first because he is loved by Jesus. Being loved by Jesus and subsequently loving Jesus naturally results in a life ordered around such love. The Christian does the things that Jesus loves not because he is coerced into doing so, but because the love of Jesus so orders the Christian life that the things which please God become delightful parts of the Christian’s own nature (Ps 1:1–2; 119; Matt 19:17, Rom 2:13). Christians delight in the word of God, therefore, because the word has love as its foundation.

The Christian is not as he once was, for he has been transformed into a new creation by this love of Jesus (Rom 6). To stay alive, the Christian must continue touching the holy things of God and fleeing from the evil things. The word of God provides life in love, for it directs the Christian toward the holy things of life, while simultaneously diverting the Christian away from the evil things of death. The Christian gladly follows where the word directs because by it he lives. To love the law of God, therefore, is as simple as trusting his promises.

#### **Law and Relationship: The Guidelines of Behavior – James 1; 2:14–26**

*The reason for this [i.e., requests for judgment in the psalms] soon becomes very plain. The ancient Jews, like ourselves, think of God’s judgment in terms of an earthly court of justice. The difference is that the Christian pictures the case to be tried as a criminal case with himself in the dock; the Jew pictures it as a civil case with himself as the plaintiff. The one hopes for acquittal, or rather for pardon; the other hopes for a resounding triumph with heavy damages. ~ C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms*

Relationships require boundaries, for better (protecting children, teaching children to live well) and for worse (punishing trespasses, teaching right from wrong, determining a moral compass). However, the boundaries are never established primarily for the worse. Punishment can never be the sole, nor the primary purpose of relational boundaries. Such boundaries are established for the sake of love and compassion, primarily for the sake of protection. The boundaries guide the children of God to life according to their nature as such. However, when the children stray, the boundaries become punishment. Thus, because of man’s fall and continued sin, the law cannot help but always accuse (Ap IV 38). However, because of Christ, while the law may accuse, it will never condemn. It continues to point the way to life and establish the relationship between God and his people in the way he so desires it to be.

*There is only one purpose for punishment, and that is to teach a lesson, and there is only one lesson to be taught, and that is love. Perfect love banishes fear, and when we are not afraid we know that love which includes forgiveness. When the lesson to be learned is not love, that is not punishment; it is revenge or retribution. Probably the lesson of love is the most terrible punishment of all—an almost intolerable anguish—for it means that the sinner has to realize what has been done, has to be truly sorry, to repent, to turn to God. ~ Madeline L’Engle, And It Was Good: Reflections on Beginnings*

**The Ten Words: The Theology of Editorial Markings – Exod 19:3–6; 20:1–17; Matt 17:1–13**

*“What God commands must be much nobler than anything we ourselves may devise. And because there is no greater or better teacher to be found than God, there can also be no better teaching than his.” (LC I 113)*

When God speaks to Moses upon the mountain, he does not give commands. Instead, he gives “words.” Like all words, the Commandments can be used in two ways depending on the relational boundaries set forth by God, and the need of the Christian.

The Commandments will always point to the Word, because Christ is himself the source and content of the Commandments. The words given by God describe the character and will of God: to love, and to live in communion and community with his beloved. When the Christian departs from the Commandments, he also departs from Christ and from all the mercy Christ brings, and from the presence of God. The Christian thus encounters the law and the punishments of the Commandments. However, in Christ and through the Christian life, the Christian also encounters, and delights in, the gospel promises of the Commandments.

What God says in the Ten Commandments can be summed up simply with the following desires: “Touch good, do not touch evil. I will show you what is good, because I love you and I want you to live” (Ps 37:27–29; Prov 14:16; Isa 52:11; 1 Pet 3:8–12; Rev 18:4).

**When God says:**

**It is as if he says:**

<p>I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.</p>	<p>You were once not a people. You were once treated as slaves, and were no better than animals. I have made you into my people—my children. I want you to live, to be holy, and to be loved. I will be your father, your caretaker, your brother, and your friend. I will be the one to love you.</p> <p><i>(Jer 31:3; Hos 2:23; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 2:10)</i></p>
<p>You shall have no other gods before me.</p>	<p>I love you. Let me be God. Do not go your own way, for apart from me you will not, and cannot, live. Fear, love, and trust in me above all things.</p> <p><i>(Deut 32:39, 45–47; Matt 5:1–11; 10:37; Mark 12:28–34)</i></p>
<p>You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.</p>	<p>I have given you my full self. You may pray to me. Call upon me in every time of trouble. Use my name to ask me for anything you want or need. You have me—use me responsibly according to my nature and my will.</p> <p><i>(Gen 12:3; Num 22–24; Ps 137:8–9; Matt 6:5–15; 21:20–22; John 14:13–14)</i></p>
<p>Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.</p>	<p>You do not need to feed me or care for me. I will feed you, strengthen you, and give you true rest. Come to me to hear me, meditate on me, and be fed by me.</p> <p><i>(Bel 3–22 + Matt 14:13–21 + John 6; Mark 2:27)</i></p>

<p>Honor your father and your mother.</p>	<p>I will ensure that you have temporal overseers to care for you. They shall love you just as I do, and because you love me, you can love them too. Let them take care of you, so that you may live well, protected, and in love.</p> <p><i>(Matt 22:15–22; Rom 13:7; 1 Tim 2:1–2; 1 Pet 2:17)</i></p>
<p>You shall not murder.</p>	<p>Not only have I redeemed you from slavery and from death, but I have also created you. I have made you different from all other beasts. You are made in my image and likeness, and I have given dominion over all creation to you. Be good stewards of life. Live in harmony with one another according to my love. Do no hurt, cause no harm. Preserve love and life even as I have created them.</p> <p><i>(Gen 1:26–28; 2:15–25; 9:6; Deut 32:35; Rom 12:17–19)</i></p>
<p>You shall not commit adultery.</p>	<p>As you live joined to me, I have also provided that you might be joined to one another. Love and care for your spouse in the same way that I love and care for you, my bride the church. Love, and receive love. Preserve the dignity of your neighbors, your spouse, yourself, and the person of marital unity.</p> <p><i>(Song 4:6; Mark 10:1–12; Eph 5:22–33; Col 3:18–19)</i></p>
<p>You shall not steal.</p>	<p>All goods have been given to you as gifts. Be thankful for what you have, and use it to my glory and to the benefit of one another. Enjoy what I have given you, strive to assist your neighbor in enjoying what I have given to him, care for the sick and the poor, and be good stewards of such goods.</p> <p><i>(Lev 19:9–14; Mark 10:17–22; Luke 12:22–34)</i></p>
<p>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.</p>	<p>Speak as I speak, with truths of love. See others the way I see them, love them as I love them, speak of them and to them the way I do. Preserve the good gifts of integrity, reputation, honor, and good name.</p> <p><i>(Ps 120:2; Prov 18:21; 38:1; Matt 18:15–20; 1 Pet 3:9)</i></p>
<p>You shall not covet.</p>	<p>I will give you everything you need. You need not look to anyone else for care. The grass will always be greenest where you trust in my care, and rely upon my grace. Enjoy your life, and be glad for one another in all things.</p> <p><i>(Ps 81; 1 Tim 6:6–10; Heb 13:5–6)</i></p>