

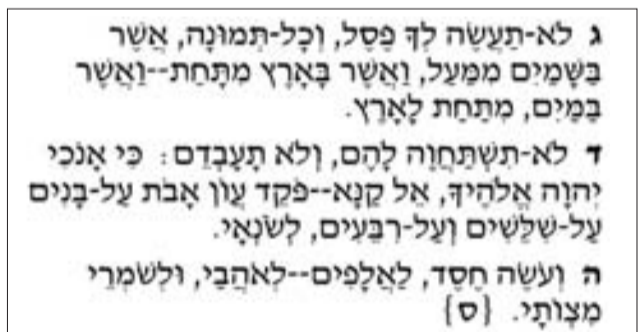
fourth generation...» Well... For some reason, I have another idea of the «God's mercy» concept.

Boris Kriger: Again, we have one more example of manipulation from your side. You have taken a half of the quotation, thus depriving it of its original meaning. «The LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exodus 20: 5, 6).

Again, just imagine if God told us that those who hate Him would not be punished. What does God's punishment mean? It means separation from God. God is the source of life and of everything we have. What makes us separate from God? Is He dismissing us from Him? No. We ourselves, because of our hatred and pride, are separating ourselves from Him, which leads to inevitable punishment. Imagine you are flying by plane and suddenly decide to leap out of it. Will the plane punish you? No. It is ready to carry you farther. It is you, in your madness, who decide to commit this suicide. What makes the children up to the fourth generation suffer? Mankind bears a collective responsibility for the sin. The sin of Adam and Eve, the original sin, has passed on to all the future generations. Why is it so? Because all people are interrelated. There are no generations that would have originated by themselves. Christians are a part of a single body, the Body of Christ. All of us are connected as parts of a single body. Thus, God's mercy consists in that those who hate Him, that is, who are separating themselves from Him, are punishing themselves up to the third or the fourth generation only, while those who love God are rewarded to thousands of generations! Is it not a true mercy of God? In order to understand this, you do not need any specialized knowledge.

Now, to give you an example, let me note that in the modern language, such words as «jealous», «devotee» or «punishment» have acquired an entirely different meaning compared to that originally imbedded in them by the Bible—the book written in Hebrew. And it does not mean the Bible contains any discrepancies. It is in our minds and souls burned-out with sins that all these discrepancies are hiding in.

Let us have a look at the original text:



It is evident for anybody who can understand Hebrew, even its modern version, that this quotation is a part of a more extended sentence, that is, of the second commandment. Its literal translation is as follows:

«Do not make (you will not make) a statue (idol) for yourself, a picture of what is higher in the sky and of what is lower on the Earth, and what is in the water underground. And you will not worship (do not worship) them, do not turn into their slaves, for I am the God (Yahweh), your God, the God devoted (devotee) and observing (not the God who punishes, but the God who observes, controls («pokaed»!)) the iniquities of fathers in their sons up to the third or the fourth generation, who hate me, and the God who is doing mercies («khesaed») to the thousands who love me and follow my commandments.»

What are these idols that God orders us not to worship, not to become their slaves? They are plainly speaking—the demons. So we may merely reformulate the phrase that have raised your doubts in a different way: «Do not worship demons, do not be a hater of God—otherwise, your iniquities will reflect



Meeting His Eminence Archbishop SERAPHIM

upon your descendants up to the third or the fourth generation. I am devoted to you and I want you to be devoted to Me. Love your God, and both you and your descendants will be graced and blessed for many centuries.»

Is there any other way God would have expressed His thought, His warning?

Fr. John Jillions: I would like to add that demons are not the only idols. This is one interpretation, but of course there are many other possible idols, all of which are rooted ultimately in fallen human will or the demonic will.

Nadezhda Lyakh: I agree we should obey and follow the commandments, but not because it is «desired by God». The reason is that these «rules» are veritable ones indeed. A person needs them to be followed, it is important for him or her. For everyone. For every soul. In this very life (not in the «future» life).

Boris Kriger: By speaking like that, you are separating yourself from God, saying «well, let Him be by Himself, and I will live for myself.» You say, «I will manage without His advice.» If God weren't God, it would have made some sense. However, the thing is, God wants the only thing that is beneficial for a human, while a human often needs something harmful for him—or herself. By definition, God, who is Love, cannot want anything harmful for a human. The holy and righteous John of Kronstadt wrote: «A man should always remember that everything he has comes from God, and it comes for free: his soul and body, all his strengths and abilities, power, wealth, beauty, health, and energy—everything. His sins and faults are the only things that really belong to him. A man should realize it and sincerely admit his nothingness, revere God, always be thankful to God, and serve the cause of people to the best of his abilities...»

Fr. John Jillions: There is something greater than mere following the rules that should be at the heart of spiritual life, i.e., love for God. Popular Orthodoxy has been far too dominated by a rules-based, ritual-based approach that often eclipses this deeper longing (see Fr A Schmemmann's Journals and his Historical Road of Eastern Orthodoxy, esp. the chapter on the Church in Russia.)

Nadezhda Lyakh: Every one of us has his or her own Kingdom of Heaven inside. Yes, a thousand times yes! I cannot even call it a faith—it is an absolute and clear knowledge. And one should strive to become a good man in order to reach and to conceive the inner Kingdom of God—not in order to live forever and even not

because these are God's commandments.

Boris Kriger: So this means you want to be better than those people who are simply following the commandments «for the sake of God». You wish to follow them just because you like them alone, and God has nothing to do with them. Again, you are trying to force God out of your life and take over His place and to judge what is right and what is wrong. You want to judge the world, including God as well. There was a creature that had stepped down this path some time ago. It was the fallen angel, the Satan, the source of all lies. His words may sound very truthful and attractive. He will not necessarily begin persuading you to commit the sins

of Sodom right off the bat. He may tell you things that are mostly true, adding just a little lie. However, this little lie is the most important thing. We shall not reject God. We shall not absent ourselves from God. Saint John Chrysostom wrote: «The things God wants from us are not heavy or difficult. The only thing He wants from us is us admitting His benefactions and thanking Him for them. And this is not because He needs it—as there is nothing He would need—but because He wants us to learn, by this, to attract the Giver of these benefactions and to be modest, while demonstrating the goodness that is worth such benefactions and care.»

Nadezhda Lyakh: Here is an excerpt from your newspaper: «The good done for the sake of God fills our lives with significance.» But what about the good done by a person driven by his moral certainty and internal need, not for the sake of God? Is this good not making his life meaningful? For example, why did Indira Gandhi do good? Was it done for the sake of God? And was not her life full of meaning? Well, it is likely that she was a religious person. But she was a Hindu. In no way was she a Christian. And I can give you dozens and hundreds of similar examples.

Boris Kriger: I did not happen to know Indira Gandhi in person. I cannot tell you what she had done and for the sake of what. We often try to turn the conversation to the topic of little knowledge to both parties and thus get some freedom of action... You are trying to say that it is possible to find the reason for being and do good even outside the Christian faith. We should only follow the words of Jesus Christ: «I am the way, the truth, and the life». Venerable Ambrose of Optina wrote: «We are sad and forgetful, and the sadness and forgetfulness deprive us of our acknowledgement to God for His great benefactions He has been doing for us: both temporal and eternal.»

Fr. John Jillions: We shouldn't be too dismissive of the goodness and holiness found outside Christianity. The Logos is found everywhere, and this makes possible goodness, beauty, truth wherever it is found. Our claim is that the Logos became incarnate as Jesus Christ, but he never ceased being Logos everywhere else at the same time. See John Garvey, Seeds of the Word (St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), which unpacks this view of how Orthodoxy views other religions.

Nadezhda Lyakh: Anyway, the faith in God and the deeds «for the sake of God» do not fill the lives of all people with significance, without any exceptions.

It may be true for some people who, perhaps, get their inspiration from nothing but their faith in God. However, it can never be the only and the most essential component of a meaningful life.

Boris Kriger: The words you are saying contradict the first and the second commandments, and the words of Jesus Christ. God can never be of secondary importance. All of us should be in awe of God. Saint Theophan the Recluse wrote: «The awe of God is in itself gaining insight into eternal goodness and acts of God by one's worshipping thoughts and feelings.» And, finally, Jesus Christ told us that He is the only way to get through to the Father, which means that the only path to God lies through the Gospel. It may seem that without God, a person can do well and his life may be meaningful, but it is not actually true. A person without God is nothing but mortal ash. A per-



Meeting Montreal Clergy

