

# The Ten Commandments, Part 2: A New Testament Sequel

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## Introduction

In an earlier paper I pointed out that about half of the words in the Hebrew text of the Ten Commandments occur within clauses that give explanations rather than making demands:<sup>1</sup>

The amount of explanatory material in the law is considerable. There are 172 words in the Hebrew text of the Ten Commandments, seventy-seven of which occur in indicative clauses—where words bound by *maqqēp* are counted separately. Counting in this way indicative material makes up 45% (77/172) of the total. As regards *maqqēp*, there are thirty-one examples in all and sixteen (52%) in indicative clauses. If words bound by *maqqēp* are counted jointly there are 141 word units in all, with sixty-two examples in indicative clauses. The method is slightly different but the results are the same. Indicative material still accounts for 44% (62/141) of the total when *maqqēp* is counted. The point to notice is that in either case virtually half of the bulk of the Ten Commandment law consists of explanatory clauses rather than commands.<sup>2</sup>

Text exhibit 3 from my earlier paper, which isolates the law's non-imperative clauses, is repeated here for the reader's convenience as text exhibit 1.

### Text Exhibit 1 Non-Imperative Clauses in the Ten Commandments

#### First Four Commands

- 1 "(2) I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
- 2 ". . . for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.
- 3 ". . . for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
- 4 "(11) For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

#### Last Six Commands

- 5 ". . . so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you."

It was pointed out that there is a pattern in the location of explanatory clauses.<sup>3</sup> They do not occur randomly. Such clauses are concentrated in the first table of the law (commands 1-4) and generally follow the imperative clause that they accompany. Two exceptions to this pattern are: (1) that in the first commandment of the first table the explanatory clause is placed before its corresponding imperative clause rather than after, and (2) that in the first commandment of the second table an explanatory clause is included although it is not expected there.

It is not necessary to assert that the Ten Commandments are a highly structured literary document. They divide into two distinct tables and the clauses within them are easily numbered.<sup>4</sup> I merely point out that the structure of the law includes some features we may have missed as well as others that we commonly notice. There are explanatory as well as imperative clauses. There is a definite pattern in where the explanations are located. And any variations on this pattern have the effect of making explanatory clauses more prominent than they would have been otherwise.

A question raised rather than settled by the above analysis is why commandments 6-10 should be devoid of explanatory clauses. No answer to this question is available on the basis of Exod 20 alone. We must turn to another part of Scripture altogether in order to complete the series of explanations begun in the law.

## New Testament Sequel to Sinai

The New Testament sequel to Israel's experience at Sinai is the Sermon on the Mount. On the one occasion, "The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain" (Exod 19:20). On the other occasion, when Jesus saw the crowds that were gathering, "he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them" (Matt 5:1).<sup>5</sup> In the one case the first five commandments of the law are explained, as shown above. In the other case the last five commandments are explained. The explanations begun amid thunder and lightning on the rocky and forbidding mount Sinai are continued on a quiet and sunny Galilean slope. Thus, although there are contrasts between the two occasions, the one scene may be considered an extension of the other. Here the series of explanations begun in the law is completed.

### Literary structure of the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is carefully constructed. It is not just a miscellaneous collection of sayings.<sup>6</sup>

Matt 5:13-16 is a chiasmic counterpart to 5:43-48. Similarly Matt 6:1-4 corresponds to 7:1-6. On first glance the statements that introduce these two main sections would appear to be contradictory. On the one hand Christ tells His hearers, "let your light shine before men" (5:16), and on the other He says, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (6:3). The one statement precedes a discussion of the law (murder, adultery, false witness, theft and covetousness), the other precedes a discussion of other religious duties (giving, praying, fasting, not worrying, not judging). So the difference between openness and secrecy corresponds to a difference in subject matter. Seen as subtopics within a two-part sermon outline, the contrast between Matt 5:13-48 and 6:1-7:6 makes excellent sense.

Within the first main section above, Matt 5:13-16 corresponds chiastically to 5:43-48. Being the salt of the earth and the light of the world is compared to being like our Father, which, if we really are His children, would be difficult to avoid and, if we are not, would be an impossible goal to attain. There is nothing salt can do to make itself salty and, from an opposite point of view, there is nothing light can do but shine. People can attempt hide the light if they choose, but light itself can only shine. There is an element of being as well as doing in keeping the law, to which we return below.

Within the second main section, Matt 6:1-4 corresponds chiastically to 7:1-6. Here the difficulty of maintaining a right motive for our own actions is presented as a reason for generosity when interpreting the motives that other people have for their actions. The material in between these two sets of beginning and ending passages (5:17-42; 6:5-34) represents the central core of Christ's discourse.

Flanking the two main sections are Matt 5:3-12 and 7:7-27, which deal respectively with the benefits and the challenges of discipleship (Christ's introduction and conclusion), and beyond them lie 5:1-2 and 7:28-29 (Matthew's introduction and conclusion). For an overview of the above outline see fig. 1.

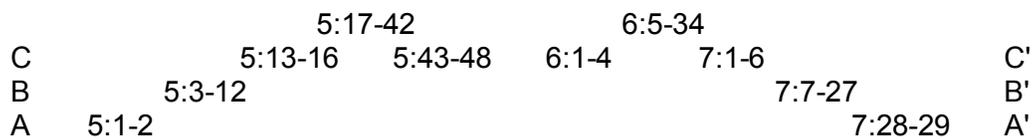


Fig. 1. Chiastic outline format for the Sermon on the Mount as recorded in Matt 5:1-7:29.

The content of the six labeled sections in fig. 1 may be summarized as follows:

- A Christ starts to speak
- A' Christ finishes speaking
  
- B Summary of blessings associated with discipleship
- B' Summary of challenges involved in discipleship
  
- C Being a Christian openly: keeping the law
- C' Doing good things secretly: other religious obligations

In addition to the above chiastic relationships there some nonchiastic ones that should be pointed out. Matt 5:16 (beginning of section C) corresponds to 6:1 (beginning--not end--of section C') and 5:48 (end of section C) corresponds to 7:12 (end--not beginning--of section C'). The passages referred to are now quoted.

*Beginning of section C: things to do openly.* "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

*Beginning of section C': things to do secretly.* "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven." (Matt 6:1)

*End of section C: summary of section on the law.* "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt 5:48)

*End of section C': summary of section on other aspects of discipleship.* "In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matt 7:12)

In the present paper I deal mostly with Matt 5:17-42, the central part of the first main section in Christ's discourse. There are four subsections within Matt 5:17-42, each having as its subject matter one or more commandments of the law. Verses 17-20 preface the discussion of specific commandments. Verses 21-26 explain the sixth commandment, vss. 27-32 the seventh commandment, vss. 33-37 the ninth commandment, and vss. 38-42 the eighth and tenth commandments together.

Matt 5:17-20: Christ's attitude toward the law

*Fulfilling as opposed to abolishing.* Christ begins by clarifying His intentions and the nature of His attitude toward the law before discussing any of its individual commandments:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (18) I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matt 5:17)

Here is the context for what follows. Christ is not hostile to the law--at least we cannot show that He is on the basis of what He says in Matt 5:17-20. Indeed, His is the only life in all human history that from beginning to end, at every point and in every way, supports the teachings of the law and illustrates the principles behind them. To assert otherwise would be to assert that Christ Himself needs a Savior. He does not. His life was always in perfect harmony with His Father's will. But it is not just that Christ Himself kept His Father's law. His life fills that law with significance for His followers. Neither what He did nor what He said has the opposite effect of making the law empty or void.

Christ "will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). It was not the Savior's purpose to be born a man and go through the agony of death in order to provide a means by which sin could continue, but with impunity. It was not His purpose to divorce sin from guilt and to save His people only from the latter, removing guilt without removing the cause of guilt. The relationship between sin and guilt is not an arbitrary one. If it were, an arbitrary decision could have been made freeing mankind from the guilt of sin without Christ having to die. In Gethsemane He prayed fervently three times that He might not have to go through with the separation from His Father that death would bring. But there was no alternative plan. He had to die. Only by doing so could He vindicate His Father's character and reconcile mankind to the God whose attributes are reflected in the law. Christ did not come to destroy the law. In one sense establishing the lasting claims of the law destroyed Him.

*"The least of these commandments."* If Christ considered the Ten Commandments more binding than death itself, there is a question as to His meaning in Matt 5:19. The word "least"

(Greek *elachistos*) is used twice there--the first time in reference to commandments, the second time in reference to people.

"Anyone who breaks one of the least [*elachistōn*] of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least [*elachistos*] in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great [*megos*] in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:19).

What Christ means by "one of the least of these commandments" is then illustrated by the sixth commandment, "Do not murder" (vs. 21). There is no context in which the commandment to preserve human life is unimportant--whether considered in and of itself or in comparison with any of the other ten. Indeed, one could argue that in one sense this commandment is the most important of all. So how can it be used to illustrate what Christ means by the word "least" in vs. 19?

Greek *elachistos* can mean either small in importance or small in size. Which shade of meaning a writer has in mind at any given time must be determined from context. In this case the context is provided by vs. 18:

"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished." (Matt 5:18)

In vs. 18 there is no indication that those words of the law which contain the letter yodh (jot), or letters normally written with a tilde (tittle), have special importance. Yodh is mentioned because it is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet and tilde is mentioned because it is the smallest part of a letter.

In vs. 19, therefore, where Christ speaks of commandments instead of letters, He must be taken to mean the smallest in size, not the smallest in importance. It would make no sense in any context to call murder unimportant. Franz Dibelius summarizes the argument well:

If one mistakes the 'least of these commandments' [*den 'kleinsten Geboten*] for parts of the law that are less important in content, then the section Mt 5,17-48 is a peculiar muddle of disparate thoughts. If, however, one sees there the smallest in size, but greatest in content, then what we have is an unbroken unity expressing a single thought.<sup>7</sup>

In the Hebrew the commandment forbidding murder contains only two words (*lō' tiršāḥ*). See table 1 (below).

Table 1  
Relative Sizes of the Ten  
Commandments in Hebrew

Commandment	Number of Words without <i>maqqēp</i>	Number of Words with <i>maqqēp</i>
1	16	14
2	43	37
3	17	13
4	55	41
5	15	12
6	2	2
7	2	2
8	2	2
9	5	4
10	15	14

If in vs. 19a "least" refers to physical size, in vs. 19b it does not. There Christ warns that if a person breaks any of the commandments--whichever one, however small it may be--he or she "will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, . . ." It cannot be His intent that one who disregards a commandment will be physically smaller in heaven than his companions. Here the word refers to relative importance. So the same Greek word *elachistos* must be interpreted differently in Matt 5:19a and 19b.

Notice in passing that although forms of the same word are used in both English and Greek, in the Syriac Peshitta there is a difference between "least" as regards commandments in vs. 19a and "least" as regards people in vs. 19b. The one word is *z<sup>e</sup>ūrē* (*z<sup>e</sup>ar* "to lessen, diminish"), the other is *b<sup>e</sup>šrā'* (*b<sup>e</sup>sar* "to take away, subtract, lessen"). The two words overlap in meaning, so it may not be useful to look for a precise semantic distinction between them. The important thing is that a distinction is made. As regards consulting the Syriac, Christ was undoubtedly speaking Aramaic as He addressed the people on the Galilean mountainside.<sup>8</sup> The Syriac of the Peshitta represents an eastern dialect of this same language. And it is likely that Matthew also used Aramaic when he first wrote down his gospel.<sup>9</sup> The link is not a direct one, but the evidence from the Peshitta should not be ignored. In this case it lends independent support to a conclusion based originally on contextual grounds.

*The righteousness of the Pharisees.* At the end of the present introductory section (vss. 17-20) Christ says:

"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matt 5:20)

This statement must have seemed incomprehensible to His first hearers, but with hindsight there is a ready explanation for it. Elsewhere Christ accuses the Jewish leaders of having a piety that was only external and did not reach the inner man: "You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence" (Matt 23:25). The Pharisees are not criticized for cleaning the outside of the cup as it were. The problem is that they had not cleaned the inside.

"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." (Matt 23:23)

I am not here advocating that Christians tithe the seeds in their containers of table spices, but again Christ does not condemn the Pharisees for doing so. What He condemns them for is failing to exhibit justice, mercy, and faithfulness. It is not that they have done too much, but that they have done too little. Their righteousness was deficient, being limited to external matters alone. An entire dimension of righteousness was missing from their experience. There was indeed something that passed for right doing but it was not accompanied by right thinking, and one of the major points of Christ's exposition of the law in Matt 5 is that what we think and what we do are inseparably bound up with each other. As Martin Luther would later remark,

Now, it is assumed by some that the fruits of faith make the faith to be faith, although Paul [Gal 5:6] intends something different, namely, that faith makes the fruit to be fruit.<sup>10</sup>

At this point in the discourse Christ has pointed out that His life and ministry are not hostile to the law, that in saying this He has reference to even the smallest of the commandments, and that the Jewish leaders of His day have an inadequate conception of the law's requirements. He now proceeds to show what is involved in keeping the law by discussing specific examples.

Matt 5:21-32: commandments  
6 and 7

Christ now comments on the commandments contained in the second half of the law, but quotes only two of the ten directly. These are numbers 6 and 7--the ones dealing with murder and adultery. See text exhibit 2.

#### Text Exhibit 2 Commandments Quoted in the Sermon on the Mount

- #6 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' (22) But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." (Matt 5:21-22)
- #7 "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' (28) But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt 5:27-28)

*Why did Christ begin with the sixth commandment?* It was mentioned earlier that in terms of the Greek original the phrase "one of the least of these commandments" must be interpreted to mean "one of the smallest of these commandments." That is the intent. Supporting evidence

for this position was found in the ancient Syriac. But this still does not explain why Jesus began His series of comments on the law with the sixth commandment instead of say the fifth. That is where the second table begins. It would be pressing the illustration too far to assume that because Christ began with matters having to do with relative size--of letters, of the strokes making up letters, of commandments made up of letters--that a two-word commandment must be used as His first illustration.

I suggest that the reason why Christ began His exposition of the law with commandment number 6 is much more significant than the fact that it contains two words. Centuries earlier He had broken off a similar series of explanations with commandment number 5. The fifth commandment receives no comment here because it had received similar attention earlier.

A given commandment might well be discussed on more than one occasion. In Deut 6:6-9, after the Ten Commandments are repeated in Deut 5:6-21, Israel was urged to study them at every opportunity. But there is a reason for avoiding repetition in this case. By beginning at the very point now where He had left off centuries before, Christ is able to do more with His words than merely elucidate His text. He is able to show the intimate connection between the two discourses in question--on Sinai first and then on the Galilean mountainside. The close connection between them is made clear by His manner of presentation. The same connection is alluded to also in Matt 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." We must hear both discourses together in order to grasp the full scope of what is being said in either one of them.

*Commandment 6.* I have emphasized the similarities between Sinai and the Sermon on the Mount and in particular that explanations of the commandments are given on both occasions. But the type of explanation Christ gives in Matt 5 is different from what He gave in Exod 20. On Sinai, when we read such things as, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt" (Exod 20:2), "for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (vs .5), "for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (vs. 7), "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth" (vs. 11), and "so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you" (vs. 12), the point being made is that the law is reasonable.

In the Sermon on the Mount the law is shown to be spiritual. It condemns all sin, not only sinful actions. The first step in the direction toward murder is shown to be no different from the last. Having said this, it is not the case that once a man has hated an associate it then makes no difference whether or not he also kills him. It certainly makes a difference to the other party, and it makes a difference to the one who has nursed his hard feelings as well. The all-important element of human choice must be taken into account. Quoting both Ps 62:12 and Prov 24:12 Paul says, with reference to bad actions primarily, "God 'will give to each person according to what he has done'" (Rom 2:6), not only according to what he has thought. And with reference to good actions John says, "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Thinking and doing cannot be dissociated from each other. Wrong thinking is comparable to wrong doing. Wherever wrong of either sort is found, the law condemns it.

*On leaving one's gift at the altar.* Christ does not approach the commandment prohibiting murder from a wholly negative point of view. The sixth commandment provides the setting for the following very positive instruction:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift." (Matt 5:23-24)

There are two points to notice here. First, the opposite counterpart of murder is reconciliation. All of the Ten Commandments have positive intent, even though all but one appears to be negative in tone.<sup>11</sup> This is one point. Another is that being reconciled to a brother and being reconciled to God are two parts of one process. Relationships between man and man are dealt with in the second table of the law (commandments 5-10), while relationships between man and God are dealt with in the first table (commandments 1-4). The law would be incomplete without either.<sup>12</sup> It is a unified whole.

*On being taken to court.* Until we are reconciled to God He appears as an adversary to us. His law condemns us and takes us to court, before the Judge of all the universe. Here is the context for Paul's remarks:

He forgave us all our sins, (14) having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. (Col 2:14)

The issue here is one of reconciliation. But notice it is not God who reconciles Himself to man; it is man who must be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:20). God does not change (Heb 13:7; James 1:17). We, by contrast, have all strayed off like sheep (Isa 53:6). If this is the case, it is we who must change and allow ourselves to be led back by our rightful Shepherd. The solution to our breaking the law is not God's complete annihilation of the law.

Here is a trustworthy saying:

If we died with him,

we will also live with him;

(12) if we endure,

we will also reign with him.

If we disown him,

he will also disown us;

(13) if we are faithless,

he will remain faithful,

for he cannot disown himself. (2 Tim 2:11-13)

Paul does not deny in Colossians what he asserts in 2 Timothy. God cannot disown Himself. He cannot be untrue to the principles of His own government, because those principles are a reflection of Himself.

Paul does not dismiss the law out of hand in Col 2:13-14. Nor can he be taken to mean that Christ abolishes the law by His death on the cross. If this were the case, some strange implications would follow. First, Paul would be found contradicting Christ, who raises this very question in Matt 5:17 and states explicitly that fulfilling is not the same as abolishing. Second, we would miss an important feature of Paul's imagery. Nailing two objects together does not destroy them but makes them inseparable, strengthening both. Many artists have attempted to represent the crucifixion on canvass. They generally show an object nailed to the cross, but it is not a scroll of the law. It is Christ's broken body. If one is inclined to interpret Col 2:14 in an

antinomian manner, he should first ask what effect Christ's being nailed to the cross has on His significance for Christians.

The answer, again, is reconciliation. When the sinner realizes that he is estranged from God and accepts that he is the one at fault in the estrangement, his entire attitude is changed and God no longer appears to be standing against him but is rightly seen as his Friend.

*Commandment 7.* The principle outlined above with reference to murder applies also to adultery--any impure act must necessarily follow from an impure thought. No action is in the fullest sense thoughtless. The first step toward adultery is the same as the first step toward murder--i.e., harboring the thought in one's mind. And the first step toward adultery is the same in principle as the last. Lust produces adultery just as hatred produces murder. The thought does not necessarily result in the deed, but the deed is necessarily preceded by the thought. The law condemns both forms of sin equally.

Christ does not content Himself with stating an abstract philosophical principle about the nature of adultery. He goes on, in vss. 31-32, to make a very practical application in the matter of divorce. What He says would be useful in any society, but all the more in the one where He lived. Consider the Samaritan woman at the well: "Jesus said to her, 'You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true'" (John 4:18). This account tells us something about the woman, but it also tells us something about her social environment. Her case cannot have been unusual. A similar attitude toward divorce can be seen in the question of the Saducees in Matt 22:23-28. They posed the problem of a woman who was married to each of seven brothers in turn and the question was whose wife she would be in the resurrection.

The Mishnah, codified from earlier rabbinic oral traditions at about the close of the second century A.D., takes an entirely casual attitude toward divorce. The last paragraph in tractate Gittin reads as follows:

The School of Shammai say: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, Because he hath found in her *indecenty* in anything. And the School of Hillel say: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, Because he hath found in her indecenty in *anything*. R. Akiba says: Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, And it shall be if she find no favour in his eyes . . .<sup>13</sup>

Only in the matter of procedural questions is divorce taken seriously and here it is taken very seriously. For example,

[If he said,] 'This is thy bill of divorce if I die,' or 'This is thy bill of divorce if I die of this sickness', or 'This is thy bill of divorce after my death', he has said nothing. [But if he said,] ['This is thy bill of divorce] from to-day if I die', or 'from now if I die', the bill of divorce is valid. [But if he said,] 'From to-day and after my death,' it is valid and it is not valid; and if he died she must perform *halitzah* and may not contract levirate marriage. [If he said,] 'This is thy bill of divorce from to-day if I die of this sickness', but he rose up and went into the street and again grew sick, and died, they must find the likely cause of death: if he died of the first sickness, the bill of divorce is valid; otherwise it is not valid.<sup>14</sup>

The relationship between theory and practice is here shown to be similar to the relationship between thought and action generally. Christ is not dealing only with abstract philosophical matters. What He says meets the ongoing, practical needs of His followers. His teaching on divorce is surely as relevant for our society today as it was for His in the first century.

*Thought and action.* I have already stated that, for Christ, our thoughts and the actions they lead to are comparable. It is not just that actions follow from thoughts, but that thoughts and actions are directly related. Here is the context for what James says about deeds, which has been misunderstood because it has been placed in a setting where it does not belong.

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? (15) Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. (16) If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (17) In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:14-17).

James is not discussing the relationship between law and grace, but the relationship between thought and action. Luther's attitude toward the book betrays a misunderstanding of this fact.

Luther read the New Testament in the light of the Pauline message that the just shall live by faith and not by works of the law. That this doctrine is not enunciated with equal emphasis throughout the New Testament and appears to be denied in the book of James did not escape Luther, and in his preface to the New Testament of 1522 James was stigmatized as "an epistle of straw."<sup>15</sup>

And yet Luther is a paradigm example of one who put into practice exactly what James was trying to say. When Luther saw that things were not right in the church of his day, he did not just reflect on the unfortunate nature of the problem. He did something and the Reformation was the result. The only illustration of James' point that is more compelling than the case of Luther is that of Paul, who turned the Mediterranean world upside down with his preaching. Paul did not contradict James; he illustrated in his life the truth of what James said. And in a similar way James did not contradict Paul; he advocated putting Paul's faith into actual practice instead of merely talking about it in some abstract manner. The two men's views can be contrasted, but it is not necessary to set them off in opposition as though to agree with the one is to disagree with the other. It is not only unnecessary to do so but unreasonable. The New Testament needs both James and Paul.

*What is thrown into hell?* It is not Christ's main point, or mine, but notice that the type of entity thrown into hell (Greek *geenna*) is one that has eyes (vs. 29) and hands (vs. 30). By definition a disembodied spirit does not have body parts such as these. Thus, the whole person is referred to here and not just his or her spirit. As Christ said in a different context, "Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). The entity which, with continued disobedience, is punished by fire has bodily members such as eyes and hands. A ghost, such as the disciples thought they were seeing, does not have flesh and bones. Eyes and hands, flesh and bones--in either case we are talking about something physical. The body has such things, a ghost does not. There are therefore no disembodied spirits in hell. And it is not just that the body and spirit are united there, the parts of the body are united as well. It is

the "whole body" that is "thrown into hell" (Matt 5:29). Nor is it a disenspirited body that we are talking about. It is the entire person. These facts have far-reaching implications.<sup>16</sup>

Matt 5:33-42: commandments

8 to 10

Christ earlier quoted two of the Ten Commandments and commented on them directly. He appears to stop at that point and turn to other matters--the swearing of oaths and *lex talionis* or the principle of a tooth for a tooth. Christ stops with the seventh commandment, however, only in the sense that it is the last one He quotes word for word. His explanation of the law continues in the verses that follow.

*Commandment 9.* There is a clear connection between Christ's teaching about oaths and the ninth commandment, which prohibits giving false testimony. In both cases the intent is that one's speech should be simple, pure, and accurate.

#9 "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matt 5:37)

The ninth commandment says, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exod 20:16). Christ does not quote the commandment here, but His allusion to it has been generally recognized.

After that Jesus goes on to [discuss] individual commandments of the law, and they are among the shortest ones: you must not kill, you must not commit adultery, you must not swear falsely.<sup>17</sup>

In the above quotation Dibelius acknowledges that the ninth commandment ("you must not swear falsely") is discussed in the Sermon on the Mount along with the sixth and the seventh, even though that commandment is not quoted.

Christ makes clear that His followers are to avoid not only outright distortions of fact, as stated in the ninth commandment, but also empty exaggeration. This lofty standard establishes a context of directness and simplicity in which the question of actual misrepresentation does not arise. The relationship, therefore, between the positive principle of simplicity in our use of words and the law's demand for factual accuracy is the same as that between hatred and murder or between lust and adultery. Simplicity and accuracy reflect a principle of thought that is inherent within the ninth commandment and which, when applied as Christ applies it, serves to strengthen the commandment rather than taking it away. The principle was always there, but now it is pointed out and applied.

*Commandments 8 and 10.* In the law itself commandments 1-5 are explained. In the Sermon on the Mount we have documented a continuation of the series of explanations with commandments 6 and 7 quoted and commandment 9 clearly alluded to. This leaves only commandments 8 and 10. The question is whether they have been omitted for some reason or whether these commandments also figure in Christ's discussion.

The eighth commandment says, "You shall not steal" (Exod 20:15). The tenth commandment is similar to it, "You shall not covet . . ." (Exod 20:17). On the one hand it is unlawful to take things that do not belong to us, on the other hand it is unlawful even to want to

take such things. The action most closely related to coveteousness is theft. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ discusses these two commandments together, from a positive rather than negative perspective, in Matt 5:38-42.

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' (39) But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (Matt 5:38-39)

In the case of *lex talionis* or a tooth for a tooth the agrieved party had the right to seek revenge within certain limits.<sup>18</sup> But Christ's disciples are to forego that right. This is a more stringent standard than the commandment not to steal. In the eighth commandment we are told not to take what does not rightfully belong to us. In Christ's instruction on *lex talionis* and on turning the other cheek we are told not to take what we could otherwise rightfully claim.

Inherent in what Christ says is another principle--that as Christians we are not only to avoid taking revenge, we are to avoid the desire for revenge. The relationship between not taking revenge and not wanting to take it on the one hand is the same as that between not taking things and not wanting to take them on the other hand. Christ is here addressing precisely the principle that underlies the eighth and tenth commandments.

## The Similarities between Exod 19-20 and Matt 5

Within the text of the Ten Commandment law there are clauses explaining commandments 1 through 5.<sup>19</sup> In the Sermon on the Mount Christ completes the series of explanations He had begun so many years earlier by commenting, directly or indirectly, on each of commandments 6 through 10. Thus, in His manner of presentation as well as in the substance of what He says, Christ binds the two occasions together and shows the closeness of the relationship between them.

The two theophanies, on Sinai and in Galilee, might seem to stand in marked contrast to each other--thunder and lightning as opposed to quiet personal discourse, an Old Testament setting as opposed to a New Testament setting, the distant and austere Father as opposed to the warm and approachable Son, people afraid for their lives on the one occasion but drawn by Jesus' unassuming manner on the other.

The two discourses, however, are actually quite similar. The thunder and lightning frightened people at Sinai rather than some other mountain because God approached His people where they were. He came to them instead of demanding that they come to Him. When the Lord spoke concerning what the people thought was only outward obedience they were frightened by the Speaker's outward appearance and were afraid He had come too close to them physically. When the same Lord later spoke quietly of spiritual things He touched their innermost thoughts and lives. There was no basis for outward fear, but when we think about what He said it is just as awesome in its implications as anything the people saw and heard around Sinai. Again God has come too close for the unregenerate man or woman to be comfortable in His presence.

Weiss and Schweitzer held that the demands were too radical for all times, and thus declared them 'interim ethics' for the early Christians, who believed that the end of all things was at hand. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Another writer, Kittel, took "the demands as purposely exaggerated so as to drive man to a sense of failure (and hence to repent and believe), . . ." <sup>21</sup> Kittel is both right and wrong. Christ teaches that the law condemns all sin, not just outward sin that has matured and taken the more tangible form of wrong actions. It condemns sin at a level that cannot be hidden from God even if we are capable of hiding it from ourselves. This is not just a high standard, it is an infinite standard. But Christ is not guilty of the exaggeration He condemns in Matt 5:33-37. An infinite standard needs no exaggeration to be impressive.

## Conclusion

The law was always just as spiritual as what Christ represents it to be in the Sermon on the Mount, but the people were not prepared to receive its more spiritual lessons immediately. First they had to learn that the law is reasonable, then in due time they could begin to appreciate the fact that it is also spiritual. One cannot learn the fullest significance of the law while refusing to obey it. But obeying once does not bring an immediate rush of insight into the significance of what has been done. That takes time. And so Israel was instructed to talk about the commandments "when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (Deut 6:7). There was a deeper meaning to God's commands than His people would be able to realize at first. The meaning of each commandment was to be probed and examined continually so that its deeper meanings could be learned. When Christ points out in His later discourse that the law is spiritual He illustrates the type of lesson that Israel could have learned by following Moses' instruction in the passage just quoted. The spiritual aspects of the law have always been there, but would not be found without a search.

When Christ says that the law should be kept openly, for all to see, He is not calling on Christians to repeat the mistake of the Pharisees by performing their acts of righteousness for outward display. To assume that this is the case betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of what it means to keep the law. What is to be opened to public view is the character of the Father in the lives of His children. The primary function of the law is to reveal what God is like. It condemns sin only because it is not like God to sin. The law is a written transcript of God's character.

Christ's command in Matt 5:48 is not, "Do perfectly, as your heavenly Father does perfectly," but "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." If right doing follows from right thinking, right thinking in turn follows from right being. One reels at the thought of being judged by such a standard. But if in our prostrate position we look up and catch a glimpse of the cross, the fairness and relevance of even this requirement can be seen.

In the gospel Christ not only says in various ways what and who he is, as for instance the shepherd, the vine, the light, the way, the truth, the life and the door, but he also says of himself: I am. Thus we read in John 8:24: ". . . Except ye believe that I am (he), ye shall die in your sins." In this unusual "I am" we have, says Gosheide, a self-disclosure such as had not, till now, been given us. "I am": with these words any living man can indicate his earthly existence but the *I am* of Christ transcends this by far and can become an object of decisive belief. The use of these words is

reminiscent of the divine utterances occurring in the Old Testament; for instance, "I am that I am" (Ex. 3:14); or "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me" (Deut. 32:39). For Christ, no less than for God, the *I am* without a predicate is valid; and upon this extraordinary reality, also here, faith is focussed.<sup>22</sup>

Christ is the ultimate revelation of God--in His life no less than in His death. He brings the law to fulfillment because His purpose, like that of the law, is to reveal the Father. But what the law was unable to do, Christ accomplished. The law could not convey the fullness of God's character, being only a written code. But Christ, having taken human flesh and lived among us, could reveal the Father fully and it was His primary goal to do so. Saving mankind was only part of His task. Salvation could apply only to sinners, led by Satan, who was "hurled to the earth" (Rev 12:9). But the self-revelation of the Father in Christ would be instructive to the entire universe.

God represents Himself as One who longs to be known and understood by His creatures. In Christ He could do this, and nowhere more clearly than on the cross. Here we see God in human flesh dying in order to give life to others (commandment 6), offering a spotless Sacrifice because of His infinite purity (commandment 7), speaking the simple, straightforward truth as He revealed the Father to lost mankind (commandment 9), not taking revenge on His enemies even though He could have claimed the right to do so (commandment 8), and not even wanting to take such revenge (commandment 10). A law like this does not need to be repealed or abolished. On the contrary, it needs to be written on our hearts (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:19-20; Heb 8:10-12; 10:16-17), as it was on Christ's. The thing that needs to change is our attitude toward the law if we find the above characteristics distasteful. This is part of being reconciled to God, i.e., realizing what He is like and accepting Him, as we would want Him to accept us, without preconditions--without asking that He change, without wanting Him to change, wanting Him always to remain just as He is, wanting in some way to be like Him.

To keep the law as Christ kept the law is to reflect the Father as Christ reflected Him. It involves being God's children, thinking like one of the family, and honoring our Father by doing what He has asked us to do because He has asked us to do it. In the next issue of *Historicism* I conclude the present series on the Ten Commandments with the much-discussed but poorly understood topic of Christian perfection.

Note: All Scripture quotations in this paper, except when noted otherwise, are from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright (c) 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Reprint corrected 10/29/87.

<sup>1</sup>Hardy, "The Ten Commandments, Part 1: Non-Imperative Clauses," *Historicism* No. 6/Apr 86, pp.59-70.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 65-66.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 63-64.

<sup>4</sup>The structure is clear but not transparent. There is a difference of opinion, for example, about where the law begins. I submit that the first commandment includes vs. 2. That verse is not part of the introduction to the law, but part of the law itself. See *ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>5</sup>See also Luke 6:12, 17-18. The "level place" of Luke 6:17 was evidently located on the "mountainside" of Matt 5:1. The parallel with Exod 19 is perhaps stronger in Luke 6 than in Matt 5 because, even though Matthew speaks of a "mountainside," Luke speaks of Christ descending, i.e., going down, to the place where He addressed the assembled people.

<sup>6</sup>There is disagreement as to whether the Sermon on the Mount is actually a sermon. The problem is that the materials corresponding to the Sermon on the Mount in Luke are scattered, although some of them are indeed gathered together and called a sermon in Luke 6:20-42. But other parts of the discourse appear as follows, according to Earnest DeWitt Burton and Edgard Johnson Goodspeed, *A Harmony of the Gospels in Greek*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947):

<i>Luke</i>	<i>Matthew</i>
14:34b-35a	5:13
11:33	5:15
16:17	5:18
12:58-59	5:25-26
16:18	5:32
12:30	6:8
11:2-4	6:9-13
12:33-35	6:19-23
16:13	6:25
12:22-32	6:25-34
11:9-13	7:7-11
13:24	7:13
13:26-27	7:22-23

I have no special insight into this matter, but proceed under the assumption that Matt 5-7 represents a summary of a real sermon preached on a single occasion. If its contents were not originally presented all at one time, then the Holy Spirit guided Matthew in a profound manner as he brought together the materials for this narrative from what Christ had said on other occasions. The outline is definitely part of the message in the Sermon on the Mount.

<sup>7</sup>"Zwei Worte Jesu" [Two Sayings of Jesus], *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11 (1910): 190. Compare the above statement with the following from William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich's standard lexicon (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press]), s.v. *elachistos*: "Of commandments *unimportant* Mt 5:19a (FDibelius, ZNW 11, '10, 188-90). Of animals *the smallest* 1 Cl 20:10." It is inexplicable to me how Dibelius' intent could be so completely misrepresented in a standard reference work of this sort. What he is quoted as saying is exactly the opposite of what he actually says.

<sup>8</sup>In comparison with Greek, Syriac is virtually identical to the language of Jesus. In comparison with other dialects of Aramaic sharp distinctions can be made. The former is the context I wish to emphasize. Matthew Black ("Aramaic Studies and the Language of Jesus," *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, ed. Matthew Black and Georg Fohrer, Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 103 [Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1968], p. 28, no. 51), quotes R. H. Charles' translation of a passage from the Letter of Aristeas as follows: "'They (the Hebrew Scriptures) need to be translated', answered Demetrius, 'for in the country of the Jews they use a peculiar alphabet, and speak a peculiar dialect. They are supposed to use the Syriac tongue, but this is not the case; their language is quite different.'" He then goes on to say, "The reference is to the peculiar dialect of Aramaic spoken by the Jews, a dialect of West Aramaic, quite different from Syriac, the dialect of East Aramaic which was in regular use as the standard Aramaic language" (ibid.). Same or different is a fundamental philosophical question and in answering it with regard to Syriac and the language of Jesus one must maintain a sense of proportion. There are differences, but both Syriac and the language of Jesus are dialects of Aramaic and this is the point emphasized here.

<sup>9</sup>See Alfred Wickenhauser, *New Testament Introduction* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1958), pp. 178-82. "Papias of Hierapolis (c. 130 A.D.) is our oldest source of information about St. Matthew's Gospel; he says: 'Matthew put together in the Hebrew (i.e. Aramaic) language (cf. Acts 21,40; 22,2; 26,14; John 20,16) the discourses (*logia*) and each one translated them as best he could'" (ibid., p. 179). "The next writer to give information on the matter is Irenaeus, who says: 'Matthew (preaching) among the Hebrews also produced in their language a writing of the Gospel, while Peter and Paul were preaching and founding the Church in Rome'" (p. 180). Many protestant scholars challenge the Aramaic origin of Matthew's gospel.

<sup>10</sup>*Table Talk*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert, Luther's Works, vol. 54 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 74.

<sup>11</sup>Anyone may skip over this footnote who wishes to do so, but some of my readers will find it helpful. Computer literacy is becoming more common. Consider the following program segment written in Pascal (for a similar example and detailed discussion see Tom Swan, *Mastering Turbo Pascal* [Hasbrouck Heights, NJ: Hayden, 1986], p. 44):

```
BEGIN
```

```
  writeln('Enter a number between 1 and 15.');
```

```
  REPEAT
```

```
    readln(number);
```

```
    okay:=(number>=1) AND (number<=15);
```

```
    IF NOT okay THEN writeln('Try another number.');
```

```
  UNTIL okay;
```

```
  writeln('Okay');
```

```
END.
```

A negative conditional statement ("IF NOT okay") occurs in line 12. As an exercise, try rewriting this conditional statement in terms of the responses you do get instead of the ones you do not get. There are times when a negative statement is the most elegant way to convey information or to capture an idea.

<sup>12</sup>When Jesus is asked on another occasion, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (Matt 22:36), the intent of the question is clearly to find out which commandment Jesus considered the most important. The items mentioned in His answer are not drawn from the Ten Commandments, but do relate to the contents of the first and second tables: "Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matt 22:37-40). Love to God is the subject dealt with in the first four commandments and love to man is the subject dealt with in the last six. It would appear that love to God is separated from and placed on a higher level than love to man in the above quotation. One should be very careful, however, not to overinterpret Christ's words. Consider how Paul uses similar terminology to draw an entirely different point: "There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism" (Rom 2:9-11). The argument is chiasmic in form: Divine judgment comes on everyone (A); first Jew, then Greek (B); and the reason for saying first Jew, then Greek (B'); is that God does not show favoritism toward anyone (A'). In Christ, God treats all people from every race in exactly the same way. Paul is seeking to eliminate a contrast between Jew and Greek rather than establish one when he says "first" and "then," and yet it is his use of these words that predisposes us to expect otherwise. It may be that when both passages are correctly understood the form of the argument will be seen to be the same in both cases. Thus, Christ's

intent in Matt 22:37-40 may well be that love to God and love to man cannot be dissociated from each other and dealt with separately.

<sup>13</sup>Gittin 9:10. See Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 321.

<sup>14</sup>Mishnah, Gittin 7:3.

<sup>15</sup>Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, New American Library (New York: Mentor Books)

<sup>16</sup>For example, if the entire person burns, then the fire has not started yet because the wicked dead must be physically resurrected before they can meet their punishment. Such a view is consistent with Dan 12:2: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." And beyond the citing of individual passages such as this, notice that the concept of resurrection receives greater emphasis in this model than many have given it, just as it did in Christ's own teaching, as when "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life'" (John 11:25). The Seventh-day Adventist theology of death is based securely on the biblical concept of a bodily resurrection. <sup>17</sup>Dibelius, "Zwei Worte Jesu," p. 189.

<sup>18</sup>The purpose for this law (Exod 21:24; Lev 24:20) was not to encourage revenge, but to prevent it from getting out of proportion. Only one eye could be taken in revenge for an eye, only one tooth for a tooth. No more than this was permitted. Even revenge was to be placed under restraint and kept within reasonable limits.

<sup>19</sup>One would first expect to see the list of explanations limited to commandments 1 through 4. The fifth commandment has a transitional status between the first table to the second. The first table deals with love to God, the second with love to man. But before the age of reason and accountability parents stand in the place of God to their children. They are the only source of sustenance, help, and authority that the child knows during its earliest years. The fifth commandment is in the second table of the law, but it occupies a unique position among the ten. Paul calls this "the first commandment with a promise" (Eph 6:2).

<sup>20</sup>*New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Sermon on the Mount," by R. H. Mounce.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 168.