

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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I I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD, YOU SHALL NOT HAVE OTHER GODS BEFORE ME. The first commandment requires us to nourish and protect our faith. It says, in effect, that we are to allow Almighty God to be God in our lives. In other words, he is to be “number one,” the primary driving force behind all that we think, say and do. We must cultivate the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity which lead us to know, love, and serve him and to worship him and render grateful praise as we live and work for his honor and glory while looking forward to the rewards and promises of the Kingdom.

The First Commandment forbids *idolatry, irreligion, and pantheism*.

Faith, hope and piety are virtues that the first commandment encourages.

We sin against the first commandment when we allow the “world” and its “pleasures” to rule our lives. This is when we make “gods” out of sports figures, or movie stars, or even possessions, and begin to allow them to rule our lives, when we obsess over them and actually give them the praise and honor due God – when we allow them to gain control of our time and resources so much so that we have little or nothing left for God. Example: A young man found that he was guilty of obsessing over football. He spent all of his free time in front of the “tube” and forgot all about (neglected) his relationship with God. After considering the first commandment he was guided to *re-order his priorities and give God his due place*. Once God was in “first place,” all of the *lesser things* (including football) fell into line. They no longer dominated his time and resources and he was finally free to let God be God. When God is God things are properly aligned - leading us toward our ultimate end. (Contrary to popular opinion, football is not our ultimate end.)

II YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD YOUR GOD IN VAIN. The second commandment forbids defaming (or abusing) the name of God in any way. It also prescribes respect. The name of God is to be revered, praised and honored above any other name. The second commandment governs our speech in sacred matters. Reverence and respect for the holiness of the Lord’s name reflects our reverence and respect for him. “We must keep the name of God in mind in silent, loving adoration and not introduce it into our own speech except to bless, praise or glorify it,” (CCC-2143)

The Second Commandment forbids *perjury, blasphemy and using God’s name to curse or to swear an oath falsely*.

Wisdom and temperance are virtues which assist us in honoring the second commandment.

We sin against the second commandment when we use the name of God frivolously in everyday speech. Example: A man has acquired this habit. It was not consistent with his faith, or who he was as a Christian, and who God is. After considering the second commandment he pledged to do all in his power to correct this habit in himself and whenever he noticed others doing it. He ordered his speech (and his life) in such a way that it shows honor and respect for the divine and reflects both what he believes and who he is – a child of God.

May our lips praise you, our lives proclaim your goodness, our work give you honor and our voices celebrate you forever.

III REMEMBER TO KEEP HOLY THE LORD'S DAY. The third commandment admonishes us to make the Lord's Day (Sundays for Christians) special (different than the other days of the week), a day this is reserved to give extra attention to God and the practice of our faith, a day set aside for prayer, study, community and service to others. We make the Lord's Day special and preserve its sanctity by participating in the Eucharist and refraining (when possible) from activities that distract us, that draw our attention away from God, family, community, and our brothers and sisters in need. Sunday is also a day to take the time needed for rest and relaxation, reflection and recreation.

Greed and indifference are two vices that the third commandment forbids.

The third commandment is encouraged by the virtues of *prudence and charity* (love of God and neighbor).

We sin against the third commandment when we refuse to give God one of our most precious resources – our time. Example: A businessman is tempted to use his time on Sunday morning to catch up on some paperwork and plan for his next product promotion while his family goes to church without him. (How common is this?) Instead he remembers the third commandment and changes his mind. *He realizes that the business can and will wait. His relationship with God and his family are far more important.* He goes to Mass with his family and spends the rest of the day together with his wife and kids. He has honored the third commandment, he feels closer to God and his family is happier than ever. His life is ordered with the highest priorities in their proper place, and all is well.

One can easily discern what our highest priorities are by how we spend our time.

IV HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER. The fourth commandment commands us to respect, love, honor and obey our parents (who gave us life) and others whom God, for our own good, has vested with his authority. (CCC-2197) The fourth commandment parallels the first commandment which commands us to love and honor God the Father who gave us life. It focuses on the family because the family is the primary building block, the foundation, of our society. As the family goes, so goes the society and the culture. Parents have the awesome God-given responsibility to provide for their family physically, emotionally, intellectually, and especially spiritually. Children have the responsibility in turn to honor their parents and contribute to the wellbeing of all the family members. "In Christ the family becomes the "domestic church" because it is [what church is], a community of faith, hope and charity.

(Compendium, 456) These responsibilities extend from the family out into society. The fourth commandment also requires that we honor and support all lawful civil authorities as a practical extension of God's authority for the common good.

Selfishness and the chronic disrespect of authority are two vices that the fourth commandment forbids.

Gratitude and patience are virtues that assist in carrying out the requirements of the fourth commandment.

We sin against the fourth commandment when we fail to work for solidarity within the family, when we, as family members, don't love, honor and respect each other. We honor the fourth commandment when all of our family members know that we are "there for them" because we love them and are always interested in their wellbeing, when we will do "whatever it takes" to help them be happy and secure. Example: When my wife's father got sick and required lots of TLC, but refused to move into a nursing home, Jan made the sacrifice and drove to Columbia, TN from Atlanta every other weekend to help her brother take care of him. They both honored the fourth commandment.

V YOU SHALL NOT KILL. The fifth commandment upholds the dignity of human life, from conception to natural death, and forbids the intentional killing of an innocent person (murder). Intentional killing of the innocent includes the unborn (abortion) as well as the sick and dying (euthanasia). In fact, the more innocent the victim, the more serious the sin against the fifth commandment; so abortion and euthanasia are among the most heinous violation of the fifth commandment. The fifth commandment also prohibits any act which is harmful to the wellbeing of oneself or of another, like alcohol and drug abuse, violence, terrorism, direct sterilization and the inhumane treatment of prisoners of war.

Anger, hatred and revenge are vices condemned by the fifth commandment.

Love and kindness are two virtues that assist us in honoring the fifth commandment.

We sin against the fifth commandment when we intentionally harm an innocent person, born or unborn. Example: A young woman, who discovers that she is pregnant with an unwanted child, contemplates an abortion as an option. After reflecting on the fifth commandment and the church's teaching involving it, she decides to have the baby regardless of the circumstances. She has done the right thing; she has respected her unborn baby as a human person of infinite value created in the very image and likeness of God.

VI YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY. Like the fifth commandment the sixth commandment upholds the great dignity of the human person and our call to a vocation of love and communion. The sixth commandment prohibits all violations of chastity (sexual purity) such as fornication, pornography, prostitution, rape and homosexual acts - all of which misuse the gift of human sexuality. It also prohibits "offences against the dignity of marriage such as adultery, polygamy, incest, cohabitation, and sexual acts before or outside of marriage." (Compendium, 502)

Lust and immodesty are vices prohibited by the sixth commandment.

Chastity, purity and temperance are virtues that assist in honoring the sixth commandment.

We sin against the sixth commandment when we misuse the gift of our human sexuality to satisfy our selfish desire for a pleasure meant exclusively for married couples. Example: A couple feels an intense physical attraction and they seriously contemplate a sexual relationship though they are certainly not married, in fact, they have only known each other for several weeks. After studying the sixth commandment and the scripture that supports the church's teaching on human sexuality, they decide to control these natural urges in favor of chastity, and wait. They vow to remain celibate until marriage and honor the sixth commandment.

VII YOU SHALL NOT STEAL. The seventh commandment requires respect for the property of others by prohibiting theft (the taking of property against the reasonable will of the rightful owner). "Theft includes: paying unjust wages, discrimination, forgery, tax evasion, fraud, deliberate poor workmanship, and waist." (Compendium, 508) The seventh command is also the basis for the church's teaching on social justice. Justice demands an equitable distribution (universal destination) of goods and respect for the rights and needs of peoples and workers, as well as the loving care for the poor and others in need. Caring for the rights and welfare of others includes meeting the legitimate needs of the underprivileged as well as caring for the environment.

Greed and selfishness are vices prohibited by the seventh commandment.

Generosity and solidarity are virtues that assist in carrying out the seventh commandment.

We sin against the seventh commandment when we disrespect the property, rights and needs of others. Example: A worker needed some extra money. He had some unexpected medical bills. He found that he could substantially increase his income by cheating the company that he worked for by having someone else "clock him out" several hours after he had already left work each day. After considering the seventh commandment he decided to "put in for overtime." The man was able to work five to ten hours of "overtime" per week at an hourly wage of "time and a half." He was able to increase his paycheck enough to pay off his medical bills. He honored the seventh commandment.

VIII YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST YOUR NEIGHBOR. The eighth commandment respects the dignity of the person by insisting on *truth* in all human relationships. "Everyone has the duty to seek the truth, to adhere to it and to order one's whole life in accordance with its demands." (Compendium, 521) The eighth commandment requires "the discretion of charity in all human communication where the personal and common good, the protection of privacy and the danger of scandal must be taken into account." (524) The eighth commandment forbids lying, perjury, slander, and deformation of character. "A sin committed against truth demands reparation if it has caused harm to others." (523)

Dishonesty and malice are two vices that the eighth commandment forbids.

Honesty and integrity are two virtues that assist us in honoring the eighth commandment.

We sin against the eighth commandment when we manipulate the truth in order to further our own selfish ambitions. Example: A lady learned that a promotion at work was to be decided between herself and a coworker. In order to bias the situation in her own favor she considered starting a false rumor that her coworker had had an affair with her boss's husband. After considering the eighth commandment she concluded that her spreading this false accusation would be a grave injustice to her coworker. She decided against such a tactic and, in fact, wished her coworker luck in applying for the position. The lady was given the position after all, and she was at peace knowing that she had acquired the position fairly. She honored the eighth commandment.

IX YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S WIFE. The ninth commandment protects the dignity of the human person by insisting on purity of heart through the virtue of chastity. The ninth commandment forbids the impurity of lustful (disordered) desire. Lustful desire (carnal concupiscence) degrades the other person by making them an "object," something to be "used" to satisfy one's selfish desire for illicit sexual pleasure. The ninth commandment condemns the moral permissiveness that is so pervasive in our society, a permissiveness "founded on an erroneous concept of human freedom," a permissiveness that actually leads to the bondage of moral vice.

Lust, impurity and covetousness are vices that are forbidden by the ninth commandment.

Chastity, modesty and purity of heart are virtues that assist in honoring the ninth commandment.

We sin against the ninth commandment when we entertain impure (lustful) thoughts concerning members of the opposite sex to whom we are not married. Example: A friend of mine moved into a nice subdivision in an affluent Atlanta area. After he, his wife and their two kids (ages 4 and 6) settled in, he met the next door neighbor and his wife. The neighbor's wife was an absolute "babe." Although my friend truly loved his wife, impure thoughts concerning the neighbor's wife would invade his consciousness now and then. My friend sought the guidance of his confessor and took the whole matter to prayer asking Almighty God for the courage and strength to avoid any lustful desire. In time the impure thoughts subsided and his relationship with his wife grew ever stronger. The temptation eventually disappeared completely. He and his family are now happier than ever. He has indeed honored the ninth commandment.

X YOU SHALL NOT COVET YOUR NEIGHBOR'S GOODS. The tenth commandment promotes human dignity by insisting on respect for the property of others. It forbids "the immoderate desire to acquire someone else's rightful goods for oneself." (Compendium, 531) The Christian is to desire Jesus and his righteousness above anything else. "Detachment from riches and self-abandonment to divine providence frees us from anxiety about the future and prepares us for the 'blessedness' of the 'poor in spirit.'" (532)

Greed, pride and envy are vices that are forbidden by the tenth commandment.

Temperance, faithfulness and self-control are virtues that assist in carrying out the tenth commandment.

We sin against the tenth commandment when we want that which is not ours in an inordinate way, when we obsess over these goods and let them control us, even to the point where we will do “whatever it takes” to acquire them, when they replace Almighty God as a top priority in our lives. Example: A young lady noticed that her supervisor at work “had it all” – a nice car, a big house, and a plush corner office. The more the young lady thought about it, the more she obsessed over it. She began to envy all of these things and she even plotted how she would one day “take her down” and have her job and all those nice “things” for herself. After someone reminded her of the tenth commandment she worked hard to overcome these thoughts. She prayed for the actual grace to conquer this temptation. Soon her priorities began to shift. She was able to elevate God to his rightful place in her life and the desire for the things of this world began to wane. The tenth commandment guided her moral decision making.