

UNDERSTANDING CATHOLICISM 4: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (CCC, #s 2052-2557)

I. The Remedy from the Slavery of Sin

- A. God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exod 20:2-17; Deut 5:6-21). They were the remedy for the slavery to sin that infected the Chosen People.
- B. Those who look upon the Decalogue (literally “ten words”) as restrictions on their freedom believe the devil’s lie:
 - “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5).
 - 1. The Commandments are a precious gift from God. Their observance places us on the path to holiness and a happy life.
 - 2. Sacred Scripture tells us:
 - “If you love the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinance, then you shall live and multiply” (Deut 30:16).
- C. The Catholic Church follows the custom of St. Augustine using the numbering of Deuteronomy 5:21 that separates coveting into two separate commandments.¹

TEN COMMANDMENTS

Tablet 1: Loving God

- 1. Holiness of God
- 2. Holiness of God’s Name
- 3. Holiness of Time

Tablet 2: Loving Others

- 4. Holiness of Fatherhood and Motherhood
- 5. Holiness of Human Life
- 6. Holiness of Marriage
- 7. Holiness of Private Property
- 8. Holiness of Speech and Truth
- 9. Holiness of Intention Toward Another’s Spouse
- 10. Holiness of Intention Toward Another’s Property

TABLET I: LOVING GOD

The first three commandments focus on the basics in having a loving relationship with God. All three are rooted in God’s holiness, and they form the fundamental steps on our journey to holiness.

II. FIRST COMMANDMENT: ***“You Shall Worship the Lord Your God and Him Only Shall You Serve”*** (CCC # 2083-2141)

- A. St. John instructs us: “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 Jn 5:3). Loving God sums up our basic duty toward God. It is the foundation of all other commandments. It is important to understand that in the Bible *obedience* to God is

¹ The Greek Fathers, the Orthodox Churches and the Reformed communities follow a different division, but the number remains at ten.

how we love God, because obedience is love in action. Obedience demonstrates our choice, where our heart is.

B. The first commandment embraces the virtues of faith, hope, and love.

1. **FAITH** is vital (Jn 20:31). This virtue gives us the ability to submit to the truths God has revealed to us. We sin against the virtue of faith when we either neglect revealed truth or deny all or parts of the truths revealed by God. The refusal to submit to the authority Christ established in his Church is also a sin against faith (CCC, # 2089):
2. **HOPE** is the virtue by which we place our trust in God's love and mercy rather than our own strength. The Book of Hebrews urges, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Heb 10:23).
 - a. *Despair* is the sin that abandons all trust in God's mercy and love.
 - b. It is a sin of *Presumption* to rely on God's mercy without our determined effort to avoid sin. This is the reason St. Bernard taught that a true conversion keeps a balance between God's mercy and his justice. We trust in his mercy, but we know that his justice requires punishment for unrepented sins.
3. **CHARITY** (love) compels us to choose God above all creatures (CCC, # 2094).
 - a. *Indifference* neglects God and treats him as if he were irrelevant.
 - b. *Ingratitude* refuses to thank God for his blessings.
 - c. *Lukewarmness* is the neglect in responding to God's love.

To the Church of Laodicea: "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew [vomit] you out of my mouth" (Rev 3:15-16).
 - d. *Acedia* or *spiritual sloth* is surrendering to extreme laziness in loving God.
 - e. *Hatred of God* comes from pride. It denies his goodness and curses him because he forbids immoral acts and imposes just punishments for our sins.

C. Other sins against the Love of God

1. *Idolatry*

Idolatry is divinizing any creature in place of or equal to God. This includes Satanism, power, pleasure, race, ancestors, the state, money, self, etc.
2. *Superstition*

Superstition attributes supernatural powers to objects or rituals apart from the limited capabilities of their nature.
3. *Divination*

Divination is an attempt to predict the future or gain knowledge of the unknown through so-called paranormal means without reference to God's revelation. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, clairvoyance and the use of mediums are forms of divination.
4. *Magic*

Magic or sorcery attempts to know and control occult (demonic) forces that are believed to influence the world. *Witchcraft* is one of the most common and seriously sinful forms of this evil.

5. *Atheism*

Atheism is a broad term that includes anything from a lack of belief in God to a total denial of His existence. It is a serious problem today that covers many different expressions.

- a. *Practical atheism* ignores God as irrelevant. One attempts to fulfill human needs by relying exclusively on oneself and this world.
- b. *Atheistic humanism* considers man to be an end in himself and the sole master of his destiny.
- c. *Liberation atheism* focuses on the betterment of man solely through economic and social means apart from God.

6. *Idol Worship – “graven images”*

The first commandment explicitly forbids making idols that are honored or worshipped as a god. Today it is common that people ignore God and worship the false trinity of Me, Myself, and I.

III. **SECOND COMMANDMENT: *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*** (CCC #s 2142-2167).

A. This commandment requires that God’s name and Jesus’ name must always be treated with great respect.

B. *Oaths*

When a person takes an oath using God’s name, it calls on God to stand behind the truth of that which is affirmed. It is seriously evil to use God’s name to support a lie.

C. *Blasphemy*

Blasphemy is the sin of speaking contemptuously of God or his perfections. It is also blasphemous to speak ill about the Virgin Mary, the other saints or the angels because they are God’s chosen creatures that reside with him in paradise.

IV. **THIRD COMMANDMENT: *Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day*** (CCC #s 2168-2195).

This commandment establishes a holy time of rest in the Lord with our family and friends away from the labor of work.

A. The Catholic Church obligates all Catholics to attend Mass on Sunday as the *minimum* requirement of fulfilling this commandment. Viewing the celebration of Mass on television is not attending Mass.

B. In addition to Sundays, Catholics are also obligated to attend Mass on the following feasts, called holy days of obligation:

1. Mary, the Mother of God (January 1)

2. Ascension of Jesus (50 days after Easter)
 3. Assumption of Mary (August 15)
 4. Feast of All Saints (November 1)
 5. Immaculate Conception (December 8)
 6. Christmas Day (December 25)
- C. Obligation to Rest - sanctifies time
1. Activity that meets the standard of work should be avoided on Sunday. Work should not be undertaken if it impedes attending Mass, inhibits the festive joy of Sunday or holy days, or makes bodily or mental rest impossible.
 2. Tragically, our modern secular culture places a heavy burden on many families to work on Sundays.

TABLET II: LOVING OTHERS

The second tablet has 7 commandments that focus on loving others. If these were observed, even at a basic level, our world would be very much different. The crime, murders, wars, addictions, injustices, and broken families that plague our societies would disappear if we kept the commandments. Then we would discover true freedom.

V. **FOURTH COMMANDMENT: *Honor your father and your mother*** (CCC #s 2196-2257).

- A. The fourth commandment protects the integrity of family relationships and fosters mutual love. It addresses the obligation of children to their parents.
- B. However, it also covers the duties to extended family members, the elderly, pupils to teachers, employees to employers, subordinates to leaders, citizens to those who administer or govern their country.
- C. This commandment also includes the duties of all those who exercise authority over others.
- D. The Christian family is called a “*domestic church*.”²
 1. In communion with the Blessed Trinity, the family is called to: (CCC, # 2205)
 - a. Educate their children in the faith.
 - b. Partake in the prayer and sacrifice of Jesus in the Holy Mass.
 - c. Pray daily and share the readings of Sacred Scripture.
 - d. Getting to heaven is the only ultimate success.
 2. Civil authorities have a grave obligation to support and strengthen marriages and the family (CCC, # 2210). Unfortunately, the reverse is happening.

VI. **FIFTH COMMANDMENT: *You shall not kill [literally “murder”]*** (CCC #s 2258-2330).

- A. The killing of an *innocent* person (murder) is *always gravely evil and never morally justified*.
 1. Human life is sacred and must be protected from the moment of conception to natural death.
 2. *Abortion* is a particularly grave evil because it murders innocent defenseless babies.

² Vatican II, Lumen Gentium 11; CCC. # 2204.

B. This commandment also includes the obligation to conserve one's own life with ordinary means.

C. This commandment allows for legitimate self-defense, but only with the proportionate force needed to repel an unjust attacker.

D. *Euthanasia*

The direct killing of the handicapped, sick, or dying, regardless of the motive, is morally unacceptable (CCC, # 2276-2279).

E. *Scandal*

1. Giving scandal, that is, leading others into sin comes under the fifth commandment, because it wounds or kills the life of grace in another's soul.
2. Scandal is caused by unjust laws (abortion), institutions (slavery), fashion (immodest dress), entertainment (TV, movies, music), parties or opinions (factions, racism).

F. *Just War*

The Church acknowledges the possibility of a just war. However, for a war to be just it must meet the following conditions:

1. The damage inflicted by the aggressor must be lasting, grave, and certain.
2. All the means of avoiding the war must be shown to be impractical or ineffective.
3. There must be a realistic prospect of success.
4. The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be defended and eliminated. The destructiveness of modern weapons weighs heavily in evaluating this condition.³

G. *Mutilation and Organ Transplants*

1. It is immoral to cause a disabling mutilation or the death of a person by removing an organ in order to delay the death of another person.
2. However, organ transplants are permitted when both the donor and the recipient give their informed consent, the physical and psychological dangers and risks are proportionate to the good sought, and a qualified surgical team and the required equipment are available.

H. *Cloning*

Human cloning is gravely sinful. It opposes the dignity of both the conjugal union between a husband and wife and human procreation.

I. *Illicit drug use, and the abuse of Alcohol*

Their usage is forbidden because, in addition to damaging the body, they reduce a person to the level of an animal by impairing his ability to think and act properly.

VII. **SIXTH COMMANDMENT: *You shall not commit adultery*** (CCC #s 2331-2400).

A. God created men and women in his image and likeness as persons with an equal dignity.

³ CCC, # 2309.

1. In the marital act, men and women imitate the Creator's generosity and fruitfulness whenever they are open to cooperating with God in the creation of human life.
 2. The marital act affirms the couple's lifetime commitment to each other. They say, in effect, "this is my body which is given to you."
- B. There are two *essential properties of marriage*:
1. The first is *exclusivity*, because marriage involves the *total self-giving* of each spouse. This is not a gift that can be shared with a third person.
 2. The second quality is *indissolubility*. A valid marriage bond can only be broken by death of one of the spouses.
- C. God created human sexuality:
Human sexuality is not just good; it's holy. From the very beginning, God created marriage with a procreative end, and he directed his blessing to this end. Therefore, the sexual union between a husband and his wife always has two purposes:
1. The procreation and raising of their children.
 2. The good of the spouses as the expression of their lifetime gift to each other.
- D. The Virtue of Chastity
1. The Catholic Church teaches that the sixth commandment encompasses the whole of human sexuality, not only issues related to marriage.
 2. The virtue of chastity governs the right use of our sexual appetite in accord with God's plan for human sexuality. Therefore, the virtue of chastity calls men and women to integrate their sexuality in a way that protects the integrity of the person and the integrity of the unconditional gift of self in marriage.
 3. It demands an apprenticeship in self-mastery, which is also training in human freedom. Otherwise, a person quickly becomes a slave to his passions, and has crippled his ability to love authentically. Self-mastery gives a person the capability to love authentically and to make the gift of self.
- E. Sins against chastity (CCC, #s 2351-2357) are rooted in lust. *Lust* is the disordered desire for or inordinate enjoyment of sexual pleasure, which is "sought for itself, isolated from its procreative (life) and unitive (committed love) purposes."
1. *Contraception*: The proper regulation of births represents one of the aspects of responsible fatherhood and motherhood" (CCC, # 2399).
However, contraceptive acts that intentionally block the natural end of the marital union are evil (CCC, # 2370). It makes a lie of the body's language that is intended to express totally self-giving. "This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love, which is called upon to give itself in personal totality" (CCC, # 2370).
The evil fruits of the wide acceptance of contraception are: divorce (fosters selfishness), abortion (makes the baby the enemy), and the redefinition of marriage.
 2. *Masturbation* is the deliberate stimulation of the genital organs to derive sexual pleasure.
 3. *Fornication* is the sexual union between an unmarried man and an unmarried woman.

4. *Adultery* is the sexual union between parties, one of which is married to someone else.
 5. *Pornography* creates a fantasy world that strips away the intimacy of the marital union to place mere sex acts on display.
 6. *Prostitution* involves the sale of sexual acts.
 7. *Rape* is the forcible violation of another's sexual integrity.
 8. *Homosexual* acts are gravely immoral. "Homosexual persons are called to chastity" like everyone else (CCC # 2359).
- F. Divorce (CCC, #s 2382-2386)
1. Jesus declared that marriage is indissoluble⁴ as he abrogated the exception that had come into the Mosaic Law.⁵
 2. Therefore, the marriage between a baptized man and woman that is ratified and consummated "cannot be dissolved by any human power or for any reason other than death" (CCC, # 2382; Code of Canon Law 1142).
 3. A civil "divorce" may be obtained in order to protect certain legal rights and the welfare of the children, but it does not dissolve the marriage bond, it does not free the couple to remarry.
 4. Annulment:
A "marriage annulment," more correctly a *decree of nullity*, is a declaration by a Church tribunal that a marriage thought to be valid actually fell short of at least one of the essential elements required for a binding union. The decree declares there never was a marriage in a sacramental sense, even though the couple was legally married according to civil law.

VIII. **NINTH COMMANDMENT: You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife** (CCC, #s 2514-2533)

This commandment is connected with the sixth commandment, so it is placed with it. The 9th commandment focus is on internally consenting to illicit sexual desires. But *ten thousand temptations do not equal one sin!*

- A. Jesus: "Every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:28).
- B. This commandment focuses on combating "lust of the flesh" (1 Jn 2:16).
- C. Jesus calls us to purity of the Heart
 1. The *heart* refers to the human will, which is at the core of our moral capacity.
 2. The *pure of heart* (Mt 5:8) are those who have disciplined their will to the demands of holiness in the key areas of: *charity, chastity, love of truth, orthodoxy of faith* (CCC, # 2518).
 3. Acquiring this virtue often entails a fierce battle against the concupiscence of the flesh and our disordered desires.

⁴ Mt 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Mk 10:9; Lk 16:18; 1 Cor 7:10-11.

⁵ Mt 19:7-9.

4. The virtue of Purity is connected with modesty, which protects the intimate center of the person. *Modesty* guides how we look at ourselves, at others, and behave toward them. It provides a fortress that resists the allurements of fashion and the pressures of prevailing ideologies. *Immodesty* reduces a person to a mere object to be used.

IX. EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor

We will now consider the 9th commandment, which may seem out of place, because the 7th and 10th commandments go together. (CCC, #s 2464-2513).

- A. Truthfulness is a bond that joins men together and makes peaceful life in society possible. Genuine freedom is only achieved in truth, even in a political sense.
 1. One of the alarming facets of current political life is the extent of lying both during and after political campaigns.
 2. This lying is so common that special words are used to hide its ugly reality: “spin” and “misspoke.”
- B. Jesus is truth, and he reveals the whole truth.⁶ He declared that he “came into the world to bear witness to the truth” (Jn 18:37).
- C. The following are sins against truth or against another’s reputation:
 1. Each person has a right to his or her good reputation. Therefore, the eighth commandment forbids every attitude and word that is likely to cause the reputation of others unjust harm.
 2. *There is no such thing as holy gossip!* The following are sins that unjustly damage another’s reputation.
 - a. *Calumny* – Harming another person’s reputation with a lie or lies. This sin requires restitution for the harm done if it is to be forgiven.
 - b. *Detraction* – Harming another person’s reputation with the truth that one is not required to share. It also requires restoration.
 - c. *Rash Judgment* – The negative moral judgment made about the reputation or behavior of a person without sufficient reason.
 3. *Perjury* is lying under an oath. The oath significantly adds to the gravity of this sin.
 4. “The *gravity of a lie* is measured against the nature of the truth it deforms, the circumstances, the intentions of the one who lies, and the harm suffered by its victims” (CCC, # 2484).
- D. Secrets
 1. We are obliged to keep a secret when the good of our neighbor demands it; when we have promised to keep it, or when our profession requires it.
 2. We may reveal a secret when it is necessary to correct a wrong or avoid a great harm to the common good.
 3. It is also allowed to reveal a secret to parents or superiors for the protection of others.

⁶ Jn 1:14; 8:12; 14:6.

4. The most bindings of all secrets are those of the confessional. A priest may *never reveal anything* he learns in Confession *for any cause*.

X. SEVENTH SOMMANDMENT: You Shall Not Steal (CCC, #s 2401-2463).

- A. Every person has a natural right to private property.
- B. The seventh commandment forbids unjustly *taking, keeping or using* without reasonable permission our neighbor's goods.
- C. Restitution: no one has the right to property acquired in an unjust way. Therefore, stealing demands *restitution* either of the goods stolen or of their value even when the sin is forgiven. The sin of theft or the unjust damage to another's property cannot be forgiven without the determination to make restitution for the loss incurred.
- D. *Promises* must be kept and *contracts* strictly observed to the extent that the commitments made in them are morally just" (CCC, # 2410).
- E. Let's consider some principles of the Church's Social Doctrine -
 1. Making profit the exclusive norm and the ultimate end is immoral.
 2. Any system that subordinates the basic rights of individuals and groups to the collective organization of production is also immoral.
 3. Totalitarian and atheistic ideologies like *communism* and *socialism* are morally unacceptable (CCC, # 2425).
 4. Similarly, capitalism and individualism that promote the absolute primacy of the marketplace is also immoral.
 5. The primary goal of a moral economic system is to serve the good of persons, the development of the whole man, and the entire human family. "Work is for man, not man for work" (CCC, # 2428).
 6. "Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the common good" (CCC, # 2428).
 7. To refuse to give a just wage when possible is a grave injustice (CCC, # 2434).
 8. The poor -
 - a. Love for the poor is deeply rooted in the Church's constant tradition.⁷
 - b. The immoderate love of riches or their selfish use is incompatible with the love and caring for the poor.
 - c. *St. John Chrysostom*: "Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life" (CCC, # 2446).

XI. TENTH COMMANDMENT: You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Goods (CCC, #s 2534-2557)

The tenth commandment relates to the seventh commandment in that it forbids internally consenting to illicit desires to unjustly acquire another's property.

- A. Coveting is at the root of theft, robbery, fraud, and injustices of every kind.
- B. This commandment forbids *greed* (the desire to amass earthly goods without limit) and *avarice* (the passion for riches and their attendant power).

⁷ Lk 6:20-22; Mt 8:20; Mk 12:41-44.

- C. *Envy* breeds sadness over another's possessions and instills the desire to acquire them unjustly and even destroy the person we envy.
 - 1. Cain's murder of Abel was the result of envy (Gen 4:1-8).
 - 2. The devil's envy drives him to destroy us spiritually and to create a culture of death (Wis 2:24). St. Augustine called envy "the diabolical sin" (CCC # 2539).
- D. The world considers wealth to be a great blessing. If that is true, why was Jesus so poor?

REFLECTION

Jesus fulfilled and perfected the Law of Moses, including the Decalogue. He did not come to abolish its precepts. Thus, Jesus taught that if we want to enter eternal life, we were required to keep the commandments (Mt 19:17). Since apostolic times, the Ten Commandments formed the basic moral instruction of Christians. These commandments form the springboard that trains our heart to love God and our neighbor (Jn 13:34; Ron 13:8-10).

The edicts of the Decalogue also form a summary of the precepts of the moral natural law, truths that are written on the heart of every human (Rom 2:14-15). Therefore, every person is bound to observe the Ten Commandments, not just Jews and Christians. The Decalogue provides a sure guideline for determining what is good and what is evil. Fidelity, however, is impossible without God's help. Therefore, God's Spirit, which is poured into our hearts (Rom 5:5), gives us the strength to be faithful (Rom 8:3-4). We can easily imagine how better our world would be if we kept the commandments.

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