

“The first to the seventh commandments follow one another in good order. Murder is a graver sin than adultery, adultery is a graver sin than stealing, etc. The order of the other three commandments is not so apparent. Although I do not presume to make a judgment, it is my opinion that the last three commandments speak, as it were, of the ground or circumstances of the preceding commandments, for it is with the mouth and with coveting that one sins against all the other commandments. The order certainly appears to shift in the eighth commandment, for to bear false witness is not a graver sin than to covet your neighbor’s wife, nor is it a graver sin to covet your neighbor’s house than his wife.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Martin Luther". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a large initial 'M' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'L'.

Commentary: Luther studied law and he was very comfortable with rules and regulations and the uneasy conscience that is the result of a life or world that experiences chaos and the violation of the law. Luther understood the function of the law (Ten Commandments) to reveal sin (Romans 3:20), but he also understood that Jesus Christ conquered sin for those who believe in his grace and love. Evil is the result of our disobedience and faith in Jesus Christ teaches us obedience and enables us to do good works. Luther’s concern about the sins of coveting our neighbor’s wife or property in the 16th century is also appropriate for us today. The word coveting is not part of our everyday vocabulary but it is part of our activity as people think of themselves before others and try to get ahead for personal satisfaction or gain at the loss of someone else.

Question: If Luther’s translation of the Bible into the common language of the people led to a religious revival in the 16th century, how can we get people engaged in spiritual understanding and growth in the 21st century?