

The Ten commandments express moral duties in a minimal and most general form, thus allowing maximum freedom in the arrangement of one's life's affairs. They are aimed at setting those boundaries which, when transpassed, can damage family and community life. Our Lord Jesus Christ in His sermons often referred to the Ten commandments and explained their deep spiritual meaning. We now shall turn our attention to each commandment successively and comment on them in the light of the New Testament.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

«I am the Lord your God... thou shalt have no other gods before Me.»

With this commandment, the Lord draws our attention toward Himself as the ultimate Source of our existence and of all goodness in life, and as the supreme Goal of our existence. He is eternal, almighty, knows everything, and lives in an approachable light. He is the only true God, the Creator of everything visible and invisible; He is the Author of life, the Lawgiver, our most merciful Savior and loving Benefactor. For this reason He deserves all our respect, reverence and sincere love. He deserves that all our thoughts, words and actions be inspired by Him and be directed toward His glory, as the Lord Jesus Christ has taught us to wish and pray: *«Hallowed be Thy Name; Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.»*

In our age, the first commandment is as applicable and important as it was thousands of years ago. Indeed, although many contemporary people are saturated by all sorts of information and knowledge, they have but a dim awareness of God's existence and role in their life. This estrangement from God deprives people's intellects of necessary spiritual guidance and makes their lives wavering and empty. To find the correct direction in life, one should learn about God and His revelation by studying the Holy Scriptures and meditating, which can be augmented by reading the writings of the Holy Fathers and other religious books approved by the Church. This process of spiritual self-education becomes especially fruitful when it is accompanied by prayer and a sincere desire to become a better Christian. This acquired religious knowledge will enlighten not only the mind but will also permeate the heart and become the light of Christ shining in good deeds. Because of this wide scope, the first commandment includes in itself the rest of the commandments, which expand its meaning with specific actions.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

«Thou shalt not make for thee any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down to them, nor serve them.»

This commandment forbids creation of any substitutes for God — worship of any kinds of idols, either physical or imaginary. The commandment was given when idolatry was mankind's sickness. In those times pagans deified all kind of objects — innumerable gods and goddesses — heavenly bodies, animals, birds, reptiles, plants, all kinds of demonic and grotesque creatures, anything in which dark superstition saw something supernatural or unexplainable. The Old Testament prophets and subsequently the Apostles and Christian preachers enlightened the world with faith in one and only one true God, the Creator of the universe and the Heavenly Father of mankind. Gradually, Christian teaching has almost completely eradicated the old paganism, and in our days the worship of idols is confined to just a few corners of the world (Japan, India, and the jungles of South America and Africa) as remnants of ancient superstitions.

However, there still exists a more subtle form of idolatry which persists even among those who would consider ludicrous any literal worship of idols. Indeed, the spirit of the second commandment forbids worship of anything or regard of anything more than God. When any relative object becomes for a person something to which he dedicates all his thoughts, time and energies, that object becomes an idol. Not only unbelievers but many contemporary Christians as well are mostly concerned about gathering material wealth and worldly fortunes, about making a successful career, achieving physical happiness and physical gratifications. There are many who give themselves up to political ideas or adore worldly leaders, movie or music stars, and because of their own little temporary gods, they completely forsake the true God and the salvation of their souls. For some, contemporary science has become the supreme author-

ity by which they judge and even reject the God-revealed truths. In general, anything material and temporal that becomes the most important object for a person to the detriment of his soul has become his false god. Also, such strong passions as sex, drug addiction, drunkenness, smoking, gambling, gluttony, greed, vanity, pride, et cetera, have become the cruel masters of many. When the book of Revelation predicts the increase of paganism toward the end of the world, it certainly means this indirect form of idolatry: «They worshipped idols of gold, silver, brass, stone and wood which can neither see nor hear nor walk» (Revelations 9:20). The Apostle Paul labels greed as idolatry, and regarding gluttons he comments that *«their god is their belly»* (Colossians 3:5; Philipians 3:19).

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

«Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.»

This commandment forbids the impious and disrespectful use of the name of God as, for example, in meaningless conversations or jokes. Sins against the third commandment include swearing (thoughtless, habitual oaths in casual conversations), blasphemy (audacious words against God), *«If he has blasphemed God and the king, take him out and stone him that he may die»* (1 Kings 21:10)) sacrilege (when people scoff or jest at sacred things), perjury (oath breaking), calling upon God as a witness in meaningless worldly affairs, and breaking promises given to God. Also, joking

specifically says: *«Six days thou shalt labor.»* This commandment is also broken by those who skip church services and pass the Lord's day in amusement, in carousing and in all kinds of useless undertakings. By doing this, they «rob» their Lord of what belongs to Him.

It would behoove Orthodox Christians to rekindle within themselves the zeal of the Christians of the first centuries and be truly dedicated to the Lord on the seventh day by going to church and taking holy Communion. By doing this, they will attract to themselves the blessing of the Lord, and their other activities will become more profitable.

THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT

«Honor thy father and thy mother, that it may be well with thee, and that thy days may be long upon the earth.»

Here the Lord God enjoins us to respect our parents, and as a reward for this He promises a felicitous and long life. To honor one's parents means to respect their authority, to love them and under no circumstances to offend them by any word or action, to submit to them, to assist them in their work, to be solicitous in their time of need and especially during illness or old age, and likewise to pray to God for them during their life as well as after their death. Dishonoring one's parents is a grave sin. In the Old Testament, anyone who slandered his parents was punished by death. *«He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death»* (Exodus 21:17)).

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and laughing in church are sins against this commandment.

Because the name of God designates the Supreme and Almighty Being, it carries a great and miraculous power. As we know from the Bible, nature instantly submits to God's name when people invoke it with faith and reverence. For example, by invoking God in his prayer, Moses divided the waters of the Red Sea so that the Israelites could cross it. The prophet Elijah prayed that it would not rain and it did not rain for more than three years; and when he prayed again, the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit. The book of the Acts of the Apostles narrates many miraculous healings and exorcism of evil spirits accomplished by invocation of the name of the Incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, one should use the name of God with awe and reverence as, for example, in pious prayer, in preaching, in serious religious conversations, and in similar well-intended activities. Using God's name in an oath is permitted only in special circumstances such as judicial proceedings (Hebrews 6:16-17). The name of God invoked attentively and piously always draws to man Divine Grace. It brings to him enlightenment of mind and gladness of heart.

THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT

«Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days thou shalt labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God.»

Here the Lord God directs us to labor during six days according to our vocation and the seventh day of the week to dedicate to Him, either in rest or in good activities. Activities that are pleasing to Him include concern about saving one's soul, prayer in church and at home, study of the word of God, enlightenment of mind and heart with meditation on spiritual subjects, religious discussions, helping the needy, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, giving succor to the grieving and other similar acts of mercy.

The fourth commandment can be broken in several ways, when, for example, someone works on the day that should be dedicated to God or when one remains idle during the week days, bowing out of his duties. Indeed, the fourth commandment

Because the family is the most basic cell of both human society and the Church, the Apostles were always concerned with strengthening proper relationships among family members. In apostolic epistles we often find such instructions as: *«Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right... And you fathers do not provoke your children to wrath... Wives submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord... Husbands love your wives and do not be bitter toward them»* (Ephesians 6:1, Colossians 3:18-20; 1 Timothy 5:4).

As to relationships with non-family members, the Christian faith teaches the necessity to show respect to every person, in accordance with his age and status. Saint Paul wrote, *«Render to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor»* (Romans 13:7). In the spirit of this apostolic directive, a Christian should honor pastors of the Church and spiritual authorities; civilian administrators who concern themselves with justice, peace and the welfare of the nation; educators; teachers; benefactors and, in general, all who are older. It is very sad that many contemporary youngsters disrespect their parents, teachers and elders, considering them «foolish» or «backward» people, disregarding the commandment that says: *«You shall rise before the gray headed and honor the presence of an old man»* (Leviticus 19:32).

But if it should happen that our parents or superiors should ask of us something contrary to the Christian faith or the Law of God, then we must say to them what the Apostles said to the Jewish chiefs when they insisted that the Apostles should not preach about Jesus: *«We ought to obey God rather than men»* (Acts 4:19, 5:29). In such instances of conflict between the Divine and human one should be ready to endure whatever the outcome might be, because suffering for the Christian faith is an integral part of our Christian calling and is rewarded in Heaven by Him Who suffered from unjust rulers (Mat. 5:11-12).

THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

«Thou shalt not kill.»

The sixth commandment orders us to respect our life and the life of other people as one of the greatest and most marvelous gifts of God. Only the

