

OR^ΩTHODOXY

IN A NUTSHELL: Self-examination for the Orthodox Christian

There are only a few things required of us in this life: to believe correctly, to live uprightly and sacramentally, to adhere to God's Commandments, and to repent when we fail to live up to them.

God's Commandments are manifold. Of course, we have the Ten Commandments that we find in the Old Testament, which have even greater and expansive meaning for us as Christians since the New Testament was revealed in Christ. As Christians, Christ made central to us the two Great Commandments which we are told by the Lord sum up all the Law and the Prophets: They are to love the Lord our God with all our being, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He also gave us new commandments, to go beyond the old, to love one another not only as we do ourselves, but with an even greater love, to love one another as He has loved us. We are told to love even our enemies and pray for them and bless them. We are given the commandment to abide in Christ and to have Him abide in us by partaking of His flesh and of His blood sacramentally and in a state of Faith and repentance. All of this also entails the acquisition of the virtues, and the seeking of cooperation with God. The Beatitudes are deemed by the Church Fathers to be Commandments. The particulars of following many of these other commandments are still found in the Ten Commandments, which, when read in light of the revelation of the New Testament, are a good starting point for self-examination. Here are some meditations to this avail:

1. I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.

Many people miss the first part of this Commandment. It is in the continuous present. In other words, the commandment starts out with a positive commandment, and it is in the continuous present:

‘I am and shall be the Lord your God, (therefore) you shall have no other gods before me.’ This requires us to answer the following questions about ourselves: Have I put God first in my life? Have I failed to trust Him in what is best for my life? Have I sought to learn what he expects from me by reading Scripture, attending attentively in Church, listening to the sermon weekly? Have I sought to learn His commandments and obey them, and make proper reparations when I have failed and due repentance?

2. ***You shall not make to you a graven idol.*** Instead of serving the God whose image I am made in, have I instead made a god or formed a view of God that is in my image, that is, determined that God must be what I think he is rather than as He has revealed Himself in the Church, Her Scriptures and Her life? Have I made material things and their acquisition my god rather than the God of heaven whose true treasure is eternal life, wholeness of spirit and happiness in one’s circumstance and happiness for others in their good state? Have I made an idol to another person by listening to them when they contradict God?

3. ***You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*** Have I held the name of God in honor and used it with reverence? Have I used the name of God lightly in speech? Have I used the name of God in any form as a curse word?

4. ***Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.*** Sabbath means rest. Christ is Himself the eternal Sabbath. In the old Testament, there was one day in seven that we were to keep holy, but in the New Covenant, we are told by Scripture and the Church Fathers that every day is to be kept holy unto the Lord by prayer, reading of Scripture and works, etc. However, there are two days that are most special in a week: Saturday and Sunday. Sunday, as the Lord’s Day of the New Covenant, is the highest of all days during the week, and the one in seven in which we are required, with the exception only of extenuating circumstances, to be in Church for the Liturgy. Saturday, as the old Sabbath, is always kept as a day in which strict fast is forbidden, even during Great Lent (the only exception in the year is Great and Holy Saturday). In monasteries, but also in Cathedrals and many parishes, there is a liturgy on Saturday as well as Sunday. In all parishes, at least in theory, there is at least Vespers, which brings the old Sabbath to a close

and inaugurates with the announcement of the Prokeimenon the arrival of the Lord's Day, the new and eternal Sabbath, the first and the eighth day. Sunday is the highest of Holy Days in a week and the day in which we are to attend the services, especially Liturgy, and receive the Sacrament of Communion as often as possible, enabling us, with Christ sacramentally within us, to keep the whole rest of the week as a continuous Sabbath in prayer and cooperation with God. Therefore we must ask ourselves: Have I kept the Lord's Day Holy by attending Liturgy and receiving Communion regularly? Have I kept other high Holy Days as I should? Do I dedicate every day to the Lord by praying and doing works of mercy and practicing self-restraint?

Do I go to confession periodically for help against sin?

5. ***Honor your father and your mother.*** Have you been just with your parents, your children, and other relatives? Have you been loving toward them as much as possible from your part?

6. ***You shall not murder.*** The Lord tells us that there are many different levels of murder. In the new covenant, we learn not only to refrain from extreme acts of hatred, but also to combat hatred internally, which our Lord teaches us is murder of the heart. Have we injured anyone by physically assaulting them or physically damaging them? If so we are required by God to repent and restore fourfold by never again injuring them and by insuring that we go out of our way to make sure to protect and defend others who have no one to defend them in such assaults. Have we injured anyone mentally or psychologically by insulting them by calling them names, or putting them down, or making fun of them? If so we must seek the person's forgiveness, repenting and seeking to make up for it with this person, and to be vigilant not to do it to others, and moreover to go out of our way to defend them when anyone in the future does this to them, and to go out of our way to defend others who are assaulted like this as well and have no one to defend them.

7. ***You shall not steal.*** Have I stolen anything? Have I failed to return something that was stolen and owned up to it and suffer the just consequences? Have I lived within my means? Have I cheated anyone? Have I taken unfair or excessive interest from anyone in business dealings? Have I paid people what I have


owed them? Have I deprived anyone of something that is due to the m?

8. ***You shall not commit adultery.*** Have I loved my spouse as I should, caring form them and loving them? Have I abandoned my spouse physically or emotionally in any way? Have I desired the spouse of another? Have I entertained lust for another or let lust for someone who is not my spouse consume me? Have I committed fornication? Worse yet have I committed adultery?

9. ***You shall not bear false witness.*** Have I sought justice in all my dealings with others? Have I perjured myself? Have I lied against another or falsely accused them? Have I failed to speak up and been a coward when someone is falsely accused? Have I allowed it to appear that someone else get blamed for a wrong that I have committed?

10. ***You shall not covet.*** Have I been ungrateful for the life and the things that God has given me? Have I wished that I had someone else’s life, or spouse, or property? Have I desired to acquire things that belong to my neighbor? Worse yet have I plotted against my neighbor to gain his things? Have I been happy when another has fallen into financial misfortune? Have I been unhappy or jealous when another has fallen into good fortune rather than being happy for them? Have I judged others shallowly based upon their material or social status?

These are good meditations to consider before approaching the chalice, as well as being good mediations before going to confession. If you have not been to confession for a while, the time to go is now, for, having identified areas that you need spiritual work on, do not let such an opportunity go to waste!

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