

Those Ten Commandments – Conversation Continued

Colleagues,

First off, I did send last week's post to Pastor X. He responded, and then I did likewise. For now, that's inter nos.

The feedback from y'all on Pastor X's proposed sermon series on the decalogue has filled my inbasket. One was Jeff Anderson's "look what I found as a different translation for that Luther citation." I've already posted that to the listserve. Here are a couple more. Starting with a feisty one.

1. That announcement for the 10 Commandment Sermon Series should have been issued on either 1 April or Halloween. Laughter or horror are the only logical responses. [An Anglican priest in Canada with a Seminex M.Div. degree!]
2. Hi Ed, Here's how I'd "fix" Pastor X's blurb about preaching on the 10 commandments.

"Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures." –Martin Luther, The Large Catechism

Even for Martin Luther, that's a very large claim. But I believe it is true. It helps to realize that Luther isn't referring to mere intellectual consent but rather to the total demand of the Law to life and how it is lived in community. In the commandments we find a God who addresses us where we live, where we face real issues about property, sex, and speech. To "know" these commandments is to know the total demand God through his Law makes of our lives as they are lived out in the world.

The commandments are guidelines for humanity in general. However, their function is not just to keep society running

smoothly, but rather to reveal us as a people who are, in our daily lives, failing to meet the total demand that God makes through the Law. We have the Ten Commandments because, just like the ancient Israelites, we are in the bondage of slavery to, as Luther put it, “sin, death, and the devil.” The commandments are a punitive list of “dos” and “don’ts” because they are a stern reminder of who we aren’t and how we fail to be God’s chosen people.

But this isn’t why Luther could say to “know” the Ten Commandments is to know everything the Bible is about. This merely sets the stage. The Bible contains plenty of examples of our failures. We can look to each other and add to that list. Although knowing the Commandments means knowing that we are guilty as charged, this is not what’s new in the Bible.

What’s new in the Bible is God’s final Word on the problem of our rebellion against Him. That final Word is one of mercy to sinners on behalf of Jesus Christ, who died on the cross bearing our sins and was raised from the dead by God. All of our failures to fulfill the Commandments are wiped clean by the body and blood of Christ, which is freely given to all. Renewed by Christ, the Commandments find their fulfillment in our new life trusting Christ.

Luther explains it best:

“When we have Christ, we will easily create new laws and judge everything correctly, even more, we will make new Decalogues”. It is through Christ’s death and resurrection alone and only that we are able to perfectly know the Commandments. This is why Luther could say to “know” the Ten Commandments is to know everything the Bible is about– it requires Christ’s death and resurrection , and that Good News is everything the Bible is about.

Beginning Sunday, September 13, we will begin a new sermon series at both services exploring how Christ's death and resurrection heals our sins as revealed by the Ten Commandments and its implication for living the Christian life today. Jesus said that God's work for us is to believe in His Messiah (John 6:29). I invite you to join in worship, examining the life of discipleship viewed through the lens of Christ's death and resurrection.

Peter Keyel
St Louis, MO

Then these responses to Jeff Anderson's discovery of an alternate translation for Luther's "sticky wicket" sentence. Instead of "Anyone who knows the Ten Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures," Jeff found this alternative reading in the Triglotta, the old LCMS edition of the Lutheran Confessions: "For it needs must be that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all the Scriptures. . . ."

1. Yes, and yet if you read the larger context of the quote in question, you get the same sense from Luther. He's really deriding pastors who think they know the entire Scriptures. Either way, Pastor X missed the boat. [ELCA pastor in Illinois]
2. Hallelujah!! Amen!! [Lay theologian in Pennsylvania. She keeps holding my feet to the fire.]
3. Ed, Tiny extra note regarding that "Trigollata." Jary Pelikan told us that it would be ideal for our younger children to sit on to raise them at the table at mealtime. [Seminary classmate of mine from the 1950s. Retired LCMS pastor in NY]
4. Once again, I think both sides are making too much of this. I would agree that the Tappert and Kolb/Wengert

translation can be misleading: one might think that the text of the Ten Commandments is all you need to understand Christian faith. (And this appeared to be how Pastor X misused this quote.) Though the old Dau/Bente [=Triglotta] and newer Concordia translation is therefore better, I would argue that both translations are in fact true (and the German and Latin can be translated either way). Let's read this in context: Luther is arguing against those who say they know the Ten Commandments perfectly. They say they know them perfectly, well they must then know all of the Scriptures, and be able to advise, help, comfort, judge, decide every possible case in the entire world. Since they obviously don't know all this, Luther is calling them back to the study of the Ten Commandments, which are a summary of the Scriptures. Put the other way, Luther can say that the entire Bible is commentary on the Ten Commandments. So of course you can't understand the Ten Commandments without knowing the cross, without knowing God's will to be gracious to thousands. Likewise you cannot understand the cross without knowing God's commandments and punishments to the third and fourth generations.

The problem is not with mistranslation, but forgetting that the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sacraments are also necessary. TOGETHER they give a brief summary of the Bible, of Christian faith, wisdom, and practice. [Ph.D. student at Univ. of Virginia]

5. Good find by alert reader Jeff Anderson! As I now have my dad's copy of the *Triglotta,* as well as *Tappert,* I can follow along. It's interesting to compare the English translation each provides of the German/Latin you quoted from the Triglotta.

Tappert: ***This much is certain: anyone who knows the Ten

Commandments perfectly knows the entire Scriptures. In all affairs and circumstances he can counsel, help, comfort, judge, and make decisions in both spiritual and temporal matters. He is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, persons, laws, and everything else in the world.

Triglotta: ***For it needs must be that whoever knows the Ten Commandments perfectly must know all of Scriptures, so that, in all affairs and cases, he can advise, help, comfort, judge, and decide both spiritual and temporal matters, and is qualified to sit in judgment upon all doctrines, estates, spirits, laws, and whatever else is in the world.

I can't help but wonder why the Tappert – and, apparently, the Kolb/Wengert – translations omit the second “must” of the sentence.

(Just thinking outloud here!) Could it have to do with different understandings/meanings of the word “must?” Example: A father takes his son into a bar for his 18th birthday. There is a sign on the door that says, “Must be 21 to enter!” The father says to his son as they walk in, “All right! You must be 21!”

Anyway, according to my Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary: *must* ...1 *a*. be commanded or requested to *b*: be urged to : ought to by all means 2 : *be compelled by physical necessity to : be required by immediate or future need or purpose to *3 a :*be obliged to: be compelled by social consideration to *b :* be required by law, custom, or moral conscience to *c*: be determined to *d :* be unreasonably or perversely compelled to *4* *be logically inferred or supposed to *5

: *be compelled by favor or by natural law to *6 : *was or were presumably certain to

Naturally, the father and his son are thrown out on their ears. The “must” of the sign was according to definition 1 a, while the father used it according to definition 4. (There is kernel of truth behind this story, by the way.)

Seems that Tappert sees fit to omit the “must” and so translates in the sense of definition 4: (“This much is certain: any idiot can see that anyone who knows the Ten Commandments – albeit perfect – already knows [i.e., ‘must’ know] the entire Scripture.”), while the Triglotta uses definition 1 a: (“You’d better believe that *in order to know* (or, *before you can know*) the Ten Commandments perfectly, you have to/are obliged to [‘must’] know all of Scripture.” Something like that.

In other words, Tappert seems to be saying that it’s a foregone conclusion that to know the Ten Commandments is to know the entire Scriptures (though there is that pesky word “perfectly”), while the English of the Triglotta following the German and Latin says it’s a “command.” Is there any way at all that the German/Latin can be linguistically construed to say the former, whether as the sentence stands or in context of the entire paragraph or even preface? (I would doubt it.) Would love to hear the reasoning.

And then there’s that ‘so that’ in the Triglotta that is absent in the Tappert, which seems to put a different twist on the paragraph.

Finally it’s interesting to note that it’s the *Catechism *(i.e., the whole ball of wax: 10Cs, Creed, Lord’s Prayer, Baptism, Sacrament of the Altar), and *not* the Ten

Commandments alone “which is a compend and brief summary of all the Holy Scripture” – agreed to in both Tappert and Triglotta:

*Tappert: What is the whole Psalter but meditations and exercises based on the *First Commandment?[*] Now, I know beyond a doubt that such lazy-bellies and presumptuous fellows do not understand a single Psalm, much less the entire Scriptures, yet they pretend to know and despise the Catechism, which is a brief compend and summary of all the Holy Scripture.*

Triglotta: And what, indeed, is the entire Psalter but thoughts and exercises upon the First Commandment? Now I know of truth that such lazy paunches and presumptuous spirits do not understand a single psalm, much less the entire Scriptures; and yet they pretend to know and despise the Catechism, which is a compend and brief summary of all the Scriptures.

(And don't forget the little bit in there about the Psalter being “meditations and exercises based on the FIRST commandment, which opens up a whole discussion.)
Richard W. D. Jungkuntz

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6. (Thank you!) cubed. I was ready to turn in my union card and join the Bruderhof gang who insist that the Sermon on the Mount is the way that Xns must live until the eschaton happens. I knew that my problem was not with Luther but our interpretation of him. So good to learn that it was a translation error. How did such an event happen with our scholarship of the past 65 years? Once again it is the Gutenberg press – electronic – to our rescue. [Lutheran military chaplain in California]

7. *Cool! We all should have seen that one coming.* A couple of years ago I started writing an article to be called “The Nine Commandments”. It started with what the Lutheran Study Bible thankfully puts before us as a sidebar inserted at Exodus 20. It lays out the Jewish, the Roman Catholic/Lutheran, and the Reformed numbering of the commandments. The Jewish numbering of the “Ten Words” (Decalogue) begins with first Gospel Word, God bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt. Then follow nine commandments. (I tell people there are only nine commandments, but before they get their hopes up, adultery is still in there.) The Jews have this one right. The commandments (all nine of those Words) make no sense without the first Word, the Good News Word about the greatest thing God had done for the chosen people up until that time. Speaking of timing, the Red Sea waters must have been still on their minds seeing as it happened only fifty days earlier by Jewish tradition, the original Pentecost festival. God gave no commands until the people were filled with Good News in their own recent history. Now THAT is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God!

[ELCA pastor in Florida]

[For this one, a caveat from EHS. There is a quantum difference between the Good News of “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt,” and the Good News of “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself—not counting trespasses.” If the word “Gospel” means what the NT says it means, it cannot be used as it is in the sentence above “Decalogue begins with first Gospel Word, God bringing the people out of slavery in Egypt.” That was indeed good news for the enslaved Israelites, but it wasn’t Gospel. In Lutheran lingo, God

did it with the left hand. Soteriology (right-handed stuff) it was not.

It was part one of God's legal (sic!) contract with Israel, clean contrary to God's earlier promise/faith covenant with Ur-patriarch Abraham. Part two was this: "You love me and keep my commandments, or else! And here are nine specifics for what I have in mind. You blow your part and you get visited." There was no rejoicing at Sinai after these specs were laid out. Au contraire. The recorded first response: "If God keeps talking to us like this, we're dead meat." Gospel it was not.

Nowhere does any NT writer—and weren't they all Israelites?—ever link the word Gospel to Exodus/Sinai. That is a precedent to be followed. They must have known something. So did Jeremiah already way back then (31:34) as he specked out what was going to be "new" in God's new covenant. The new one would offer what was totally absent in the Sinai contract, namely, "forgiveness" for sinners, i.e., Gospel.

Exodus/Sinai was indeed a gift from God, but a gift that obligates. Gospel is also a gift from God, but a gift that liberates from those very unfulfilled obligations of the prior contract. Exodus/Sinai and Gospel are as different as day and night. Or, shall we say, law and promise. What God has not joined together, let us not do so either.]

In that Gospel,

Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder