



# The Pope, Indulgences, and Jesus Christ

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# The Pope, Indulgences, and Jesus Christ

*[Tom Ascol](#)*

## Reformation Background

The year was 1517. The place was the European region of Saxony. Excitement ran high in the small village of Juterbock, located near the more urban University town of Wittenberg.

A Dominican Monk by the name of Johann Tetzel entered the village as an ambassador of Pope Leo X, the head of the Roman Catholic Church. This was Tetzel's latest stop on a tour of selling "indulgences" for the Pope. An indulgence is a certificate which by papal authority promises the removal of punishment and suffering for sin.<sup>[1]</sup> Leo authorized the selling of them to help raise money to pay for the completion of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

Since the middle ages the Roman Catholic Church has taught that while God alone can forgive the guilt of sin, He has left it to the church to forgive the temporal punishments which sin deserves. God removes the guilt and eternal punishment of the Christian's sins, but it is the responsibility of the church--and more specifically, the Pope--to remove the "temporal punishments" which those sins deserve. This is accomplished through an elaborate system of penance, purgatory and indulgence.

Here is how the system works. When you sin, the Roman Catholic Church requires you to make confession to a priest, who then absolves you of your guilt and requires of you acts of penance. These acts of penance may include saying certain prayers a certain number of times or performing specific deeds of charity. The acts of penance are designed as a way for the performer to make temporal payment for his sins. If penance is not performed perfectly or completely--and this is rarely the case--then the penitent's temporal punishments build up over his lifetime.

Since it is impossible for a person to enter into heaven, the very presence of God, with any of his or her sins unpaid for, some method of purging sin from the penitent was needed. Adopted as an article of faith at the Council of Florence in 1439, the doctrine of purgatory fit the bill perfectly. More than a type of "step-down-unit" between earth and heaven, purgatory is a terrible place of suffering where those who do not sufficiently pay for their sins in this life (through perfectly performed works of penance) can spend however much time is necessary being "purged" of their sins after death. This post-mortem temporal punishment is necessary so that one day (and it may take twenty years, one hundred years, one million years, or even fifty billion years; no one knows!) the penitent dead will be made fit for heaven.

Fortunately, the Roman Catholic Church has a "treasury of merit" which holds the possibility of mitigating some or all of a believer's purgatorial sufferings. This treasury consists of the "over-and-above" good works that were done by Christ and unusually faithful men and women throughout history. The saints who performed works of "supererogation" (ie. more than they themselves needed to get out of purgatory and into heaven) have deposited their extra merit into this treasury. The Pope can disburse this accumulated merit as he determines to whom he determines. An indulgence, granted by the Pope, draws on this extra merit in order to reduce the number of years which the recipient must spend in purgatory before he is released to heaven.

The treasury of merit works something like a huge bank account held in trust, with the Pope being the sole trustee. If you owe a \$10,000 debt and fulfill the application process, the Pope has the authority to draw on this account and grant to you enough money to pay your debt. Thus, based on the merits of others your sins are indulged and you can escape at least some of the punishments of purgatory.

Indulgences come in two kinds. A partial indulgence removes part of the penalty of your sin. For example, in the early sixteenth century the Pope declared that any faithful church member who visited the Castle Church in Wittenberg on All

Saint's Day, went to confession, and viewed the more than 5000 relics which were on deposit there would be granted indulgences which reduced the amount of time necessary in Purgatory by 1,902,202 years and 270 days.<sup>[2]</sup> In recent years Rome has become less willing to stipulate the exact number of years which will be discounted in purgatory for partial indulgences. But, for one facing an indeterminate amount of time in torment, something is better than nothing.

It is not, however, better than everything. The second kind of indulgence is a plenary, or full, one. This indulgence removes all of the temporal penalty from sin and therefore all of the time which is required in purgatory. With a plenary indulgence, nothing is left to chance. The recipient goes to heaven. He goes straight to heaven. He does not pass through purgatory.

This background makes more understandable the commotion and excitement which was caused by Tetzel when he entered into the town of Juterbock--especially since the indulgences which he came to sell were not mere partial ones but the plenary kind. Those who purchased his wares were guaranteed to skip purgatory altogether. Furthermore, these indulgences could be applied not only to the purchaser, but also for any dear, departed loved one who up to that point had been suffering the punishments of purgatory.

Tetzel was quite a showman and salesman. And he did all that he could to persuade his hearers to purchase indulgences. Part of his speech played upon the affections of his hearers toward their departed loved ones.

Indulgences have benefit not only for the living but for the dead. Priest, noble, merchant, wife, youth, young girl, do you not hear your parents and your other friends who are dead, and who cry from the bottom of the fiery inferno, "We are suffering horrible torments! An insignificant offering would deliver us; you can give it, and you will not."<sup>[3]</sup>

He even made up a little rhyme which went something like this: "As soon as the coin into the coffer rings, another soul into Heaven springs."

Tetzel was quite effective in convincing multitudes of people to give large sums of money to purchase these indulgences.

Martin Luther, who was a Priest and Professor of Bible at the nearby University of Wittenberg, spoke out strongly against Tetzel and his indulgence selling. Such practice, Luther argued, was tantamount to selling the forgiveness of sins for money and was therefore a perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He was so indignant that he posted on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg 95 theses against indulgences, calling for a public debate of the issue.

Thesis #32 said, "Those who believe that, through indulgence letters, they are made sure of their own salvation, will be eternally damned along with their teachers." He wrote further in thesis #36, "Every Christian who is truly repentant has a right to full remission of penalty and guilt, even without letters of indulgence."

Who was right, Luther or Tetzel? Who has understood the biblical teaching of forgiveness and salvation from sin more accurately--Luther, or the Roman Catholic Church?

These are crucial questions, and not just for historical purposes. What is at stake is the very heart of God's message of salvation. How can sinners be made right with God? How can we become fit to enter His presence in Heaven? What has Jesus Christ accomplished for us, and what is still left for us to accomplish for ourselves? These questions have eternal significance!

## **Recent Papal Bull**

The importance of it was driven home afresh in the latter part of 1998. On November 29, Pope John Paul II, since 1978 the head of the Roman Catholic Church, issued an official declaration, called a papal bull, entitled, *Incarnationis Mysterium*. In this bull the Pope declares the year 2000 as the "Great Jubilee Year," and calls for a year-long celebration to mark the beginning of Christianity's third millennium.

At the very heart of this jubilee celebration is a renewed emphasis on indulgences. Calling it a "precious gift" to the world, the Pope decreed that, beginning on Christmas Eve 1999 and continuing until January 6, 2001, "all the faithful, ... make abundant use of ... the indulgence."[\[4\]](#)

The "Jubilee indulgence" which the Pope is offering is a plenary, (that is, full) indulgence. It purportedly has power to remove completely the penalty of all of your sins & enable you to by-pass purgatory altogether. You can earn one full indulgence a day, benefiting not only yourself but also any of your departed loved ones who are presently suffering in purgatory.

This indulgence can be earned by pilgrimages to Rome or Jerusalem, performing acts of service to others, making donations to the poor, or even by abstaining for only one day from "unnecessary consumption," including smoking, drinking alcohol or sexual relations.[\[5\]](#)

## Salvation in the Bible

How should we respond to this? Pope John Paul II has done many commendable things in his tenure as head of the Roman Catholic Church. He has been an ardent defender of the unborn and an outspoken advocate for human rights. He ought to be applauded for his stand on these and many other issues. Nevertheless, despite his commendable qualities, one must not diminish the fact that what he teaches and what evangelicals teach (or at least, have historically taught) cannot both be right!

"Catholic-bashing" has no place in a Christian's life and it is not my intent to engage in such activity. Nor is it my desire to take cheap theological "pot-shots" at the Pope. *Incarnationis Mysterium*, however, demands to be exposed for the soul-damning document which it is.

In Romans 5:8-11 the Apostle Paul sets forth the absolute completeness of that salvation which Christ has secured for sinners by His death.

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

A glass prism held over white paper in sunlight reveals that white light actually consists of every color of the rainbow. The various shades have always been there, but it takes a prism to manifest them clearly.

In a similar way the death of Jesus serves as a prism for the love of God. In the cross the multifaceted brilliance of divine love shines most clearly. The crucifixion reveals the nature and depth of God's love for sinners. From the cross flow all of the blessings of our comprehensive salvation. Paul refers to three of these blessings in the above text. Collectively, they demonstrate the completeness of salvation and, consequently, the offensiveness of the Pope's recent bull.

*Justification*

The first blessing is justification. To be justified means to be declared righteous in God's sight. As the Shorter Catechism puts it, "Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners effectually called to Jesus Christ, wherein He pardons all their sins, and accepts them as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, and received by faith alone."

Justification is a legal term, borrowed from the courtroom. It describes the status which a believer has before God as Judge. God accepts Christ as a substitute in behalf all who trust in Him. The perfect life which Christ lived and the atoning death which He died are credited to the account of believers. God imputes Christ's righteousness to them. Thus, as Paul says, we are "justified by His blood."

A believer can never be more justified than he is at the moment that he first believes. He can neither add to nor detract from his justification, no matter how many good works he performs. He can increase in grace and holiness, but a Christian can never increase in justification. He is once and forever forgiven, accepted by God for the sake of Jesus Christ. The law of God can never again condemn the person who is in Christ Jesus by faith.

### *Reconciliation*

Another blessing which Paul mentions is reconciliation. To be reconciled to God is to be restored to a peaceful relationship with Him. Sin made us His enemies. Christ has made us His friends. When a believer is granted peace with God it means that the hostilities between them have been put aside. Nothing can be added to this. The fact that God reconciled us while we were His enemies gives us assurance that "we shall be saved by His life." Nothing more is needed. Christ, by His life and His death, has secured everything that is necessary for our salvation.

Though the subjective dimensions of reconciliation are immense for the believer (he is thereby able to love, enjoy and hope in God, etc.), in this passage the Apostle stresses the objective dimension of the blessing. Reconciliation is God's work. It is a fact. Christ's death has accomplished it. God gives it to believers. Through Christ, believers "receive the reconciliation."

### *Propitiation*

The third blessing is not mentioned by name, but Paul very succinctly describes it when he says that "we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (v. 9). Contrary to those who try to reduce the biblical conception of wrath to an impersonal force which is independent of God, the Scripture is clear that what is being "revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," is "the wrath of God" (Romans 1:18). All of us by nature are objects of it (Ephesians 2:3). This wrath, which will culminate on the great day of His wrath (Revelation 6:17), is precisely that from which the death of Christ has saved us.

This is the blessing of propitiation. God set forth Jesus "to be a propitiation by His blood" (Romans 3:25). That is, God gave His only begotten Son, so that by means of His death, divine, holy wrath could be averted from sinners. Because of Christ, believers "shall be saved from wrath." This is an unconditional certainty. Sin and its consequences have been fully and finally dealt with by the death of Christ.

Note carefully Paul's reasoning here. Just as Christians have been justified by Christ's blood in that He died for us when we were sinners, how much more, now that we are reconciled to God, shall we be saved from His wrath! On what basis? Jesus Christ, whose life and death in our behalf has completely saved us. Believers will never be required to suffer the penalty which their sins deserve, because Jesus has already once and for all paid the price.

Can there be any question regarding the comprehensive nature of this salvation? It is complete! God has left nothing to chance. Those who trust Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior have nothing to fear in this life or in the life to come because all

of their sins have been completely punished on the cross. There is nothing else that could ever be done and therefore nothing else that could ever be required which could in any way add to the salvation which God has provided in Jesus Christ.

## **Rome vs. the Bible**

This is radically different from the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. In his recent bull, Pope John Paul has stated,

"Reconciliation with God does not mean that there are no enduring consequences of sin from which we must be purified. It is precisely in this context that the indulgence becomes important, since it is an expression of the 'total gift of the mercy of God.' With the indulgence, the repentant sinner receives a remission of the temporal punishment due for the sins already forgiven as regards the fault."[\[6\]](#)

But Paul teaches that the salvation which God provides in Jesus Christ includes being saved from His wrath--which is the only proper penalty which sin incurs. By His death, Jesus has once and forever paid this penalty.

How cruel to tell people that even though God has forgiven their sins they nevertheless must somehow pay for them through acts of penance by securing an indulgence from the church. Such teaching damns naive people to a life of doubt and fear. It drains the work of Jesus Christ of its glory and power.

The gospel is great news for those who have no hope in themselves--who are willing to trust Christ and Christ alone; to depend on His finished work on the cross and nothing more. But it is bad news for those who trust in indulgences or any religious organization which promises to remove the penalty of sin. There is only one salvation available to sinners and it is all of grace. And the only way which it may be received is through faith--trusting Christ, not trusting the church, the pastor, the Pope or a special letter of indulgence. Salvation is all of grace.

## **The Pope, Indulgences and Jesus Christ**

Pope John Paul is no Johann Tetzel. The Pope, I believe, is a man of integrity. Tetzel was a shyster. But they stand united in their confidence in indulgences. While John Paul's recent pronouncement might have caught some evangelicals off guard, it should not have. The Roman Catholic Church has not changed its views on this subject in over 400 years.

When the controversy over indulgences erupted in the 16th century the Roman Catholic Church was compelled to respond. They did so in an official way at the Council of Trent. That council decreed that the use of indulgences was both right and good. Furthermore, by that council, the Catholic Church "condemns with anathema those who either assert that they are useless; or who deny that there is in the Church the power of granting them" (Session 25, Dec. 4).

In other words, the Roman Catholic Church officially curses--condemns to hell--those who deny the power and legitimacy of indulgences. I willingly stand under Rome's anathema: indulgences are useless and the Church of Rome has no power to grant them. They are worse than useless, for those who trust in them thereby deny Jesus Christ and consign themselves to hell.

Those who trust Jesus Christ are completely saved by Him and thus have no need of any supposed indulgence by the Pope. The treasury of merit is a myth. Purgatory is imaginary. Works of supererogation are nonexistent. No mere mortal has ever been good enough for God, much less better than necessary so that he has merits left over which can be given to others.

Those who know these things must preach Christ with boldness and conviction in the face of error and confusion. Salvation is by grace alone, received through faith alone, which looks to Christ alone and thus redounds to the glory of God alone. In Christ, we have everything that we need--for this life and the life to come.



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<sup>1</sup> See *Enchiridion of Indulgences* (1968), under "Norms of Indulgences," Section 1, and Canon 993 of the *Roman Catholic Church Code of Canon Law*.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Cromarty, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God: The Story of Martin Luther* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Sect. 10, para. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Sect. 4; see Al Mohler, "They're Back . . . The Pope and Indulgences", *Fidelitas* (December 4, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Sect. 9, para. 3.



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<sup>1</sup> See *Enchiridion of Indulgences* (1968), under "Norms of Indulgences," Section 1, and Canon 993 of the *Roman Catholic Church Code of Canon Law*.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Cromarty, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God: The Story of Martin Luther* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1998), 86.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>4</sup> *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Sect. 10, para. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, Sect. 4; see Al Mohler, "They're Back . . . The Pope and Indulgences", *Fidelitas* (December 4, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Sect. 9, para. 3.



# An Ethical Manifesto: 1 Timothy 1:8-11 and the Decalogue

*Richard Barcellos*

In this essay we will reassess 1 Timothy 1:8-11 with the goal of determining whether or not Paul's list of vices reflects both the content and order of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandments. This thesis occurs in Dr. George W. Knight's *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The scope of Dr. Knight's commentary on 1 Timothy 1:8-11 was purposely suggestive due to space constraints. The goal of this essay is to build upon the seminal work of Dr. Knight and suggest that his basic thesis can be supported from the text itself and other considerations.

Assuming the validity of Dr. Knight's thesis, we are supplied with a strong arguments for both the perpetuity of the Decalogue, including the fourth commandment, under the New Covenant and the continuing function of the Decalogue as the basic, fundamental law of God which is applicable to all men. This has major implications for Christian ethics and is in full agreement with historic Baptist theology as represented in *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*.

1 Timothy 1:8-11 states:

But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.<sup>[1]</sup>

In considering this passage, three preliminary questions will be asked in order to set the stage for a more careful consideration of a fourth question. The exposition unfolds in the following order: Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law? What is said about the law? To whom is Paul referring when he says "the law is not made for a righteous person"? What law is Paul referring to in verses 8 through 10?

## Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law?

In verses 5 through 7 Paul makes mention of some who have strayed and turned aside to idle talk (see verses 5, 6). These desire to be teachers of the law though they are ignorant of what they claim is their expertise (see verse 7). In verse 8 a contrast between the way those who have strayed use the law and the proper use of the law is begun and completed in verse 11. Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law? He does so to combat the wrong use of the law and to set forth its right use. The law was being used unlawfully by some and Paul aims to present its lawful use (see Titus 3:9 for another instance of an unlawful use of the law).

## What is said about the law?

In verse 8 Paul says, "that the law is good if one uses it lawfully." The law is both good and can be used lawfully. There is obviously a lawful and unlawful use of the law. Those described in verses 5 through 7 used the good law unlawfully but Paul is going to show its lawful use. Commenting on that which "we know" about the law, New Testament scholar George Knight says:

That which "we know" is "that the law is good" ... The statement has striking similarities with several in Romans 7 (Romans 7:14,16 ... ). The point in 1 Timothy 1:8, as in Romans 7, is to affirm that the *nomos*

(law) is intrinsically good because it is given by God (cf. Romans 2; 7:22; 8:4) and is not to be considered bad, though it can be mishandled, with bad results, as the *nomodidaskaloi* (law-teachers) have done.[2]

It is very clear that in this passage the law is viewed in its intrinsic goodness as it reveals proper God-defined moral behavior.

## To whom is Paul referring?

In verse 9 Paul states, "the law is not made for a righteous person." To whom is he referring? Some understand "a righteous person" to refer to the justified, the saved, the Christian without qualification. "This view acknowledges that the law functions to bring a person to Christ as a sinner, but then asserts that a saved person is not to be concerned with or directed by the law." [3] This common view is contradicted by many texts in Paul's writings (see for instance Romans 7:14, 16, 22, 23; 13:8-10; and especially 2 Timothy 3:16, 17), other texts in the New Testament (Matthew 5:17, 18; James 2:8-11), and does not fit the context as will become clear. It is simply and emphatically not true that the law has no place in the life of the Christian. What then does Paul mean? Knight offers the following explanation:

The meaning of *dikaios* [righteous] here would seem to be determined in large measure by its place preceding and contrasting with a list of terms concerned with moral behavior. Therefore, the point of this section is to emphasize, against the would-be *nomodidaskaloi* [law-teachers], that the law is given to deal with moral questions and not for speculation. The would-be *nomodidaskaloi* [law-teachers] are not Judaizers like those of Galatians, since the P[astoral] E[pistles] give no evidence of that, but rather those who deal with God's law from the perspective of myths, genealogies, and disputes about it (v. 4; see Titus 3:9). Thus Paul is saying that the law is not given to apply in some mystical way to people who are already "righteous," i.e., those already seeking to conform to the law. It is, rather, given to deal with people who are specifically violating its sanctions and to warn them against their specific sins (as the list in vv. 9b-10 goes on to do).[4]

The Expositor's Greek Testament agrees with Knight's interpretation when it says, "*diakaios* [righteous] is used here in the popular sense, as in 'I came not to call the righteous'." [5] The "righteous person" is anyone in *external* conformity to the law whether Christian or non-Christian. [6] Patrick Fairbairn seems to agree when he says:

By the latter expression [righteous] is to be understood, not one who in a worldly sense is just or upright (for the apostle is not here speaking of such), but who in the stricter sense is such--one who, whether by nature or by grace, has the position and character of a righteous man. Why is the law not made for such? It can only be because he is of himself inclined to act in conformity with its requirements. [7]

These "righteous" ones are those who "conform" to the law. The word "righteous" is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to both non-Christians and Christians. For instance, Paul uses a form of this word in Philippians 3:6 when he says, "concerning the righteousness [*dikaiousune*] which is in the law, blameless." This verse is Paul's own description of his relationship to the Mosaic law prior to his conversion (see Philippians 3:9; Luke 1:5, 6; and Acts 10:22). Thus a person can be "righteous" and not a Christian.

James 5:16 states, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man [*dikaious*] avails much." Here Elijah is viewed as a believer, "a righteous person" (see Matthew 25:37, 46; and Romans 5:19). Thus a person can be "righteous" and a Christian.

In 1 Timothy 1:9 Paul is not referring to the law in a *soteriological* sense as it would point to Christ, but in an *ethical* sense as it defines proper behavior for man. In this sense the law defines proper behavior and rebukes those not in conformity to it. Thus it is not for "a righteous person" because such a person is already conforming to the ethical standards of the

law.[\[8\]](#) But what about the person who is not conforming to its standards? He is obviously not "a righteous person" in the sense intended by Paul. It is this person whom Paul has in mind as he writes of the ethical use of the law.

This understanding of the passage makes this use of the law applicable to believers and unbelievers alike. The law is the standard for proper conduct as defined by God for mankind in general, Christian and non-Christian. This lawful use of the law points out sin and defines that conduct which "is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel."[\[9\]](#)

Notice in verses 10 and 11 that living according to the sins listed in verses 9 and 10 "is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel." In other words, lawless living is antithetical to sound gospel doctrine.[\[10\]](#) "The sound doctrine demands that man *must* keep God's law."[\[11\]](#) The gospel does not replace the law; it *upholds* the law. John Stott says,

It is particularly noteworthy that sins which contravene the law (as breaches of the Ten Commandments) are also contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel. So the moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law. We must not therefore imagine that, because we have embraced the gospel, we may now repudiate the law![\[12\]](#)

Knight agrees:

[T]he "sound teaching" [doctrine] of the Christian faith has the same ethical perspective as the law, and...that teaching also points out sins that are contrary to it....By this Paul indicates that law and "sound teaching" [doctrine] are together in opposing these sins and therefore have a common ethical perspective.[\[13\]](#)

Living according to the list of vices in First Timothy 1:9, 10 is sin for the Christian and non-Christian alike.[\[14\]](#)

## To what law is Paul referring?

In verses 8-10 some commentators see Paul referring to law in general and not the Mosaic law. There are, however, indicators within and beyond this context which show this view to be inadequate. *First*, when Paul details for us the lawful use of the law he clearly refers to commands contained in the law of Moses (see verses 9 and 10 and the exposition below). *Second*, "The ethical list in vv. 9-10 is similar to the Decalogue and the application of it in Exodus 21."[\[15\]](#) *Third*, in verses 5 through 7 where Paul brings up the would-be law-teachers it seems clear that there is an assumed and well known law. *Fourth*, in Titus 3:9 when the law is mentioned Paul again assumes that it would be well known to his readers. *Fifth*, it would be very difficult not to read these statements on the law in light of the rest of Paul's letters which deal extensively with this very issue.

To what law is Paul referring? Consider the following observations. In verse 8 Paul uses an article before the word law. "But we know that *the* [emphasis added] law is good." This indicates that Paul is referring to an identifiable body of law.[\[16\]](#) It is clear from verses 9b and 10 that Paul had in mind at least the fifth through the ninth commandments of the Decalogue.[\[17\]](#) Knight states, "from 'strickers of father and mother' onward the order of the second part of the Decalogue is followed."[\[18\]](#) It is also clear that Paul summarizes violations of the fifth through the ninth commandments with single words in the Greek text. Again, Knight comments, "single words are used in the latter part of the list to refer to violators of a specific commandment".[\[19\]](#)

The terms "murderers of fathers" (*patroloais*) and "murderers of mothers" (*matroloais*) are single word summaries of the fifth commandment in terms of its violation. The term "manslayers" (*androphonois*) is a single word summary of the sixth commandment in terms of its violation. The terms "fornicators" (*pornois*) and "sodomites" (*arsenkoitais*) are single word

summaries of the seventh commandment in terms of its violation. The term "kidnappers" (*andrapodistais*) is a single word summary of the eighth commandment in terms of its violation. The terms "liars" (*pheustais*) and "perjurers" (*epiorkois*) are single word summaries of the ninth commandment in terms of its violation.<sup>[20]</sup> Paul's list clearly reflects both the *content* and *order* of the second part of the Decalogue.

Our final observation concerning what law Paul is referring to is best put in the form of a question. What part of the Mosaic law do the sins listed before verse 9b reflect? If the sins in 9b and 10 reflect both the *content* and *order* of the Decalogue, should we expect the sins in 9a to do so as well? In other words, since verses 9b and 10 reflect the *content* and *order* of the second part of the Decalogue, does verse 9a reflect the *content* and *order* of the first part?<sup>[21]</sup> Homer Kent says, "the list of sins that appears in verses 9 and 10 seems clearly to follow the order of the Ten Commandments."<sup>[22]</sup> Consider Knight's observations once again:

Once it is recognized that from "strikers of father and mother" onward the order of the second part of the Decalogue is followed, then the question naturally arises whether the preceding part of the list in v. 9 corresponds to the earlier part of the Decalogue. An interesting correlation may well exist, especially if it is borne in mind that single words are used in the latter part of the list to refer to violators of a specific commandment, and therefore single words could also be used in the former part to characterize violators of the earlier commandments.<sup>[23]</sup>

Commenting on all of the vices in verses 9 and 10 Fairbairn says, "they admit of being all ranged under the precepts of the two tables."<sup>[24]</sup> He goes on to say:

In regard to those for whom, he says, the law *is* made,--those, that is, who need the check and restraint of its discipline,--the apostle gives first a general description.... Then he branches out into particulars, the earlier portion of which have respect to offences against God, the latter to offences against one's fellow-men ....<sup>[25]</sup>

Alfred Plummer adds:

In rehearsing the various kinds of sinners for whom law exists, and who are found to be (he hints) among these false teachers, he goes roughly through the Decalogue. The four commandments of the First Table are indicated in general and comprehensive terms; the first five commandments of the Second Table are taken one by one, flagrant violators being specified in each case.<sup>[26]</sup>

Let's take a closer look at verse 9 going backward from Paul's reference to the fifth commandment at the end of the verse.<sup>[27]</sup> The first sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is the "profane". The noun form of "profane" is used of persons in the New Testament only twice; here in 1 Timothy 1:9 and in Hebrews 12:16. The verb form of "profane" is used of persons twice in the New Testament as well.<sup>[28]</sup> In Acts 24:6 it is used in the context of profaning the temple. In Matthew 12:5 it is used in the context of profaning the Sabbath. Concerning the verb form of the word "profane", the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says,

"To desecrate,"...Common in the LXX<sup>[29]</sup> I...thus...of the *holy day* [emphasis added] of God in Nehemiah 13:17f. ...In the NT the only use is at Matthew 12:5 of the violation of the Sabbath and at Acts 24:6 of that of the temple, in both cases in the sense of the OT view of holiness....<sup>[30]</sup>

One Greek-English lexicon indicates that the Septuagint uses this word to refer to desecrating or profaning the Sabbath in Nehemiah 13:17; Ezekiel 20:13 and Isaiah 56:2.<sup>[31]</sup> Notice that the Septuagint uses a form of the word "profane" in Isaiah 56:2 (see Isaiah 56:6 as well) in the context of the Sabbath being defiled (verse 2) and kept (verse 4). This is especially instructive considering the fact that Isaiah's prophecy concerns the interadvental days of the New Covenant. The word

"profane" then refers to breaking the fourth commandment.[\[32\]](#) This understanding is supported by several considerations. Paul was very familiar with the Septuagint. He was reducing other commands of the Decalogue to one word. He was following the *content* and *order* of other commands of the Decalogue. He was reducing other commands of the Decalogue to single words in a negative form.[\[33\]](#) Knight concludes, "Since the keynote of the sabbath is to keep it holy (... Exodus 20:8 ...) and since Paul's list is in negative terms, the single term [profane], ... might well characterize those who profane that day, putting the command negatively in terms of its violation ..."[\[34\]](#) This sin is a violation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.[\[35\]](#)

The second sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "*the unholy*." Knight says,

Likewise, those who take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7) might well be designated negatively by a single term as those who are "unholy"... This understanding is strengthened if the language associated with this command has been influenced by the petition of the Lord's Prayer that the Lord's name be hallowed or regarded as holy (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2).[\[36\]](#)

This sin is a violation of the third commandment of the Decalogue.

The third sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "sinners". The Greek word for sinner

is often used in the NT with the broad meaning "sinner," as it is in 1 Timothy 1:15, ... At times, however, it is used in the NT more specifically of those who fail to keep the Mosaic law, particularly Gentiles, especially because of their idolatry ... This usage is found also in Paul in Galatians 2:15 (cf. on idolatry Romans 2:22). Thus one who violates the prohibition of making and worshipping idols (Exodus 20:4-6) might well be designated a "sinner" in the specific sense (so Exodus 20:5 LXX ... ).[\[37\]](#)

This sin is a violation of the second commandment of the Decalogue.

The fourth sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "*the ungodly*." "[T]he first commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3) prohibits having other gods and abandoning God as the one and only true God...."[\[38\]](#) The New Testament uses a positive form of the word which Paul uses here in 1 Timothy 1:9, "ungodly," "of those who accepted the ethical monotheism of the OT (see Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7)"[\[39\]](#) though they were not even Christians. In other words, those in the texts just cited were not violating the first commandment, at least externally, and those in 1 Timothy 1:9, "the ungodly", were. This sin is a violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue.

It seems quite clear that both the *content* and the *order* of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandment is followed by Paul in this list of sins which are "contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel. Knight concludes, and rightly so, "The order of the Decalogue seems, then, to give a satisfactory explanation of Paul's list from [*the ungodly*"] onward."[\[40\]](#)

One question still remains. What about the first two sins in Paul's list "*the lawless and insubordinate*?" These first pair of terms function as a general introduction to the more specific list that follows. "These two terms bring into perspective those for whom the law is given, namely, those who need its discipline and restraint in their propensity for lawlessness and disobedience."[\[41\]](#)

Knight's concluding comments serve as a fitting end to our study of this crucial text.

Paul has shown how the law may be used lawfully in accordance with its purpose as an ethical guide to warn against sin. He has demonstrated this by presenting a list that shows that the Decalogue is so understood in the OT. He has concluded by stating that this is also the ethical perspective of the truly healthy teaching based on the gospel, so that both it and a proper use of the law concur in terms of their concern for a righteous life and in their teaching against sin. Thus when the law is rightly applied as an ethical restraint against sin, it is in full accordance with the ethical norm given in the gospel as the standard for the redeemed life. A different use of the law, for example, in a mythological or genealogical application to the righteous, is thereby shown to be out of accord with the law's given purpose and the gospel and its teaching.[\[42\]](#)

It now becomes obvious what law Paul was referring to in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. He was referring to the heart of the law of the Old and New Covenants. He was referring to the basic, fundamental law of the Bible. He was referring to the law common to believer and unbeliever. He was referring to the law whose work is written on the hearts of all men by creation. He was referring to the Decalogue in its function of revealing God-defined ethical norms for all men.[\[43\]](#)

1 Timothy 1:8-11 now becomes for us a vital text in the whole question surrounding the utility of the Decalogue. According to the exposition of this text, both Christian and non-Christian are held to an ethical standard which is reflected in the Decalogue.[\[44\]](#) It becomes quite clear that the utility of the Decalogue transcends the Old Covenant. The Decalogue is used by Paul as the basic, fundamental law or body of ethical divinity applicable to all men. It is clear that the Decalogue has more usefulness than a temporary law governing the life of Israel under the Old Covenant. The Decalogue is transcovenantal. This point is supported by considering the fact that Paul was writing to Timothy who was ministering in Asia Minor (Ephesus) where Jews and Gentiles lived and after the Old Covenant had been abolished and replaced by the New Covenant.

The goal of this essay was to reassess 1 Timothy 1:8-11 in light of Dr. George W. Knight's seminal work on this text. The attempt has been made to build upon his work and show that his basic thesis stands: Paul's list of vices reflects both the content and order of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandments. This text functions as an ethical manifesto of Paul's view of the utility of the Decalogue in Christian ethics. This interpretation is reflected in the Reformed and historic Baptist view of the utility of the Decalogue as articulated by *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* which reads:

The moral law [Decalogue] doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation (19:5).

It is hoped that this essay will not only contribute to our understanding of 1 Timothy 1:8-11 but call Baptists and all Christians back to the ethical paths of our theological forebears.



1 All English Bible references are taken from *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments, The New King James Version*, (Nashville, TN, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

2 George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992, reprint, 1996), 81.

3 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 80.

4 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 83.

5 W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume IV*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, re. 1988), 95.

6 This means that Christians may be in external and internal conformity to the law at the same time.

7 Patrick Fairbairn, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Minneapolis, MN, Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, Inc., reprint, 1980), 87.

8 Knight adds: "The "righteous" are, then, those living in conformity to the requirements of the law by the work of Christ wrought by the Spirit in them (cf. Romans 8:4, ...). But Paul does not use "righteous" here in an absolutistic way such that he himself would not have been inconsistent to refer to the law for the Christian (cf. Romans 13:8-10), but in that less than absolute way which we see in Jesus--in a different situation and with a different nuance--but nonetheless in a nonabsolute way (Luke 5:32: "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance") (83). The nuance of Luke 5:32 is negative and the nuance of 1 Timothy 1:9 is positive.

9 See Knight, 89, 90 for a discussion on the prepositional phrase, "according to the glorious gospel," which argues for the understanding taken above.

10<sup>10</sup>. If living according to the vices in 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 is sinful living and "contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel," then living in opposition to the vices is righteous living and not contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel." In other words, for Christians, living antithetical to the vices in 1 Timothy 1:9, 10 constitutes not an abrogation of the law but a fulfillment of the law, which is "sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel." This shows that the law is for the Christian to fulfill (see Romans 8:4; 13:8, 10) and when he does so, he is living in conformity to "sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel."

11 William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Book House, re. 1981), 71. The emphasis is Hendriksen's.

12 John Stott, *Guard the Truth*, (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1996), 50.

13<sup>13</sup>. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 88.

14<sup>14</sup>. William Hendriksen seems to concede this when he says, "The apostle now gives a summary of the law of the Ten Commandments. That summary shows clearly that there is no room for anyone (least of all for the Ephesian errorists) to sit at ease in Zion ..." *Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus*, 67.

15<sup>15</sup>. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 81.

16 The article *ho* (the) is not used before *nomos* (law) in verse 9. However, it is somewhat common for Paul to not use an

article after doing so previously in the context. The function of the article carries over from verse 8 to verse 9 which means that Paul is referring to the same law in both verses. See Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament, Volume III*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Guardian Press, 1976), 306, where he says, "...not, 'a law' in general, as will be plain from the preceding remarks: nor does the omission of the article furnish any ground for such a rendering, in the presence of numerous instances where *nomos*, anarthrous (without the article), is undeniably 'the Law' of Moses." He then lists several instances and adds, "to say nothing of the very many examples after prepositions."

17<sup>17</sup>. Several commentators agree. See for instance, Walter Lock, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, (ICC), (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1924, re. 1973), 12, and Alford, *Greek Testament, Volume III*, 306. Fairbairn goes so far as to say, "...law so considered, unless the context plainly determines otherwise, always bears pointed reference to the decalogue; for this was the law in the more emphatic sense--the heart and essence of the whole economy of law; hence alone deposited in the ark of the covenant. And that this here also is more especially in the eye of the apostle, is evident from the different sorts of character presently after mentioned as intended to be checked and restrained by the law: they admit of being all ranged under the precepts of the two tables" (*The Pastoral Epistles*, 87). J. H. Bernard says that the order of the Decalogue is followed from "the unholy and profane" but applies both of these terms to the third commandment exclusively. He says, "These lawless ones are now more exactly described, the order of the Decalogue being followed, and the extremest form of the violation of the Commandment being specified in each case" (*Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges, The Pastoral Epistles*, (Cambridge, England, At the University Press, 1899), 27).

18 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84.

19 Ibid., 84. There are two words which refer to the fifth commandment. It is very clear from the words themselves that each points to the fifth commandment. *patroloais* (murderers of fathers) refers to those who don't honor their father; *matroloais* (murderers of mothers) refers to those who don't honor their mother. There are also two words which refer to both the seventh commandment and the ninth commandment (see above).

20 See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 85, 86, and Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 27, 28, where this pattern is shown in more detail.

21 This is partially suggested in John MacArthur, author and general editor, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN, Word Publishing, 1997), 1860, 1861, note on 1 Timothy 1:9, which says, "These first 6 characteristics, expressed in three couplets, delineate sins from the first *half* [emphasis added] of the Ten Commandments, which deal with a person's relationship to God." See also Geoffrey B. Wilson, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 24, where he says, "In a characteristic enumeration Paul sets forth the positive function of the law. The list follows the order of the Ten Commandments. The first three pairs cover offenses against God, while the vices mentioned are all violations of the second table of the law." *The MacArthur Study Bible* claims that 1 Timothy 1:9 contains three couplets. Assuming this to be the case and that by couplet one means a pair of synonyms separated by a *kai* (and), someone might want to argue that since there are three couplets above the terms which refer to those who violate the fifth commandment, then only three of the commandments of the first part of the Decalogue are referenced. This could be a way to exclude one of the first four commandments from the list. Michael Griffiths does this very thing, excluding the second commandment from the list. See his *Timothy and Titus*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Books, 1996), 35, 36. This seems very difficult for the following reasons. *First*, it is obvious that two terms in 1 Timothy 1:9b, *patroloais* (murders of fathers) and *matroloais* (murders of mothers), which both refer to the fifth commandment of the Decalogue and are separated by a *kai* (and), do not function as a couplet, as defined above. A couplet, as defined above, contains two words which are synonymous. However, these terms which represent the fifth commandment are not synonymous. This specific two-term structure is necessary to reflect the two-fold nature of the fifth commandment. "Honor your father and your mother." No other commands of the Decalogue have compound objects. *Second*, Paul does not use couplets, as defined above, to refer to single commands of the Decalogue elsewhere. *Third*, there is good reason to believe that Paul is not using the rhetorical device of couplet, as defined above, in this passage at all. Blass and Debrunner as well as A.T. Robertson suggest that Paul is using two rhetorical devices called polysyndeton and asyndeton. Polysyndeton is a rhetorical device which repeats the word *kai* (and) in a list of words. Asyndeton is a rhetorical device which omits the word *kai* (and) in a list. Blass and

Debrunner, say, "Asyndeton appears naturally in lengthy enumerations, if only for the sake of convenience; there is an inclination, however, to combine pairs in the interests of clarity ...up to the point where this becomes burdensome (1 Timothy 1:10). If a series is not strictly a summary but merely an enumeration, asyndeton may even be necessary" (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, [Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press, 1961], 240). Elsewhere (230), Blass and Debrunner say that sometimes *kai* (and) may "form pairs which are asyndetic among themselves." Among the examples given are Acts 1:13 and 1 Timothy 1:9. Acts 1:13 in the Greek text illustrates this phenomenon very clearly. A.T. Robertson says, "Perhaps, as Blass suggests, polysyndeton is sometimes necessary and devoid of any particular rhetorical effect, as in Luke 14:21. ...Sometimes the connective is used with part of the list (pairs) and not with the rest, for the sake of variety, as in 1 Timothy 1:9f" (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, [Nashville, TN, Broadman Press, 1934], 427). Fourth, a very plausible case can be made which shows that Paul reduces nine of the Ten Commandments, including the fourth, to single words in terms of their violation from this text (see the exposition above and especially the treatment of the word "profane" below). It must be granted that there are four pairs of terms in the Greek text of 1 Timothy 1:9 separated by a *kai* (and). The first pair functions as introductory and gives a two-fold description of who the law is for (see comments below); the second and third are single word summaries of the first through fourth commandments (see comments below); the fourth contains single word summaries of the fifth commandment. If one defines couplet as a pair of words separated by *kai* (and) though not necessarily synonymous, then I suppose we could call these pairs couplets.

22 Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Pastoral Epistles*, (Chicago, IL, Moody Press, 1986), 82.

23 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84

24 Fairbairn, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 87.

25 Fairbairn, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 88. Fairbairn holds that the latter part of the list is dealing specifically with commands contained in the second part of the Decalogue; the former dealing generically and not referring to any specific command. Kent holds a similar view where he says, "The first table of the Decalogue is covered in general terms by these three pairs of words." Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84. Kent seems to acknowledge that the three pairs do refer to each of the first four commandments and in order.

26 Alfred Plummer, *The Pastoral Epistles*, (New York, NY, Hodder & Stoughton, nd.), 45.

27 This approach is borrowed from Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84, from which I will quote extensively at this point.

28 The verb form describes objective action. The noun form describes subjective disposition.

29 LXX is the Roman numeral for seventy and refers to the Septuagint. The Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Old Testament with which Paul was very familiar.

30 Geoffrey W. Bromiley, translator, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, re. 1979), 605.

31 William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, translators, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago, IL, The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 138. The LXX also uses *bebeloo* (to profane) in Exodus 31:14; Isaiah 56:6; Ezekiel 20:16, 21, 24; 22:8, 38 all in the context of the Sabbath. The participial form of *bebeloo* (*bebeloun*) is used in only three verses in the LXX: Isaiah 56:2, 6 and Ezekiel 23:39. Both Isaiah texts refer to profaning the Sabbath and the Ezekiel text to profaning the sanctuary. In the LXX of Ezekiel 22:26 the word "profane" is used three times in a context which includes breaking the Sabbath. Hiding their eyes from the Sabbath was one way Old Covenant priests could "profane" God.

32 Michael Griffiths applies the third pair of terms exclusively to the fourth commandment. See Griffiths in *Timothy and Titus* (36). Kent applies the third pair of terms to the third and fourth commandments. See his *The Pastoral Epistles*, 83, 84.

33 It is of interest to note that the fourth commandment is considered *negatively* ("defiling"; "profaning" NASB) in Isaiah 56:2, 6 and *positively* ("keep") in Isaiah 56:4. The Hebrew word "keep" in Isaiah 56:4 means to watch or preserve whereas the Hebrew word for "keep it holy" in Exodus 20:8 means to set apart or consecrate. The opposite of defiling or profaning the Sabbath is keeping or preserving the Sabbath. Since Paul is reducing the commands of the Decalogue to single words in terms of their violation, he could well have the LXX version of Isaiah 56 in mind. Isaiah states the violation of the fourth commandment in a single word in terms of its violation and the LXX uses the very word Paul does. A similar phenomenon occurs in the LXX version of Ezekiel 44:23, 24. I owe this observation to Dr. Jim Renihan of the Institute for Reformed Baptist Studies, Westminster Theological Seminary, Escondido, California.

34 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84.

35 This understanding of 1 Timothy 1:9 provides the repetition of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue in the New Testament in a most instructive context. *First*, it comes in a context dealing with the Mosaic law. *Second*, it comes in a context which includes other commands of the Decalogue. *Third*, it comes in a context which follows the content and order of the Decalogue. *Fourth*, it comes in a context where other commands of the Decalogue are reduced to single words in terms of their violation. *Fifth*, it comes in a context applicable to both believers and unbelievers. This answers the objection often brought against the perpetuity of the fourth commandment which says that since it is not repeated it is not binding and the objection which says that it was unique to Israel as God's Old Covenant nation. If the understanding of this text offered above is correct, then the fourth commandment is both *repeated* in the New Testament and *binding* on all men. This would mean that believers and unbelievers may be explicitly indicted for violating the essence of the fourth commandment after the Old Covenant has been replaced by the New Covenant. This would also mean that the Mosaic law and the fourth commandment of the Decalogue both contain Moral Law.

36 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 84.

37 Ibid. As noted above by Knight, the Greek word for sinner (*hamartia*) is used in the second commandment of the Decalogue in the LXX. This is further evidence supporting the view that Paul had the LXX in mind while formulating certain aspects of this list. See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 87,88 for a discussion on Paul's partial dependence on the LXX while formulating this list of vices.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid. John Stott recently said, "This reconstruction is certainly ingenious and may be correct although it has to be declared unproved." Stott, *Guard the Truth*, 49. I have attempted to build upon Dr. Knight's work and prove its validity.

41 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 85.

42 Ibid., 91, 92.

43 I realize that the tenth commandment of the Decalogue is not referred to here by Paul. However, he does so in Romans 13:9 in a context clearly applying to Christians and in 1 Corinthians 6:10 in a context clearly applying to non-Christians. See Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 87, for suggested reasons why Paul left out a reference to the tenth commandment. Alford offers the following explanation: "It is remarkable that he does not refer to that very commandment by which the law wrought on himself when he was alive without the law and sin was dead in him, viz. the tenth. Possibly this may be on

account of its more spiritual nature, as he here wishes to bring out the grosser kinds of sin against which *the moral law* [emphasis added] is pointedly enacted. The subsequent clause however seems as if he had it in his mind, and on that account added a concluding general and inclusive description ..." *Alford's Greek Testament, Volume III*, 307.

44 This has enormous implications for the place of the law in the civil realm.



# An Ethical Manifesto: 1 Timothy 1:8-11 and the Decalogue

*Richard Barcellos*

In this essay we will reassess 1 Timothy 1:8-11 with the goal of determining whether or not Paul's list of vices reflects both the content and order of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandments. This thesis occurs in Dr. George W. Knight's *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The scope of Dr. Knight's commentary on 1 Timothy 1:8-11 was purposely suggestive due to space constraints. The goal of this essay is to build upon the seminal work of Dr. Knight and suggest that his basic thesis can be supported from the text itself and other considerations.

Assuming the validity of Dr. Knight's thesis, we are supplied with a strong arguments for both the perpetuity of the Decalogue, including the fourth commandment, under the New Covenant and the continuing function of the Decalogue as the basic, fundamental law of God which is applicable to all men. This has major implications for Christian ethics and is in full agreement with historic Baptist theology as represented in *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*.

1 Timothy 1:8-11 states:

But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for *the* lawless and insubordinate, for *the* ungodly and for sinners, for *the* unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.<sup>[1]</sup>

In considering this passage, three preliminary questions will be asked in order to set the stage for a more careful consideration of a fourth question. The exposition unfolds in the following order: Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law? What is said about the law? To whom is Paul referring when he says "the law is not made for a righteous person"? What law is Paul referring to in verses 8 through 10?

## **Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law?**

In verses 5 through 7 Paul makes mention of some who have strayed and turned aside to idle talk (see verses 5, 6). These desire to be teachers of the law though they are ignorant of what they claim is their expertise (see verse 7). In verse 8 a contrast between the way those who have strayed use the law and the proper use of the law is begun and completed in verse 11. Why does Paul bring up the issue of the law? He does so to combat the wrong use of the law and to set forth its right use. The law was being used unlawfully by some and Paul aims to present its lawful use (see Titus 3:9 for another instance of an unlawful use of the law).

## **What is said about the law?**

In verse 8 Paul says, "that the law is good if one uses it lawfully." The law is both good and can be used lawfully.

There is obviously a lawful and unlawful use of the law. Those described in verses 5 through 7 used the good law unlawfully but Paul is going to show its lawful use. Commenting on that which "we know" about the law, New Testament scholar George Knight says:

That which "we know" is "that the law is good" ... The statement has striking similarities with several in Romans 7 (Romans 7:14,16 ...). The point in 1 Timothy 1:8, as in Romans 7, is to affirm that the *nomos* (law) is intrinsically good because it is given by God (cf. Romans 2; 7:22; 8:4) and is not to be considered bad, though it can be mishandled, with bad results, as the *nomodidaskaloi* (law-teachers) have done.[\[2\]](#)

It is very clear that in this passage the law is viewed in its intrinsic goodness as it reveals proper God-defined moral behavior.

## To whom is Paul referring?

In verse 9 Paul states, "the law is not made for a righteous person." To whom is he referring? Some understand "a righteous person" to refer to the justified, the saved, the Christian without qualification. "This view acknowledges that the law functions to bring a person to Christ as a sinner, but then asserts that a saved person is not to be concerned with or directed by the law."[\[3\]](#) This common view is contradicted by many texts in Paul's writings (see for instance Romans 7:14, 16, 22, 23; 13:8-10; and especially 2 Timothy 3:16, 17), other texts in the New Testament (Matthew 5:17, 18; James 2:8-11), and does not fit the context as will become clear. It is simply and emphatically not true that the law has no place in the life of the Christian. What then does Paul mean? Knight offers the following explanation:

The meaning of *dikaios* [righteous] here would seem to be determined in large measure by its place preceding and contrasting with a list of terms concerned with moral behavior. Therefore, the point of this section is to emphasize, against the would-be *nomodidaskaloi* [law-teachers], that the law is given to deal with moral questions and not for speculation. The would-be *nomodidaskaloi* [law-teachers] are not Judaizers like those of Galatians, since the P[astoral] E[pistles] give no evidence of that, but rather those who deal with God's law from the perspective of myths, genealogies, and disputes about it (v. 4; see Titus 3:9). Thus Paul is saying that the law is not given to apply in some mystical way to people who are already "righteous," i.e., those already seeking to conform to the law. It is, rather, given to deal with people who are specifically violating its sanctions and to warn them against their specific sins (as the list in vv. 9b-10 goes on to do).[\[4\]](#)

The Expositor's Greek Testament agrees with Knight's interpretation when it says, "*diakaios* [righteous] is used here in the popular sense, as in 'I came not to call the righteous'."[\[5\]](#) The "righteous person" is anyone in *external* conformity to the law whether Christian or non-Christian.[\[6\]](#) Patrick Fairbairn seems to agree when he says:

By the latter expression [righteous] is to be understood, not one who in a worldly sense is just or upright (for the apostle is not here speaking of such), but who in the stricter sense is such--one who, whether by nature or by grace, has the position and character of a righteous man. Why is the law not made for such? It can only be because he is of himself inclined to act in conformity with its requirements.[\[7\]](#)

These "righteous" ones are those who "conform" to the law. The word "righteous" is used elsewhere in the New

Testament to refer to both non-Christians and Christians. For instance, Paul uses a form of this word in Philippians 3:6 when he says, "concerning the righteousness [*dikaiosune*] which is in the law, blameless." This verse is Paul's own description of his relationship to the Mosaic law prior to his conversion (see Philippians 3:9; Luke 1:5, 6; and Acts 10:22). Thus a person can be "righteous" and not a Christian.

James 5:16 states, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man [*dikaiou*] avails much." Here Elijah is viewed as a believer, "a righteous person" (see Matthew 25:37, 46; and Romans 5:19). Thus a person can be "righteous" and a Christian.

In 1 Timothy 1:9 Paul is not referring to the law in a *soteriological* sense as it would point to Christ, but in an *ethical* sense as it defines proper behavior for man. In this sense the law defines proper behavior and rebukes those not in conformity to it. Thus it is not for "a righteous person" because such a person is already conforming to the ethical standards of the law.<sup>[8]</sup> But what about the person who is not conforming to its standards? He is obviously not "a righteous person" in the sense intended by Paul. It is this person whom Paul has in mind as he writes of the ethical use of the law.

This understanding of the passage makes this use of the law applicable to believers and unbelievers alike. The law is the standard for proper conduct as defined by God for mankind in general, Christian and non-Christian. This lawful use of the law points out sin and defines that conduct which "is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel."<sup>[9]</sup>

Notice in verses 10 and 11 that living according to the sins listed in verses 9 and 10 "is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel." In other words, lawless living is antithetical to sound gospel doctrine.<sup>[10]</sup> "The sound doctrine demands that man *must* keep God's law."<sup>[11]</sup> The gospel does not replace the law; it *upholds* the law. John Stott says,

It is particularly noteworthy that sins which contravene the law (as breaches of the Ten Commandments) are also contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel. So the moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law. We must not therefore imagine that, because we have embraced the gospel, we may now repudiate the law!<sup>[12]</sup>

Knight agrees:

[T]he "sound teaching" [doctrine] of the Christian faith has the same ethical perspective as the law, and...that teaching also points out sins that are contrary to it...By this Paul indicates that law and "sound teaching" [doctrine] are together in opposing these sins and therefore have a common ethical perspective.<sup>[13]</sup>

Living according to the list of vices in First Timothy 1:9, 10 is sin for the Christian and non-Christian alike.<sup>[14]</sup>

## **To what law is Paul referring?**

In verses 8-10 some commentators see Paul referring to law in general and not the Mosaic law. There are, however, indicators within and beyond this context which show this view to be inadequate. *First*, when Paul details for us the lawful use of the law he clearly refers to commands contained in the law of Moses (see verses 9 and 10 and the

exposition below). *Second*, "The ethical list in vv. 9-10 is similar to the Decalogue and the application of it in Exodus 21."[\[15\]](#) *Third*, in verses 5 through 7 where Paul brings up the would-be law-teachers it seems clear that there is an assumed and well known law. *Fourth*, in Titus 3:9 when the law is mentioned Paul again assumes that it would be well known to his readers. *Fifth*, it would be very difficult not to read these statements on the law in light of the rest of Paul's letters which deal extensively with this very issue.

To what law is Paul referring? Consider the following observations. In verse 8 Paul uses an article before the word law. "But we know that *the* [emphasis added] law is good." This indicates that Paul is referring to an identifiable body of law.[\[16\]](#) It is clear from verses 9b and 10 that Paul had in mind at least the fifth through the ninth commandments of the Decalogue.[\[17\]](#) Knight states, "from 'strikers of father and mother' onward the order of the second part of the Decalogue is followed."[\[18\]](#) It is also clear that Paul summarizes violations of the fifth through the ninth commandments with single words in the Greek text. Again, Knight comments, "single words are used in the latter part of the list to refer to violators of a specific commandment".[\[19\]](#)

The terms "murderers of fathers" (*patroloais*) and "murderers of mothers" (*matroloais*) are single word summaries of the fifth commandment in terms of its violation. The term "manslayers" (*androphonois*) is a single word summary of the sixth commandment in terms of its violation. The terms "fornicators" (*pornois*) and "sodomites" (*arsenkoitais*) are single word summaries of the seventh commandment in terms of its violation. The term "kidnappers" (*andrapodistais*) is a single word summary of the eighth commandment in terms of its violation. The terms "liars" (*pheustais*) and "perjurers" (*epiorkois*) are single word summaries of the ninth commandment in terms of its violation.[\[20\]](#) Paul's list clearly reflects both the *content* and *order* of the second part of the Decalogue.

Our final observation concerning what law Paul is referring to is best put in the form of a question. What part of the Mosaic law do the sins listed before verse 9b reflect? If the sins in 9b and 10 reflect both the *content* and *order* of the Decalogue, should we expect the sins in 9a to do so as well? In other words, since verses 9b and 10 reflect the *content* and *order* of the second part of the Decalogue, does verse 9a reflect the *content* and *order* of the first part?[\[21\]](#) Homer Kent says, "the list of sins that appears in verses 9 and 10 seems clearly to follow the order of the Ten Commandments."[\[22\]](#) Consider Knight's observations once again:

Once it is recognized that from "strikers of father and mother" onward the order of the second part of the Decalogue is followed, then the question naturally arises whether the preceding part of the list in v. 9 corresponds to the earlier part of the Decalogue. An interesting correlation may well exist, especially if it is borne in mind that single words are used in the latter part of the list to refer to violators of a specific commandment, and therefore single words could also be used in the former part to characterize violators of the earlier commandments.[\[23\]](#)

Commenting on all of the vices in verses 9 and 10 Fairbairn says, "they admit of being all ranged under the precepts of the two tables."[\[24\]](#) He goes on to say:

In regard to those for whom, he says, the law *is* made,--those, that is, who need the check and restraint of its discipline,--the apostle gives first a general description.... Then he branches out into particulars, the earlier portion of which have respect to offences against God, the latter to offences against one's fellow-men .... [\[25\]](#)

Alfred Plummer adds:

In rehearsing the various kinds of sinners for whom law exists, and who are found to be (he hints) among these false teachers, he goes roughly through the Decalogue. The four commandments of the First Table are indicated in general and comprehensive terms; the first five commandments of the Second Table are taken one by one, flagrant violators being specified in each case.[\[26\]](#)

Let's take a closer look at verse 9 going backward from Paul's reference to the fifth commandment at the end of the verse.[\[27\]](#) The first sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is the "profane". The noun form of "profane" is used of persons in the New Testament only twice; here in 1 Timothy 1:9 and in Hebrews 12:16. The verb form of "profane" is used of persons twice in the New Testament as well.[\[28\]](#) In Acts 24:6 it is used in the context of profaning the temple. In Matthew 12:5 it is used in the context of profaning the Sabbath. Concerning the verb form of the word "profane", the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says,

"To desecrate,"...Common in the LXX[\[29\]](#) I...thus...of the *holy day* [emphasis added] of God in Nehemiah 13:17f. ...In the NT the only use is at Matthew 12:5 of the violation of the Sabbath and at Acts 24:6 of that of the temple, in both cases in the sense of the OT view of holiness...[\[30\]](#)

One Greek-English lexicon indicates that the Septuagint uses this word to refer to desecrating or profaning the Sabbath in Nehemiah 13:17; Ezekiel 20:13 and Isaiah 56:2.[\[31\]](#) Notice that the Septuagint uses a form of the word "profane" in Isaiah 56:2 (see Isaiah 56:6 as well) in the context of the Sabbath being defiled (verse 2) and kept (verse 4). This is especially instructive considering the fact that Isaiah's prophecy concerns the interadvental days of the New Covenant. The word "profane" then refers to breaking the fourth commandment.[\[32\]](#) This understanding is supported by several considerations. Paul was very familiar with the Septuagint. He was reducing other commands of the Decalogue to one word. He was following the *content* and *order* of other commands of the Decalogue. He was reducing other commands of the Decalogue to single words in a negative form.[\[33\]](#) Knight concludes, "Since the keynote of the sabbath is to keep it holy (... Exodus 20:8 ...) and since Paul's list is in negative terms, the single term [profane], ... might well characterize those who profane that day, putting the command negatively in terms of its violation ..."[\[34\]](#) This sin is a violation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue.[\[35\]](#)

The second sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "*the unholy*." Knight says,

Likewise, those who take the Lord's name in vain (Exodus 20:7) might well be designated negatively by a single term as those who are "unholy"... This understanding is strengthened if the language associated with this command has been influenced by the petition of the Lord's Prayer that the Lord's name be hallowed or regarded as holy (Matthew 6:9; Luke 11:2).[\[36\]](#)

This sin is a violation of the third commandment of the Decalogue.

The third sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "sinners". The Greek word for sinner

is often used in the NT with the broad meaning "sinner," as it is in 1 Timothy 1:15, ... At times, however, it is used in the NT more specifically of those who fail to keep the Mosaic law, particularly Gentiles, especially because of their idolatry ... This usage is found also in Paul in Galatians 2:15 (cf. on idolatry Romans 2:22). Thus one who violates the prohibition of making and worshipping idols (Exodus 20:4-6) might well be designated a "sinner" in the specific sense (so Exodus 20:5 LXX ... ).[\[37\]](#)

This sin is a violation of the second commandment of the Decalogue.

The fourth sin category going backward from "murderers of fathers and mothers" mentioned by Paul is "*the ungodly*." "[T]he first commandment of the Decalogue (Exodus 20:3) prohibits having other gods and abandoning God as the one and only true God...."[38] The New Testament uses a positive form of the word which Paul uses here in 1 Timothy 1:9, "ungodly," "of those who accepted the ethical monotheism of the OT (see Acts 13:43, 50; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7)"[39] though they were not even Christians. In other words, those in the texts just cited were not violating the first commandment, at least externally, and those in 1 Timothy 1:9, "the ungodly", were. This sin is a violation of the first commandment of the Decalogue.

It seems quite clear that both the *content* and the *order* of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandment is followed by Paul in this list of sins which are "contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel. Knight concludes, and rightly so, "The order of the Decalogue seems, then, to give a satisfactory explanation of Paul's list from ["*the ungodly*"] onward." [40]

One question still remains. What about the first two sins in Paul's list "*the lawless and insubordinate*?" These first pair of terms function as a general introduction to the more specific list that follows. "These two terms bring into perspective those for whom the law is given, namely, those who need its discipline and restraint in their propensity for lawlessness and disobedience." [41]

Knight's concluding comments serve as a fitting end to our study of this crucial text.

Paul has shown how the law may be used lawfully in accordance with its purpose as an ethical guide to warn against sin. He has demonstrated this by presenting a list that shows that the Decalogue is so understood in the OT. He has concluded by stating that this is also the ethical perspective of the truly healthy teaching based on the gospel, so that both it and a proper use of the law concur in terms of their concern for a righteous life and in their teaching against sin. Thus when the law is rightly applied as an ethical restraint against sin, it is in full accordance with the ethical norm given in the gospel as the standard for the redeemed life. A different use of the law, for example, in a mythological or genealogical application to the righteous, is thereby shown to be out of accord with the law's given purpose and the gospel and its teaching. [42]

It now becomes obvious what law Paul was referring to in 1 Timothy 1:8-11. He was referring to the heart of the law of the Old and New Covenants. He was referring to the basic, fundamental law of the Bible. He was referring to the law common to believer and unbeliever. He was referring to the law whose work is written on the hearts of all men by creation. He was referring to the Decalogue in its function of revealing God-defined ethical norms for all men. [43]

1 Timothy 1:8-11 now becomes for us a vital text in the whole question surrounding the utility of the Decalogue. According to the exposition of this text, both Christian and non-Christian are held to an ethical standard which is reflected in the Decalogue. [44] It becomes quite clear that the utility of the Decalogue transcends the Old Covenant. The Decalogue is used by Paul as the basic, fundamental law or body of ethical divinity applicable to all men. It is clear that the Decalogue has more usefulness than a temporary law governing the life of Israel under the Old Covenant. The Decalogue is transcovenantal. This point is supported by considering the fact that Paul was writing to Timothy who was ministering in Asia Minor (Ephesus) where Jews and Gentiles lived and after the Old Covenant

had been abolished and replaced by the New Covenant.

The goal of this essay was to reassess 1 Timothy 1:8-11 in light of Dr. George W. Knight's seminal work on this text. The attempt has been made to build upon his work and show that his basic thesis stands: Paul's list of vices reflects both the content and order of the Decalogue from the first through the ninth commandments. This text functions as an ethical manifesto of Paul's view of the utility of the Decalogue in Christian ethics. This interpretation is reflected in the Reformed and historic Baptist view of the utility of the Decalogue as articulated by *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* which reads:

The moral law [Decalogue] doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation (19:5).

It is hoped that this essay will not only contribute to our understanding of 1 Timothy 1:8-11 but call Baptists and all Christians back to the ethical paths of our theological forebears.



# Calvin as an Interpreter of Scripture

*A. T. Robertson*

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There is little that is new to be said concerning the wonderful work of Calvin as an expounder of the Word of God. For nearly four hundred years students of the Bible have found in his lucid and sane comments the clearest light available on many points of great interest. There was once, perhaps, a tendency to overestimate the value of his work. But even so now, after all the progress made in research, there is still great value in the keen spiritual insight and intellectual acumen of Calvin. He was a real scholar in his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, and wrote in Latin that had a classic flavor, though, like all the current ecclesiastical Latin, much modernized. He went to the sources, as every interpreter should, and thus was able to draw his water from the original fountain of truth.

Calvin took little interest in textual criticism. Indeed, the matter was little understood in his time. He did face questions of authorship at various points, but matters of introduction always held a subordinate place in his mind. He did not think that Paul wrote Hebrews, though he considered the book one of the greatest in the New Testament. He was only willing to use II Peter with the understanding that Peter wrote it. Honesty and candor were distinct marks of the work of Calvin, hence he had little use for the allegorical method of interpretation which had been so long in vogue. He made few allusions to the old Greek commentators. He sought to interpret the book according to its real historical sense with practical applications. He over-rated the application to the Pope, as was indeed natural under the circumstances.

The dogmatic interest held him chiefly. Hence Romans was the foundation of his "Institutes." He loved the majesty of God and littleness of man developed in Romans. Indeed, Calvin was best on Paul's Epistles where the dogmatic element is prominent. But the Prophets appealed to Calvin strongly, as did the Psalms. He began the historical books last and did not finish them. He expounded all the books save Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Esther, Nehemiah, Ezra, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Revelation. He was fond of Daniel, but said that he did not understand the Apocalypse.

He is at home on Acts, and shows fine spiritual sympathy with the narrative.

Calvin possessed historical imagination in the sense that he could make the characters live before the reader. He learned how to do this work in his lectures to theological students in Strassburg and Geneva. He seized the heart of Scripture and made it popular, though thoroughly scholarly. He came at times to have an audience of one thousand eager listeners. What he cared for most, as he himself states, was to get the spirit of the writer with clearness and brevity. He insisted on clearness and brevity as absolutely essential for a true interpreter.

He was not often led astray by long digressions (barring the Pope), but kept to the main track as a rule.

He avoided mere subtleties of language and of ideas. He did not seek to show mere ingenuity, and sought by the historical grammatical method to facilitate the real knowledge of the Scriptures.

He had withal real piety of spirit, great common sense and lucidity of style. With a real Christian experience he spoke out of a full heart.



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# A Review of Baptism

*Should Babies Be Baptized*, by T. E. Watson. London: Grace Publications, 1995, 125 pp.

Reviewed by [Fred A. Malone](#)

This expanded republication of *Baptism Not for Infants* (1962), often overlooked, is a welcome addition to any shelf as a useful refutation of infant baptism. Watson's unique method of argument is to take quotations exclusively from paedobaptist authors and allow them to refute each other. The result is a persuasive nonsectarian rejection of every Scripture and argument used by paedobaptists to defend infant baptism. The often heard argument that disagreements between paedobaptists on each Scripture and argument actually strengthens the case for infant baptism from all the Scriptures makes no sense in the light of Watson's presentation.

On his way to the Anglican ministry, the Thomas Watson was converted and began to question the Anglican baptismal regeneration position. As a lover of the Puritans, he questioned how he could disagree with such learned men (a common confession by many today). However, seeing that the sacraments are not small matters, and that he must be convinced in conscience by Scripture alone in order to baptize babies, he came to reject each point and ground of infant baptism biblically for himself. Along the way, he discovered great disagreement between paedobaptists themselves.

Chapter headings deal with such questions as did the Jews, John the Baptist, Christ, or the apostles baptize babies? He asks if Christ ordered the baptism of babies? Major paedobaptists answer in the negative. He discusses indirect evidence, the antiquity of infant baptism, Old Testament arguments, Charles Hodge's "church" argument, J. G. Vos' "covenant" argument, as well as his own position that infant baptism is unauthorized by and inconsistent with New Testament teaching. Closing chapters deal with the evils of infant baptism. Appendices deal with the blessing of babies, the antiquity of infant baptism, and the teaching of the Westminster Confession and Catechisms. The result is an astonishing refutation of the doctrine from the mouths of paedobaptists themselves.

Such classic Scriptures used by paedobaptists as Acts 2:39 and 1 Cor. 7:14, as well as the household baptism texts are so well refuted by major paedobaptists that one cannot use them with any confidence to support infant baptism anymore. Watson's paedobaptist analysis of the Great Commission firmly establishes its intention for the baptism of disciples alone. Further, Watson's discussion of the antiquity of infant baptism reveals paedobaptist evaluations that the Apostolic and Church Fathers do not provide clear testimony that infant baptism is an apostolic tradition. His revealing analysis of how Charles Hodge and J. G. Vos are inconsistent with their own definitions of "church" and "covenant of grace" in order to establish their argument for infant baptism is masterful.

Watson's last chapter on the evils of infant baptism catalogues misleading statements from paedobaptists such as Pierre Marcel, as well as from church confessions, which have led many thousands into dangerous presumption concerning their salvation because of their infant baptism. Watson does not wish to be a controversialist, but he cannot help noting in church history how such presumption has led to the downfall of many. He also charges that the "resistible grace" and breakable covenant of Pierre Marcel for covenant children is really a tenet of Arminianism. I think he is right.

In his conclusion, Watson brings three significant applications. First, if infant baptism is unbiblical, then everyone needs to be baptized "as a professed believer to keep the ordinance of Christ." Second, one cannot continue as a Christian worker or minister in any church or denomination which makes infant baptism obligatory. And, third, if it

is unbiblical, then one is obligated to show others the error of their ways.

Watson's little book is extremely persuasive and useful in considering arguments for and against infant baptism. The large and significant disagreement between paedobaptists on each point, specific Scriptures, and various grounds for infant baptism is condemning, as is B. B. Warfield's statement: "Let us confess that we do not all argue alike or aright. But is not this a proof rather of the firm establishment in our hearts of the practice?" (*Studies in Theology*, p. 406). To which Watson responds: "Indeed it is, and hence men are so slow to give the practice up" (79).

*Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism.* By Robert R. Booth. Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 190 pp.

Reviewed by [Fred A. Malone](#)

*Children of the Promise* is an attractive and well-presented argument for the paedobaptist position. Formerly a Baptist pastor, Booth writes simply and with the sensitivity of one who has wrestled seriously with the doctrine of baptism, settling into the paedobaptist position. His call for charity toward one another with open Bibles is a needed call which resonates with every true Christian.

Developing his argument along the lines of a theology of the biblical covenants, Booth argues that the Old Testament "covenants of promise" were an unfolding of the one covenant of grace. Therefore, to Booth, the covenant of grace, by definition, includes the household and its children as did the covenants of promise. From this assumption and inference, Booth concludes that the New Covenant, as the fulfillment of those Old Testament covenants of promise, must also include the household and its children by definition. Therefore, just as the household children were circumcised in the covenants of promise, so the household children of the New Covenant receive the sign and seal of baptism. This line of reasoning is Booth's primary argument. To prohibit household children from the sign of baptism would require for Booth a specific statement prohibiting them, even if the instituted commands and examples of baptism in the New Testament described "disciples only" baptism. For Booth, positive instituted New Testament revelation cannot override logical inference from the Old Testament.

Booth includes an appendix entitled "Samuel Miller's Argument from Church History," even though Pierre Marcel (*The Biblical Doctrine of Infant Baptism*, see review in *Founders Journal* 35) denies that such an argument is worthy of use in the debate on baptism. Miller argues that from Tertullian forward, infant baptism was the accepted practice of the church until the Anabaptists arose, thus establishing the supposed apostolic tradition of infant baptism.

Typical of paedobaptist arguments, neither Booth nor Miller discuss the importance of the Didache (100-125 A. D.), the earliest tradition of the apostles outside of the New Testament, which actually is a church manual giving directions for how baptism should be practiced. Yet it only describes the baptism of disciples, a glaring omission if infant baptism were practiced. Miller's essay is a weak presentation of the historical argument.

Another appendix has Booth's chart of the similarities between circumcision and baptism. While Baptists recognize many of Booth's comparisons (ie., cleansing and regeneration), he misses the most important point of his own comparison: that circumcision was an Old Testament type of which regeneration, not baptism, is the antitype (Rom.

2:27; Phil. 3:3; Col. 2:11-12).

Baptism is the new sign given in the New Covenant to those who have repented and believed as evidence of that regeneration (heart circumcision) and membership in the effectual New Covenant (Heb. 8:8-12). It is retrospective of the antitypical reality of which circumcision was the type. Booth does not understand that the connection between circumcision and baptism is that of prospective and retrospective signs of the reality they both symbolize, the regeneration of the heart. This is why Holy Spirit regeneration is called the "seal" in the New Testament (Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; 2 Cor. 1:20), not baptism, as Booth claims. It is perfectly plausible for the prospective sign to be required typically of the Old Testament people of God while reserved antitypically and retrospectively for the New Testament people of God in the fulfillment. And this is exactly what the biblical evidence presents against Booth's logical inference.

One reason Booth's argument is not persuasive to covenantal Baptists is its glaring exegetical errors on major points. For instance, his definition of a biblical covenant goes beyond Scriptural evidence by "good and necessary consequence." Booth's definition of a divine biblical covenant is: "a conditional promise, sealed by blood, sovereignly administered by God, with blessings for those who obey the conditions of the covenant and curses for those who disobey its conditions" (24). Booth would be hardpressed to fit the Noahic Covenant into this definition as well as the unbreakable and effectual New Covenant (Jer. 31:27-34; 32:40), guaranteed successful in each member by God Himself (32:40).

Booth takes the New Testament warnings against false conversion experientially and forces that possibility to redefine every divine covenant as conditional and breakable--all to justify infant baptism of covenant members who later can become covenant breakers. This *a priori* approach to biblical revelation is too obvious to be accepted.

One other example of the kinds of exegetical errors which mar the book is Booth's biblical definition of "new" in the New Covenant. He actually says:

"The Hebrew word for 'new,' *hadash*, used in reference to the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31, is not the meaning 'brand new'; rather, it means 'renewed' or 'fresh.' The new covenant, like previous covenantal administrations, added to and expanded the redemptive revelation of God. It renewed the previous covenants, rather than replacing them" (51).

This "renewal" statement is a huge exegetical error, which is a major point for Booth's definition of the New Covenant as a breakable covenant for infant baptized members. It also appears to support the theonomic position. Yet how can the New Covenant "renew" the Sinai Covenant, which it is "not like," when it replaces it in Gal. 3:19 and Heb. 8:8-12? Further, it takes little effort to open a concordance and to see that *hadash* is used of a "brand new" king (Ex. 1:8), house (Deut. 22:8), wife (Deut. 24:5), cart (1 Sam. 6:7), song (Psa. 33:3), heavens (Isa. 66:22), heart (Ezek. 36:26), and a brand new covenant (Jer. 31:31-34), instead of "renewed" or "fresh." The same is true of *kaina* (new) in the Greek New Testament. Booth's sloppy hermeneutics and exegesis cannot be given serious consideration by covenantal Baptists. It also grossly misleads the lay reader who may not know how to check such misleading statements.

Finally, Booth's cry for charity between disagreeing brethren rings hollow in light of the offensive way he gradually identifies the covenantal Baptist argument with dispensationalism ("the dispensational and baptistic argument" p. 80). He actually says, "While some Baptists have sought to defend their view of baptism with a covenantal method of interpretation, most Baptists have not taken this approach. Over against the covenantal approach, the dispensational method of interpretation emphasizes the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments" (18).

Either Booth is ignorant of the historical Baptist argument from the covenantal view, or else he misrepresents the facts to the uninformed reader on purpose. The 1689 London Baptist Confession, Abraham Booth, Adoniram Judson, Alexander Carson, John L. Dagg, R. B. C. Howell, Charles H. Spurgeon, Paul H. Jewett, Walter Chantry, the reviewer, and many others (including David Kingdon referenced by Booth), all have argued for the baptism of professing believers within a covenantal Baptist perspective. All would be offended at being classified as dispensationalists, as Booth so cleverly does. If he wants to say that many numbers of modern Baptists are dispensational, then he should say so. But that is not the same as to say that most Baptists have argued from a dispensational perspective. Such careless language does not foster brotherly charity between covenantal Baptists and paedobaptists.

All in all, Booth's attempt to justify infant baptism is valiant if exegetically and logically flawed. One has trouble believing that all paedobaptists would even agree with his definition of a covenant (John Owen does not), which is a fundamental issue. If one were looking for a good argument to become a paedobaptist, and if one felt comfort reading of a former Baptist's theological journey, then one might become convinced by Booth's presentation to leave the trials of reforming a difficult Baptist church, or denomination, and to seek the safe haven of paedobaptist service and ministry. But if one is looking for sound hermeneutics and exegesis, an understanding and refutation of the covenantal Baptist position, and a better argument for infant baptism, this book will sadly disappoint.



# News

## Founders Online wins award

The Founders Ministries web site ([www.founders.org](http://www.founders.org)) has been recognized as one of the Top 5 Southern Baptist sites on the web. The award was made by the web directory service Suite 101 ([www.suite101.com](http://www.suite101.com)). The Founders site was the only one in the top five that does not represent an official SBC agency.

The other sites in the top five were the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Experiencing God by Henry Blackaby, the International Mission Board, and the North American Mission Board.

## Founders Fellowship Breakfast June 15, 1999

A Founders Breakfast is scheduled before the opening session of the Southern Baptist Convention in Atlanta on Tuesday, June 15, at 7:00 AM in room W266-267 of the Georgia World Congress Center (the venue of the convention meeting). "The Church in the World: Biblical Mandates for the 21st Century" is the theme. Drs. Don Whitney and Tom Ascol will speak. Cost is \$5.00 for a full sit-down breakfast. Tickets must be purchased in advance from Founders Ministries • PO Box 150931 • Cape Coral, FL 33915. Space is limited.

## New church formed in Little Rock

Seeking a fellowship of Southern Baptist believers who are committed to the Doctrines of Grace, seven families have together formed Covenant Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas.

According to the church's website, "Covenant Baptist Church is a fellowship of believers committed to the sovereignty and majesty of God, historic Southern Baptist beliefs, and the evangelization of Arkansas, America and the world....Covenant Baptist brings together people from all walks of life who believe Christ's grace is both necessary and sufficient to save our world, and who are committed to sharing His love with all mankind."

"This is a thrilling opportunity," said Rod D. Martin, 29, an elder of the church. "For far too long our city has been without a Southern Baptist congregation which actively disciples its members in terms of the historic Reformed faith. It is our aim to focus unceasingly on the majesty and sovereignty of God, just as our Southern Baptist forefathers always did before us."

"'Church Growth' is fine, as far as it goes; but what we're interested in is conforming to the likeness of Christ through the diligent study and application of Scripture. That offends people, but it calls them to repentance and life in a way that no praise chorus ever will."

Elder Ronnie Rudd agreed. "Churches today are so busy focusing on the felt needs of man that they have increasingly forgotten the timeless purposes of God. If we begin to really understand God, we will know everything we need to know about us."

The church meets temporarily at the Eagle Forum building, 623 Woodlane, across from the State Capitol. Sunday School begins at 9:50 A.M., with services at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. on Sundays, and at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesdays.

Martin and Rudd share preaching duties while a senior pastor is sought.

Covenant Baptist's statement of faith (the New Hampshire Baptist Confession of 1853), church covenant, and constitution are all available on the web at <http://www.theVanguard.org/cbc>.

## **SBC church membership declines for first time since 1926**

According to Annual Church Profiles for 1998, which are compiled by Lifeway Christian Resources, membership in Southern Baptist churches decreased by 162,158 last year. Numeric gains were noted in other areas including Sunday morning attendance, Sunday School and Discipleship Training enrollment and financial contributions. Baptisms decreased 1.16 percent from 1997 to a total of 407,264.

Membership in most Southern Baptist churches would need to decrease at least 50 percent in order to bring statistics into closer alignment to reality. Two generations of neglecting biblical church discipline have left most congregations with inflated church rolls which are dominated by inactive and non-resident members.



# Letters

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Friends at the *Founders Journal*,

I am writing for two primary reasons. First, your publication and ministry have been a great encouragement to me through the seminary years and now into the first year of the pastorate. Thank you and may God grant your ministry favor to the glory of His name. Second, several letters written in the Winter 1998 issue addressed questions that have been weighing heavily on me lately. Namely, are there reformed SBC churches, and if so, how does one find them? And further, how should reformed pastors begin teaching what must seem like a new gospel in their churches? We have a generation of young pastors returning to the reformed faith but with no idea of how to peaceably introduce it to their churches. I have become convinced that the reformed faith must not be relegated only to coffee house discussion groups, but must influence every aspect of our practice. It should not be a doctrine only for the seminary trained, but for the masses. I wish you could address these subjects in a future issue. Even though the SBC is historically a reformed denomination, how long should its reformed pastors continue to stay within its gates? I recently finished *The Forgotten Spurgeon*, a book I received with my subscription to *Founders Journal*, and from my own analogy between Spurgeon's times and ours, I am not convinced he could stay within the camp, even though it has returned to its conservative roots. I love the people in the church I serve, and will patiently stay the course as long as the Lord leads us to stay. I am trusting Him to be my Guide and Teacher, but I am looking to you for wise counsel.

Yours sincerely,  
B. P., SC

*There is a growing number of Southern Baptist churches that are returning to the reformed theology of their heritage. Leading a church to understand and apply long-neglected truths from God's Word takes patience, love and is best accomplished through an expository ministry. Let the Word speak. The kingdom of God is certainly bigger than the SBC and every pastor must determine for himself, under God, where he should expend his labors. For my part, there has never been a better time since the early years of this century to labor within Southern Baptist borders. Every Southern Baptist church is independent. Our associations are voluntary. Before a man leaves the SBC for connectional reasons he should ask himself these two questions: 1) What can I do tomorrow that I cannot do today if I were to leave the SBC tonight? 2) What can I not do tomorrow that I can do today if I were to leave the SBC tonight? Answers to these questions can help give direction to those who wrestle with this issue. --Ed.*

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Hello!

Just a little note to let you know how very much I enjoy the *Founders Journal*. I read it through as soon as it comes! The article on baptism by Spurgeon is especially good. All of it is, of course. There is nothing quite like the doctrines of sovereign grace in all of Christian living. To be able to ascribe all praise and glory to the Lord is such a self-emptying and gratifying way to live. "None of self, and all of Thee," as the last line of an old poem says so powerfully.

Thanks for your needed ministry!

M. H., via e-mail

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Dear *Founders Journal*,

Could you send me your free *Founders Journal* sample. I became a Sovereign Grace Baptist instead of a Southern Baptist because I lost all hope and concluded that all Southern Baptists were Arminians! You've renewed my hope!

T. J., MO

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Dear Brother Ascol,

I have just read from cover to cover the latest online edition of the *Founders Journal*. As usual, you and your contributing writers have done a fantastic job!

I cannot tell you how much it encourages my heart to see godly men in the Southern Baptist Convention taking a bold, uncompromising stand for God's truth and against the Devil's lies. The very thought of modern-day SBC pastors calling upon their brethren to practice formative and (where needed) corrective church discipline thrills my soul. I honestly thought we would never again see these things in the SBC.

May God continue to bless you, your family, and your church family!

Your friend in Christ,  
J. K., Meadow Bridge, WV

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Mr. Ascol,

I wanted to drop a note and say hello. I can not tell you how much I have enjoyed the FJ Web site! Which of course is where I got your address from. I pastor a small Baptist church (independent)...I am relatively new to Calvinistic and reformed theology and at times I still scratch my head and wonder if it is ever going to all come together for me! I have found the *Founders Journal* to be a big help and a real blessing. Keep up the good work and the fight for truth. I so admire the tenacity of those who desire to move a whole denomination, I am just trying to figure out how to move the church that I pastor. Which brings me to the heart of my reason for writing: Can you give a new pastor (less than 2 years), who is new to the doctrines of grace any helpful ideas of how to move a church into an understanding of these truths? I was hired as a "4-point Calvinist", although in hind sight I realize I was a "no-point" Calvinist; and if the church truly understood what the 4 points were I am sure they would not have even wanted a "4-point Calvinist"! My dream and goal now is to eventually arrive at the place in our church's theology where we can embrace the 1689 confession.

I hope that I am not consuming too much of your time. I am seeking help from someone who has more experience than I and is much wiser than I. If you are too busy to respond I would certainly understand.

In Him,  
S. E., CT

*The best way to introduce a church to the doctrines of grace is expositionally. Help them develop a love and hunger for the Word. As people gain confidence in the Scriptures they respond increasingly well to being instructed and corrected by them. These doctrines are revealed to us in the Bible. We should teach them from the Bible. Obviously, there are some practical steps which can help in this process, and those who have done it are an invaluable resource from which to seek counsel. But, in the final analysis, what we desire as pastors is to see the churches which we serve rooted and grounded in the Word. As this occurs, doctrine will be seen to be important and doctrinal expression inevitable. --Ed.*

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I just found your journal on the web. I hope that Southern Baptists will return to the old confessions, such as the Philadelphia or Second London confession. Only when we, as Baptists, recognize that our heritage is Calvinistic will we again have the power that we so urgently need.

In His Name,  
W. R. S., via e-mail

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Thanks for the information found in your web site. I have used the winter/spring 1995 issue to add to a presentation given to a history club in Chattanooga, Tennessee. My topic was the roots and founding of the Southern Baptist Convention. Your information helped me greatly.

Keep it coming,  
D. W., via e-mail

